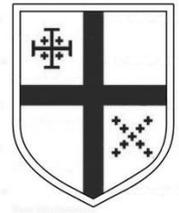


Glad Tidings

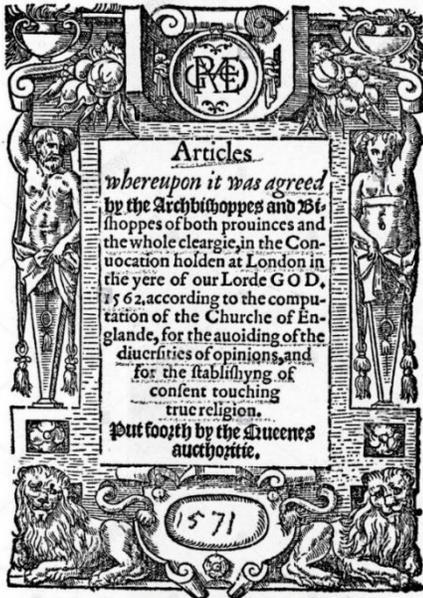


The Newsletter of the United Episcopal Church of North America

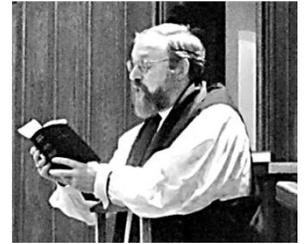
Ascension 2021

THE ARTICLES OF RELIGION – 450 YEARS

by The Most Revd Peter D. Robinson, Presiding Bishop



This year marks the 450th anniversary of the Articles of Religion reaching their final form, the revision of 1801 marking, for the most part, only political changes. The Reformation Era was marked by the production of Confessions and sets of Articles by which the Evangelical Churches expressed their teaching. The earliest sets of Articles were produced in the 1520s, with Zwingli's Sixty-Seven Articles of 1523 being among the earliest, whilst the Augsburg Confession of 1530 soon became one of the defining documents not just of Lutheranism, but in its influence on subsequent document, on Protestantism as a whole. New sets of Articles would continue to appear up to the mid-1560s when the Thirty-nine Articles, and the Second Helvetic Confession brought the great era of confession writing to a close.



The Forty-Two Articles. Most writers agree that the roots of the English Articles of Religion lay in the Augsburg Confession with both the Ten Articles of 1536 and the unpublished Thirteen Articles of 1537-8 showing considerable influence from the great Lutheran formulary.[1] The Ten Articles defined the Church of England's position from 1536-40, but during that time Henry VIII was

considering an alliance with the Lutheran princes against the Emperor Charles V.[2] This led to the production of the Thirteen Articles in 1538, which were used as part of the negotiations with the German representatives. Both documents largely came from the pen of Thomas Cranmer, assisted by reforming bishops such as Shaxton, Fox, and Latimer. When work began on the 42 Articles in the winter of 1552-53, Cranmer and his colleagues took the 13 Articles, which correspond to the first 17 Articles of the Augsburg Confession, as their basis, and reworked and expanded them to cover the whole range of topics under discussion in the 1550s, which included repudiations not just of Roman Catholic errors, but also those of religious radicals such as the Anabaptists. Theologically, they are substantially the same as the later 39 Articles, but the 42 Articles had only a very short life, as Edward VI died in July 1553 and was succeeded by his half-sister Mary (1516-58), who was a Roman Catholic. Several hundred English Protestants escaped to the Continent, and in the Marian Reaction that followed, some 281 Protestants were burnt at the stake, effectively ending the hold of the Roman Church in England. Mary's reign proved to be short, as she died in November 1558, and was succeeded by Edward's other half-sister, Elizabeth (1533-1602/3).

The Thirty-Nine Articles. Elizabeth had received the same sort of Christian Humanist education as Edward VI, and as a result she was known to be inclined towards the New Religion. She had dodged the issue of her religious allegiance during the reign of Mary to avoid being executed as either a traitor or a heretic. This had been a key formative experience for the new Queen, and she proceeded cautiously in religious matters. Although some preliminary Articles were issued in 1559 along with the revised Prayer Book, it was to be four years into Elizabeth I's reign before the doctrinal standards of the Church of England beyond the Bible, the Creeds, the first Book of Homilies, and the Prayer Book were given fuller consideration. Archbishop Matthew Parker seems to have had a considerable influence on the new Articles, taking the 1553 text, and revising it by removing redundant material, and making some additions from the Württemberg Confession of 1553. This had been prepared as a Lutheran response to the reconvening of the Council of Trent[3] and was very highly thought of at the time. The eventual text, the first version of the Thirty-Nine Articles, was approved by Convocation in February 1562/3 [4], and sent to the Queen for approval. She deleted Article 29, so as not to offend traditionalist and Lutheran sensibilities, and the Articles were issued in the summer of 1563.

The thirty-eight Articles approved by Elizabeth were to remain unaltered until 1571, (*Continued on Page 2.*)

(Continued from front page.) when in the wake of her excommunication by Pope Pius V, and declining hopes of making common cause with the Lutheran powers, a further revision was authorized. Directed by Bishop John Jewel, it made a few verbal changes to the Articles, reinserted Article 29 and referencing the new Second Book of Homilies, which had been revised earlier in 1571. The text was approved by the Crown, and clergy and schoolmasters were required to subscribe to the Articles of Religion on ordination or installation. Additionally, clergy were required to read the articles to their congregations at their installation, hence the English legal expression ‘reading in’ for taking possession of a vicarage or rectory. From 1571 until 1865 the clergy were required to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles, but in the latter year the requirement was relaxed to a simple statement that the Articles were agreeable to the word of God – a change brought about by the liberal wing of the Church of England.

Purpose and Context. Both the 1553 and the 1562/71 sets of Articles were drawn up with the avowed intent of ending controversies in religion by stating the boundaries of orthodoxy within the Church of England. The Thirty-nine Articles are regarded as the principal Anglican confessional statement stating the Church of England’s position in the mid-16th century controversies concerning the Authority of Scripture, justification, and the sacraments. Many of these disputes, and more particularly the Anglican response to them, remain relevant today. Because of their 16th century origin, we need to be aware of the context in which they were written. For a start, the 39 Articles are both Augustinian in theology, and Christian Humanist in outlook. Augustinianism derives from the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who had combatted the Pelagian heresy in the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries, and the dominant influence on Catholic theology from the fifth century to the twelfth.[5] Christian Humanism, which is most closely associated with Erasmus[6] brought the direct study of the Scriptures in the original languages, which in turn led to the rediscovery of the New Testament’s and Augustine’s views on justification, sanctification, election, and the sacraments. With the solitary exception of Martin Luther, all of the major Reformers were to some degree Christian Humanists, who had a high concept of the dignity of mankind, and the independence of the individual. Although Erasmus of Rotterdam, remained a Roman Catholic, many of those who were profoundly influenced by him – Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, Philip Melancthon, Heinrich Bullinger, Peter Martyr Vermigli, John a Lasco (Jan Laski), to name a few – joined the ranks of the Reformers.[7] The English Reformers Cranmer and Latimer were both at Cambridge when Erasmus taught there in the 1510s, so the old saying that ‘Luther hatched the egg that Erasmus laid’ has some validity.

The Thirty-Nine Articles are not in and of themselves a Confession, they are too narrow in scope, but they are the most significant of a group of documents that form the Anglican equivalent. The Articles themselves refer to the two volumes of the Book of Homilies published in 1547 and 1562 respectively as providing a fuller explanation of Anglican teaching. Nowell’s catechism was authorized alongside the Articles in 1563, and became the official guide to the interpretation of the Articles. However, the writings of the Continental Reformers also played a part in forming the mind of the Church of England under Elizabeth, with Bullinger’s ‘Decades,’ the Heidelberg Catechism[8], and Ursinus’[9] and Bastingius’ commentaries[10] on the Heidelberg Catechism all forming part of the curriculum for those training for the ministry. It is probably no accident that the modern theological incoherence of Anglicanism has progressed hand-in-hand with the downgrading, and abandonment of the Articles of Religion as a statement of faith. This can be traced in the American Church from their adaption and adoption by 1801 General Convention as part of the doctrine and discipline of the Church, through to them being mentioned as ‘sufficient testimony’ to the beliefs of the Church in 1844, through to an attempt to remove them from the Prayer Book in 1925, and then their eventual relegation to the historical documents section of the 1979 Prayer Book.

When the UECNA was founded in 1981, the Articles of Religion were once again restored to their rightful place as a key component of the doctrine and discipline of this Church with assent to them being required by all those who are ordained to, or to serve in, the Ministry in this Church. They provide an anchoring point for the theological life of the Church which commits us to Biblical orthodoxy, the Western theological tradition as it derives from the four Latin Doctors, and the key insights of the Protestant Reformers ensuring that the Church will not be blown hither and yon by every new theological fad that comes along. In an age where Christianity is increasingly marginalized, it is vitally important that we know who we are, and what we believe, in order to withstand the chaos created by our decaying secularized society and to provide hope for the future. +PDR

1. Gerald Bray - ‘The Thirteen Articles’ (‘Churchman’ 106, p.244)
2. 1537-1540 seems to have been the high point of Lutheran influence in England, after that the voices of the likes of Martin Bucer (1491-1551), and Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) become ever more important, though not decisive.
3. The Württemberg Confession was largely the work of Johannes Brenz (1499-1570) who was superintendent of the Church in Saxe-Württemberg 1553-1570.
4. Until the 18th century the New Year began on March 25th in England.
5. Augustine is one of the four Latin doctors along with Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, and Gregory the Great.
6. Erasmus was not the originator of Christian Humanism, but was its best-know exponent, spreading the movement through Northern Europe.
7. Bucer, Vermigli, and Laski all worked in England during the reign of Edward VI. Melancthon was invited to succeed Bucer as Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge but declined. Many of Elizabeth’s bishops sat under Bullinger’s pulpit in Zurich during the Marian Exile.
8. See Anthony Milton ‘A Missing Dimension of European Influence on the English Protestantism: The Heidelberg Catechism and the Church of England 1563-1663’ *Reformation and Renaissance Review* Vol. 20 No. 3 (2018)
9. Zacharias Ursinus, a pupil of Philip Melancthon, and the driving force behind the composition of the Heidelberg Catechism.
10. Jeremias Bastingius, (*Dutch*: Bastinck) 1551 to 1595, student of Ursinus and Beza.