

*Semper reformanda –*

**THE NEED TO RECOVER  
THE PRINCIPLES OF  
THE REFORMATION  
TODAY**

D. A. Scales

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*John Jewel, 1522 – 1571*

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the need to recover the Reformation today”*

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## *Semper reformanda* –

### **The need to recover the principles of the Reformation today**

The history of the Church – in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and in the whole Christian era – is marked by God’s gracious revelation of his saving truth in Jesus Christ, but also by the sad declension from it of the visible Church. Since the Reformation the glorious truths revealed in Scripture have been to a great extent lost sight of in all the major Protestant denominations. Confidence in the authority of Holy Scripture and the cardinal doctrines of the Faith recovered at the Reformation has been eroded. While my focus will be on the Church of England, virtually all that is said of that Church is true of the other major Protestant denominations in the British Isles.

We need today to recover the principles of the Reformation, and to apply that teaching to the Church. While we may look back at history and see the Reformation as in general a completed work, we must also realise that it will be constantly necessary to examine the doctrine and practice of the church against the measure of Scripture and to reform anything that is amiss: *semper reformanda*<sup>1</sup>. The Church always needs the work of Reformation, not least today.

#### ***sola Scriptura*: the final authority of Holy Scripture**

The final authority of Holy Scripture was the essential principle of the Reformation. From it flowed the doctrines which had been gradually lost since the days of the early church, the recovery of which split the visible church. The gradual loss, again, of this belief and principle has led to the spread of unbelief and to enfeeblement in the contemporary church.

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase means ‘always needs to be reformed’. It is frequently wrongly translated as ‘always reforming’ and used to encourage and justify a restless enthusiasm for change.

We will consider the teaching of the Articles of the Church of England on Holy Scripture. Article VI is entitled: “Of the Sufficiency of the holy Scriptures for salvation”. This is more fully expounded in the first sentence:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

That is a clear principle; if it were fully believed and fully applied, there would be a mighty Reformation today. From this fountain all Christian truth flows. The teaching is reiterated in Article XX:

although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation.

Article XXI measures General Councils by Scripture: “things ordained by them as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of holy Scripture.”

Article XVIII (*Of obtaining eternal Salvation only by the name of Christ*) ends: “holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved”. We know this truth because Scripture states it.

The three great creeds (the Nicene, the Athanasian, and the Apostles’ creeds) are received, not because of any eminence on the part of those who formulated them, nor because they date from the early Church: rather, they “ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture.” (Article VIII)

How may we be sure of the promises of God, and how may we be sure of the will of God? Article XVII (*Of Predestination and Election*) declares:



we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture: and, in our doings, that Will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God.

The Word of God is the only measure of God's promises and of his guidance – wise counsel for our subjective age.

Various serious doctrinal errors of Rome are to be rejected because they are not consonant with Scripture. Purgatory, pardons, the worshipping of images and relics, and the invocation of saints are a “fond thing vainly invented”, because they are “grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God”. (Article XXII) The conducting of public prayer in a tongue ‘not understood of the people’, as in the Latin mass, “is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God” (Article XXIV). Finally, Article XXVIII teaches that “Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of the Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture”.

The first mark of the visible church of Christ is that it is “a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached” (Article XIX). The Church is “a witness and a keeper of holy Writ” (Article XX): it bears witness to what Scripture is – the inspired, infallible, and inerrant utterance of God; its duty as keeper does not in any way signify that the Church has authority over Scripture; the word used in the Latin text of the Articles, *conservatrix*, signifies preserver, defender, maintainer. The Church is at all times to be under the written Word, to be taught and corrected by it: thus

it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. (Article XX)

It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, ... so that nothing be ordained against God's Word. (Article XXXIV)

We must weigh all teaching by the measure of Scripture, because it is true of churches generally, as it is true of General Councils, that “They be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the Spirit and Word of God” (Article XXI).

Scripture is the rock on which our belief, our preaching, and our practice is to be established. Since the Reformation the Church of England has suffered periods of grievous declension. There have been periods of spiritual deadness – as in the seventeenth century – when outward forms were preserved, but the message of the Gospel was lost and preaching set forth only a form of morality. Arising from the Enlightenment has grown a spirit of liberalism, in which the mind of man is made the ultimate judge of religious truth – where Scripture is judged by man, not man by Scripture: this has been evidenced by rejection of the historicity of Scripture, rejection of the teaching of Scripture on such matters as Scripture, the wrath of God, and substitutionary atonement; more recently it has been evidenced in such reports as *Christian Believing* (1986), the ordination of women, and the rising pressure to reject the teaching of Scripture on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Liberalism is in the ascendant today. These weaknesses have affected all major denominations, not simply the Church of England. The Church of England, however, has since the 1830s had another movement within it inimical to scriptural religion – the Anglo-Catholic movement. This has sought to re-introduce into the English Church every teaching and practice of the Church of Rome, except the papacy – though more recently the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission has suggested that the primacy of the Bishop of Rome is God’s gift to the Church<sup>2</sup>.

Each of these movements is a rejection of the supreme authority of Holy Scripture: the Established Church and the churches of the United Kingdom need to recover the Gospel of Scripture by bowing to the authority of Scripture.

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<sup>2</sup> “we nevertheless agree that a universal primacy will be needed in a reunited Church and should appropriately be the primacy of the bishop of Rome”; ARCIC, *The Final Report* (1981), 85, from the Report “Authority in the Church II” (1981).

“The Commission’s work has resulted in sufficient agreement on universal primacy as a gift to be shared, ...”; ARCIC, *The Gift of Authority – Authority in the Church III* (1999), 42

## Confessional Protestantism

From early in the history of the Church it has been found helpful to have summaries of the teaching of Holy Scripture to enable believers to profess the main tenets of their faith – as in the great creeds (which ‘may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture’); and to make clear what is the true teaching of Scripture, when the faith has been confused or assailed by heresy. These confessional statements have had authority, because they have been derived from Scripture: they have not represented an attempt by the Church to exercise a teaching authority apart from Scripture.

The Reformation produced a large number of such confessions, remarkable for their general unanimity, except that Lutheranism never accepted a Reformed doctrine of the sacraments.<sup>3</sup> In Great Britain the two great Confessions of the Reformation and immediate post-Reformation period were the Articles of Religion (1571) and the Westminster Confession (1647); the Baptist Confession of 1690 is chiefly a repetition of the Westminster Confession. The essential teachings of Scripture were intended to be a test of ministerial orthodoxy and a guide to all as to the teachings espoused by the Church. A Church needs to have an identity, and a doctrinal confession establishes that identity.

Since the Reformation there has been an increasing restlessness with doctrinal confessions. In 1772 the Feathers Tavern Petition was presented to Parliament for the abolition of subscription to the Articles and its replacement by a simple declaration of belief in the Bible. While a simple declaration of belief in the Bible may sound proper and appropriate – why should anyone be required to assent to more than Scripture? – its essential naivety is immediately plain: if a man assents to belief in the Bible, what does that mean? History abounds with teachings and heresies which all claim to have the Bible as their source: it is necessary, therefore, to unpack what belief in the Bible signifies.

The present state of the Church of England reflects these pressures: liberalism wishes to be free to think things that differ from the Articles,

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology* (1930), xxxiii

indeed which directly contradict them; and Anglo-Catholicism has sought to introduce into the Church of England an alien religion, many of the tenets of which are rejected by the Articles. The great Reformation confessions are ignored (as in the Church of Scotland, where the Westminster Confession remains the formal doctrinal standard), or sidelined, as in the current Form of Assent required of clergy in the Church of England. That declaration of assent is to the faith, revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, to which the historic formularies of the Church of England (which include the Articles) bear witness. Thus the assent given means as much or as little as the person assenting wishes: the faith “revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds” is undefined.

In practice the Church of England has lost its grip on the cardinal scriptural doctrines of Christianity and as a result it is withering. What it needs is not a liberalism that allows anyone to believe and teach almost anything, but a return to those doctrines which were recovered from Scripture at the Reformation – not less doctrinal definition, but a recovery of doctrinal definition.

We hear much of comprehensiveness. The historic Church of England has always been a comprehensive church: its boundaries have not been set very tightly, but it is a Church which insists on the sole and supreme authority of Scripture (not the supposed triple authority of Scripture, tradition, and reason beloved of the ecclesiastical chattering classes), on the sovereignty of God in salvation (in predestination and election), on the finished work of Christ in substitutionary atonement on the Cross, and on justification by grace alone through faith alone; about the sacraments it teaches that they are instruments which signify the covenantal grace of God towards us; it rejects baptismal regeneration; and it teaches that the presence of Christ at the Lord’s Supper is in the heart of the believer, not in or in any way attached to the bread and wine.

What is often termed comprehensiveness is not comprehensiveness at all, but mere inclusiveness, which seeks to comprehend in one outward body all who wish to belong to it, regardless of the inconsistency of their views, which can often amount to contradictions. This inclusiveness is a disgrace, not a glory; it is not the

comprehensiveness of Scripture; it dishonours our God, by making it incidental whether the teaching of his Word is accepted or not. It cannot claim the blessing of God, and we have been taught that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Yet this is the policy that has been followed by the leaders of the Church of England. When Randall Thomas Davidson sought to define his first fourteen years (1903 – 1917) as Archbishop of Canterbury, he thought his aim might be described as “a desire to assert in practice the thoughtful and deliberate comprehensiveness of the Church of England”,<sup>4</sup> a comprehensiveness in doctrinal belief, denominational differences, and ritual and devotional variety. This comprehensiveness was not the historic comprehensiveness of the Church of England; it was rather a general inclusivism, the boundaries of which might shift, seeking to include all who were ‘thoughtful’ and not wishing to exclude any who were not ‘extreme’.

The only way forward is a recovery, not a diminution, of doctrine – doctrinal renewal. The new evangelicalism has failed: it called upon evangelicals to abandon their defensive position, to enter into dialogue with other traditions, and to seek by involvement in the ongoing life of the Church of England to influence it in a Biblical direction: the Church of England has not been influenced in this way, but the evangelicals who followed this path have lost their distinctiveness and evangelicalism has been fragmented. Over forty years ago Dr. Samuel wrote:

the policy has been disastrous for the Reformation teaching of the Church of England. All the principle doctrines of the Reformation have been, if not actually compromised, then blurred and confused by this approach. ... if this line is further pursued by Evangelicals, ... then within a generation they will cease to have a definite doctrinal position at all and will become indistinguishable from the theologically incoherent mass of the centre of Anglicanism.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Thomas Davidson* (1935), ii, 795

<sup>5</sup> D.N. Samuel, *The Reformation and the Church of England today* (1973), 6-7

Dr. Samuel issued a call for doctrinal renewal:

Let us give our mind, then, to doctrine, to the teachings of the Word of God and how we may present them, for these are always the controlling influence in religion. ... Reformation ... came through doctrine. It was doctrine that changed the face of Europe, and if anything will change the Church of England again it will be doctrine, for that alone has the power to do it. It must be shown that it is the neglect of these things which has brought death and the acceptance of these things that will bring life.<sup>6</sup>

Let us espouse confessional Protestantism. It is likely to result in division; if so, so be it. Division is not sought – all are invited to submit to the Word of God. John Jewel quoted in his *Apology* a statement of Gregory Nazianzene: “There is a peace that is unprofitable; again, there is a discord that is profitable”.<sup>7</sup>

The challenge before us, from liberalism and from Anglo-Catholicism, is the one stated so succinctly by Bishop E.A. Knox in 1933 in his history of the Tractarian Movement on the occasion of its centenary:

the problem that the Oxford Movement has set the Church of England to solve is that of retaining ecclesiastical unity in spite of doctrinal divergences which often amount to contradictions. Must not the attempt end in such a minimizing of doctrine as will act injuriously on the whole of religious life? Would not external unity be dearly bought at the cost of shipwreck of Faith? Can a creedless Church be a teacher of a nation and of the world?<sup>8</sup>

## **The ordained ministry**

What is the function of the ordained ministry? It is the proclamation

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<sup>6</sup> Samuel, *op. cit.*, 8

<sup>7</sup> John Jewel, *Works*, III (1848), 107

<sup>8</sup> E.A. Knox, *The Tractarian Movement 1833 – 1845* (1933), 383

of the Word of God, the preaching of the everlasting Gospel of the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. This purpose has become confused and overlaid, with supposed priestly duties (representing the people to God) and with administration.

Ministers are messengers from God to man, sent out to proclaim the Gospel and to teach the saints. As the Church of England ordination service states, they are

to be messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord; to teach and to premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord's family; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever.

They are not to serve tables – not to be taken up with administration – but to preach. Their responsibility to administer the sacraments is an adjunct of their responsibility to preach: St. Paul speaks of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as proclaiming or preaching<sup>9</sup> the Lord's death: so when the Lord's Supper is administered, the Gospel of salvation through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

Sacerdotalism, therefore, is false to Biblical teaching: it is a system which invests a man with the role of a sacrificing priest, representing men to God: in the New Testament, there is only one sacrificing priest, Jesus Christ; and all God's elect people are priests, inasmuch as they are called to offer a sacrifice of praise. The Church of Rome and Anglo-Catholicism wish to see their ministers as priests, repeating the sacrifice of Calvary and offering it on behalf of men to God: this is not the teaching of the New Testament, nor of the historic Church of England.

There is no priestly caste, as there was under the old Covenant. Ministers are elders, or presbyters, commissioned by God to act as his messengers to fallen man. It is unfortunate that the word priest, which is used in the *Book of Common Prayer* and is a contraction of presbyter, causes confusion: in the diocese of Sydney its use has been replaced by

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<sup>9</sup> καταγγέλλετε (1 Corinthians 11: 26)

presbyter. Ministers are not a separate caste: they are a function *within* the whole people of God. As Luther taught, all Christians are of the spiritual estate; bishops and presbyters are set aside *within* the Christian body.

All that signifies sacerdotalism must be banished from vesture and ceremony; much that does this has been insinuated into the life of the Church of England since 1833. There should be no sacerdotal vesture at the administration of the sacraments: they do not require priests, so no priestly garb is needed.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the Canons declare that there is no doctrinal significance in such garments is beside the point: we all know that there is, and that is why such enormous pressure is put, for instance, on ordinands to wear a stole at their ordination.

In the 1662 Ordinal a copy of the New Testament is given to a man immediately after he has been made deacon; a Bible is given to a man immediately after he has been ordained priest or presbyter; and a Bible is given to a man immediately after he has been ordained or consecrated Bishop. He is given the essential equipment for his ministry, and, as his calling is to proclaim the Gospel, that is the Bible. In the ordination service in *Common Worship* the man ordained to the priesthood may be given, additionally, a chalice and paten, as symbols of his calling to minister the sacraments. This may seem appropriate, as the administration of sacraments is part of the work of the ministry; but at the Reformation this giving (the *porrectio instrumentorum*) was omitted, to preclude any idea of sacrificial priesthood; the ministry of the sacraments is an adjunct of the preaching of the Word of God, so that a man who has been given a Bible has received in symbol the commission to preach the Gospel *and* to administer the sacraments. Rome has argued that Anglican orders are invalid because of the lack of intention to make sacrificing priests; this change is an ecumenical sop to Rome and a subversion of Reformation theology.

The question whether women might be ordained to the public ministry of the church was not a matter for debate at the time of the

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<sup>10</sup> I am not discussing here the issue of distinctive ministerial dress, which has often exercised the minds and hearts of God's people since the Reformation; but the wearing of a form of dress that signifies that the wearer claims to be a sacrificing priest and to perform sacerdotal functions.



Reformation, but it has, of course, become one in recent years. The Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* speaks to it – St. Paul’s teaching in 1 Timothy 2 is explicit:

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve.<sup>11</sup>

The issue that faces the contemporary church is whether Scripture is inspired and infallible; whether St. Paul’s teaching, based on the Creation, is the Word of God, or historically and culturally conditioned. Thomas Rogers in his exposition of the Articles of Religion, stated, of those who are to be chosen and called to the ordained ministry: “they are to be men, not boys or women”.<sup>12</sup> Anne Askewe, the Protestant martyr of 1546, recounted part of her interrogation:

Then the bishop’s chancellor rebuked me, and said, that I was much to blame for uttering the scriptures: for St Paul (he said) forbade women to speak or to talk of the word of God. I answered him that I knew Paul’s meaning so well as he, which is (1 Corinth. xiv.) that a woman ought not to speak in the congregation by way of teaching.<sup>13</sup>

Expounding 1 Corinthians 14: 34 (“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law”), Thomas Becon wrote in his catechism:

Of these words of St Paul we learn that it is not lawful for women to teach in the congregation openly, which only appertain[s] unto men, yea, and unto such men alone as are appointed by public authority unto the ministry:

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Timothy 2: 11-13. Cf. Werner Neuer, *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective* (translated by G.J. Wenham; 1990); R.J.K. Law, *Women are not for Ordination* (The Harrison Trust; 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Rogers, *The Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England* (Parker Society; 1854), 240

<sup>13</sup> John Bale, *Select Works* (Parker Society; 1849), 155; John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, V, 538.

notwithstanding, women to preach and teach in their own houses, it is not only not forbidden, but also most straitly commanded.<sup>14</sup>

People will comment about a woman who preaches, that she ‘did it much better than many men’: but what saith the Scripture? It is not lawful for women to teach openly in the congregation: if they have ability to teach, let them use that ability in the very important work of teaching women and children; if men are proving feeble at the task, they must withdraw from the ministry, or be better trained – to see that their first duty is the preaching of the Word of God. Obedience is our sole duty.

The number of women ordained in the Church of England reveals how far disobedience has gone. In the year 2015, leaving aside those who have retired, there were 7,440 male clergy, and 3,850 female clergy – 65.8% were men, and 34.1% were women. In most years slightly more men than women are ordained: thus in 2015 258 men were ordained, and 232 women;<sup>15</sup> but in the years 2006 and 2010, more women were ordained than men.<sup>16</sup> There is increasing pressure on ordinands in the Church of England to acknowledge women’s ordination.

It is necessary for the Church of England, and many other Churches, to recover the practice ordained by Holy Scripture, and to apply the Reformation principle of the final authority of Scripture. The churches which have ordained women are withering: God has ‘given them up’.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Becon, *The Catechism* (Parker Society; 1844), 376. The Reformers acknowledged that, in cases of necessity, a woman might undertake what she might not otherwise do. Thus William Tyndale wrote:

If a woman, learned in Christ, were driven unto an isle where Christ was never preached, might she not there preach and teach to minister the sacraments, and make officers? The case is possible ... “Love thy neighbour as thyself,” doth compel. (William Tyndale, *Answer to Sir Thomas More’s Dialogue* (Parker Society; 1850), 176)

<sup>15</sup> There were also 8 ordained about whose gender the Church of England’s media office was uncertain!

<sup>16</sup> In 2006 234 men and 247 women were ordained; in 2010 273 men and 290 women were ordained.

<sup>17</sup> Romans 1: 24, 26, 28

A mighty revolution is needed, but our God is omnipotent.

## Episcopacy

By episcopacy we mean oversight of the clergy beyond the bounds of a local church by one man singly and permanently; if this work is undertaken by several men (as in a presbytery) or by a man holding temporary authority (the President of the Methodist Conference is elected for one year), it is not episcopacy. There are two main theories of episcopacy: one that it is an ancient and godly form of government, which has no exclusive divine authority (and we recognise, with Article XXVI, that “in the visible Church the evil be ever mingled with the good, and sometimes the evil have chief authority in the Ministration of the Word and Sacraments”); the other theory is that “the Holy Catholic Church commands every church to have its bishop, so that societies otherwise governed are living in disobedience and sin, and their members cut off from the appointed means of grace”.<sup>18</sup>

The word *ἐπίσκοπος* (overseer) is used in the New Testament; it would appear that such men were *πρεσβύτεροι* (elders) perhaps with some additional responsibilities, but within the local congregation – not bishops in the later sense. Though there was no episcopacy in the New Testament, it had become universal in the Church a century later. Professor Gwatkin summarised the position:

while bishops date back to the end of the apostolic age, we have no reason to believe that Christ or His Apostles directly or indirectly made Episcopacy an ordinance binding on all Christian churches.<sup>19</sup>

The Articles of Religion are the historic doctrinal standards of the Church of England. If bishops are essential to the being, or indeed to the well being, of the Church, we should expect to find that stated in the Articles. Bishops are not mentioned in the definition *Of the Church* (Article XIX):

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<sup>18</sup> H.M. Gwatkin, *Episcopacy* (1914); (1962 edition) 5; *Episcopacy* (English Church Tract, no. 26), 1

<sup>19</sup> Gwatkin, *op. cit.*, 11; *Episcopacy* (English Church Tract, no. 26), 4

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance

Article XXIII, *Of Ministering in the Congregation*, states:

It is not lawful for any man [to minister] before he is lawfully called and sent. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the Congregation to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard.

Again, there is no mention of a bishop. Indeed the only mention of bishops in the Articles is in Article XXXVI, *Of the Consecration of Bishops and Ministers*, which deals not with the faith and doctrine, but the governance, of the Church; it states that the Ordinal "doth contain all things necessary, neither hath it anything that is of itself superstitious or ungodly".

The doctrinal statements of the Church of England make no assertions about, or indeed mention of, bishops; they refer to the validity of the ordinal, but there is no suggestion that bishops are of the *esse* or, indeed, of the *bene esse* of the Church.

What of the Ordinal? The rubrics of The Form and Manner of Making of Deacons require that "there shall be a Sermon or Exhortation," declaring, among other things,

how necessary that Order is in the Church of Christ

Similarly, the rubrics of The Form and Manner of Ordering of Priests require that "there shall be a Sermon or Exhortation," declaring, among other things,

how necessary that Order is in the Church of Christ

In the Form of Ordaining or Consecrating of an Archbishop or Bishop, a Sermon is required, but there is no reference to its subject matter. The Reformers were meticulous in what they wrote: deacons and presbyters

are recognised in the New Testament, and are therefore necessary in the Church of Christ. Episcopacy as it has occurred throughout the history of the Church is not recognised in the New Testament, and therefore is not declared necessary in the Church of Christ: indeed, as the omission must be deliberate and significant, we may state that the ordinal teaches that bishops are not necessary in the Church of Christ.

The Preface to the Ordinal declares that

It is evident unto all men diligently reading holy Scripture and ancient Authors, that from the Apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church; Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.

This statement has often been misunderstood.<sup>20</sup> Professor Gwatkin commented:

This is a statement of historical fact, and it is historically true. Priests (elders) and deacons are found well within the Apostles' time, and bishops arose at the end of it. But though this is "evident to those reading Scripture and ancient authors," it is not evident (and it is not said to be evident) to those reading Scripture only, for ... there is no trace of bishops in Scripture. And whatever cannot be proved by Scripture the Church of England declares unessential.<sup>21</sup>

Until the 1662 Act of Uniformity (which was not a doctrinal statement of the Church of England), foreigners who had not been episcopally ordained were admitted to Church of England benefices without re-ordination: episcopal ordination, and therefore episcopacy, were not essential.

Episcopacy is not essential (of the *esse* of the Church); nor is it necessarily beneficial (of the *bene esse* of the Church). Dr. D.B. Knox wrote that "it is neither of the *esse* or the *bene esse*, but is a matter of

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<sup>20</sup> E.g., "The appeal to history on which this argument was based is false." Iain H. Murray, *J.C. Ryle Prepared to Stand Alone* (2016), 146

<sup>21</sup> Gwatkin, *op. cit.*, 15-16; *Episcopacy* (English Church Tract, no. 26), 6

indifference, for all things necessary for our spiritual *well* being have been given to us in scripture.”<sup>22</sup> Episcopacy is an ancient and seemingly form of leadership in the wider church, but it is not essential to the existence or to the welfare of the Church.

This sober and modest view of episcopacy has been lost sight of. The primary cause of this has been the Anglo-Catholic movement, which has sought to reintroduce much of the teaching of the Church of Rome into the Church of England. Thus, J.H. Newman, in Tract 1 of the *Tracts for the Times*, asserted that the bishops were “the SUCCESSORS OF THE APOSTLES”. This was more fully explained:

the Christian Ministry is a succession. And if we trace back the power of ordination from hand to hand, of course we shall come to the Apostles at last. We know we do, as a plain historical fact; and therefore all we, who have been ordained Clergy, in the very form of our ordination acknowledged the doctrine of the APOSTOLICAL SUCCESSION.

He concluded his argument: “Exalt our Holy Fathers the Bishops, as the Representatives of the Apostles, and the Angels of the Churches”. Apostolical succession, however, is shown solely by conformity to apostolical teaching – “they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship”<sup>23</sup> – not by tactual succession.

It is an historical irony that the Church of England’s loss of its theological distinctives has left episcopal ordination as, in practice, the only invariable mark of the Church of England. One cannot be certain of the doctrine that a minister will hold; one cannot expect that he will use the historic liturgy of the Church; one cannot expect that the minister will be a man; but he (or she) will have been episcopally ordained. Thus episcopacy – that modest internal usage of the Reformed Church of England, not claimed as an essential of the universal church – has become apparently the one thing needful, a most unhappy distortion and false emphasis.

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<sup>22</sup> D.B. Knox, “Lambeth and Reunion”, in *Churchman*, 102 (1988), 347. This paper was first delivered at the Protestant Reformation Society’s Conference in 1985.

<sup>23</sup> Acts 2: 42

At the first Lambeth Conference in 1867 Christian Unity – that is fellowship between Christians – was considered, and the points agreed for the effective promotion of unity were, in Knox’s words, “thoroughly scriptural, spiritual and heavenly minded”.<sup>24</sup> In 1888, however, at the third Lambeth Conference, the subject was the reunion (that is to say amalgamation) of denominations. Four points were agreed as the basis for such reunion: the Holy Scriptures; the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed; the two sacraments; and the historic episcopate. The first three points are, in essence, one – Holy Scripture; but the fourth point, the historic episcopate

is not to be found in scripture. To require it as a necessity to fulfil God’s command to be in fellowship with each other, is to contravene Article 6 of the 39 Articles. ... To endeavour to maintain the unity of the spirit is an essential Christian duty but the scripture never hints that the maintenance of a certain type of ministry is necessary to fulfil this duty.<sup>25</sup>

This false position, which makes episcopacy a *sine qua non* of the Church, has persisted, for instance in the reconciliation service proposed in the failed Anglican – Methodist Reunion Scheme in the 1960s, and in various statements of the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commissions since the 1970s.

We recognise the validity of the ministry of all ministers of other Bible-believing churches, which have recognised an outward call and a credible profession of an inner call in their ministers. We must discern the difference between the Church of England’s internal practice (however useful or laudable we may consider it to be) and the Bible’s requirement for Christian ministry and Christian unity.

### **Withdrawal from the ecumenical movement**

We must discern the difference between union and unity. The Lord Jesus Christ’s prayer in John 17 was for spiritual unity, a union through the Spirit with God and one another. Knox commented:

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<sup>24</sup> D.B. Knox, *op. cit.*, 344

<sup>25</sup> D.B. Knox, *op. cit.*, 345

This prayer was fulfilled at Pentecost and the unity that the Spirit's presence in each brings about is to be preserved by Christlike behaviour towards one another and the removal of man-made barriers which keep us separate. This prayer of our Lord for unity of Christians with one another and with the Godhead has nothing to do with denominational amalgamation, as it is so constantly misapplied these days.<sup>26</sup>

There is a true unity among all those who accept the Word of God as truth (John 17: 17) and who have believed on Christ through that Word preached (John 17: 20).

We must discern between the visible church and the invisible church. The visible Church has its marks: it "is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance" (Article XIX). The invisible Church consists of all those who through grace are united to Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit; its members are known to God alone. In ordinary circumstances members of the invisible Church will be members of the visible Church; but there is much teaching in the New Testament (such as the parable of the wheat and the tares) that emphasises that it is possible to belong to the visible Church while not belonging to the invisible Church. The marks of the visible Church define its outward character, but do not identify the members of the invisible church. In the eyes of the Church of Rome and of those whose doctrine derives from the Church of Rome the visible Church and the invisible Church are coterminous: baptism makes its subject at once a member of the visible Church and the invisible Church. The errors and confusion that spring from the failure to distinguish things that differ are indeed many and profound.

The ecumenical movement is not seeking simply to deepen fellowship between believers (unity) but to forge visible union, because it sees those two objects as the same thing. It starts from the position that all who call themselves Christians must be comprehended; it has a subjective, and false, criterion. It does not have an objective criterion, which would seek to identify and bring greater unity to those who hold

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<sup>26</sup> D.B. Knox, *op. cit.*, 345



certain primary doctrines. The Reformation doctrine of the Church of England furnishes such an objective criterion, because it defines the visible church – “a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance” (Article XIX). If there are to be discussions about union – a separate issue from the pursuit of the unity for which the Lord Jesus Christ prayed – only those who meet this criterion should be involved.

We have already noted that the Lambeth Conference of 1888 under Archbishop E.W. Benson sought reunion of churches on the basis of the Lambeth Quadrilateral, which included the unscriptural requirement of the historic episcopate.

The Agreed Statements of the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commissions have sought to find middle ground between the two doctrinal systems through ambiguity and obfuscation, particularly by employing a bridge term that might by its ambiguity be acceptable to both parties; but there is no middle ground on the final authority of Holy Scripture, or on the doctrine of justification by grace only through faith only, or on transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the mass, or on the papacy, or on Mariolatry, or on a host of controverted doctrines. Attempts to pretend that the differences between Reformed Protestantism and Roman Catholicism are misunderstandings about terminology are facile and foolish. The Roman system is coherent, though built on many false premises; the Reformed faith, built on Scripture alone, is also a coherent system of understanding and teaching. These two systems are mutually contradictory; there is no middle ground, no unfortunate misunderstanding of vocabulary which will miraculously resolve the differences; the circle has not been squared. This is clear to those of the Protestant Reformed faith; and it is clear to the Vatican, where the Congregation of the Faith has been exceedingly cautious in its response to the supposed agreements, and has pointed out their weaknesses.

Rome, however, has seen the Wittenberg anniversary as an ecumenical opportunity. On October 31st., 2016, the Pope gave a Reformation anniversary speech in Lund, Sweden. He said: “We have the opportunity to mend a critical moment of our history by moving

beyond the controversies and disagreements that have often prevented us from understanding one another.” But we can only move beyond the controversies and disagreements (if that phrase has any significant meaning) by resolving them. The Pope then thanked the Reformation for giving “greater centrality to sacred Scripture in the Church’s life.” It is difficult to see how he might be able to claim that sacred Scripture has acquired greater centrality in the Roman Church.

In January 2017 the Pope received an ecumenical delegation from Finland. He said: “The intention of Martin Luther 500 years ago was to renew the Church, not divide her,” and he stressed the importance of theological dialogue. It would be interesting to know Luther’s reaction to this delicately phrased description of his intention: it would be plainer to state that he was determined to follow the teaching of the written Word of God wherever that might lead. The pope also expressed the hope that by the Holy Spirit’s action, “we will be able to find further convergence on points of doctrine and the moral teaching of the Church, and will be able to draw ever closer to full and visible unity.” Convergence is an important piece of ecumenical vocabulary: it suggests that, somehow, contradictory doctrines can come together. The ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement is an inter-faith mutual acceptance, as Dr. Samuel has demonstrated in *The End of the Ecumenical Movement*.

It is illuminating that sociologists perceive fear to be a root cause of ecumenism. Religious professionals feel marginalised in a hostile, secular world, and think that their ecclesiastical organisation will become more significant in the eyes of the world, if it is larger. Bryan Wilson, sometime Reader in Sociology in the University of Oxford, wrote in his book *Religion in Secular Society*:

What must be recognised, however, interesting as the ecumenical movement may be, is that ecumenicalism, even at its most successful, is not in itself a revival of religion, nor a reconversion of society. It is the turning-in on itself of institutionalized religion, as its hold on the wider social order has diminished. The healing of divisions is something which restores the morale of churchmen ... in a period when the external influence of the Church is declining ...

The energy which churchmen have put into the ecumenical movement has been perhaps in rough proportion as they have lost hope of evangelization of the world. Essentially this has been a movement directed inwards into the life of the Church, not outwards into the wider society, which remains essentially unmoved by ecumenical achievement, and perhaps even rather suspicious of it. ...

If compromise means the loss of distinctive purpose and particular commitment, it may also be that for those who remain something of their previous ardour will disappear. Ecumenism may be a policy not only induced by decline, but one encouraging decline.<sup>27</sup>

What a searching analysis! We know, of course, that the calling to be a minister of the Gospel, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, is the greatest and most glorious office to which a man may be called: the hostility of secular society or a desire to find esteem in the world's eyes are irrelevant to that calling.

Divisions are unavoidable in a fallen world: we must not magnify their supposed importance. The aim of the ecumenical movement, to form a single undivided visible church is naive: every enforced reunion scheme spawns breakaway groups. If the great denominations were all reunited with Rome (which, as St. Paul would say, *μὴ γένοιτο* – ‘God forbid’), there would, by God's grace, be many who would remain outside. Spiritual unity is vitally important; visible union in error is to be eschewed. J.C. Ryle wrote in his paper on “The Fallibility of Ministers”:

Yes! peace without truth is a false peace; it is the very peace of the devil. Unity without the Gospel is a worthless unity; it is the very unity of hell. Let us never be ensnared by those who speak kindly of it. Let us remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: “Think not that I came to send peace upon the earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword.” (Matth. x. 34)

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<sup>27</sup> Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (1966); Pelican edition (1969), 202-203; OUP edition (2016), 162-163

False doctrine and heresy are even worse than schism. If people separate themselves from teaching which is positively false and unscriptural, they ought to be praised rather than reproved.

Unity which is obtained by the sacrifice of truth is worth nothing. It is not the unity which pleases God.<sup>28</sup>

## Seriousness in worship

Philip Edgcumbe Hughes characterised the Reformers' approach to worship as follows:

The worship of Almighty God, Creator, Redeemer, and Judge, was for the Reformers not merely an indescribable privilege but also a most solemn responsibility. They approached God with love and joy indeed, but with awe too, for they were ever conscious of his infinite majesty and holiness. To come before God without seriousness was great wickedness.<sup>29</sup>

A right seriousness can often be absent from public worship today. There can too easily be an atmosphere and attitude of light entertainment, a danger of the atmosphere of the world pervading the worship of the church. In public worship we are coming apart from the world to acknowledge the holiness of the Triune God and to hear his Word. Our seriousness does not have to be gloomy, or drab, or self-consciously antiquated; but our worship must be God-honouring and God-centred, not man-centred. The loss of an active understanding of the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners, and the consequent

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<sup>28</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Knots Untied* (1874); James Clarke edition (1964), 293, 295. Cf. Ryle's comment on Luke 12: 51:

Thousands of well-meaning people now-a-days are continually crying out for more "unity" among Christians. To attain this they are ready to sacrifice almost anything, and to throw overboard even sound doctrine, if, by so doing, they can secure peace. Such people would do well to remember that even gold may be bought too dear, and that peace is useless if purchased at the expense of truth. Surely they have forgotten the words of Christ: "I came not to send peace, but division." (J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels – St. Luke*, II (1858), 98)

<sup>29</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (1980 edition), 156

desire to entice men into the Kingdom by force of persuasion, has led to man-centredness in evangelism, which has also encouraged man-centredness more generally.

The Reformers had a clear view of the purposes of public worship. Thus the exhortation at the beginning of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer teaches that we assemble and meet together, not only “humbly to acknowledge our sins before God”, but also

to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received  
at his hands,  
to set forth his most worthy praise,  
to hear his most holy Word,  
and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary,  
as well for the body as the soul.

Their seriousness in worship, and our seriousness in worship when we use the forms of service they compiled, are shown in a deep sense of the holiness of God, the sinfulness of sin, and the greatness of our redemption in Christ: we acknowledge, indeed, that “there is no health in us”.

The seriousness of their approach to the Lord’s Supper is revealed in the three exhortations in the communion service. The exhortation that is to be used at every administration of the Lord’s Supper presses those who intend to partake of the sacrament to “consider how Saint Paul exhorteth all persons diligently to try and examine themselves, before they presume to eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup.” Do we rightly esteem the Lord’s Supper today? Are congregations sufficiently exhorted to make due preparation before they partake of the sacrament? It could be argued that the much more frequent administration of the Lord’s Supper has led to less adequate preparation and the danger of unworthily partaking of this ordinance of Christ.

In considering the place of liturgy it is too easily forgotten that all the Reformed churches had a set form, certainly for the administration of the Lord’s Supper. The English Reformers, particularly Thomas Cranmer, left the English Church with an incomparable liturgy: it is a vehicle for the glory of God and the edification of his people. It is,

above all, rich in Scripture. Contemporary liturgies do not possess this rich Scriptural character, nor the sense of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. In particular, all modern forms for the administration of the Holy Communion have moved away from the true Scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper; to a greater or lesser extent they manifest the doctrines of Anglo-Catholicism – this is true of the deposited books of 1927 / 1928, the experimental services of the 1960s, the *Alternative Service Book* (1980), and *Common Worship* (2000). Doctrinal disagreement has been met by error, ambiguity, or vacuity. A scriptural liturgy alone is acceptable; if there are options, they must *all* be scriptural; the Reformed faith cannot be merely a permitted option within a doctrinally inclusive church.

Hughes concluded: “By their example and by their writings, and particularly by the *Book of Common Prayer*, the Reformers recall us to worship that is scriptural, that is evangelical, and that is serious.”<sup>30</sup>

### **The need to recover the principles of the Reformation today**

The need to recover the principles of the Reformation today is not simply a matter of theological debate; it immediately affects the spiritual life of the Church and the Nation. The Gospel is and remains the power of God unto salvation; to depart from it is spiritual darkness and death. Only when the Church recovers the principles of the Reformation, the final authority of Scripture and the Gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ enshrined in confessional Protestantism, will it have a message to preach to a lost world.

We must fully recover our belief in, our confidence in, and our practical application of:

the doctrine of Holy Scripture as the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God;  
the doctrine of the fall of man, of human sinfulness and corruption;  
the doctrine of the work and office of our Lord Jesus Christ, of his substitutionary death, made, offered, and completed at Calvary;  
the doctrine of the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man,

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<sup>30</sup> Hughes, *op. cit.*, 158

a work of sovereign grace;  
the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone,  
without the works of the law;  
the doctrine that holiness of life is the only sign of the saving work  
of God in man.

This is scriptural religion. This is the doctrine of the Church of  
England. This is true evangelicalism.

The Holy Spirit alone can bring about a recovery of the principles of  
the Reformation and their application today. We must pray earnestly  
for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as at Pentecost and as at the  
Reformation. The work of God at the Reformation was extraordinary:  
in His sovereign pleasure he caused many men in various places, often  
quite independently, to discover the truths of salvation revealed in  
Scripture; men who were priests of the Roman Church were shown  
their spiritual need, and found it met in the Gospel of the grace of our  
Lord Jesus Christ. Similarly in the eighteenth-century revival, God  
called many men out of darkness into his marvellous light, often leading  
unconverted ministers, who had been blind leaders of the blind, to see  
the truth as it is Jesus.

As for ourselves, we must resist any temptation to depart from the  
Scriptures and the Gospel revealed in them: we must seek to recover  
the principles of the Reformation today. “It is required in stewards,  
that a man be found faithful.”<sup>31</sup>

Our God is Sovereign: we look to Him alone. We must not put our  
confidence in organisation or organisations. The Almighty God can  
act. He has acted in the past: he broke the yoke of Rome at the time of  
the Reformation; he gave new life at the time of the Evangelical  
Revival when the church was spiritually dead. We must call on him:

O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD,  
revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the  
years make known; in wrath remember mercy.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> 1 Corinthians 4: 2

<sup>32</sup> Habakkuk 3: 2

## ***Semper Reformanda* – The Need to Recover the Principles of the Reformation Today**

Where has there been defection from the high-water mark of the Biblical teaching and practice of the Reformation? What requires Reformation today?

This paper considers certain key areas, where the principles of the Reformation need to be recovered: the supreme authority of Scripture as the primary principle of the Reformation, and the sole judge of tradition and reason; confessional Protestantism – a clear statement of the cardinal scriptural doctrines of Christianity; a right view of the ordained ministry, recognising the priority of preaching, and eschewing sacerdotalism and the ordination of women; a right view of episcopacy, not least the Reformers’ recognition that it is not one of the marks of the visible church; withdrawal from the ecumenical movement, seeking not corporate union, but a unity in Biblical and evangelical doctrine; a restoration of seriousness in worship.

“Can a creedless Church be a teacher of a nation and of the world?” (Bishop E.A. Knox) Dr. Scales concludes: “Only when the Church recovers the principles of the Reformation, the final authority of Scripture and the Gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ enshrined in confessional Protestantism, will it have a message to preach to a lost world.”

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