

# Yes, Virginia, There is Such a Thing as Fundamentalism or The Subject Matter of Christianity is the Subject Matter of Christianity



Much of what I have written on my blog has been addressed against what is called either (depending on which side of the Reformation one hangs one's hat) Liberal Protestantism or Catholic Modernism. (One of the advantages of being Anglican is that one can embrace either heresy. When Anglican Evangelicals go bad they become liberal Protestants. When Anglo-Catholics go bad, they become Modernists.) Within the parameters of the church, I consider liberalism to be the greatest heresy today because it denies the central subject matter of the Christian faith as taught in the Scriptures, and summarized in the ecumenical creeds: the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation of God in Christ, the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Numerous essays on my blog address this heresy in one way or another. Even the issue of same-sex sexual unions, which is the key issue of controversy dividing the Western churches these days, I regard as church dividing precisely because I see an inherent connection between affirming same-sex activity and denying key doctrines of Christian faith. It is not a

coincidence that the leading advocates of SSUs have also been functional unitarians and/or panentheists. (I think of people like retired Bishop John Spong, the late Marcus Borg, and Sallie McFague. Despite a caginess that makes her hard to pin down, I think it clear that Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori is solidly in this camp.) There are, of course, exceptions, including some theologians whom I have admired and who have influenced me: Stanley Hauerwas and George Hunsinger, in particular. However, they really are exceptions. Precisely because Scripture is so clear on this issue and it is tied so closely to the doctrine of creation (and, I would add, even the doctrines of the Trinity and ecclesiology), where one stands on SSU's predictably indicates where one stands on creedal issues.

Advocates of theological liberalism/modernism in the church regularly refer to those who disagree with them as "fundamentalists," and I have been the recipient of this accusation myself. John Spong's book *Rescuing the Bible From Fundamentalism* is a typical example. The joke is, that for theological progressives, a "fundamentalist" is anyone who believes more of the Christian faith than the one using the epithet. For Spong, Jerry Falwell and Billy Graham were "fundamentalists," but so was Karl Barth, and New Testament scholar N.T. Wright. If a fundamentalist is anyone who believes more than Bishop Spong, then the term is vacuous. To refer to N.T. Wright as a fundamentalist is just another way of saying that one disagrees with him, and, because he does not affirm one's views, he must be either evil or foolish or both. The fundamentalist accusation saves the time of actually having to address the arguments of someone like Wright. (I have used Wright as an example precisely because his position is ambiguous. Wright's "New Perspective" work on the apostle Paul has led him to be labeled a dangerous "liberal" by some advocates of a traditional Reformation reading of Paul.)

That a term can be misused does not mean that it cannot be

used meaningfully at all. That Karl Barth and N.T. Wright are not fundamentalists does not mean that there are no such people. What is a fundamentalist? Historically, the term originated early in the twentieth century with the publications of a series of books entitled *The Fundamentals*, written by a number of conservative Protestant theologians in response to the rise of liberal Protestantism. With the separation of J. Gresham Machen from Princeton Seminary, the founding of Westminster Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, fundamentalism became associated with conservative separatist Protestantism. In the mid-twentieth century, the rising movement then known as Neo-Evangelicalism (associated with Billy Graham and institutions such as Fuller Seminary and *Christianity Today* magazine) distanced itself from fundamentalism as a conservative Protestant movement that was more academic, more ecumenical, and open to aspects of the civil rights movement of the 1960's. With the rise of the (political) religious right in the early 1980's and the social and political division of the culture wars of the late twentieth century that divided not only political parties but also religious denominations, internal divisions over issues such as the inerrancy of scripture and women's ordination, clear-cut divisions between what were now called conservative Evangelicals and fundamentalists once again tended to blur.

To describe fundamentalism by its history in this way could lead to the impression that fundamentalism is restricted to a particular historical phenomenon within a specific religious tradition – that of conservative Protestantism. To do so would be to fail to locate the theological nature of fundamentalism, and would view it as an isolated phenomenon – which would be a mistake. Fundamentalism is not so much a particular movement within the specific religious tradition of Protestantism as a type that has appeared not only within Protestantism, but in other Christian traditions as well.

Fundamentalism has at least two characteristics: first, it is

a distinctly modern phenomenon. It appeared at a time when Christian identity was threatened by the rise of modern secularism that has its origins in the Enlightenment, and when secularism was perceived to have infiltrated even the Christian churches. And, second, fundamentalism is reactionary. Fundamentalism identifies itself in terms of that which it rejects as much as or more so than what actually defines it. Once one recognizes that fundamentalism is both modern in origin and reactionary, it becomes evident that fundamentalism is not simply identical with conservative or orthodox Christianity; one can also speak of fundamentalism outside of the narrow historical parameters of twentieth and twenty-first century American Protestantism.

How to identify fundamentalism? I have found the following three descriptions to be at least helpful. In the 1960's, E.J. Carnell, President of Fuller Seminary and one of the leaders of what was then called "Neo-Evangelicalism," described fundamentalism as "cultic orthodoxy." While theologically orthodox in the creedal sense, fundamentalism differed from historic orthodoxy in being insular, in defining Christianity in terms of its own peculiar historical manifestation. When I was growing up, the denomination of which I was a member was presumed to be the only true church. In the public school I attended, I had many friends who were members of other Christian denominations, but I understood them to be "not" Christians. When Billy Graham held one of his evangelistic rallies in our city, there were those in my congregation who argued against our participating on the grounds that Graham did not tell people that they needed to join our denomination.

In the 1970's, liberal Protestant biblical scholar James Barr wrote a book entitled *Fundamentalism*, in which he said that one of the characteristics of fundamentalism was "maximal conservatism." If there were two options available on any question, the fundamentalist could be counted on to take the more conservative of the two positions. In the undergraduate

college I attended, the Old Testament professor had as an essay question on the final exam: "How do we know that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch, including the description of his own death at the end of Deuteronomy?" Barr was speaking about issues of biblical criticism, but the issue applies elsewhere as well. A friend of Roman Catholic Cardinal Manning once remarked that he would have loved nothing more than to have a papal encyclical delivered with his *London Times* at breakfast every morning.

In his recent book on *The Eucharist and Ecumenism*, George Hunsinger contrasted three kinds of theology: academic, ecumenical, and enclave. By "academic," Hunsinger means basically the theology of "liberal Protestantism." By "ecumenical," he means a theology that is willing to reach across denominational boundaries to learn from the entire catholic tradition of the church. By "enclave," he means a kind of denominational theology that defines itself in terms of its own denominational or confessional distinctives.

"Enclave" theology is then another characteristic of what I am calling fundamentalism. Enclave theology tends to place the center of its theology in its own confessional distinctives. In the church in which I grew up, the single most important doctrine was "believer's baptism." There are certain kinds of Lutheran theology where the proper understanding of the relationship between law and gospel is the most important concern, and where one stands on the "third use of the law" can lead to theological fisticuffs. There are Reformed theologians for whom the proper understanding of divine sovereignty and of the covenant or "federalism" simply is the most important issue. There are Anglicans for whom the loss of the 1928 Prayer Book is an overwhelming obsession; there are Evangelical Anglicans for whom Anglicanism is "Reformed" (in the Calvinist sense), is defined strictly by the views of the Anglican Reformers (especially a specific interpretation of the theology of Thomas Cranmer) and an adherence to a literal

reading of the 39 Articles in every detail, and for whom the Caroline Divines mark the beginning of a period of decline; in contrast, there are Anglo-Catholic Anglicans for whom the proper understanding of apostolic succession is definitive, who view the Reformation as an almost unmitigated disaster, and have nothing good to say about the 39 Articles. There are Roman Catholics who embrace what has been called "creeping infallibility"; while not every statement of the pope is technically infallible, they should be treated (at least presumptively) as if they all are. I once engaged in an online discussion with some members of the Orthodox Church who argued with complete seriousness that the "Frankish takeover of the papacy" under Charlemagne was the point at which the Western church ceased to be a Christian church.

Fundamentalism tends to have certain other characteristics as well:

(1) A distrust of modern science expressed in suspicion of both evolutionary theory and global warming: both so-called "creationism" and "Intelligent Design" express this distrust; this does not mean that there are no unbelieving scientists such as Richard Dawkins, but, in principle, it is quite possible to embrace both a positive respect for the methodological principles and findings of modern science and orthodox Christian theology as well. I think, for example, of scientists and theologians such as Owen Gingerich, Francis Collins, John Polkinghorne, E.L. Mascall, Thomas F. Torrance, and Alister McGrath.

(2) A distrust of historical-critical methodology in the study of the Bible as evidenced in concerns about such things as the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch or single authorship of the Book of Isaiah. Again, it is not that there are no liberal Protestant theologians, but it is quite possible to be critical of secularist biases among liberal Protestant biblical scholars while recognizing the positive results of biblical criticism; the list of critically orthodox biblical

scholars is too lengthy to mention, but I think particularly of people who have influenced me, such as Brevard Childs, Richard Hays, and N.T. Wright.

(3) An alliance between "conservative" theology and what American culture calls "conservative" political views. In particular, American Evangelicals and conservative Roman Catholics have made common cause in supporting the politics of the Republican party because of its endorsement of "conservative social ethics" in regard to such issues as homosexuality and abortion. Here I am afraid, they have been taken advantage of by a party that really does not care about their concerns. I think of an example mentioned in Thomas Franks' book *What's the Matter with Kansas?* Social conservatives vote a certain way because they see Madonna and Britney Spears kiss in public, and those they elect then vote to give Madonna and Britney Spears a tax break. Again, this does not mean that the Democratic party reflects Christian morality any more than does the Republican party, but orthodox Christians have been deluded to believe that either American political party cares about their concerns. The recent collapse of courage among Republicans in support of religious freedom bills (as, for the example, the Indiana RFRA) shows that conservative Christians have aligned themselves with an uncertain ally.

(4) Apologetic concerns that are disassociated from the central subject matter of Christian faith. Among both Roman Catholics and Evangelicals there has been the advocacy of a rationalist epistemology whose purpose is to dispel doubt by buttressing certitude in correspondingly recognized voices of authority. For Roman Catholics, the crucial argument concerns the infallibility of the papacy as a guarantee of epistemological certitude while simultaneously casting doubt on the epistemological claims of Protestantism by both challenging the clarity and sufficiency of Scripture and pointing to the conflicting truth claims of numerous

Protestant denominations. For Protestants this has meant the mutually exclusive endorsement of either evidentialist or presuppositionalist apologetics combined with arguments to support biblical inerrancy while simultaneously challenging the certainty of Roman Catholic claims. In both cases, in order to work, the arguments must become increasingly sophisticated and complicated. I have seen Roman Catholics try to make arguments that church fathers such as Irenaeus or Medieval thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas held to understandings of church authority that did not exist until after the Reformation period. I have seen Roman Catholics argue that (apart from papal infallibility), the Bible has no internal coherence and can mean anything that the reader wants it to mean. Evangelical arguments about inerrancy have to introduce numerous qualifications to explain that only no longer existing original manuscripts are inerrant, and that any phenomena of Scripture that would seem to challenge the theory must be re-interpreted in order to make them fit. (At this point, of course, the argument becomes question-begging: any troubling phenomena are either examples of copyists' errors or simply do not mean what a plain sense reading would indicate.)

### **An Alternative to Fundamentalism or the Subject Matter of Christianity is the Subject Matter of Christianity**

If the point of the above were merely to criticize fundamentalism, it would be a wasted exercise. There is no secular advantage to orthodox Christians distancing themselves from fundamentalists, and proclaiming "Hey, we're not like those guys." For certain kinds of secularists, all Christians are simply "oppressors" – as evidenced in the recent political hostility to Christian educational institutions such as Gordon College or the University of Notre Dame. (Thus the secularist evaluation of Christians as summarized in the popular internet dictum "Haters gonna hate.") If I am opposed to fundamentalism, it is not because of apologetic concerns but

for similar reasons to my opposition to liberal Protestantism. While I regard liberal Protestantism to be the greatest contemporary threat to the gospel (from within the church), I consider fundamentalism to be almost as equally problematic and for the same reason. If liberal Protestantism has abandoned the central subject matter of Christian faith, fundamentalism at least retains that subject matter, but relegates it to secondary importance in comparison to other "enclave" issues. In both cases, there is an idolatrous preference for some secondary human concern in place of the central subject matter of Christian faith.

What then is the orthodox Christian alternative to fundamentalism? It is not unique to any one denominational or confessional tradition. Various labels could be used to describe it: critical orthodoxy, evangelical catholicism or catholic evangelicalism, ecumenical theology. It affirms the following:

(1) The formal sufficiency, clarity and primacy of canonical Scripture: In the second-century battle with the gnostic heresy, the church affirmed the full canon of a two-testament Bible as containing the definitive witness to what Christians believed about God, creation, Christ, and salvation. Scripture was read in the worship of the church, it was the subject of homilies, and expositied by theologians. Theologians such as Irenaeus, Hilary of Poitiers, and Augustine assumed in their reading of Scripture that it had a formal sufficiency and clarity in its literal sense. (T.F. Torrance has used the expression "intrinsic intelligibility" as a shorthand description of this understanding. Torrance's book *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* provides one of the best studies of how the fathers read Scripture. It is, unfortunately, out of print, and used copies are ridiculously expensive.) Patristic theologians have sometimes been accused of an arbitrary allegorism, but it was actually the gnostics who embraced arbitrary methods of biblical interpretation.

Patristic theologians often interpreted the Old Testament typologically, but this meant that the Old Testament pointed to Jesus Christ as its fulfillment, not that the reader imposed his or her own meaning on the passage. Later, Thomas Aquinas would speak of the priority of the "literal sense," and anticipated the views of the Reformers. (Few people are aware that Thomas's primary theological task was that of an expositor of Scripture; his commentaries are only recently being translated.) Later, the Reformers would insist on the primacy and sufficiency of Scripture, but they were not being original here.

One of the happy ecumenical convergences of the twentieth and early twenty-first century has been the renewed appreciation for a theological reading of Scripture – as typified by what has been called the "biblical theology" movement. Biblical theology peaked in the mid-twentieth century, and there were worries about its collapse in the 1960's and 70's but, as with Mark Twain, the rumors of its demise were greatly exaggerated. As in any other discipline, there are different schools, who disagree with each other on various issues – the controversy about the "new perspective on Paul" would be an example – yet among orthodox Christians, there is a common agreement about the importance of a theological reading of Scripture in its "plain sense." This is as true of Roman Catholics as of Protestants, and the methods used are the same. (Since even before Vatican II, Roman Catholic scholars have been committed to careful, critical, theological reading of Scripture. I received my graduate training in Roman Catholic institutions and I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Roman Catholics took Scripture seriously. I remember one Catholic professor saying, "Of course, Paul believed in justification by faith and regarded it as forensic.") The best theological commentaries of the Bible these days are as likely to have been written by Catholics as by Protestants. Three recent commentary series display the current ecumenical convergence: IVP's *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* is a

multivolume collection of patristic commentary on each book of the Bible distributed by an Evangelical publisher. Roman Catholic (former Episcopalian) Rusty Reno is editor of the *Brazos Theological Commentary on Scripture* with volumes written by Roman Catholics, various flavors of Protestants and Anglicans, and Orthodox authors. Evangelical publisher Baker Academic is currently the publisher of the multivolume *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture*.

I would add here that a doctrine *of* Scripture is not the same thing as a doctrine *about* Scripture. The shared commitment to the primacy and formal sufficiency of Scripture as found in writers from Irenaeus to Thomas Aquinas to the Protestant Reformers to the more recent advocates of “biblical theology” is that of a concern with the theological “subject matter” of Scripture, what Athanasius called its “scope” (*skopos*). Modern conservative Protestant concern about issues such as the “inerrancy” of Scripture is a doctrine *about* Scripture, a shorthand label for a particular theological understanding of Scripture’s origin (verbal plenary inspiration) that presumes commitments to specific notions of the relation between divine sovereignty and human instrumentality in the writing of Scripture, and has as little relation to the theological subject matter of Scripture as does the competing Roman Catholic doctrine of papal infallibility. Both are primarily tools of a modern rationalist apologetics, which, even if tenable, would have little value in understanding the “scope” of Scripture.

(2) In referring to the “scope” or “subject matter” of Scripture, I am assuming (as did Athanasius), that Scripture has both a center and a periphery. The center can be found in the “Rule of Faith” appealed to by second-century theologians such as Irenaeus and the ecumenical creeds of the patristic era. The “Rule of Faith” is not an addition to Scripture, but is a hermeneutical tool to identify the heart of Scripture and assist in its interpretation. From the earliest discussions of

Christian faith by the church fathers, this subject matter or "scope" of Scripture has been summarized in the following doctrines: the nature of the Triune God; creation; fall; covenant (with the nation of Israel); the incarnation, life, atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; soteriology; the mission of the Holy Spirit, grace, ecclesiology; eschatology.

(3) There are numerous theologians who have focused on this central subject matter of Christian faith in their writings, and it is important that Christians of all theological traditions know them well. Among the fathers, I would mention particularly, Irenaeus, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, the Cappadocians, and Augustine. In the Medieval church, I would consider Thomas Aquinas to be the most important figure. (In the mid-twentieth century, "Thomism" was a philosophical movement, and Catholic philosophers valued Thomas primarily for his apologetic value. In the last several decades, theologians have recognized that Thomas was actually a theologian; numerous recent studies have focused on his doctrines of the Trinity, creation, Christology, soteriology, grace, and the sacraments.) There has been a resurgence of patristic theology among Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and Evangelicals in recent decades. This is all to the good, but the Medieval church should not be neglected. The Reformation is a late Medieval movement, and cannot be understood without understanding its historical precedents. It is also important that those of us in Reformation churches should know well the key writers in our own tradition. For Lutherans that means Martin Luther, and for the Reformed, John Calvin. For Anglicans, Thomas Cranmer is important, but, even more important for the theological understanding of Anglicanism, I would argue, is Richard Hooker.

(4) A key issue in the divide between ecumenical Christians and enclave Christians has to do with their understanding of the nature of the Reformation: Was the Reformation a reforming

movement in the Western Catholic Church, or, was it, rather, a complete break with an apostate Rome? The self-understanding of historic Anglicanism, as well as the continental Reformers, was the former, while enclave theologians, whether Protestant or Tridentine Roman Catholics, tend to view the Reformation as a complete break with that which had gone before. I would say that this is as much an issue of methodology and theology as of the reading of texts. Historically, polemics between Catholics and Protestants has tended to emphasize discontinuity; in the mid-twentieth century, both Catholic and Protestant scholars began to emphasize continuity, and this was the school of historiography that influenced me in my doctoral studies and dissertation. In recent years, resurgence of polemics has led to a renewed focus on discontinuity among some scholars. As an apologetic concern, Anglican Reformers such as Thomas Cranmer and John Jewel insisted on the catholicity of their views, but at the same time did not hesitate to criticize the post-Reformation Roman Catholic Church insofar as they argued that Rome had departed either from the plain reading of Scripture or from the faith of the patristic church. However, they insisted that Rome was in discontinuity, not themselves. It is this tension between continuity and discontinuity that can provide ammunition for both ecumenists and enclave Christians to claim that they are being faithful readers of the Reformers or the Catholic tradition.

(5) There are a number of modern (chronologically not methodologically) theologians who have continued to focus on the central subject matter of Christian faith in their writings. The Reformed theologian Karl Barth is, I think, the most significant modern figure. Barth initiated the modern trinitarian revival in his *Church Dogmatics* 1.1. Barth has been influential for both Protestants and Catholics. For example, Reformed theologian Thomas F. Torrance and Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar could both be claimed as disciples of Barth. His influence can be seen in

their respective theologies of atonement. Torrance was a Reformed theologian working in a tradition that had focused almost exclusively on the death of Christ as the center of atonement theology. Torrance insisted that the cross only made sense within the light of the incarnation and the ontology of the person of Jesus Christ as God become human – that is, the hypostatic union. And, of course, the cross could not be understood apart from the resurrection. The crucified Christ is God become human, who has conquered death. Conversely, von Balthasar was a Catholic theologian working in a tradition that had (under the influence of theologians like Karl Rahner) focused almost exclusively on the incarnation as the whole point of Christology. Von Balthasar insisted that the incarnation and resurrection needed to be read within the light of their center, the cross. The incarnation of Jesus Christ was oriented toward the cross, and the resurrection cannot be understood except in light of the cross.

Protestants and Catholics need to know each others' theologians. If Catholics need to know Barth and Torrance, Protestants need to know Balthasar and, I would add, such figures as Henri de Lubac, whose writings on grace have been significant in their challenge of Tridentine Catholic limitations – if not identical to, at least in the same ballpark as Protestant concerns about post-Reformation Roman Catholic theology.

(6) This likely reflects Anglican prejudice, but I would also point out that historically there has been a pattern to the worship of the church that can be traced to the earliest fathers. The same church that recognized and handed on the canon of Scripture worshiped in a certain way – a worship that began every Sunday with the liturgical reading of the canonical Scriptures and concluded with the eucharistic meal. The worship of this church included a liturgical year that through its organizational structure annually summarized the “scope” of Christian faith. The most crucial celebration of

the Christian year was Holy Week, with its retelling of the events of Palm Sunday, the establishment of the eucharist (Maundy Thursday), the crucifixion (Good Friday) and the resurrection of Christ (Easter Sunday). Unfortunately, many Reformation churches have neglected or abandoned this liturgical structure of worship, but, in recent decades, Protestant theologians such as Geoffrey Wainwright and James K.A. Smith have reminded us of its importance. In recent years, there has been a revival of liturgical worship even among some historically "low church" Protestant denominations; this is all to the good. At the same time, unfortunately, there can be a liturgical enclave theology that is the "funhouse mirror" image of low church rejection of liturgical worship as "vain repetition." Among Roman Catholics, this manifests itself as a nostalgia for the Latin mass and a rejection of the *Novus Ordo*; among some Anglicans, the 1662 Prayer Book (or the American 1928) is considered the "gold standard," and Prayer Books reflecting the work of the 20th century liturgical movement (such as the 1979 American BCP) are viewed with suspicion.

(7) There is a close relationship between doctrine and practices, between faith and spirituality, ethics, and politics. How could this not be the case if Christian faith is concerned with salvation? The basic Christian claim is that through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians are united to the risen Christ and participate in the life of the triune God. If, as Christians affirm, Jesus Christ is Lord, then the implication is that Christ is Lord over every area of culture.

A generation ago, Evangelical David Moberg complained in his book *The Great Reversal*, that Evangelicals had lost a concern about social justice that had characterized the Evangelicals of the nineteenth century, and that there was now a division between liberal Protestants who were concerned with social justice and Evangelicals who focused exclusively on

evangelism. If it was the case that Evangelicals of a former generation avoided politics, that would certainly not be the case of the generation of Evangelicals following in the wake of the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Beginning with the rise of the so-called Moral Majority, continuing with groups like the Christian Coalition, and overwhelming support for President George W. Bush by “values voters” in the early 2000’s, Evangelicals regularly embraced an identifiable political philosophy. Unfortunately, it is precisely the identification of Evangelicalism with this particular political philosophy that has led to the alienation of the “Millennial” generation from the church.

Dissatisfaction with the alliance between conservative Christianity and conservative politics does not mean endorsement of the political left. Both sides of the current American political divide have the following in common: (1) both are variations of the individualist liberalism that originated with John Locke. This is illustrated by the focus on “rights talk” that both sides share. For so-called political conservatives, the rhetoric is of “right to life” or freedom from excessive taxation – thus the rhetoric of the “Tea Party”; for the political left, the rhetoric is about the “right to choose” or the right to express one’s “true” sexual identity; (2) both sides view politics as a direct confrontation between the individual and the state; thus, neither side recognizes the significance of mediating social structures such as families, churches, workplaces, schools.

There are alternatives. The anabaptist ethics of those influenced by Stanley Hauerwas rightly focuses on the church as a community of discipleship distinct from the culture. Reformed sphere sovereignty and Catholic subsidiarity both recognize the significance of mediating social structures between the individual and the state: the family, the church, work places, schools, voluntary organizations such as food pantries or clubs. Eastern Orthodox writer Rod Dreher has

written much recently about the Benedict Option – in the light of the defeat of the culture wars, Christians need to focus on forming distinct communities of virtue rather than continuing to follow failed ineffective political policies. Pope Francis's politics of "mercy" corrects the church's tendency to articulate cultural war opposition in terms of a simple "no" by emphasizing the church's primary message to the culture is one of mercy and forgiveness, not condemnation

Karl Barth's insistence that in every interaction with the culture, the gospel speaks both a "Yes" and a "No" is helpful. On the one hand, every individual whom the Christian encounters has been created in the image of God, is fallen and sinful, and is redeemed by Christ – whether he or she recognizes or acknowledges it or not – and must be treated as such. On the other hand, Jesus Christ alone is Lord, and, as the Barmen Declaration made clear, any attempt by a state or culture to claim Jesus Christ's Lordship for itself is idolatrous, and must be resisted.

(8) Christians of different confessional traditions need to get to know one another and cooperate in shared ventures. Evangelical author John Armstrong has coined the term "missional ecumenism" to refer to this. To a large extent, ecumenical encounters between Christians have taken place at the highest levels of organizational ecclesial structures, e.g., in official ecumenical dialogues. In my own experience, academia has been the setting for these relationships. I received my doctorate at the Catholic University of Notre Dame, but the faculty included not only Catholics, but also Methodists, Anglicans, Lutherans, and even a Mennonite. There were more non-Catholic than Catholic graduate students in the doctoral program: Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Orthodox, even a Baptist. The focus of theological study was deliberately ecumenical.

At the Anglican seminary where I teach, we revised our curriculum a few years ago, and decided that we needed to

include in each syllabus a description of how the particular course emphasized Anglican distinctives. Shortly afterwards, Lutherans approached us and we found ourselves entering into a joint agreement. We are now not only an Anglican seminary, but also the official site of the North American Lutheran Seminary. Most recently, we were approached in a similar way by Presbyterians, and we are beginning a Presbyterian track. Life is full of surprises.

Armstrong's point, however, is that ecumenical interaction is too important to be left to denominational bureaucrats, or, I would add, even seminaries. The average town has several different churches of different denominations. We all read the same Bible, affirm the same ecumenical creeds, and yet do not really know or interact with one another. I am an Anglican, and there are several churches of different confessional traditions that are much closer to where I live than the Anglican church I attend. I have never set foot in the local Roman Catholic Church or the Methodist Church, which are only a few blocks from my house. Some of the students at my seminary attend the local Presbyterian Church, which I have visited only once, for a musical concert. If we take seriously our Lord's prayer that his church would be one, if we acknowledge that the source of Christian unity is not our denominational confessions but unity with the crucified and risen Christ who enables us to participate in the life of the triune God; if we worship God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each Sunday morning through the reading of Scripture, the preaching of the Word, the reciting of the Creed, and the breaking of sacramental bread; if we believe that we die with and are risen with Christ in baptism; if we believe that the church is the body of Christ, which is united to his crucified and risen body as we share in the sacramental eucharistic bread and wine of which he spoke the words "This is my body," "This is my blood," then our living our Christian lives each day as if Christians outside our own denominational structures did not exist is a contradiction of what we claim

to believe. We need to do better.

(9) Finally, the most interesting and exciting theological work being done these days is being done by theologians and biblical scholars from different confessional traditions who focus on what I have called the theological center: the doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation, Christology, soteriology, etc. However, insisting that there is a center and a periphery to Christian faith – and that the center lies in the affirmations of the rule of faith and the ecumenical creeds – does not mean that confessional differences do not exist or that they are not important. (I have written about such issues as the relation between Scripture and tradition, episcopacy, justification by faith, infant baptism, eucharistic theology.) However, it does mean that even discussion of theological differences needs to re-examine those differences in light of the creedal center. Doing so makes a difference.

For example, division between Protestants and Catholics on justification has hinged on disagreements about whether justification is an “imputation” or an “infusion.” Stated baldly, the disagreement is intractable. However, referring justification to Christology can lead to progress in understanding. Both Protestants and Catholics affirm that salvation consists in being united to Christ. Luther himself did not use the language of “imputation,” but he did speak of “alien righteousness.” His point was that our standing before God does not depend on any good works that we have accomplished, but on Jesus Christ’s finished work on the cross, which he accomplished independently of, and “outside us,” entirely without our contribution: Jesus saves us; we do not save ourselves. The Catholic affirms that in justification we are forgiven, and there is nothing we can do to earn that forgiveness. But the Catholic also wants to affirm that God’s forgiveness is effective. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we really are united to the crucified and risen Jesus

Christ, and Christ really shares his life with us, resulting in a genuine change and transformation. The Catholic wants to take seriously the language of Anglican Thomas Cranmer's eucharistic rite: we really do dwell in Christ and he dwells in us: Jesus saves us; we do not save ourselves. But Jesus really does save us in such a way that we become more and more like him. There is progression in holiness.

Similarly, there has been disagreement between Protestants and Catholics on the notion of eucharistic sacrifice. The Protestant point is that Jesus Christ has died once for all, and his sacrifice on the cross cannot be repeated. Our salvation depends entirely on his finished work, and there is nothing that we as a church can offer to God to contribute to that. Jesus is not sacrificed again in the eucharist, and all we can offer to God as a sacrifice is the living sacrifice of "our selves, our souls, and our bodies." Careless use of language by Catholics can suggest exactly the kind of repetition of Christ's sacrifice to which Protestants object. Again, however, focusing on the creedal center can lead to progress in understanding. Certainly Jesus Christ's death on the cross is once for all, and cannot be repeated. At the same time, the church affirms that in the eucharist, the risen Christ gives himself fully to his church and is present to the worshiping community in his full humanity and deity. (We do not worship an absent Savior.) If in our eucharistic worship, Jesus is fully present (through the mediation of the Holy Spirit) in the body in which he died once for all for our sins, then his once for all sacrifice is present to the church in its full effectiveness, and when we receive the sanctified elements of bread and wine in faith, we receive the full benefits of Jesus' sacrifice. It is not that Jesus is sacrificed again, but when the church speaks of the eucharist as a sacrifice, it is insisting not that we have something of our own worthiness to offer to God – we don't – but that the only offering we can present to God the Father is the offering of Christ's once for all finished work upon the cross. The

whole point of language of eucharistic sacrifice then is not to say that the church has something of its own to offer to God, but precisely the opposite – to make plain that our salvation depends on Christ’s finished work – his once for all sacrifice – and not our own.

Ecumenical dialogue that proceeds through the trinitarian, incarnational, and soteriological center will not resolve every theological disagreement, but it certainly makes such disagreements less intractable.

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## Anglican Reflections: What About Priests?



The New Testament uses the words *episkopos* (“bishop”) and *presbyteros* (“elder”) to refer to those who exercised office in the church, along with *diakonos* (deacon). It uses the word *hiereus*, equivalent to English “priest” or Latin *sacerdos* to refer to Old Testament and Jewish priests (Matt.8:4; John 12:51, Acts 5:27, Heb. 7:14), to the High Priesthood of Jesus (Heb. 4:14), and to the priesthood of the entire church as the people of God (1 Peter 2:9, Rev. 20:6). The New Testament never uses the word *hiereus* to refer to persons who hold office in the church.

Nonetheless, Anglicans have continued to use the word "priest" to refer to those who hold the office of *presbyter*, to the consternation of some. Richard Hooker wrote that he preferred the word "presbyter" to "priest" because he would prefer not to offend those who are troubled by the word. The Anglican Reformers rejected the notion of eucharistic sacrifice, and so rejected any notion of priesthood that implied sacrifice. As Richard Hooker asked, "Seeing then that sacrifice is now no part of the church ministry how should the name of Priesthood be thereunto rightly applied?" Hooker believed that the term "priest" was permissible in reference to one "whose mere function or charge is the service of God," and specifically in reference to the celebration of the eucharist: "The Fathers of the Church of Christ with like security of speech call usually the ministry of the Gospel Priesthood in regard of that which the Gospel hath proportionable to ancient sacrifices, namely the Communion of the blessed Body and Blood of Christ, although it have properly now no sacrifice." In the end, Hooker did not think the word itself is very important: "Wherefore to pass by the name, let them use what dialect they will, whether we call it a Priesthood, a Presbytership, or a Ministry it skilleth not: Although in truth the word Presbyter doth seem more fit, and in propriety of speech more agreeable than Priest with the drift of the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ." (*Laws* 5.58.2-3.)

There are two key aspects of ordained ministry that touch more directly on the "priestly" aspect of ordination in Anglican tradition than the use of the word "priest" as equivalent to "presbyter."

First is the "office of the keys," and specifically, the sacramental rite of "confession" or "Reconciliation of a Penitent" (1979 BCP). The Anglican Reformers did not adopt either the more radical Reformation view that individual confession of sin should be to God alone nor the Tridentine Catholic view that confession to a priest was mandatory.

Rather (in a manner similar to Lutheran practice), they retained the possibility of non-obligatory individual confession to a priest. The 1549 and 1552 Eucharistic rites include an invitation to private confession:

*And because it is requisite that no man should come to the holy Communion but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience: therefore if there be any of you which by the means afore said cannot quiet his own conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel; then let him come to me, or some other discreet and learned minister of God's word, and open his grief, that he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort, as his conscience may be relieved; and that by the ministry of God's word he may receive comfort and the benefit of absolution, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness. (1552 BCP)*

Cranmer's catechism recommends private confession as does *The Second Book of Homilies*. John Jewel's *Apology of the Church of England* refers to the "power of the keys" and Jewel suggested that private confession was a matter of individual conscience. Several of the Caroline Divines recommended private confession. Cranmer's exhortation was retained in the 1662 BCP. The standard *Prayer Books* and Ordinal continued to retrain both the use of the word "priest" and proclamations of absolution of sin.<sup>1</sup>

The second "priestly" aspect of ordination concerns eucharistic sacrifice. By the end of the second century, writers like the author of *The Didache*, Clement, Justin Martyr, and Hippolytus were already referring to the eucharist as (in some sense) a sacrifice. Later writers like John Chrysostom would insist on the oneness of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the eucharistic sacrifice. The church does not offer a new sacrifice, but an *anamnesis* of Christ's one sacrifice.

Medieval theologians wrote much more about “real presence” than they did on the subject of eucharistic sacrifice. Medieval theologians did agree that the “once for all” nature of Christ’s passion meant that his sacrifice could not be repeated. Thomas Aquinas wrote that Christ’s passion was a “true sacrifice” because “Christ by his suffering made perfect sacrifice for our sins” (ST 3.48.2). Thomas stated that the eucharist does not offer a different sacrifice than the one offered on the cross: “There is one sacrifice.” (ST 3.83.2). The eucharist does have the nature of a sacrifice inasmuch as it makes Christ’s passion present (ST. 3.79.3). The eucharist is a “re-presentation” of Christ’s passion (ST 3.83.3). Thomas makes clear that what takes place in the eucharist is not a repetition of what Christ did on the cross.<sup>2</sup>

Whether they understood or correctly represented the patristic and Medieval position, the Reformers uniformly rejected the notion of eucharistic sacrifice. Martin Luther insisted that since Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was sufficient, and only Christ himself could offer himself as a sacrifice, that sacrifice could not be repeated. Therefore, there could be no repetition of Christ’s sacrifice in the mass, and so no eucharistic sacrifice.<sup>3</sup>

John Calvin insisted that there was no longer any human priesthood (as in the Old Testament) because Christ alone is now the only priest. To speak of a eucharistic sacrifice is to rob Christ of his eternal priesthood by claiming to do his work. The doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice presumes that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was not sufficient. Calvin rejected Roman Catholic arguments that the eucharistic sacrifice was not a “re-sacrifice” by simply re-affirming that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was “once for all” and not repeatable.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Cranmer’s position on eucharistic sacrifice was in line

with the Reformers.<sup>5</sup> Christ's once-for-all sacrifice on the cross cannot be repeated and so there is no eucharistic sacrifice. Cranmer's eucharistic prayer affirms:

*O God heavenly Father, which of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesu Christ, to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, who made there (by his one oblation, once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world, and did institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to celebrate, a perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again . . .*

The only reference to eucharistic sacrifice in Cranmer's rite is not to a re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice, but to our grateful response – "rendering unto thee most hearty thanks, for the innumerable benefits procured unto us by the same, entirely desiring thy fatherly goodness, mercifully to accept this our Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving."

The 39 Articles repeat this understanding:

*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. (Art.31)*

The first sentence is compatible with the traditional Catholic position of someone like Thomas Aquinas, but the concluding sentence clearly repudiates any notion of eucharistic sacrifice. Confusingly, the reference to "sacrifices" (plural), presumes that the Catholic position is that each eucharist is a distinct sacrifice, but this is contrary to the

historic Catholic position, represented by someone like Thomas Aquinas, that the once-for-all nature of Christ's sacrifice on the cross is not repeatable, and that there is only one sacrifice. The historic Catholic position is that the eucharist is not a repetition of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, but a re-presentation or making present of that once-for-all sacrifice. In referring to "sacrifices," Art. 31 repudiates a position that historic orthodox Catholic theology would not seem to hold.

The logic of a Catholic thinker like Thomas Aquinas would be:

- 1) The once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross is complete and sufficient, and therefore is not repeatable.
- 2) Because the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is not repeatable (see 1), the eucharist *cannot be a repetition* of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice, but must instead be a re-presentation or making present of that one sufficient once-for-all sacrifice.

The Reformers' logic would be as follows:

- 1) The once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross is complete and sufficient, and therefore is not repeatable.
- 2) Because the sacrifice of the cross is not repeatable (see 1), and a eucharistic sacrifice *would be a repetition* of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice, the eucharist is not a sacrifice.

This would seem to be a rather blatant case of talking past one another.

At the same time, there are ambiguities in Cranmer's eucharistic rite that left the door open to later Anglican affirmations of eucharistic sacrifice. The 1662 BCP directs that bread and wine be placed upon the table without any words accompanying the action. Kenneth Stevenson points out that

this can be interpreted either “functionally” or “functionally-symbolically.”<sup>6</sup> In the eucharistic prayer, immediately after Christ’s death is described as a “ full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world,” the eucharist is described as a “perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again.”

Caroline Divine Lancelot Andrewes, in his apologetic against Roman Catholic theologian Robert Bellarmine, stated:

*Our men believe that the eucharist was instituted by the Lord for a memorial of Himself, even of His sacrifice, and, if I be lawful so to speak, to be a commemorative sacrifice, not only to be a sacrament and for spiritual nourishment. . . . The sacrifice which is there is Eucharistic, of which sacrifice the law is that he who offers is to partake of it, and that he partake by receiving and eating, as the Saviour ordered.*<sup>7</sup>

The writers of the Oxford Movement often understood eucharistic sacrifice as the offering that the risen Christ makes perpetually before his Father in heaven. Christ offers ceaselessly in heaven that sacrifice that he made once-for-all upon the cross. The church’s eucharist is the earthly type of this heavenly offering. In John Keble’s *Eucharistic Adoration*, he states:

*For the true oblation in the Eucharist is not the Bread and Wine, that is only as the vessel which contains or the garment which veils it; but that which our Lord by the hands of the priest offers to His Father in the holy Eucharist, is His own Body and Blood, the very same which He offers and presents to Him, with which, as S. Paul says, He appears before Him now, night and day continually in heaven, in commemoration of His having offered it once for all in His Passion and Death on the Cross. It is the one great reality,*

*summing up in itself all the memorial sacrifices of old.*<sup>8</sup>

In their response to Pope Leo XIII's Bull *Apostolicae Curae* (1896) which declared Anglican orders "utterly null and void" because of the ordinal's lack of reference to eucharistic sacrifice, the Archbishops of York and Canterbury stated:

*[W]e make provision with the greatest reverence for the consecration of the holy Eucharist and commit it only to properly ordained Priests and to no other ministers of the Church. Further we truly teach the doctrine of Eucharistic sacrifice and do not believe it to be a "nude commemoration of the Sacrifice of the Cross," an opinion which seems to be attributed to us by the quotation made from that Council. But we think it sufficient in the Liturgy which we use in celebrating the holy Eucharist,—while lifting up our hearts to the Lord, and when now consecrating the gifts already offered that they may become to us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,—to signify the sacrifice which is offered at that point of the service in such terms as these. We continue a perpetual memory of the precious death of Christ, who is our Advocate with the Father and the propitiation for our sins, according to His precept, until His coming again. For first we offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; then next we plead and represent before the Father the sacrifice of the cross, and by it we confidently entreat remission of sins and all other benefits of the Lord's Passion for all the whole Church; and lastly we offer the sacrifice of ourselves to the Creator of all things which we have already signified by the oblations of His creatures. This whole action, in which the people has necessarily to take its part with the Priest, we are accustomed to call the Eucharistic sacrifice.*<sup>9</sup>

Finally, modern ecumenical discussion has led to a more or less agreed understanding of eucharistic sacrifice built on a

greater appreciation for the notion of *anamnesis*, not as mere memory, but as “re-collection.” ARCIC, the agreed statement between Roman Catholics and Anglicans, states:

*The notion of memorial as understood in the passover celebration at the time of Christ, i.e. the making effective in the present of an event in the past, has opened the way to a clearer understanding of the relationship between Christ's sacrifice and the eucharist. The eucharistic memorial is no mere calling to mind of a past event or of its significance, but the church's effectual proclamation of God's mighty acts. Christ instituted the eucharist as a memorial (anamnesis) of the totality of God's reconciling action in him. In the eucharistic prayer the church continues to make a perpetual memorial of Christ's death, and his members, united with God and one another, give thanks for all his mercies, entreat the benefits of his passion on behalf of the whole church, participate in these benefits and enter into the movement of his self-offering.*<sup>10</sup>

The above makes clear that there have been at least three senses in which Anglicans have been willing to speak of ordained clergy as “priests.” First, “priest” is understood to be the English equivalent of the New Testament “presbyter.” Second, unlike some other Reformation churches, the Church of England understood the notion of the “keys” to include the authority of ordained clergy to pronounce absolution, and thus, from the beginning, the *Prayer Book* tradition allows for the possibility of private confession. Third, although controversial, the notion of eucharistic sacrifice has been retained in an at least modified sense, understood not as a repetition of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice on the cross, but as both a “sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving,” and also as a “perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again.” At the same time, while being clear that Christ's sacrifice on the cross is a sufficient once-for-all

sacrifice for the sins of the world, and cannot be repeated, many Anglicans have been willing to speak of eucharistic sacrifice not in the sense of a “repetition” of Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice, but as a “re-presentation,” or a “making present” of Christ’s sacrificial offering, made once-for-all on the cross, and now continually offered by the risen Christ to God the Father (Heb. 9:24).

[1](#) Church of England Board for Mission and Unity of the General Synod, *The Priesthood of the Ordained Ministry* (London: Church House, 1986), 45-50.

[2](#) George Hunsinger. *The Eucharist and Ecumenism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 111-117.

[3](#) Hunsinger, 100-104.

[4](#) Hunsinger, 105-109.

[5](#) On the Anglican Reformers and eucharistic sacrifice, see *The Priesthood of the Ordained Ministry*, 50-60, H.R. McAdoo and Kenneth Stevenson. *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Anglican Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1995), 112-117.

[6](#) Stevenson, 112.

[7](#) Cited by Stevenson, 126. Stevenson includes numerous citations of Anglican divines who affirm a notion of eucharistic sacrifice going beyond a “sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving,” despite the apparently clear stance of the 39 Articles. Andrewes is a typical example.

[8](#) *On Eucharistical Devotion*, 1870; cited *The Priesthood of the Ordained Ministry*, 70.

[9](#) *Answer of the Archbishops of England to the Apostolic Letter of Pope Leo XIII [Saepius Officio] Addressed to the whole body of Bishops of the Catholic Church*; cited *Priesthood of the Ordained Ministry*, 76.

[10](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/eucharistic_doctrine1971.cfm) Anglican – Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission, “Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine 1971”; [http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/eucharistic\\_doctrine1971.cfm](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/eucharistic_doctrine1971.cfm).

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## Anglican Reflections: What About the 39 Articles?



Broadly speaking, the 39 Articles stands within the tradition of Anglicanism as “reformed catholicism,” or, more specifically, a reforming movement within the western catholic church. (This contrasts with more radical Reformation movements, such as the Anabaptists, and, arguably, the Puritans, who viewed themselves as completely breaking with western catholicism to return to the pristine Christianity of the New Testament.)

The Articles are largely an ecumenical document, the majority of whose statements fall broadly within the parameters of “reformed catholicism.”

Arts. 1-5, 8 affirm historic creedal Nicene and Chalcedonian Christianity.

Arts. 9-10,12-13,15-18 affirm the positions of a moderate Augustinianism. Even art. 17 does not teach a specifically Calvinist doctrine of predestination. There is nothing about negative predestination (reprobation or double predestination). The election that is described is corporate and "in Christ." ("In Christ" was added to the original 42 Articles.) "Arminians" such as Richard Hooker were able to affirm this article, to the chagrin of strict Calvinists.<sup>1</sup>

Arts. 6, 7, 11 affirm the sufficiency and primacy of Scripture as well as justification by faith, which are commonly held Reformation positions, although even here, an argument could be made that the position on Scripture is consistent with that of the patristic church, of Eastern theologians such as John Damascene, and Western theologians such as Thomas Aquinas. Anglican theologians such as Cranmer, Jewel, and Hooker make clear that (contrary to the Puritan hermeneutic), Anglicans do not understand the "Scripture principle" in a "regulative" sense.

The "controversial" articles are those articles, especially beginning with Art. 19, "Of the Church," in which the position of the Church of England is set over against that of other contemporary Reformation-era churches, usually the Tridentine Roman Catholic position, but sometimes that of other Reformation churches, usually those of the Radical Reformation. (Arts. 38-39 are addressed against Anabaptists).

Which of the articles have been "controversial" in the history of Anglicanism and today? Art. 22, repudiating purgatory and icons; Art. 25, concerning the number of sacraments, and seemingly forbidding elevation of the consecrated host; Art. 28-29, which seem to reject any notion of bodily presence (not simply transubstantiation, but also the Orthodox or Lutheran positions) and elevation of the host; Art. 31, which appears to reject any notion of eucharistic sacrifice. Generally, Evangelical Anglicans have tended to be happy with these

articles, and Anglo-Catholics unhappy. Conversely, Art. 27 seems on a literal reading to affirm baptismal regeneration, a position not embraced by a good many Evangelical Anglicans.<sup>2</sup>

I suggest that the Articles themselves provide hermeneutical principles to address such issues: Art. 6 states that what is not “read” in Scripture, nor “proved” by Scripture “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.” The key phrases are “proved,” “required,” “necessary to salvation.” Article 7 gives some guidance on hermeneutical principles in reading Scripture. Art. 8 and 21 make clear that Anglicans accept the dogmas of the ecumenical councils not because such councils have intrinsic authority as councils, but because they are consistent with the teaching of Scripture. Since the sometimes political battles of the nineteenth century (including imprisoning ritualist clergy), Anglicans seem to have adopted a position of tolerance in regard to dissenters on the “controverted” Articles. What may not be demanded by the church (as in Tridentine Catholicism) might nonetheless be allowed as a matter of private opinion, e.g., belief in some kind of doctrine of purgatory. (Certainly we would not want to say that Anglicans such as C.S. Lewis, who believed in purgatory, are outside the bounds of the permissible?<sup>3</sup>) Liturgical practices that are explicitly prohibited by the Articles (such as elevating the host or the use of icons) are widely practiced in numerous Anglican parishes. (There are icons in my own parish, and in the offices of many of the faculty at TSM, an “evangelical” Anglican seminary.) Article 28 specifies that “The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was not by Christ’s ordinance reserved . . . ,” yet the Good Friday Service of the 1979 BCP specifies: “In places where Holy Communion is to be administered from the reserved Sacrament, the following order is observed,”<sup>4</sup> and many Anglicans use the reserved sacrament not only in Good Friday

services, but also for “Deacon’s Masses,” and for taking the sacraments to “shut ins” and the sick, following the practice of the early church.

Ecumenical discussion and historical investigation have helped to shed light on some of the controverted questions, bringing Evangelicals and Catholics to better mutual understanding, if not necessarily agreement. For example, the primary concern of Art. 31 is to affirm the sufficiency and satisfaction of Christ’s atoning death, and to repudiate any notion of eucharistic sacrifice that would imply that Christ was being re-sacrificed. Modern ecumenical discussion has made clear that the patristic notion of eucharistic sacrifice (and arguably even the Medieval doctrine) was not that of a re-sacrifice but that of a re-appropriation or re-presentation of the once for all sacrifice of Christ. Accordingly, whatever Art. 31 is rejecting, it should not be understood to reject either the patristic or the more theologically sophisticated understanding of eucharistic sacrifice embraced by contemporary Roman Catholics or Orthodox or indeed by Anglo-Catholics, and even by some non-Anglican Protestants. Discussions concerning the meaning of *anamnesis*, and ecumenical discussions between not only Anglicans and Roman Catholics, but also those between other Christian bodies has led to a kind of common ecumenical understanding that, if not completely resolving disagreements, has made them less problematic. Roman Catholics have affirmed that the affirmation of “transubstantiation” does not require a particular theological theory concerning eucharistic presence. Accordingly, ARCIC was able to claim that Roman Catholics and Anglicans had reached a common understanding about the eucharist.<sup>5</sup>

On the doctrine of eucharistic presence, all non-Roman Catholic churches (including the Orthodox) repudiate the Tridentine position on transubstantiation, that the elements are transformed in such a manner that the bread and wine lose

their natural identity as bread and wine. The Anglican Reformers' notion of a "spiritual" presence ("only after an heavenly and spiritual manner") is notoriously difficult to interpret. Does "spiritual" mean immaterial as opposed to physical? Virtualism or receptionism (as presumably in Cranmer)? A presence "through the Spirit" (as in the East and in Calvin)? One would hope that Art. 28 would not exclude Anglicans from affirming that Christ is present *in* the elements in a manner similar to Lutheran or Orthodox belief.

Here I think that Richard Hooker's discussion is helpful. (1) The permanent humanity of Christ and union with the risen Christ is central to eucharistic theology; (2) "Participation" or union with Christ means we genuinely share in Christ's resurrection life, and through the Holy Spirit, the church is united to Christ as its head so as to become the body of Christ; (3) "that what merit, force or virtue soever there is in his sacrificed body and blood, we freely fully and wholly have it by this sacrament"; (4) that the effect of the sacrament "is a real transmutation of our souls and bodies from sin to righteousness, from death and corruption to immortality and life"; (5) that since bread and wine in themselves are an incapable instrument to bring about these effects, we are to trust to the strength of Christ's "glorious power who is able and will bring to pass that the bread and cup which he giveth us shall be truly the thing he promiseth." Anglicans have not endorsed or demanded any particular theory about *how* this takes place. (*Laws* 5.67,7).

Hooker's discussion does not address every one of the controverted articles, but it provides an example of the approach to be taken. Each issue of disagreement needs to be addressed separately. The theological concerns are more important than particular positions that attempt to address such concerns. For example, the broadly Augustinian position endorsed by the Articles affirms the priority and necessity of grace, the reality of original sin and the unregenerate will

in bondage to sin, the genuine transforming effect of grace, etc. It does not demand endorsement of particular theological theories about grace, as, for example, the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination. Distinctions need to be made between substantive issues of disagreement, and personal theological theories. For example, there is substantive disagreement between Zwinglians and non-Zwinglians about whether or not Christ is “truly present” in the Eucharist. To affirm as the Articles do that the sacraments are “effectual signs of grace,” that baptism is an “instrument” of engrafting into the church, that the eucharist is a “partaking” of the body and blood of Christ, makes clear that Anglicans repudiate Zwinglianism. On the other hand, any understanding of real presence (such as Tridentine transubstantiation) that denies that the consecrated elements retain their identity as bread and wine is also problematic. But it would seem that different theories of how Christ is present and how the sacraments are “instruments” of salvation should be permissible.

In summary, the Articles affirm a position of “reformed” or “evangelical catholicism.” They presume that the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the final authority for the church, and “sufficient” for salvation. They affirm the essential clarity and non-repugnancy of Scripture. At the same time, they affirm an understanding of ecclesiology that presumes that the historic catholic church (especially the patristic church) is largely in continuity with the Scriptures. They affirm the Creeds as necessary implications of – not additions to – the teaching of Scripture: “they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture” (Art. 8), and the ecumenical councils as faithful interpreters of Scripture. The Articles affirm a broadly Augustinian doctrine of grace, and an understanding of the sacraments as effectual “instruments” of salvation. At the same time, in areas where the late Medieval Western church endorsed positions that were incompatible with either the teaching of Scripture or the positions of the patristic church, the Articles embrace

standard Reformation positions (justification by faith, affirmation of the sufficient sacrifice of Christ, denial of transubstantiation, rejection of purgatory). Insofar as even councils can err, they are subject to correction. (However, this would imply that, since even councils can err, even doctrinal statements such as the 39 Articles can err, and are subject to correction.)

At the same time, it needs to be noted that the 39 Articles are not perfect expressions of Evangelical or Catholic faith. For example, they largely follow the late Medieval and Reformation tendency to present a gospel of sin and salvation, omitting any discussion of creation, or any extended discussion of God's covenant with Israel. These omissions are largely corrected by later Anglicans, e.g., the rediscovery of the significance of creation by Richard Hooker and the Caroline Divines, a greater appreciation for the Old Testament in preachers such as John Donne, an embracing of the tools of modern literary and historical criticism by nineteenth-century Anglican biblical scholars such as B.F. Westcott, F.J.A. Hort, and J.B. Lightfoot, by Charles Gore and the *Lux Mundi* group, in the twentieth century by Sir Edwin Hoskyns or Austin Farrer or by contemporary Anglican biblical scholars such as Anthony Thiselton or N.T. Wright. Modern ecumenical theological discussion has led to a rediscovery of the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity, along with a theology of salvation that is rooted in the economic Trinity; accordingly, the doctrines of creation, of God's covenant with Israel, of the mission of the Holy Spirit in ecclesiology, and of eschatology have greater significance today than they did in the theology either of the Reformers or of the Tridentine Roman Catholic Church against which the Reformers protested.

Finally, the 39 Articles is a confessional statement of a particular local church. It is not equivalent to an ecumenical council. The status of the 39 Articles would be something like that of a General Synod. Moreover, while they are historically

significant for Anglican identity, Anglicans need to acknowledge that other churches have their own defining documents, e.g., the Lutheran *Book of Concord*, and there is often broad agreement between these documents and the 39 Articles. As noted above, most of the material in the Articles is ecumenical or Reformational. Problems with individual articles connected with the controversial Articles have largely been settled by Anglicans by allowing for individual variation. We do seem to have learned something from the ritualist controversy. We no longer imprison people for putting candles on altars. People like C.S. Lewis were not held in suspicion for believing in purgatory. I would hope that orthodox Anglicans would continue in this tradition. I would be surprised and disappointed if church trials begin to be held for Anglo-Catholic priests who elevate the host or if congregations were suddenly forbidden to distribute the reserved sacrament at Good Friday services. I cannot imagine that Evangelicals would relish a repetition of the Gorham controversy. As I see a realignment of orthodox Anglicans in response to the theological aberrations of the last decade or so in not only the Episcopal Church USA and the Anglican Church of Canada, but also more and more, in the Church of England, and other westernized churches in the Anglican Communion, one of my fears is that the confessional battles of the nineteenth-century between Evangelical Anglicans and Anglo-catholics would be repeated. Historically, the 39 Articles has been an important source of confessional identity for Anglicans. It would be most unfortunate if it became a source of confessional division, either between Evangelical and Anglo-catholic Anglicans, or as a tool of anti-ecumenical retrenchment.

1 See especially Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the English Church From the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[2](#) J.C. Ryle's *Knots Untied: Being Plain Statements on Disputed Points in Religion from the Standpoint of an Evangelical Churchman* (London: William Hunt & Co., 1885) would be an example of a nineteenth century Evangelical reading of the 39 Articles and the baptismal service denying baptismal regeneration. Charles Simeon, another prominent nineteenth century Anglican acknowledged: "In the baptismal Service we thank God for having regenerated the baptized infant by his Holy Spirit. Now from hence it appears that in the opinion of our Reformers regeneration and remission of sins did accompany baptism." *The Excellency of the Liturgy* (NY: Eastburn, Kirk, 1813), Sermon 2, 63.

[3](#) "I believe in Purgatory." C.S. Lewis. *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964), 108.

[4](#) *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the use of The Episcopal Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 282.

[5](#) "Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine 1971," *Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission*, [http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/eucharistic\\_doctrine1971.cfm](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/eucharistic_doctrine1971.cfm).

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## Anglican Reflections: What About Apostolic Succession?



Apostolic succession has had three different meanings in the history of the church.<sup>1</sup>

(a) In the second century, apostolic succession was important (over against gnosticism) because of the issue of historical continuity. A historical succession of bishops was one of the four marks distinguishing catholic Christians from their gnostic opponents. Those churches that recognized the canonical authority of Scripture, interpreted and summarized Scripture by the Rule of Faith, and worshiped in word and Sacrament were the same churches that could trace their history through a succession of bishops from the apostles. This is the argument used by Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* 3.3,4. The focus here is on succession of bishops as an assurance of orthodox teaching.

(b) The bishops are successors of apostles in the sense that they continue to exercise various functions exercised by the apostles: teaching, preaching, celebrating the sacraments, ordination.

(c) The most controversial understanding of apostolic succession is that the “grace” of ordination is handed down from the apostles from one generation of bishops to another through the laying on of hands.

The reason that (c) is controversial is because of the questions it raises concerning the validity of ordination in

those churches that do not have episcopal polity or who cannot trace their ministry through the historical succession of bishops. For those who hold to (c), the validity of the orders of non-episcopal Reformation churches have been called into question:

(1) Apostolic succession was strongly affirmed in the Oxford Movement. However, (a) and (b) were not distinguished from (c), with the result that there were either concerns about the validity of sacraments in non-episcopal churches or it was simply assumed that there were no valid sacraments in non-episcopal churches.<sup>2</sup>

(2) Pope Leo XIII's bull *Apostolicae Curae* (1896) notoriously declared Anglican orders to be "absolutely null and void," to which the Archbishops of York and Canterbury responded with *Saepius Officio* (1897); the question of the validity of Anglican orders continues to be a major point of contention between Roman Catholics and Anglicans. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's (later Pope Benedict XVI) commentary on *Ad Tuendam Fidem* in 1998 stated that the teaching of *Apostolicae Curae* concerning the invalidity of Anglican orders is one of the teachings to which Roman Catholics must give "firm and definitive assent."

(3) The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral stipulated that "The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of His Church" is one of four conditions necessary for church union with Anglicans.

(4) When the Church of South India was formed by a union of Anglican and non-Anglican churches, those with non-Episcopal ordinations were not required to be re-ordained, although all future ordinations included bishops. Although the Lambeth Conference approved of the formation of the Church of South India, my understanding is that its membership was temporarily suspended from the Anglican Communion until the status of

episcopal ordinations was normalized.

(5) In ecumenical agreements leading to intercommunion between Anglicans and non-episcopal churches (such as the Lutheran), agreements have taken place by which future ordinands receive episcopal ordinations.

In *The Doctrine of the Church and Christian Reunion* (1920), A. C. Headlam argued that there is early historical evidence for (a) and (b), but that they should not be confused with (c), which is late, and does not appear until the time of Augustine of Hippo, and there is no evidence for (c) in the early church. Modern discussions of apostolic succession confuse (c) with (a) and (b), and then read into references to “apostolic succession” in the church fathers an understanding of the transmission of grace through episcopal succession that they did not have. Headlam argued that there is a significant difference between apostolic succession in senses (a) and (b) and (c): Concerning (a), he writes: “[T]here is no idea that the validity of [the bishop’s] ordination depended upon this succession, or that the succession depended on any spiritual gifts received at ordination.” Concerning (b), he writes: “[W]hat is definitely maintained is that for a valid ministry and the due performance of the Sacraments this succession and transmission by ordination is necessary.” Finally, concerning (c), Headlam states: “I have, I think, read everything from the Fathers which is quoted in favour of the Apostolic Succession, and I do not know any passage which speaks of succession by ordination in this sense.”<sup>3</sup>

Headlam argues that in the early church, the doctrine of orders was as follows:

(1) The ordination is performed in the church, where the Spirit is present, and the power to give the gifts of the Spirit comes through the church.

(2) The rite is performed the way that the church has

ordained, understood as having passed down from the apostles.

(3) The rite is performed by the duly appointed minister who had received the authority to do so, i.e., the bishop. However, this is not because of a spiritual power received by transmission from the apostles, but because the church had consecrated him with the authority to do so.

(4) The theology behind this is that the work of the Church is the work of God and that God gives the Spirit in answer to the prayers of the church. The essential matter of ordination is prayer accompanied by the laying on of hands.

Against Headlam, Michael Ramsey argued that (c) is implicit in (a) and (b). Ramsey argued for (c) on the basis of Christ's acting in the liturgy. If Christ acts through the bishop, then (c) is true. Grace is bestowed by the risen Christ through the action of the whole Church. Since Christ bestows grace through the sacramental actions of his body, and since certain actions of grace are confined to the bishop, i.e., ordination, then "the Church's full and continuous line of grace does depend on the succession of Bishops, whose work, however, is not isolated but bound up with the whole Body."<sup>4</sup>

Ramsey's point, while true, does not really address Headlam's criticism of (c), and so his conclusion does not follow. That Christ acts through (a) and (b) may imply that Christ acts through bishops, but it does not imply (c) that ordination takes place through a transmission of grace that is passed down exclusively through the laying on of hands of bishops in apostolic succession, or the converse, that Christ does not act in churches that do not have such bishops. Headlam's argument is that the early church saw ordination as a gift of the entire church who delegated the authority of the laying on of hands to bishops ordained in the apostolic succession. The alternative position sees ordination as a gift attached specifically to bishops in apostolic succession which they exercise on behalf of the church. Both are arguments for

apostolic succession, but they understand its significance in different ways and the two views have very different consequences when addressing the status of churches that do not have bishops ordained in apostolic succession.

In light of the above, it is important to remember that historic Anglicanism did not consider episcopacy to be of the *esse* of the church, but of the *bene esse*. Both John Jewel in his *Apology of the Church of England* and Richard Hooker in *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* considered episcopacy to be an indication that the Church of England was in continuity with the catholic church (especially of the patristic era), but did not claim that the non-episcopal churches of the continental Reformation were not true churches or were lacking in means of grace. William Palmer's "three branch theory," formulated in his *Treatise on the Church of Christ* (1838) marks a shift from the historic Anglican position in this regard.

[1](#) Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (London: Longmans, Green: 1956), 82; Arthur C. Headlam, *The Doctrine of the Church and Church Reunion* (NY: Longmans, Green, 1920), 124-133.

[2](#) "Why should we talk so much of an establishment, and so little of an APOSTOLICAL SUCCESSION? Why should we not seriously endeavour to impress our people with this plain truth;—that by separating themselves from our communion, they separate themselves not only from a decent, orderly, useful society, but from THE ONLY CHURCH IN THIS REALM WHICH HAS A RIGHT TO BE QUITE SURE THAT SHE HAS THE LORD'S BODY TO GIVE TO HIS PEOPLE?" John Keble, "Adherence to the Apostolical Succession the Safest Course," *Tracts for the Times*, Tract 4.

[3](#) Headlam, 124-133.

[4](#) Ramsey, 83.

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# Anglican Reflections: What About Bishops?

I received the following question in my email and thought it worth sharing my response:

*I am having a hard time wrapping my mind around the defense for episcopal church government. I can see the case for a plurality of elders in the New Testament, but this would seemingly lend itself to either a Presbyterian or Congregational polity. What is the best defense for the role of bishops? Can we defend it from the New Testament? And how do Anglicans account for the plurality of elders, such as revealed in Philippians 1:1?*

*The following is my own argument, but is a summary of arguments that can be found in numerous sources. A bibliography occurs at the end.*



Almost immediately after the Reformation, Anglicans acknowledged that the distinction between bishops and presbyters is not clearly articulated in the New Testament. Episcopacy was still defended, and a number of similar arguments have been used and repeated, beginning at

least from the time of Richard Hooker.

The first issue has to do with the difference between exegesis and hermeneutics, that is, the difference between what Scripture meant in its original historical setting and how the church applies Scripture to its life today. The fundamental difference between Richard Hooker and his Puritan opponents had to do with the issue of contemporary application. Both Hooker and the Puritans agreed that Scripture was the final authority for Christian doctrine and practices, but they differed on what that meant for the contemporary application of Scripture. The Puritans subscribed to the "regulative" principle of biblical interpretation: whatever is not specifically commanded in Scripture is forbidden. Accordingly, they were opposed to such practices as the exchange of wedding rings, written liturgies (such as the *Book of Common Prayer*), hymns (apart from the Psalms), vestments, and bishops, insofar as the Puritans noted correctly that the New Testament makes no inherent distinction between *presbyteroi* (presbyters) and *episkopoi* (bishops). To the contrary, Hooker embraced a permissive understanding of biblical hermeneutics: whatever Scripture does not explicitly forbid is permitted. Moreover, Hooker distinguished between matters of doctrine and morals (which are unchangeable), and matters of civil and ritual law (which are changeable by the church). The famous distinction between moral, civil and ritual law is not original to Hooker; it can be found in Thomas Aquinas, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in John Calvin. Hooker also insisted, however, that the distinction meant that churches were free to adopt ecclesiastical practices that were not explicitly commanded in the New Testament as long as they were not forbidden. This included written prayers (liturgical worship, including the *Prayer Book*), practices such as exchanging wedding rings, and retaining the historic catholic practice of the three-fold order of bishops, priests, and deacons – even if that order is not explicitly commanded or found in the New Testament.

In making this claim, Hooker was distinguishing himself not only from Puritans but from what later would be called Anglo-Catholics. Both Puritans and Anglo-Catholics insisted that church order was of the *esse* of the church; Hooker believed it was of the *bene esse*. Bishops are part of positive law. They are part of good order, and part of ancient tradition. They are permissible, but not necessary.<sup>1</sup>

The second issue has to do with historical continuity, and specifically the question of both continuity and difference between the first century apostolic church and the second century catholic church. In the second century conflict with Gnosticism, the early fathers first designated the church as “catholic” (meaning universal) in contrast to the “private knowledge” (*gnosis*) claimed by gnostics. The patristic writers of the second century named four marks that distinguished catholic identity.<sup>2</sup>

(1) The canon of Scripture. All of those churches that could trace their origins to the apostles acknowledged the canon of Scripture, including both Old and New Testaments, as being the single normative witness to the God who had created the world, made a covenant with Israel, had redeemed sinful humanity through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and had left the apostles as his successors – this, in contrast to gnostic sects that rejected the Old Testament (because its God was the creator of matter) or added gnostic gospels to the New Testament. (Unresolved was the question of the authority of the “deutero-canonical” texts, those books in the LXX translation of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament not found in the Hebrew canon, and written in Greek during the period between the writing of the last books of the Hebrew Bible and the writing of the New Testament, and later designated “apocrypha” by Protestants.)

(2) The Rule of Faith. All of those churches that could trace their origins to the apostles, and acknowledged the authority

of the biblical canon, acknowledged the "Rule of Faith" as the proper interpretation of Scripture. There are several variations of the "Rule," but versions found in Irenaeus, Origen and others both summarize the core content or subject matter of the Old and New Testaments and also anticipate the outline and even the texts of the later creeds. The "Rule" has a trinitarian structure, and summarizes God the Father's creation of the world, the redemption of sinful humanity through the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Holy Spirit's presence in the church, the Scriptures, the return of Jesus Christ in judgment, and the resurrection of the dead.

(3) Apostolic succession. All of those churches that acknowledged the authority of the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and interpreted Scripture through the lens of the Rule of Faith could also trace their historical continuity through their bishops back to the apostles who were eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ's ministry and who had written the New Testament scriptures.

(4) Worship in word and sacraments: Many accounts of the distinguishing marks of the second-century Catholic church mention only the previous three characteristics, but a fourth should be added as well. All of those churches who acknowledged the canonical scriptures interpreted through the lens of the Rule of Faith, and who could trace their lineage back to the apostles through their bishops also worshiped using a pattern of word and sacrament. Accounts of this basic structure are found in some of the earliest Christian writings outside of the New Testament, works such as *The Didache* or Justin Martyr's *First Apology*. When early Christians worshiped, they read the canonical scriptures, and they preached on the read texts. After the reading, they celebrated the sacraments. Newcomers to the community were baptized; those who were baptized shared the body and blood of Christ through eating and drinking of consecrated bread and wine.

Note that there is a reciprocal relationship between these four practices. Those churches that acknowledged the Scriptures were also the ones who interpreted them through the Rule of Faith, who could trace their history through their bishops to the apostles who were disciples of Jesus, and had written the New Testament, who worshiped by reading the canonical texts in the service of the word, and celebrated the sacraments of baptism and eucharist that were given to the church by Christ. Those churches that acknowledged the Rule of Faith, used it to interpret the Scriptures, had received the Rule from the church that traced its history through bishops to the apostles, and the Rule later formed the basic outline of the questions that were asked of catechumens when they were baptized when the church gathered to worship. Those churches that could trace their history through bishops were also those who acknowledged the canonicity of the Scriptures written by the apostles of whom they were the successors, who acknowledged the Rule of Faith, who led the worship of the church. Those churches that worshiped in word and sacrament read the canonical Scriptures in their services, used the Rule of Faith as a baptismal creed, and were led by bishops in their worship.

The point is this: although the distinction between bishops and presbyters is not found explicitly in Scripture, it was the churches that made the distinction between bishops and presbyters who transmitted to the early church the canon of Scripture itself, the Rule of Faith by which the canonical Scriptures are interpreted and the practice of worshiping in word and sacrament. Moreover, the second century church made the claim that these bishops could transmit the authentic writings and practices of the apostles because they were in historic succession from the apostles. And, of course, it is from these second century catholic churches that all subsequent Christian churches trace their origins, including those Reformation Protestant churches that repudiate episcopal polity.

The third issue has to do with historical development. Specifically, how did the two-fold distinction between presbyter/bishops and deacons in the first century apostolic church become the three-fold office of bishop, presbyter and deacon in the second century? The key theological issue is whether this development was an aberration or departure from New Testament order (as the Puritans and some Reformation Protestants claim), or rather, whether it was appropriate and desirable.

The problem is set out by Michael Ramsey: "In the Church of the New Testament we find Baptism, Eucharist, Apostles [and I would add, presbyter/bishops]. In the subsequent centuries we find, Baptism, Eucharist, the Bishops [as distinct from presbyters], the Bible, the Creeds. In what sense do these marks of the Church declare or obscure the Gospel of God?" Ramsey states the "crucial question for theology" as: "Does this developed structure of Episcopacy fulfill the same place in the Church and express the same truth as did the Apostles' office in Samaria and in Corinth and throughout the Apostolic Church?"<sup>3</sup>

The first principle of any doctrine of ministry is that ordained ministry must find its foundation in the ministry and priesthood of Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> Ramsey criticizes Anglo-Catholic discussions of apostolic succession that defend episcopacy and apostolic succession in the abstract, neglecting the relation between episcopacy and a christocentric soteriology, and specifically without reference to the church as the body of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

In the New Testament we find the following:

(1) the ministry and priesthood of Christ. Christ is the chief shepherd (*episkopos*) (1 Pet. 2:25; John 10:11) and the high priest who is also the sacrifice for sin (Heb. 2:17,18).

(2) the universal priesthood of the church in which all the baptized participate and which is a participation in the ministry and priesthood of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, the priesthood of the whole people of God (1 Peter 2:9).

(3) within the church, there are numerous charisms and ministries shared in different ways by all the people of God who are members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:4-11; 28).

(4) Particularly in later epistles of the New Testament and the Acts of the Apostles, there begins to appear an ordered ministry, distinct from the ministries of charism in which all Christians share. This ministry consists in (i) apostles; (ii) deacons; (iii) presbyters/bishops.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, there are fundamental distinctions in the New Testament between (1) the ministry of Christ and (2) the universal priesthood of all members of the church as the body of Christ; (2) the ministry of all believing Christians – the universal priesthood of the church – which includes charisms, distinct from (3) the ministry of orders, that is, certain Christians who are called and set aside for specific ministries of oversight and service. At the same time, this ordained ministry does not exhibit the clearly formulated three-fold distinction between bishops, priests, and deacons that we find in the second century. Nonetheless, the distinction between (2) and (3) indicates that even in the New Testament there is at least by the time of the writing of the pastoral epistles a clear distinction between clergy and laity.

Richard Hooker's summary of the Anglican understanding of orders in *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* is consistent with what we find the New Testament: "Touching the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," that the "body of the Church" is divided into clergy and laity, and that "the clergy are either presbyters or deacons." (*Laws* 5.78.2.)

In the New Testament, the key roles of those in orders seem to be (1) to teach and to bear witness to Jesus Christ and his gospel in an authoritative way; this is especially the particular (and unique) role of apostles as eyewitnesses of Christ; (2) to exercise authority/oversight in the church; (3) to exercise a role of servanthood (particularly the role of deacons); (4) although it came to be a major function of ordained ministry, the New Testament does not state explicitly that the ordained ministry has a unique role to proclaim the word and to administer the sacraments.

### *The Role of Presbyters/Bishops*

Hooker acknowledges that the terms “bishop” and “presbyter” are used interchangeably in the New Testament, but he makes an important point about terminology in distinguishing between “words” and the “realities” to which words refer.<sup>7</sup> Hooker’s basic point is that discerning whether the three-fold order of bishops, priests, and deacons exists in the New Testament depends not on whether there is a linguistic distinction between presbyter and bishop, but rather whether the distinct office of bishop occurs in the New Testament, and whether individuals exercise that office, regardless of whether the actual name “bishop” is applied to them. According to Hooker, the role of bishop has primarily to do with exercising oversight:

*The name bishop hath been borrowed from the Grecians, with whom it signifieth, one which hath principal charge to guide and oversee others. The same word in ecclesiastical writings being applied unto church governors, at the first unto all, and not unto the chiefest only, grew in time peculiar and proper to signify such episcopal authority alone, as the chiefest governors exercised over the rest; for with all names this is usual, that inasmuch as they are not given, till the things whereunto they are given have been sometime first observed; therefore generally, things are ancients*

*than the names whereby they are called. (Laws 7.2)*

Hooker argues that there are in the New Testament those who exercise oversight over other presbyters, and thus effectively occupy the role of bishops. First are the apostles. There is a unique role to the office of apostle insofar as apostles are eyewitnesses of Christ, and this is something that cannot be transmitted to others. At the same time, there are elements of the role of the apostles that are transmitted, the attestation to the gospel of Christ, and their role of oversight over others.<sup>8</sup> According to Hooker, the apostles were thus the first “bishops” in the church. They were apostles insofar as they were sent by Christ to proclaim the gospel, but were also “bishops” in the sense that they exercised governance over the church (*Laws 7.4-5*). (Moberly notes as of significance that the authority of the apostolate is presumed throughout the New Testament. What happens to this apostolic role once there are no more apostles?)<sup>9</sup>

In addition, even in the New Testament, there were (besides the apostles), presbyters who exercised authority/oversight over other presbyters or who transmitted their authority/oversight to others. So Paul gave authority to Timothy and Titus, who, in turn, delegated authority to others. (*Laws 7.4*).<sup>10</sup> Other writers have noted as well the distinctive role of James, “the Lord’s brother,” in Jerusalem. Although not called a bishop, James seems regularly to be associated with a leadership role in the church at Jerusalem that is not attributed to other presbyters.<sup>11</sup> So while the New Testament does not make a verbal distinction between *presbyteros* and *episkopos* – the terms are used interchangeably – Hooker (and others) argue that the functional distinction is implicitly present. The apostles, in addition to their unique role as eye-witnesses of the risen Christ, also exercised a governing role in the church. In addition, some presbyters

exercised a governing/oversight role over other presbyters.

### *Post-apostolic Writings*

Some of the earliest writings outside the New Testament continue to refer to *presbyter/bishop* interchangeably. *The Didache* (late first or early second century) is aware of two distinct kinds of ministry: “Prophets” and “apostles” seem to be an itinerant ministry of a charismatic or Spirit-inspired nature; bishops and deacons exercise a local settled office, and are associated particularly with the celebration of the eucharist. The term “bishop” (*episkopos*) is used to describe a role that would elsewhere be called a “presbyter.” The “apostle” is not one of the Twelve, but something like a traveling preacher or evangelist.<sup>[12](#)</sup>

1 Clement (95 AD?) speaks of a succession from the apostles, who appointed “bishops and deacons,” and equates the office of bishop and presbyter: “For we shall be guilty of no slight sin if we eject from the episcopate men who have offered the sacrifices with innocence and holiness. Happy, indeed, are those presbyters who have already passed on, and who ended a life of fruitfulness with their task complete.”<sup>[13](#)</sup>

Ignatius of Antioch, who wrote a decade or so after Clement, does make a clear distinction between the roles of bishop and presbyter. Ignatius’s focus is on the unity of the church as obedient to the authority of one bishop, and refers explicitly to the three-fold office: “You should all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ did the Father. Follow, too, the presbytery as you would the apostles; and respect the deacons as you would God’s law.”<sup>[14](#)</sup> Finally, the significance of a succession of bishops is emphasized by the second half of the second century, as evidenced in Ireneaus.<sup>[15](#)</sup>

As episcopacy became identified as a distinct office in the church, the office of bishop was characterized in the

following ways:

(1) Unity: The local church is led by a single bishop who proclaims the word and presides at the eucharist, assisted by the college of presbyters in communion with the laity, who all together form the body of Christ.

(2) Oversight: Christ himself is the chief Shepherd (*episkopos*), but participation in his ministry is shared by the bishops and the presbyters.

(3) Continuity/succession: The bishop is the sign of historical unity and continuity with the gospel of Jesus Christ as witnessed to and proclaimed by the original disciples. "Apostolic succession" is also understood not only as a continuity of history, doctrine and practices, but the continuity of ordination, as it is the bishop's function to lay hands on those who, through ordination, are brought into the presbyterate.

(4) The bishop does not exercise his role autonomously, but represents the entire church of Christ, in communion with all other bishops in the church. One of the bishop's roles as teacher is to engage in joint oversight with the teaching of other bishops. Heresy necessarily demands the breaking of eucharistic communion because it is a violation of the unity of the body of Christ.<sup>[16](#)</sup>

It is worth noting that although the above characteristics of the offices of the church developed historically, it would seem that the functional equivalent of something like the episcopate would be necessary in any church that hoped to maintain historic Christian faith and to be in continuity with the apostolic faith. Churches that have adopted alternative non-episcopal polities (as, for example, presbyterian or congregational) have nonetheless found it necessary to develop forms of oversight that are functionally equivalent to the role of bishops. Such oversight may be exercised by groups of

clergy (as a kind of “corporate episcopacy”), by presbyteries, or by “conventions.” It is significant that even a congregational body like the Southern Baptists has an elected “President of the Southern Baptist Convention,” elected annually.

A crucial theological question has to do with the theological status of the bishop; specifically, is episcopacy an order in itself, distinct from the presbyterate? Thomas Aquinas argued that the priesthood (presbyterate) is the highest order because it is an ordination to the celebration of the eucharist. The bishop has certain extra functions as well, ordination, for instance, but episcopacy is not a distinct order. Bishops are consecrated, but they are not ordained. Duns Scotus argued to the contrary that the episcopate is a proper order in a distinct sense, and a higher order than the presbyterate. The Council of Trent endorsed the Scotist model, and so embraced a fundamentally hierarchical understanding of the relationship between bishops and priests. Historically, as we have seen in Richard Hooker, Anglicans embraced the Thomist position. Theologically, there are only two offices: presbyter and deacon. Bishops are presbyters with special functions.<sup>17</sup>

That, in short, would be the historic Anglican argument for bishops. While the New Testament itself does not distinguish verbally between the office of *bishop* and *presbyter*, there were already those in the apostolic period who exercised the kind of oversight over others that is associated with the office of bishops. The apostles, in particular, not only had the unique role of being eye-witnesses to the mission, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also exercised roles of witness and oversight that necessarily would continue after their absence. There were also presbyters in the apostolic period who were already exercising the role of oversight characteristic of the office of bishop. With the distinction between bishop and presbyter that arose in the period immediately after the death of the apostles in the early

second century, there is an essential historical continuity between the church of the first century and the church of the second century. Not only is there not any indication that the distinction between bishops and presbyters was challenged in the second century, but it was those churches who recognized the distinction between bishop and presbyter who could rightly make the claim that they were in continuity with the apostolic church. Among other things, they were the churches who recognized and passed on the canonical Scriptures to subsequent generations, so even those Reformation churches who rejected episcopal polity owe a necessary debt of gratitude to those second-century bishops. The three-fold office of bishop, priest and deacon was preserved by all historical Christians right up until the time of the Reformation, and the majority of the Christians in the world still have bishops. While Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and Anglo-Catholics believe that bishops ordained in the apostolic succession are of the esse of the church, the historic Anglican position was argued by Richard Hooker. While bishops are not required in order to be a Christian church, they are the church's historical polity, and can arguably be traced to the apostles. There are a number of reasons why having episcopacy makes sense; among other things, it is an argument for historical continuity with the apostolic and patristic church. Finally, episcopacy is a matter of Christian freedom. Anglicans are not bound by a "regulative" hermeneutic, and so are free to continue Christian practices such as liturgical prayer, a church year, a lectionary, and, finally, bishops, that are not explicitly commanded in Scripture. For two thousand years, the majority of Christians in the world have retained these things, and have found them to be conducive to spiritual formation. As the old saying goes, "If it's not broke, don't fix it."

Finally, on the question of a "plurality of elders" (as in Philippians 1:1), as soon as there is one bishop and one presbyter, there is a plurality. And, of course, in the patristic church, the normal pattern was one bishop surrounded

by his presbyters, a plurality. In many contemporary Anglican churches, there is also a plurality depending on the size of the congregation or diocese. It is not at all unusual for large parishes to have both a rector and one or more assistants. A bishop of a large diocese will often have an assistant, with a title something like "Bishop Coadjutor" or "Assistant Bishop."

I hope that helps.

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[1](#) Stephen Sykes, "Richard Hooker and the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood," *Unashamed Anglicanism* (Abingdon, 1995)

[2](#) Robert W. Jenson, *Canon and Creed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); J. N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, Green, 1960); *Early Christian Doctrines*, revised edition (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1978).

[3](#) Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (London: Longmans, Green: 1956), 58, 77.

[4](#) This is an assertion made by the Church of England report on priesthood, by Moberly, Ramsey, Torrance, and Sumner. (See the bibliography below.)

[5](#) Ramsey, 218-220.

[6](#) The institution of deacons is mentioned first chronologically in Acts 6. It is described as primarily an order of service.

[7](#) The basic distinction here is that laid down by Hilary of Poitiers in his monumental patristic text on hermeneutics: *De Trinitate*. Hilary's basic hermeneutical principle is laid out

in his dictum: Non sermoni res, sed rei sermo subiectus est (The thing is not subject to the word, but the word is subject to the thing.) That is, realities control the meaning of the language we use to refer to them rather than the other way around.

[8](#) Hooker writes about the uniqueness of the apostles' role as eye-witnesses in *Laws* 7:45, but this is also a crucial theme in Cullmann's essay, "The Tradition," *The Early Church* (SCM Press, 1955). It is because of the apostles' unique role as eye-witnesses that the canonical Scriptures as writings that can be traced to authoritative eye-witnesses exercise a uniquely authoritative role in the post-apostolic church that post-apostolic tradition cannot. Bishops are successors to apostles, but they are not apostles.

[9](#) R.C. Moberly. *Ministerial Priesthood* (NY: Longmans, Green: 1898), 146.

[10](#) Also Moberly, 152-158.

[11](#) Moberly, 147-151.

[12](#) "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Commonly Called the Didache," *Early Christian Fathers*, Cyril C. Richardson, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952); <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.viii.i.i.html>

[13](#) "The Letter of the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth, Commonly Called Clement's First Letter," *Early Christian Fathers*; <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.vi.i.iii.html>.

[14](#) "To the Smyrneans," *Early Christian Fathers*; <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.vi.ii.iii.vi.html>.

[15](#) *Against Heresies*, 3.3, 4.

[16](#) On this last point, see Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries* (Louisville: Concordia

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[17](#) Torrance, 76-80.

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# The New Church of England Baptismal Liturgy

My brief (for me) comments on the new Church of England baptismal liturgy.

Evil is horizontal language. Sin is vertical language. An atheist can reject evil. Sin always has reference primarily to God. Dropping the language of sin is carried through to soteriology. The baptized no longer turn to Christ as "Saviour," but simply "turn to Christ." They no longer "submit to Christ as Lord" and Christ is no longer identified as "the way, the truth, and the life." The extent of Christology is that the baptized "trusts" in Christ and promises to "follow him for ever."

It is interesting that the baptismal prayer omits all language of sin. The apostles' creed is dropped in preference to vague promises to trust God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The prayers again omit any reference to sin or forgiveness of sin.

This strikes me as a Nestorian (or adoptionist) Christology an Abelardian soteriology, a Pelagian anthropology and an ethics that has only the second table of the law.

The formula itself does at least contain the traditional trinitarian names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but if we take seriously the principle of *lex orandi lex credendi*, it is

questionable whether this is even a Christian rite of baptism because the content of the faith in to which the person is baptized is not Christian faith.

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## On “Lutheran” Anglicanism



Last summer, my friend David Koyzis started a conversation about [why there are so many Baptists who call themselves “Calvinists,” but no “Lutheran” Baptists.](#)

David might be surprised to know that there are Anglicans who call themselves “Lutherans.” They have historical connection with Trinity School for Ministry in connection with a former Dean/President, and every year I discover at least one or two new students in my classes who identify with this “Lutheran” Anglicanism. The recent publication of [this book](#) reminded me that “Lutheran” Anglicanism is alive and well, and has prompted me to post my own assessment of “Lutheran” Anglicanism.

Before I give my own assessment of Lutheran Anglicanism, I should perhaps say a little about my own acquaintance with Luther and Lutheranism before I encountered the “Lutheran”

Anglicans. During my years at graduate school, I came across Luther as part of my studies, and knew several Lutherans who were fellow students. I studied Luther primarily in courses on Christology and liturgy, and included a chapter on Luther in my dissertation. My assessment of Luther was mixed. I appreciated most Luther's Christology and his sacramental theology, although I found his theology of the ubiquity of Christ's ascended human nature problematic. I was less happy with Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, where I thought he could have learned a thing or two from Thomas Aquinas or Augustine. Luther's failure to distinguish adequately between natural and moral freedom combined with a failure to distinguish adequately between foreknowledge and predestination led to a determinist doctrine of human will and divine predetermination that made God responsible for sin. Luther's way of stating the distinction between the "hidden" and "revealed God" was rightly repudiated by Karl Barth as undermining the fundamental theological thesis that God is in himself who he is in his revelation. I was also less than happy with Luther's "law/gospel" hermeneutic, which, while it had some validity for interpreting certain passages in Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Romans was largely a case of eisegesis if imposed on the Bible as a whole. As a Reformation Christian, I embraced Luther's doctrines of *sola scriptura*, and justification by grace alone through faith alone, not because they were Luther's but because I believe them correct – although I tended to understand the Reformation *sola's* through Anglican eyes.

As part of my doctoral research, I read quite a bit in modern secondary literature on Luther. I read not only Luther, but became familiar with some of the key hallmarks of Lutheran theology – the Augsburg Confession, and much of the material in the Book of Concord. I also became familiar with a few modern Lutheran theologians: Soren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gustaf Aulen, Helmut Thielicke, and contemporary Lutherans such as Wolfhart Pannenberg, Carl Braaten and Robert

Jenson, Gilbert Meilaender and David Yeago. Overall, my assessment of Luther and Lutheranism was mostly positive.

I discovered a very different “Luther” and approach to “Lutheranism” among the “Lutheran” Anglicans, a kind of Lutheranism I had never encountered before. This “Lutheran” Anglicanism was a variant on a way of reading Luther that Lutheran theologian Gilbert Meilaender calls “dialectical Lutheranism”<sup>1</sup>

Dialectical Lutheranism is distinguished by the following key characteristics:

### **Justification and Sanctification**

It is arguable that one of the most significant theological advancements of the Protestant Reformation was to distinguish clearly between justification as a forensic declaration of righteousness, what Luther called “alien righteousness,” and sanctification, a real intrinsic change by which the sanctified actually do become holy. If the error of Tridentine Roman Catholicism was to equate justification with sanctification, making justification an “infused righteousness,” dialectical Lutheranism tends to err in the opposite direction, reducing sanctification to just another way to talk about justification, and thus to confirm the critique of Trent, that Protestants reduce justification to a “legal fiction.”

A classic example can be found in Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde, who begins an essay on “Lutheran Spirituality” by writing: “Sanctification, if it is to be spoken of as something other than justification, is perhaps best defined as the art of getting used to the unconditional justification wrought by the grace of God for Jesus’ sake.”<sup>2</sup> Forde continues: “Sanctification . . . is not something added to justification.”

Moreover, Forde denies that sanctification is about moral transformation: “[L]iving morally . . . should not be equated with sanctification, being made holy.” (14) Indeed, Forde is suspicious of language of sanctification: “Talk about sanctification is dangerous. It is too seductive for the old being.” Forde suggests that the tradition was mistaken when it “sharply distinguished” sanctification from justification: “God alone does the justifying,” But sanctification “enters the picture to rescue the good ship Salvation from shipwreck on the rocks of Grace Alone. Sanctification, it seems is *our* part of the bargain.” (15)

Consequently, “dialectical Lutheranism” tends to understand sanctification using the language of returning “again and again” to the moment of justification. There is no sense of progress, no sense in which righteousness can grow, no sense in which grace can be understood as a power that transforms and “makes possible the Christian’s journey toward holiness,” a “growth in grace” in which one becomes “more and more” holy, in which we are “gradually transformed and perfected along the way.”<sup>3</sup> Forde is a good example of the approach that Meilaender criticizes as a “returning again and again” to justification. In Forde’s words: “The description of sanctification as a process leads to the temptation to make the process itself into the basic theological scheme.” (119) Such schemes inevitably become a “a kind of ‘practical Pelagianism,’ where original sin does not exist and sanctification is gained by our exercise of free will.” (120) Rather, suggests Forde, sanctification just is returning again and again to justification: “[W]e find ourselves always starting afresh. . . . One is always at a new beginning.” Accordingly, sanctification is then “not a continuous or steady progress,” but simply a return, over and over, to justification: “Our sanctification consists merely in being shaped by, or getting used to, justification.” (28-29)<sup>4</sup>

## **Law and Gospel**

“Dialectical Lutheranism” tends to make “law and gospel” the hermeneutical key for interpreting both Scripture and life. Lutheran David Yeago has written about the way that Lutheran theology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century made “the assumption that a radical antagonism of law and gospel is the ultimate structuring horizon of Christian belief.”<sup>5</sup> For those who hold this view, says Yeago, law and gospel are “irreducibly opposed” and “incompatible”: “The law is sheer oppression, the gospel sheer liberation, and this total opposition can only be ended by the negation of the law.” (40). Forde again provides an example in his book *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, which contains numerous passages such as the following: “The law is not a remedy for sin. It does not cure sin but rather makes it worse. . . [T]he law multiplies sin precisely through our morality, our misuse of the law and our success at it.” William Hordern equates “law” with “works-righteousness,” and “demands that come to us with threats of punishment and promises or rewards” (137). Law is about “extrinsic” rewards and punishments (146). “Lutheran” Anglican Paul Zahl states: “[T]he law is always heard as an attack.” “[T]he law . . . accuses, and it accuses always.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Third Use of the Law**

Correlative to this understanding of law as entirely negative is a rejection of what the Lutheran Confessions and Reformed theology call the “third use” of the law – law understood not as condemnation of sin or as a restraint of wrong-doing through threat of punishment, but rather as guide for living for the Christian who lives under grace. Forde writes that “talk of a ‘third use’ mistakes the relation of the Christian in this present age to the law. . . What the Christian knows is not a different *use* of the law, but just the difference between law and gospel, and thus what law is for.” (81) Similarly, Hordern suggests that the “third use of the law” is a “logical impossibility.” Echoing the “dialectical”

understanding of justification, Hordern suggests that the only point of a “third use” would be subsumed under the “first use,” to “turn again to the good news of forgiveness.” (120)

## **Spontaneity**

Given its reluctance to speak of “progress” in the Christian life, “dialectical Lutheranism” uses a very different kind of language to talk about the effects of grace – the language of “spontaneity”: Forde suggests that a “truly good work” is one “that is free, uncalculating, genuine, spontaneous.”<sup>8</sup> Again, he writes: “The insistence that only those works are truly good that are done spontaneously and joyously out of faith, hope and love belongs to the very heart and soul of Luther’s Reformation.”<sup>9</sup> Grace cannot be prepared for in any way. It is not correlated to any human activity whatsoever. If sanctification exists, it is something that “just happens,” spontaneously.

## **Practices**

Reluctance to speak of Christian sanctification in terms of “progress,” or “journey,” combined with an insistence that grace is always spontaneous naturally leads to a dilemma when it comes to Christian practices such as prayer, worship, or sharing in the sacraments. Specifically, dialectical Lutheranism seems not to know what to do with Christian practices. The temptation is to interpret them as “works righteousness” rather than “means of grace.” Forde does not mention the sacraments in his discussion of either sanctification or Luther’s “Theology of the cross”; he does refer to Aristotle, where he picks up Aristotle’s claim that we become just by doing good deeds, as we acquire skills by practicing. To the contrary, it is only the one who is already righteous who does good works. Works performed on the premise of “becoming righteous” are “not good works to begin with.”<sup>10</sup> Hordern has a chapter on “Justification and the Practice of

the Church.” He notes that “The doctrine of justification puts more emphasis upon serving the neighbor than upon religious actions such as attending worship services.”<sup>11</sup> He is willing to say that worship centered in Word and Sacraments “has proven in the experience of Christians to be a means of grace whereby believers have found new strength for the living of the Christian life.” (170) But the bulk of the chapter is concerned to assert that “The doctrine of justification means that Christian life is not guided by a set of rules and regulations.” (177) Much of what Hordern writes about the manner in which Christians should be patient with and forgive one another, recognizing that we are all forgiven sinners is valuable. Having granted that, it is significant that Hordern says little about the sacramental and liturgical practices of the church except to insist that “A church that patterns its actions after justification will not pursue its members and harangue them into attending worship services.”(171) He does say that a church “committed to justification will . . . search for ways to make the worship experience, meaningful, joyous and relevant to the Christian life.” (172) But this is a minimal discussion of the sacramental and liturgical dimensions of the church’s life. It is perhaps significance that in in Paul Zahl’s book entitled *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life*, the words “baptism,” “eucharist,” “Lord’s Supper,” “liturgy,” do not appear. Zahl does state that “A theologian of grace has no ecclesiology. The ecclesiology of a theologian of grace is a negation of ecclesiology. . . . grace trumps church every time.”<sup>12</sup>

## **Critique**

I would suggest that “dialectical” Lutheranism is, first, a poor reading of Luther. It ignores the kinds of things that Luther says in his sermon on “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” in which he does not reduce sanctification to simply returning to justification, “again and again.” Luther is willing to speak of moral progress – using the language of “more and more” even

in respect to justification: "Christ daily drives out the old Adam *more and more* in accordance with the extent to which faith and knowledge of Christ grow. For alien righteousness is not instilled all at once, but it begins, *makes progress*, and is finally perfected at the end through death." [my emphasis]<sup>13</sup>

Luther is willing to speak of the "second kind of righteousness" (sanctification) using language such as "that manner of life spent profitably in good works, in the first place, in slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to the self," as "crucify[ing] the flesh," "work[ing] love," "living soberly with self, justly with neighbor, devoutly toward God," "his righteousness follows the example of Christ in this respect and is transformed into his likeness."

Similarly, in "The Councils and the Church,"<sup>14</sup> Luther speaks of "sanctification" and "virtue" in a way that would make Methodist "virtue" ethicist Stanley Hauerwas proud, and would no doubt sound like "works righteousness" to a "dialectical Lutheran":

*For they, rejecting and not understanding the Ten Commandments, preach much about the grace of Christ instead. They strengthen and comfort those who remain in sins, telling them that they shall not fear sins or be terrified at them, since through Christ, these are all done away; and yet they see people going on, and let them go on, in open sins, without any renewal or improvement of their lives. From this one observes that they really do not understand the faith and Christ aright, and abolish Him even as they preach Him. For how can a man preach rightly about the works of the Holy Ghost in the First Table and speak about comfort, grace, forgiveness of sins, if he neither heeds nor practices the works of the Holy Ghost in the Second Table, which he can understand and experience, while he has never attempted or experienced those of the First Table? Therefore it is certain*

*that they neither have nor understand either Christ or the Holy Ghost, and their talk is mere foam on their tongues, and they are, as has been said, good Nestorians and Eutychians, who confess or teach Christ in the premise and deny Him in the conclusion, or idiomata; that is, they teach Christ and destroy Him by teaching Him.*

At the 2013 Trinity School for Ministry Ancient Evangelical Future Conference, Lutheran theologian David Yeago gave a marvelous talk on Luther's shorter catechism,<sup>15</sup> in which he pointed out that Luther's Small Catechism has often been misread because of the Law/Gospel hermeneutic. Luther's beginning exposition of the Ten Commandments has been understood to lead the sinner to despair; the third section of the catechism on the Lord's Prayer is meant to lead the sinner to prayer for forgiveness. To the contrary, claims Yeago, the structure of the Catechism follows the structure of the Creed. The first section (on the Ten Commandments) corresponds to the first article and points to God as Creator and the moral law as reflecting God's intentions for his creation. The second section on the Creed corresponds to the second article and the work of Christ. The third section on the Lord's Prayer corresponds to the article on the Holy Spirit, and is meant to direct the catechumen to holiness. Luther does not even mention justification in the Small Catechism.

## **Psychologism**

Concerning the "law/gospel" hermeneutic, the key question is whether what the apostle Paul means by law and gospel is what "dialectical Lutheranism" means. What does Paul mean by the expression *ergon nomou* ("works of the law")? The "New Perspective" on Paul argues that "works of the law" refers specifically to those "boundary markers" that separate Jew from Gentile, namely circumcision and kosher diet. As I have written elsewhere, I think this too narrow a reading. "[T]he logical flow of Paul's argument is to move from circumcision

as one element of 'works of the law' (the New Perspective's emphasis) to the greater moral demands of the law as expressed in the Ten Commandments, and, on that basis, goes on to claim that unless one keeps fully the moral requirements of the law as well, that circumcision and kosher will do one no good. Since both Jews and Gentiles are guilty of idolatry, theft, lying, and adultery, all stand condemned before the moral requirements of the law, and can only be justified by God's free gracious gift in Christ. As I read it, Paul consistently uses 'law' language to push beyond mere boundary markers to focus on the violation of the moral dimension of the law."<sup>16</sup>

As I read it, "works of the law" has a very specific focus for Paul. It refers to violations of the objective moral law contained in both Tables of the Ten Commandments. That is, when Paul talks about justification apart from "works of the law," he is dealing with the question of "objective moral guilt." If that is the case, then the New Perspective has Paul wrong here. But then, so does "dialectical Lutheranism" to the extent that "dialectical Lutheranism" tends to interpret "law" and "justification" psychologically. For "dialectical Lutheranism," "Law" is any command that one perceives as restricting and demanding, and against which one tends to rebel. A nice illustration is found in Paul Zahl's *Grace in Practice*, where he talks about "law" in terms of driving his car and not wanting to obey the 45 mph speed limit sign, or wanting to smoke because everyone tells him not to do it. Dialectical Lutheranism also understands "law" to mean any performance standards that are imposed on one by someone else, leading to a sense of unworthiness. But this is not what the apostle Paul means by law. Paul is not concerned about my psychological disposition to break speed limits or feelings of inadequacy I might have because of overly demanding parents or my temptations to resist the unreasonable demands of authority figures. For Paul, justification "apart from works of the law" has to do with only one thing, concrete objective guilt for real violations of the moral principles expressed in the Ten

Commandments.

In addition, for Paul, the threat of the law is not the permanent situation of the Christian, but, rather, the situation of those who live before the coming of Christ and the fulfillment of the law. Because we have been redeemed by Christ, and the Holy Spirit dwells in us, we can rejoice in God's law as a reflection of his love, and, although we continue to be sinners, there is nonetheless real growth and progress in holiness.

If "dialectical Lutheranism" tends to interpret "law" psychologically, it tends to do the same with "grace." If my problem is either one of "guilt feelings" generated by my own failure to live up to my own or others' standards, or resistance against the arbitrary demands of others, then the solution to such "guilt feelings" is also interpreted psychologically. When I perceive that Christ loves me apart from my "performance," then I am grateful, and I can respond in gratitude to Christ's love.

While such gratitude is certainly a wonderful thing, it is not what Paul is talking about when he talks about justification, and it is certainly not what Paul is talking about when he talks about sanctification. When Paul writes about justification, he is concerned with genuine pardon for genuine objective wrong-doing. When Paul writes about sanctification, he does not use the language of gratitude but of "union with Christ," of deliverance from slavery to sin. As Richard Hays states in *Moral Vision of the New Testament*: "There is, interestingly, no emphasis in Paul on gratitude as a motivation for obedience."<sup>17</sup>

The problem with such a psychological interpretation of law and gospel is that it confuses the seriousness of objective guilt with psychological "guilt feelings" or resistance to the unrealistic expectations of parents or others, and it presumes way too much about the power of psychological feelings of

gratitude to produce real change. I sometimes am grateful for what Christ has done for me, and I find myself having compassion on others in return, but sometimes I find myself feeling nothing – neither gratitude nor awe – and I resent that some inconsiderate jerk is making demands on me, and so I respond with resentment. And I do this even knowing that Christ has died for me.

What is missing from the psychological account is Augustine's notion of the *habitus*. My problem as a sinner is that I have done objective wrong, and have not loved God and my neighbor; but I am also trapped in the continuing dispositions and habits of previous sinful behaviors. The only escape from such enslaving habits is the origination of a new *habitus*, which will replace my previous propensity toward self-aggrandizement with a genuine love for God and others. For this, the only solution is a real ontological transformation that takes place as, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, I am united to the risen Christ and share in his resurrection life. This union resulting in a genuine ontological transformation takes place not through "spontaneous" psychological awareness, but through the objective means by which I come to share in Christ's risen life: the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, the practices of prayer, reading Scripture, living in Christian community. Such transformation is slow and gradual, and there are frequent setbacks, but it is genuine. The language that Christian tradition uses to describe this transformation is sanctification, deification, *theosis*.

Why is it that contemporary "dialectical Lutheranism" tends to interpret law and gospel psychologically rather than in the objective language of forgiveness from genuine guilt, and the objective ontological transformation following from union with Christ? I suspect that the source may lie in the dependence of contemporary interpreters on the readings of Paul found in mid-twentieth century Lutheran biblical scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann and Ernst Kasemann. Bultmann, in particular,

was a liberal Protestant, who, because he rejected the miraculous, interpreted the New Testament in terms of Martin Heidegger's existentialist philosophy. Because Bultmann did not believe in the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus, he interpreted justification existentially – in terms of “self-understanding.” Because he did not believe in a second coming of Christ, Bultmann re-interpreted eschatology in terms of an existential “moment of decision.” Bultmann's re-interpretation of justification was, consequently psychological and a-temporal. Such an interpretation was a far remove from either Paul or Luther's understanding of justification as an appropriation of Christ's objective work “outside of myself” and my own “self-understanding”(“alien” righteousness).

One of the more helpful insights in Aquinas and Hooker is the distinction between various kinds of law, particularly the distinctions between eternal, moral, and positive law.

Any command, whether written or oral, is an example of positive law. But the only positive laws that are *morally* binding are those that are in accord with the moral law to love God with all of our heart and our neighbors as ourselves. (There can be positive laws that bind even if they are not moral in themselves. So, the existence of speed limits on highways is an example of positive law that is not arbitrary, but prevents automobile accidents in which genuine harm could occur.) The gospel frees us from all kinds of positive laws, not only the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, but also the arbitrary positive laws of others' expectations for us or our own perfectionism or scrupulosity or mere demands for social conformity. At the same time, it is important not to confuse such social expectations with those positive laws that echo genuine moral law.

There are real dangers in not clearly distinguishing between positive law and moral law. The law that Paul addresses in Romans is not the law of either our own or others' expectations of us, but the real moral law (expressed in the

Ten Commandments), and this is the law that we are guilty of violating. Thus, in Romans 7, Paul is not discussing a struggle with “law” as social disapproval, but with genuine violation of the divine moral law: coveting is a sin because it violates the command to love my neighbor as myself, and it demonstrates a lack of trust in God’s providence and care in my life.

### **Is Justification by faith therapy?**

I would suggest that any adequate theology of justification and grace must contain at least the following: a) divine initiative: the human role is always one of response to grace, not its condition; b) genuine forgiveness of real sins: the human role is not a condition of, but a response to forgiveness; c) real transformation and participation in holiness: grace is effective; it produces real change, and this happens through union with the crucified and risen Christ.

These are all objective realities that, while they affect the self, take place outside the self. This, I think, is the primary insight of Luther’s notion of *alien* righteousness. Even “c) real transformation,” takes place through a union with the risen Christ who is outside my consciousness.

While justification may have consequences in terms of my self-understanding, as well as emotional and psychological consequences, justification is primarily about the forgiveness of sins, not about the psychological or emotional consequences of forgiveness of sin. Does the repeated use of personal anecdotes in “Lutheran” Anglicanism lead to the impression that justification is primarily about a change in my “self-understanding” rather than about an objective act that has taken place outside myself? Is this focus on transformation of self-understanding (how I “see” myself and others) the legacy of Schleiermacher and Bultmann more than Luther?

Paul's standard paradigm for Christian behavior is indicative followed by imperative. (Because . . . therefore . . . ) Karl Barth is consistent with Paul here in his insistence that theologically we need to begin with gospel, not law. It is only in the light of the good news of our redemption in Jesus Christ that we can appreciate our own sinfulness. But that does not mean agreement with the standard "dialectical Lutheran" trope that the "law always condemns." It is very clear that, for Paul, the law condemns "prior to Christ," whether chronologically or experientially. However, after Christ, the law has a positive function. Romans 7 is not a description of the "normal Christian life." As Paul makes clear in Romans 8:2, "The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." (Cf. Gal. 6:2) Brevard Childs suggests (following Paul W. Meyer) that the radical Lutheran understanding of 'law' in Romans 7, crucial to the Law/Gospel hermeneutic, is mistaken: "Paul is not concerned in Romans 7 with the malevolent power of the law, but rather with that of sin. . . . [C]hapter 7 concerns the demonic force of sin in perverting the law that was intended by God to procure life, but has actually brought forth the exactly opposite result. . . . By isolating works from law, Paul is able to contrast God's righteousness, not with righteousness from the law, but with Israel's own righteousness. The just requirements of the law have been fulfilled in Christ, and are now made available to all who walk in the Spirit (8:4)."<sup>18</sup>

Paul never suggests that sanctification rests on a forensic declaration. To the contrary, Paul uses two different words to discuss two different aspects of grace: *dikaiosune* (justification) is a forensic declaration, and Paul uses this when discussing the objective problem of guilt. When discussing the Christian life, however, Paul uses *hagiosmos*, translated "sanctification" or "holiness," and Paul associates *hagiosmos* with metaphors of being set free from captivity, union with Christ, and the indwelling Spirit, not with

courtroom language. Paul's common language for both justification and sanctification is that of "union with Christ," which has two aspects, dealing with the two characteristics of sin: objective guilt (justification) and indwelling sinfulness (sanctification). So I am not holy because I believe that Jesus died for my sins. I am *forgiven* (and accounted righteous) because I believe that Christ Jesus died for my sins, but I actually become holy because, through faith, I am united to the crucified and risen Christ, who shares his resurrection life with me. Sanctification, which is a real intrinsic transformational change *in me* is not to be confused with justification which is forensic and concerns Christ's *alien* righteousness *outside me*.

### **Practices as "means of grace"**

It is not enough then simply to return to justification "over and over again." Sanctification involves a real progress and a real growth in grace. Far from Christian practices being "works righteousness," they are the necessary "means of grace" through which God makes the church holy.

As mentioned above, dialectical Lutheranism does not seem to know what to do with Christian practices, interpreting them as "works righteousness" rather than "means of grace." My own limited reading of Forde confirms that he rejects a notion of sanctification as "progress" as an example of a "theology of glory." In *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, Forde seems to equate such notions of "progress" as Aristotelian, as becoming righteous "by practice."

However, there are a number of "practices" connected with the Christian faith: the reading of Scripture, the practice of prayer, corporate worship, the celebration of the sacraments. It is surely no coincidence that numerous spiritual writers – Medieval mystics, Anglican George Herbert, contemporary writer Kathleen Norris – speak of the practical necessity of continuing the mundane tasks of praying the Daily Office, of

reading and meditating on Scripture, of receiving the sacraments, of worshiping in community, when one is beset by doubts.

Dialectical Lutheranism tends to repudiate all of this as a form of “works righteousness.” But that rather misses the point. Traditional definitions of the sacraments speak of them as “means of grace” – grace, not works! Biblical language about prayer and meditating on God’s word uses the language of “refreshment,” of “quenching one’s thirst,” of “satisfying hunger”: “Taste and see that the LORD is good!” (Ps. 34:8). Hebrews 6:5 speaks of those “who have tasted the goodness of the word of God.” In John 6:53, Jesus says, “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” Engaging in Christian practices of prayer and meditating on Scripture, receiving the sacraments, reciting the daily office, and worshiping with fellow Christians is not “works righteousness,” trying to “earn our salvation.” Rather, these are the means by which the risen Christ shares his life with us. When we are starving, we do not think of eating as a “good work,” but as a way of keeping ourselves alive. Similarly, when beset by doubt, when we are suffering from spiritual sickness, the last thing we need is to starve from lack of spiritual nourishment. In times of spiritual aridity, when prayer and worship and Bible reading might seem meaningless, one of the best things we can do is to just keep on doing it anyway. Pray, read the Bible and meditate on Scripture, receive the sacraments. These are means by which God feeds the starving soul.

Luther was more than willing to criticize external rituals, and people who put faith in pilgrimages or indulgences. However, he never suggests that the external practices of the church – reading Scripture, liturgical worship, or administration of the sacraments – are examples of “works righteousness.” To the contrary, they are the means by which God communicates *holiness* to the church. They are “means of

grace.” About Scripture, Luther says:

*This is the main point. It is the high, chief, holy possession from which the Christian people take the name “holy,” for God’s Word is holy and sanctifies everything it touches; nay, it is the very holiness of God. Romans 1:16 says, “It is God’s power, which saves all who believe thereon,” and 2 Timothy 4:3, “It is all made holy by the Word of God and prayer”; for the Holy Ghost Himself administers it, and anoints and sanctifies the Church, that is, the Christian, holy people, with it and not with the pope’s chrism, with which he anoints, or sanctifies fingers, garb, cloaks, cups, and stones. . . .*

**On preaching:**

*We speak, however, of the external Word orally preached by men like you and me. For Christ left this behind Him as an outward sign whereby His Church, His Christian, holy people in the world, was to be recognized. . . . Wherever, therefore, you hear or see this Word preached, believed, confessed, and acted on, there do not doubt that there must be a true ecclesia sancta catholica, a Christian, holy people, even though it be small in numbers; for God’s Word does not go away empty ( Isaiah 55:11), but must have at least a fourth part, or a piece of the field. If there were no other mark than this one alone, it would still be enough to show that there must be a Christian church there; for God’s Word cannot be present without God’s people, and God’s people cannot be without God’s Word.*

**On baptism:**

*God’s people, or the Christian holy people, is known by the holy Sacrament of Baptism, when it is rightly taught and believed and used according to Christ’s ordinance. That, too, is a public sign and precious, holy possession whereby God’s*

*people is made holy, for it is a holy bath of regeneration through the Holy Ghost, in which we bathe and are washed by the Holy Ghost from sin and death, as in the innocent, holy blood of the Lamb of God. Where you see this mark, know that the holy Christian people must be there, even though the pope does not baptize you or even if you know nothing about his holiness and power. . . .*

### On the eucharist:

*God's people, or a Christian, holy Church is known by the holy Sacrament of the Altar, when it is rightly administered according to Christ's institution and is believed and received. That, too, is a public mark and precious, holy possession, bequeathed by Christ, whereby His people is made holy [my emphasis]. By means of this sacrament it exercises itself in faith, and openly confesses that it is a Christian people, as it does also by means of the Word of God and baptism.<sup>19</sup>*

### Mediation

Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas and Anglican Richard Hooker (but also Martin Luther and Karl Barth) insist that God always works through created intermediaries. The "dialectical Lutheran" focus on "spontaneity" seems closer to Ulrich Zwingli here; for Zwingli, God always works directly, not through created intermediaries. Rather, for Aquinas and Hooker, conversion is a supernatural act, but an act of grace restoring and perfecting an original creation. It is not a miracle. That which provides for continuity between the fallen creature and the regenerate creature is the *image of God*, which is not lost in the fall, and cannot be. This means that, for Hooker (reading Aquinas through Reformation eyes), while Christ's alien righteousness is the ground (formal cause) of my justification, justification is effective and produces a

real change in the creature. Sanctification is real, and produces a real change from potency to act in the justified human being, as the transformed creature becomes more and more Christ-like. As such, language of "participation," "deification," or *theosis*, is not a problem. "Deification" does not mean that creatures cease to be creatures, but that, through union with the humanity of the crucified and risen Christ, who is, in his personal identity, God the Son of God, justified sinners are transformed as they participate in the life of the risen Christ.

To the contrary, for dialectical Lutheranism, justification seems to be a direct creative act, a miracle, in which God does not restore an original creation, but creates something entirely new. There is no continuity whatsoever between the fallen creature and the new creation, except God's word of proclamation, which destroys the sinner before justifying through the word.

This leads to the question of *continuity*. Aquinas and Hooker retain both teleology and the potency/act distinction as a way of explaining continuity and identity through change in time. Does "dialectical Lutheranism" embrace an ontology of immediate creationism, in which, at each moment God simply creates a new world? Is there a way to account for continuity of identity, especially in creation, fall, restoration, and regeneration if one rejects the Aristotelian distinction between potency and act?

One of the unclarities in "dialectical Lutheranism" is that it simultaneously seems to affirm and deny a real change in the justified sinner. On the one hand, there seems to be a suspicion of any genuine transformation; yet, on the other hand, the very affirmation of justification by faith presupposes that there must be such a transformation, insofar as faith, which is indeed, an act of looking away from the self to the alien righteousness of Christ, is indeed, a human act. It is not God who believes instead of the sinner, but the

sinner, who, certainly through grace, exercises a genuine act of faith. Given, however, that the will of the sinner is bound, is turned in on itself, such an act of faith demands a genuine transformation, a change. Even if I am not in charge, even if my faith is a gift from God, even if my faith looks away from me, "I" am the one in whom God gives the gift of faith, and the faith I exercise is indeed, *my* act. If, however, grace is effective in producing an act of faith, how can we consistently claim that grace is able only to effect faith, but not to produce other genuinely transformative acts in the justified sinner? How can we claim that the sinner, through grace, exercises genuine faith, and, yet that the same grace that enables faith, cannot enable "deification"? Does this not point to a limit, not in the sinner's ability, but the divine efficacy? Are we not tying God's hands in the name of a certain understanding of creatureliness and total depravity? Does God need to denigrate the creature in order to uphold his infinity and omnipotence?

Insofar as Aquinas and Hooker believe that God works through created realities, they also affirm that "grace perfects nature; it does not destroy it." God and the creature are not two competitive realities operating on the same plane. In grace, God moves in creatures in such a way that human freedom is enhanced rather than destroyed. "Dialectical Lutheranism" seems to presuppose that where God acts, the creature must give way – thus a repeated insistence by "Anglican" Lutherans that there is "no such thing" as free will. Does this not presume that God and the creature are two competing actors in the same field of being? Does this denial of free will mean that it is necessary to deny the existence of human freedom in order to enhance divine freedom?

Why not embrace instead the scholastic dictum that grace presupposes and does not destroy nature? If one recognizes that evil is privation and not a positive reality, one does not need to deny the existence of "free will" to speak of

grace. Rather, since all creation is already God's good work, regeneration restores the creature to its proper *telos*; it returns the will to proper desires and proper use of created goods. One does not then speak of "free will," but of "freed will."

Is regeneration, strictly speaking, a miracle, or is it a mediated act? In Luther's essay "Two Kinds of Righteousness," he distinguishes between "alien righteousness . . . from without," through which we are justified by faith, and a "proper righteousness," by which we "work with the first," "follow the example of Christ," and are "transformed into this righteousness." Does not such language of transformation demand the Aristotelian language of potency and act in terms of sanctification? Is not sanctification a real progress in righteousness, where we, by following Christ, become "conformed to his image"? Is not sanctification the place to talk about "pilgrimage," "virtue," and "transformation", as those who have been "declared righteous" in justification, actually "become righteous" through inner moral transformation?

What about practices and habit? Is it not the case that practices such as prayer, Scripture reading, and worship form character, and result in real spiritual growth, even if they do not justify? It is, of course, a major thesis of the law/gospel dialectic that "law" does not enable performance. An exhortation "Do this!" does not enable me to do it. But does "gospel" understood as mere proclamation of pardon or forgiveness do any more to enable performance? If the problem is the "bondage of the will" (addiction to destructive habits of sin), then the proclamation that I am forgiven for the way I have lived out those destructive habits is indeed good news. It is wonderful to hear that I will not be condemned for offenses that I seem to have no power to stop doing. But that does not change the problem of the "bondage of the will" itself. The alternative to "bad habits" is "good habits." In

order to produce good actions, I must become good. There must be a real change within me. But justification is not something *in* me. It is, "alien righteousness." It is "forensic." It is "imputation." Such an "alien righteousness" can not help me if what I need is to change, because change must come from within. As Paul says: I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives *in* me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20). Or, in the language of John's gospel: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I *in* him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5). The "in Christ" language of Scripture is not associated with "imputation," with declarations of forgiveness, but specifically with the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, and with mutual indwelling between the risen Christ and the church that is his body.

I would suggest that the ecclesial practices of the church (worship, sacraments, scripture-reading, prayer) provide the connection between the priority of grace as an *alien* righteousness, (the ascended Christ outside me) and sanctification as a change from within (Christ within me). The practices as practices do not make me righteous; nor do they encourage me to look within myself for righteousness. However, they do produce a change within me as they direct my attention outside myself to hear the proclaimed word of Scripture, to address the God who is outside me in prayer, to participate in union with the crucified and risen Christ who stands at the right hand of the Father, as through worship and the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, the indwelling Holy Spirit uses these practices as *mediated* channels of grace to unite me to the risen Christ and transform me from within.

### **Some Final Advice for my "Lutheran" Anglican friends**

The above critique is not meant to turn my "Lutheran" Anglican friends away from Luther. Please read Luther, but read all of

Luther, not only what he says about justification by faith and “law and gospel.” Particularly read material on his Christology, and his theology of the sacraments, his views on worship, his catechisms, his exposition of the Sermon of the Mount. Read the Lutheran Confessions as found in the Book of Concord. These are indispensable for understanding Lutheran theology, and I notice what seems a complete neglect of this material among “Lutheran” Anglicans.

Continue to read Lutheran theologians, but read other Lutherans besides Bultmann, Kasemann, and Forde. David Yeago is very helpful:

“Introduction: A Catholic and Evangelical Theology?” and “The Bible” in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, James Buckley and David Yeago, eds. (Eerdmans, 2001).

“Crucified Also For Us Under Pontius Pilate: Six Propositions on the Preaching of the Cross,” *Nicene Christianity*, Christopher Seitz, ed. (Brazos, 2001).

“The Catholic Luther,” *The Catholicity of the Reformation*, Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds. (Eerdmans, 1996).

“The Office of the Keys,” *Marks of the Body of Christ*, Braaten and Jenson, eds. (Eerdmans, 1999).

Explore other relevant theological texts on questions of “law,” “gospel,” “justification,” the sacraments, and Christian ethics.

Lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*, *Living Together*, and *Ethics*.

Karl Barth. *Evangelical Theology* (Eerdmans, 1992).

Karl Barth. “Gospel and Law,” *Community, State, and Church* (Peter Smith, 1968).

Stanley Hauerwas. *The Peacable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, 2003).

Eric L. Mascall. *Via Media: An Essay in Theological Synthesis* (Longmans, Green, 1956).

Thomas F. Torrance, "Justification: Its Radical Nature and Place in Reformed Doctrine and Life," *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

Thomas F. Torrance. *Theology in Reconciliation. Essays Toward Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Wipf & Stock, 1996).

Investigate some other interpretations of Paul besides those of "dialectical Lutheranism":

Brevard Childs. "Law and Gospel," *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Fortress, 1992).

Brevard Childs. *The Church's Guide for Reading Paul*. (Eerdmans, 2008).

Do not neglect your own Anglican tradition, and other classic texts on Christian spirituality, both contemporary and classical. There is much wisdom here. If I found myself stranded on a desert island, and could only take a handful of texts with me, I confess that I would prefer George Herbert's poems or Thomas Traherne's *The Centuries* or a volume of John Donne's sermons to Luther's *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* or his *Commentary on Galatians*:

Simon Tugwell. *Prayer: Living With God* (Templegate, 1975), *Prayer in Practice* (Templegate, 1974), *Ways of Imperfection: An Exploration of Christian Spirituality* (Templegate, 1985).

Kathleen Norris. *Acedia & me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life* (Riverhead, 2008).

George Herbert. *The Temple* (numerous editions)

Thomas Traherne. *Centuries of Meditations* (numerous editions).

John Donne. *Sermons and Poetry* (numerous editions)

Richard Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (numerous editions)

Julian of Norwich. *Showings* (also called *Revelations of Divine Love*)

Walter Hilton. *The Ladder (or Scale) of Perfection*

Finally, do not neglect the practices of the church. Both Anglicanism and traditional Lutheranism have in common a spirituality that is ordered by liturgical worship. Develop a regular *practice* of reading Scripture, and of prayer. Do not neglect the Daily Office. Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer are two of Cranmer's great gifts to the church. And, finally, immerse yourself in the worship of the church. Do not neglect the liturgy or preaching of the Word or the sacraments. Christian "practices" really are "means of grace." They are not "works righteousness."

Further reflections from my blog:

["I Love Your Law: A Sermon about law and grace"](#)

["Anglican Reflections on Justification by Faith"](#)

["What is Anglican Theology?"](#)

1 Gilbert Meilaender "Hearts Set to Obey," in Carl Braaten & Christopher Seitz, eds. *I Am the Lord Your God: Reflections on the Ten Commandments* (Eerdmans, 2005) 253-275. (This essay is required reading for every student in my introductory Christian Ethics course.)

2 Gerhard Forde, "The Lutheran View," in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 13.)

[3](#) Meilaender, , 259, 261

[4](#) A similar approach is found in William Hordern, *Living by Grace* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975). Hordern begins his discussion with two chapters on "Justification and Religious Paternalism" and "The Forgiveness of God," both of which are about the Lutheran understanding of justification. There then follow two chapters on "Liberation from Sin" and "New Life in Christ." The reader might approach these chapters expecting to find a discussion of sanctification, but discovers instead that they are further discussion of the importance of justification.

[5](#) David S. Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology: Reflections on the Costs of a Construal," *Pro Ecclesia* vol. 2, no. 1 (1993) 37-49.

[6](#) Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heideberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 27.

[7](#) Paul Zahl, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 6, 22.

[8](#) Forde, *Christian Spirituality*, 30.

[9](#) Forde, *On Being A Theologian of the Cross*, 109.

[10](#) Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 104-105.

[11](#) Hordern, 170.

[12](#) Zahl, 252,254.

[13](#) Martin Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness."  
<http://www.mcm.edu/~eppleyd/luther.html>

[14](#) Martin Luther, "On the Councils of the Church."  
[http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther\\_e14.htm](http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther_e14.htm)

[15](#) David Yeago, "Scripture and Rule of Faith in the Lutheran

Tradition”

[http://www.tsm.edu/audio/aef\\_2013\\_scripture\\_and\\_rule\\_of\\_faith\\_in\\_the\\_lutheran\\_tradition](http://www.tsm.edu/audio/aef_2013_scripture_and_rule_of_faith_in_the_lutheran_tradition)

[16](#) William G. Witt, “Anglican Reflections on Justification by Faith,” *Anglican Theological Review* Spring 2013.

[17](#) Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (NY: Harper & Row, 1996), 39.

[18](#) The Church’s Guide for Reading Paul” *The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 105.

[19](#) Martin Luther, “The Councils and the Church” [http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther\\_e14.htm](http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther_e14.htm)

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## **New Page on “Hermeneutic of Discontinuity”**

I have added a new page entitled [“A Hermeneutic of Discontinuity,”](#) a theological discussion of the current ecclesial crisis. Click above or on the link on the left.

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## **It’s about communion! But communion with whom??**

Over at Church of the Holy Communion in Charleston, South Carolina, [Fr. Dow Sanderson](#) speaks about his decision to

remain in the Episcopal Church:

*I especially urge those of you who feel that you must leave your church home, in these difficult times, and seek another Anglican "safe haven". Like so many things in this broken and highly polarized world, some would frame this discussion as simply a choice between Biblical, Orthodox Truth on the one hand, and very progressive, liberals on the other. This simply is not true. In fact, the overwhelming majority of Anglo-Catholics in the United States remain a part of the Episcopal Church and have absolutely no intention of doing otherwise. These would include, of course, very famous places like St. Paul's in Washington, Church of the Advent in Boston, St. Thomas, Fifth Avenue in New York, St. John's in Savannah, to name just a few.*

*What is at stake here is Communion. Anglicanism, in all its expressions, has always claimed to be something more than just a church of the Reformation. Reformed, yes, but through our ties to the ancient See of Canterbury, we have depth of Tradition and continuity with the Apostolic Church that has always been highly valued.*

I certainly think that people of good conscience can remain in The Episcopal Church. At the same time, Fr. Sanderson begs a number of questions. Foremost, he states that the question is one of "communion." But this begs the question, "communion with whom?" The Catholic tradition is quite clear that communion is only possible with those who hold the Catholic faith. One of the better books on this subject is Werner Elert's *Eucharist and Communion in the First Four Centuries* (Concordia Publishing House, 2003). St. Athanasius was not in communion with the heretic Arius. St. Cyril of Alexandria was not in communion with Nestorius. St. Augustine was not in communion with the Donatists. After the ecumenical councils of the early centuries, those who refused to subscribe to them were no longer in communion with the Catholic Church. For

example, the Copts refused to recognize Chalcedon, and have been out of communion with the Orthodox churches to this day. Rome and Orthodoxy do not agree on the role of the pope, and so they have been out of communion since 1054. And, of course, Anglicans have been out of communion with Rome since Henry VIII.

The second question that Fr. Sanderson fails to address has to do with canon law and the role of the bishop in a diocese. As a priest in a diocese, what is one's obligation when one's bishop is deposed for "abandoning the communion" when he has not in fact done so? Bishop Mark Lawrence did not leave the Episcopal Church. He was kicked out. He was kicked out based on the misuse of a canon that was intended to be used for clergy that really had left the Episcopal Church and joined another denomination. But Bishop Mark was actually trying to keep the Diocese of South Carolina in TEC, not leave. In a case of double jeopardy, Bishop Lawrence was re-tried (without a trial or representation) on charges that had already been dismissed a year ago. Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori stated that she had accepted ["the renunciation of the ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church of Mark Lawrence,"](#) although TEC's canons state that such renunciation must be received in writing, and [Bishop Lawrence has denied that he made such a renunciation.](#)

So the Presiding Bishop's claim that Bishop Mark had "abandoned the communion," was, at the least, a very creative interpretation of TEC's canon law.. To be blunt, Bishop Mark did not abandon communion. TEC broke communion by deposing him. It was only after TEC violated its own canon law by deposing Bishop Mark that South Carolina left TEC. Moreover, the Global South bishops (who represent the majority of bishops in the Anglican Communion) have [refused to recognize the deposition of Bishop Lawrence](#), and they continue to recognize Bishop Lawrence as the legitimate bishop of South Carolina: "We want to assure you that we recognize your

Episcopal orders and your legitimate Episcopal oversight of the Diocese of South Carolina within the Anglican Communion.” So the question of “communion” is not a straightforward one.

Given that Bishop Mark’s deposition was contrary to TEC’s own canons, it would seem that Bishop Mark still the legitimate bishop of the Diocese of South Carolina, and, as a priest in that diocese, Sanderson either acknowledges the legitimacy of TEC’s deposition, or not. By placing himself under TEC’s authority in South Carolina, Fr. Sanderson is making a choice. He is choosing to be in communion with TEC. But he is also choosing to refuse to be in communion with Bishop Lawrence, who, until TEC wrongfully deposed him, was Fr. Sanderson’s bishop.

When I lived in Boston, I attended Church of the Advent, which Fr. Sanderson mentions, for a year or so. Fr. Sanderson finds it significant that the Church of the Advent remains in TEC. However, I know something of that story. During the time I lived in Boston, Advent survived a near schism when the unique governing board at Advent (a “corporation,” not an elected vestry) attempted to leave TEC (not over doctrine) and take the building with them. But the majority of the congregation did not agree with the corporation, and the matter went to court. The congregation won. The corporation lost. But that set a legal precedent. The building belonged not to the corporation, but to the diocese. The current congregation at Advent has not left, and could not leave, because they would lose their building to the diocese.

When I attended Advent, the average Sunday attendance (ASA) was around 400. [TEC’s statistics page indicates that it is now around 250](#). So the Church of the Advent has not left TEC. But somewhere around a third of its Sunday attendees have. When I attended, Advent had two kinds of members, those who were serious Anglo-Catholics, and those who attended because they liked the beautiful music and liturgy. I cannot be certain, but I would imagine that the vast majority of those who no

longer attend Advent on Sunday mornings were the serious Anglo-Catholics. Those ones who still keep coming are likely those who come for the music.

So what's my point? My point is not to criticize Fr. Sanderson for his decision to remain in the Episcopal Church. For those of us who are committed to orthodox Anglicanism, and have struggled with the Episcopal Church crisis over the last decade or more, where we end up is never simple. People can stay, and they can leave, and both decisions can be made in good conscience.

At the same time, Communion is important. But communion is also a choice, and a necessary choice that we all must make. To choose to be in communion with some is by necessity to choose not to be in communion with others. If one stays in the Episcopal Church, one has not chosen "communion" over non-communion. One has chosen communion with some (such as Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori) over others (such as Bishop Mark Lawrence). Unfortunately, it is impossible to choose both, and I would suggest that it is the Episcopal Church that has forced that decision on the orthodox, not the reverse.

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## **New Article: What is Anglican Theology?**

After a lengthy absence – Busy semester! Lots of grading! – I've posted a new article entitled "What is Anglican Theology?" Because of its length, I have posted it as a "page" rather than a blog post.

It can be found [here](#). Enjoy!