

## THE FORMULARIES

*The Rev. Dr. Shane Copeland*

What do Anglicans believe? This is a valid question and if you asked ten different Anglicans, you might actually get ten different answers! This theological diversity leads many to believe that Anglicans do not have any particular doctrine beyond what one might call “Creedal Christianity.” And while orthodox Anglicans can certainly be defined in this way, Anglicanism does have a particular doctrine that was established in the 16th Century. The English Reformers looked first to Scripture, and then to the Church Fathers to lay a Protestant and Reformed foundation. They did this by writing key documents called “formularies.” This paper will explore each of these formularies, giving a brief introduction and overview, and do the same with the Homilies. So to understand what Anglicans believe, one must read the Formularies.

The Formularies are:

1. The Articles of Religion (39 Articles)
2. The 1662 Book of Common Prayer (BCP or prayer book)
3. The Ordinal: the Ordering of Deacons, Presbyters and Bishops

Gerald Bray writes that, “the historic formularies were designed by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) to give the English Church a solid grounding in the three fundamental areas of its life--**doctrine**, **devotion** and **discipline**. The Articles provided its doctrinal framework, the Prayer Book settled the pattern of its devotional life and the Ordinal outlined what was expected of the clergy, whose role was the key to the church’s discipline.”<sup>1</sup>

In addition to these Formularies are the Homilies, which are referred to in the 39 Articles. The Homilies were written by the English Reformers to be in depth commentaries on the Three Formularies.

The most important aspect of the Formularies is how each one affirms the Bible as the primary formulary of Anglicanism. Everything that Anglicans believe flows from Scripture. The Three Formularies can only be held to because they place Scripture as the ultimate authority, in which life is to be found in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A starting place is to look how the Formularies are set forth in the official documents of Anglicanism. The Canons of the Church of England state this about the Formularies.

### **A 2 Of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion**

The Thirty-nine Articles are agreeable to the Word of God and may be assented unto with a good conscience by all members of the Church of England.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald Bray, *The Faith We Confess: An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles* (London, UK: The Latimer Trust, 2009), 1.

### **A 3 Of *The Book of Common Prayer***

1. The doctrine contained in *The Book of Common Prayer* and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church according to the Use of the Church of England is agreeable to the Word of God.
2. The form of God's worship contained in the said Book, forasmuch as it is not repugnant to the Word of God, may be used by all members of the Church of England with a good conscience.

### **A 4 Of the Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons**

The Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, annexed to *The Book of Common Prayer* and commonly known as the Ordinal, is not repugnant to the Word of God; and those who are so made, ordained, or consecrated bishops, priests, or deacons, according to the said Ordinal, are lawfully made, ordained, or consecrated, and ought to be accounted, both by themselves and others, to be truly bishops, priests, or deacons.

### **A 5 Of the doctrine of the Church of England**

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

In particular such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, *The Book of Common Prayer*, and the Ordinal.<sup>2</sup>

Canons A2-4 give a description of each individual Formulary and A5 makes explicit that Anglican doctrine is particularly found in them. All Three, plus the teachings of the Church Fathers and Councils are submitted to the Bible as the supreme authority.

More recently, **The Jerusalem Declaration** issued by Global Anglican Future Conference in June 2008 states this about the Three Formularies.

4. We uphold **the Thirty-nine Articles** as containing the true doctrine of the Church agreeing with God's Word and as authoritative for Anglicans today.
6. We rejoice in our Anglican sacramental and liturgical heritage as an expression of the gospel, and we uphold **the 1662 Book of Common Prayer** as a true and authoritative standard of worship and prayer, to be translated and locally adapted for each culture.
7. We recognise that God has called and gifted bishops, priests and deacons in historic succession to equip all the people of God for their ministry in the world. We uphold **the classic Anglican Ordinal** as an authoritative standard of clerical orders.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Canons of the Church of England. 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. July 18, 2019. <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/canons-church-england/section-a>

<sup>3</sup> "The Jerusalem Declaration." July 18, 2019. <https://www.gafcon.org/jerusalem-2018/key-documents/jerusalem-declaration>

These statements uphold the historic place of the Formularies and for the current and continued role in the life of Anglicanism.

The Diocese of the Rocky Mountains (DRM) makes clear in Article 1 of its Constitution how it values the authors of the Formularies stating, “This Diocese holds the essentials of evangelical Anglicanism handed down through the English reformation.” The Constitution then goes on to affirm The Jerusalem Declaration and puts particular emphasis on the statements from it regarding the Formularies.

c) **The Thirty-nine Articles** as containing foundational doctrine of the Church agreeing with God’s Word and as authoritative for Anglicans today

(d) Anglican sacramental and liturgical heritage as an expression of the gospel, and **the 1662 Book of Common Prayer** as a true and authoritative standard of worship and prayer, to be translated and locally adapted for each culture. <sup>4</sup>

In addition, the DRM Canons require all Clergy to Subscribe in writing to the Formularies:

*...I subscribe to **the Thirty-Nine Articles** as containing the true doctrine of the Church agreeing with God’s Word and as authoritative for Anglicans today; I uphold **The Book of Common Prayer as set forth by the Church of England in 1662, together with the Ordinal attached to the same, as setting out the theological, liturgical, and ministry principles that are the standard for Anglican doctrine and worship**; I affirm the Jerusalem Declaration of 2008, and the Constitution and Canons of this Diocese.* <sup>5</sup>

Seeing the importance placed upon the Three Formularies for understanding Anglican doctrine, here is an overview of each plus the Homilies.

### 1. The Articles of Religion

The 39 Articles are placed first in the order in the official documents of Anglicanism since their focus is particularly upon doctrine. They are the Anglican Confession. They were written for the purpose of establishing what Anglicans believe. This preference is reflected in how the Articles are listed first in the Canons of the Church of England, The Jerusalem Declaration, and in the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of the Rocky Mountains.

The Articles of Religion are the doctrinal lens through which the Book of Common Prayer is understood. In other words, the Articles interpret what is said in the liturgies of the BCP, not the other way around. The BCP does indeed contain and express doctrine, but Anglican doctrine is primarily found in the Articles. The Articles shine a light on

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<sup>4</sup> “The Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Constitution.” July 18, 2019.  
<http://rockymountainanglican.org/founding-documents/>

<sup>5</sup> “The Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Canons.” July 18, 2019.  
<http://rockymountainanglican.org/founding-documents/>

statements in the BCP that may be less clear. This allows consistency in the theology of the English Reformers, who wrote both the Articles and the prayer book.

Bishop J.C. Ryle wrote, “the Church of England’s Book of Common Prayer was never intended to be the Church’s standard of doctrine in the same way that the Articles were...the Articles, far more than the Prayer Book, are the Church’s standard of sound doctrine.”<sup>6</sup>

Archbishop Thomas Cranmer originally wrote 42 Articles in 1552. Queen Elizabeth’s Archbishop, Matthew Parker, revised the 42 down to the present 39. Parliament ratified them in 1571 with required clergy subscription, which still exists today in many places within the Anglican Communion. Written in the 16th Century, the Articles are considered to be an early Reformed Confession that draws from various sources. They became the basis for the much more detailed Westminster Confession of Faith a century later.

Article VI clearly states that the Bible (66 Books of the Old and New Testaments), “containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.” They also repeatedly state that the Scriptures are the supreme authority over all else, whether they are Creeds, Tradition, or Church Councils (Articles VI, VIII, XX, XI). The Church is defined in the same manner as all other Reformed confessions as a place in which the “pure Word of God is preached and Sacraments be duly ministered” (Article XIX). Original sin, justification by faith and predestination are all affirmed (IX, XI, XVII). Jesus is held to be the only means for Salvation (XVIII).

Regarding the Sacraments, Article XXV states that there are only two that Christ Himself ordained: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. They are “certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God’s will towards us, by which He works invisibly in us, and not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in Him.” The other five held by the Church of Rome are merely rites or sacraments of the Church. The Roman belief and practices of Transubstantiation, reservation and adoration are rejected. Rather, in the Supper, “the Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten...only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten is...Faith” (Article XXVIII). The sacrifice of Christ was a once for all, perfect, propitiating and redeeming event that took place on the cross, never to be repeated (XXXI).

There have been numerous commentaries on the Articles through the centuries. The earliest is *The Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England* by Thomas Rogers. Rogers was the Chaplain to Archbishop Bancroft, and this was first published in the 1580’s and its finalized version in 1607. Giving that Rogers was a contemporary of Matthew Parker, John Jewell and Richard Hooker, what he has to say is significant. More recently, J.I. Packer and R.T. Beckwith have written a short book giving background on the Articles,

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<sup>6</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Knots Untied: Being Plain Statements on Disputed Points in Religion From the Standpoint of an Evangelical Churchman* (Moscow, ID: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2000), 78.

arguing for their continued role in the twenty-first century Anglicanism: *The Thirty-nine Articles: Their Place and Use Today*.

## 2. The Book of Common Prayer

The Book of Common Prayer (1662) is the official prayer book of the Church of England and the standard for worldwide Anglicanism. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer is the main author, or rather editor, of the BCP. The Prayer Book contains all of the liturgical services necessary for the life of the Church, from birth to death. The liturgies are drawn from the Ancient Church through the Medieval Church.

Cranmer produced the first BCP in 1549. This was the first time God would be worshipped in the English language across the whole nation! And the Bible would be heard in English as well. Although it was a Reformational book, it was meant to be a transitional work. This is why Cranmer brought the Continental Reformers Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli to England to help revise the prayer book. Their work, along with others, produced the second book in 1552. This BCP, with minor revisions in 1559, 1604 and finally 1662, is the second of the Anglican Formularies.

The anchor of the BCP is the Daily Offices: Morning Prayer (or Mattins) and Evening Prayer (or Evensong). Cranmer took the Seven Daily Offices from the Monasteries and distilled them into two for common people to daily gather to confess their sins, to give thanks to God, to hear the Word, and to pray.

In line with the 39 Articles, Scripture is of highest importance. This is especially seen in the rhythm of the twice a day gathering for Morning and Evening Prayer. He appointed several Psalms per service to be said or sung. In addition to the Psalms, an Old Testament Lesson and a New Testament Lesson were also read in each service. In this way, the entire Book of Psalms was covered every month, and the Old Testament read once a year, and the New Testament twice a year! For Holy Communion, Cranmer appointed an Epistle Lesson and a Gospel Lesson for every Sunday and Feast Day. The Communion service also prescribes a sermon to be preached before the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is ministered so that the Gospel audible explains and lead to the Gospel visible.

The Jerusalem Declaration says this sacramental and liturgical heritage is an expression of the Gospel. The Rev. Dr. J.I. Packer has reflected that the Gospel in the prayer book is expressed through a repeated cycle of sin, grace, and faith.

Packer wrote:

To join in a service of worship is to be taken on a journey through a prescribed series of thoughts and actions. How did Cranmer secure evangelical worship? By routing his regular services via a sequence of three themes: first, the detecting and confessing of sin; second, the announcing of grace, in God's promise to pardon and restore the penitent through Christ; third, the exercising of faith, first in believing God's promise and trusting Him for pardon, and then in acts of praise, testimony, intercession, and obeying instruction, all based on the prior restoring of

fellowship with God through forgiveness. All the main Prayer Book services have this built-in evangelical design.<sup>7</sup>

Dom Gregory Dix once commented on the 1662 Holy Communion Service, "As a piece of liturgical craftsmanship it is in the first rank . . . It is not a disordered attempt at a Catholic rite but the only effective attempt ever made to give liturgical expression to the doctrine of justification by faith alone."<sup>8</sup> Although Dix did not intend his comment as a compliment, it is accurate. The rubrics, the ordering of the rite, and the words all show Packer's and Dix's observations regarding the Gospel cycle and Justification by Faith. Included in these are the rubrical direction for the Minister to stand at the North Side of the Table, which is to be covered in a clean white linen cloth, the lack of an epiclesis and invocation in the service, and the distribution of the bread and wine immediately following the words of institution. Cranmer wanted to follow the biblical pattern of Jesus' Last Supper where they ate and drank immediately following His words to do so.

Also important is the rubric at the end of the Communion service, which gives a more specific definition of the true presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

*It is hereby declared, That thereby no adoration is intended, or ought to be done, either unto the Sacramental Bread or Wine there bodily received, or unto any Corporal Presence of Christ's natural Flesh and Blood. For the Sacramental Bread and Wine remain still in their very natural substances, and therefore may not be adored; (for that were Idolatry, to be abhorred of all faithful Christians;) and the natural Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ are in Heaven, and not here; it being against the truth of Christ's natural Body to be at one time in more places than one.*<sup>9</sup>

John Stott had this to say about the Communion Rite:

Cranmer was determined to be consistent in its application. The ordained minister could still be called a 'priest', because this English word is simply a contraction of the word 'presbyter' (elder), but every reference to an 'altar' was eliminated from the Book of Common Prayer and replaced by 'table', 'holy table', 'Lord's table' or 'Communion table'. For Cranmer saw clearly that the Communion service is a supper served by a minister from a table, not a sacrifice offered by a priest on an altar. The shape of his final Communion service exhibits the same determination, for the thankful self-offering of the people was taken out of the Prayer of Consecration...and judiciously placed after the reception of the bread and wine as a 'Prayer of Oblation.' In this way, beyond any possibility of

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<sup>7</sup> J.I. Packer, *The Gospel in the Prayer Book* (Marcham Manor Press, 1966).

<sup>8</sup> Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1945 2nd Ed), 672.

<sup>9</sup> This rubric is known as the "Black Rubric." It was first part of Cranmer's 1552 Book of Common Prayer, but added late enough that it was printed in black ink rather than red as were the rest of the rubrics. It was slightly revised in 1662 to the version above but the name Black Rubric had stuck by that time.

misunderstanding, the people's sacrifice was seen to be their offering of praise in responsive gratitude for Christ's sacrifice, whose benefits they had again received by faith.<sup>10</sup>

While much more can be said about the Prayer Book as a whole, including the Baptismal Service, Solemnization of Matrimony, and the Catechism (and its place in understanding Anglican doctrine), the length of this paper would begin to grow significantly beyond being an introduction and encouragement to study deeper the actual Formularies.

One more item to think about is how both The Jerusalem Declaration and the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of the Rocky Mountains state that the 1662 BCP is, "to be translated and locally adapted for each culture." The reality is that the language of the 1662 is 16th Century English written for an auditory and illiterate society. The need is to contextualize the prayer book for today. Today's society is a visual one and the long sentences and repeated phrases, while helpful to memorization in the past centuries, are barriers in the 21st Century. This is hard work that needs to both understand the ethos and principles of Cranmer's work, and the local setting to adapt it to. One cannot translate what one does not know. There are options that include fairly "word for word" translations of the 1662 into contemporary English, to more free adaptations of the ethos and principles of the prayer book. Holding the conviction that the Prayer Book is an expression of the Gospels impels 21<sup>st</sup> century Anglicans to this endeavor.

### 3. The Ordinal

The Ordinal, while attached to the Book of Common Prayer, is technically separate from it. The Ordinal is subtitled, "The Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons according to the order of the Church of England." The Church of England in the Reformation retained the ancient three-fold order of ministry: Deacons, Presbyters and Bishops. The three-fold order did differentiate Anglicanism from the other Reformation Churches on the Continent. In order to ensure their agreement with those churches, the English Reformers produced an ordinal that is thoroughly Scriptural, placing great emphasis on the ministry of the Word.

The need for an Ordinal is set forth in Article XXIII. This states, without reference to any particular orders, that, "It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the Sacraments...before he be lawfully called and, and sent to execute the same." Article XXXVI states that any person ordained or consecrated according to the Ordinal are considered to be lawful.

As with the BCP, Cranmer did not create the Ordinal out of thin air. He revised and edited the existing Roman Ordinal to Reformational theology. He removed all language that might imply that ministers have a sacerdotal role. As Gerald Bray notes, "Ministers of the Church of England were not priests in the Roman sense, ordained to offer eucharistic sacrifices on the altar of the church during the celebration of mass. Rather,

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<sup>10</sup> John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1986), 262.

they were called to be pastors and teachers, as were the other ministers in Protestant churches.”<sup>11</sup>

In line with, and as an expression of the theology of the 39 Articles and the 1662 BCP, the Ordinal places the Bible as the foundation from which all ministry is to flow, whether it be a Deacon, Presbyter or Bishop. This is seen in each of the three exhortations declared, in the vows made, and in the giving of a Bible to each newly ordained Deacon, Presbyter and Bishop.

The Deacon is given a New Testament with the words from the Bishop, “Take thou authority to read the Gospel in the Church of God, and preach the same, if thou be thereto licensed by the Bishop himself.”

The Priest is given only a Bible (no paten or chalice) with these words from the Bishop, “Take thou authority to preach the Word of God, and to minister the holy Sacraments in the Congregation, where thou shalt be lawfully appointed thereunto.”

The Bishop is also given only a Bible with these words from the Archbishop, “Give heed unto reading, exhortation, and doctrine. Think upon the things contained in this Book. Be diligent in them, that the increase coming thereby may be manifest unto all men. Take heed unto thyself, and to doctrine, and be diligent in doing them; for by so doing thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee. Be to the flock of Christ a shepherd, not a wolf; feed them, devour them not. Hold up the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring in the outcasts, seek the lost. Be so merciful, that ye be not too remiss; so minister discipline, that you shall forget not mercy; that when the chief shepherd shall appear ye may receive the neverfading crown of glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

There are two further considerations, one regarding the office of Deacon, the other Bishops. With regards to Deacons, the Ordinal did not envision a permanent Diaconate. This practice had been lost in the Western Church for about a thousand years by the time of the Reformation. It is only a practice that has been renewed in the last century. Seeing permanent Deacons fully ministering and flourishing in the church is needed.

The other issue is the office of Bishop. The English Reformers retained the office of bishop in addition to presbyter because they saw it in line with Scripture and ancient practice (see the Preface of the Ordinal). At the same time, they also believed that the essence of both offices were the same. Presbyter (elder) and Bishop (overseer) are used interchangeably in the New Testament (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 20:17-35).

Griffith Thomas comments, “Cranmer...expressly maintained that Presbyters and Bishops were originally identical, and that the development that made them distinct and gave Bishops rule over Presbyters was of human origin.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Bray, *The Faith We Confess*, 199-200.

<sup>12</sup> W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to The Thirty Nine Articles* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Theological Seminary, 1996), 329.

The offices are not so much as distinct in kind, but in practice. Presbyters exercise their ministry as pastors overseeing a congregation, and Bishops as pastors in a diocese overseeing many congregations (and their pastors). It is important as Anglicans to strike a balance of valuing the office of Bishop without putting undue importance upon it that neither reflects Scripture nor ancient practice. The Ordinal does an excellent job of doing so.

### The Homilies

The Homilies have a unique and mostly forgotten place in Anglicanism. The uniqueness is in the fact they have never been elevated to place of the Three Formularies in the canons or clergy subscription. But they are a subset of the Articles of Religion. They are named and pointed to in two of the Articles as means to further understand Anglican doctrine. Article XXXV states that the Homilies “contain a godly and wholesome Doctrine” and that they should “be read in Churches.” The short Article on Justification (XI) points to the Homily of Justification as a place to more fully understand this important doctrine. Cranmer and Bishop John Jewell wrote most of the Homilies. This is important since the same Reformers who wrote the Formularies wrote the Homilies. If one wants to understand more fully statements made in the Articles and prayer book, reading the Homilies is invaluable.

The Homilies were written at a time when many of the clergy in the Church of England were not yet reformed themselves and/or untrained in preaching. While Cranmer and many leaders of the Church of England had adopted Reformational theology in the 1530-40’s, they had to be underground about this while King Henry the VIII was still alive. Only after Henry died were the church leaders able to move the whole church in a reformed direction. The Homilies were an important means to help train the clergy and catechize the laypeople. They were appointed to read by ministers who were not yet ready or able to preach Reformational theology sermons.

As Article XXXV states, there were two sets or books of Homilies. Book One, containing 12 sermons, was written before the reign of Mary I (1553-1558), and Book Two, with 21 sermons, after her reign. Some Homilies are short, and others broken into two or three parts, were to read over consecutive Sundays. The longest sermon by far is “Against the Peril of Idolatry, and Superfluous Decking of Churches.” This homily addressed one of the main concerns of the Reformers: the use and abuse of images, icons and statues in worship.

The Articles are known for being short, concise statements on doctrine, even in comparison to other Reformation Confessions. Article XI on Justification by Faith is an example of using the Homilies to better understand the Formularies, especially since it specifically points to one of the Homilies for this purpose.

The Homily on Justification, written by Cranmer, states this:

...three things, which must go together in our justification. Upon God’s part, his great mercy and grace, upon Christ’s part, justice: that is, the satisfaction of God’s

justice, or the price of our redemption, by the offering of his body, and shedding of his blood, with fulfilling of the Law perfectly and thoroughly; and upon our part true and lively faith in the merits of Jesus Christ; which yet is not our's, but God working in us. So that in our justification, there is not only God's mercy and grace, but also his justice; which the Apostle calleth the justice of God; and it consistent in paying our ransom and fulfilling of the Law. And so the grace of God doth not shut out the justice of God in our justification; but only shutteth out the justice of man; that is to say, the justice of our works, as to be merits of deserving our justification. And therefore St. Paul declareth here nothing, upon the behalf of man, concerning his justification, but only a true and lively faith; which nevertheless is the gift of God, and not man's only work, without God. And yet, that faith doth not shut out repentance, hope, love, dread, and the fear of God, to be joined with faith in every man that is justified; but it shutteth them out from the office of justifying."

The Formularies are the place one turns to in order to understand what Anglicans believe. Again, referring to Gerald Bray, it is in the Articles, Prayer Book and Ordinal that the doctrine, devotion and discipline of Anglicanism are found. And above all, the primary Anglican Formulary is the Bible.

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