

## SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ANGLICAN ECCLESIOLOGY

—Ashley Null

Based on the novel by Nicholas Sparks, *The Notebook* (2004) is a romantic film about a wonderfully obsessive love. The plot starts off with an old man in a nursing home reading a story from an old battered notebook to an equally elderly woman each day. At first she is hesitant to be with this stranger, no matter how kind he is. However, as he begins to read through the story of young working-class Noah Calhoun and his doggedly enduring pursuit of the privileged but sweet Allie Nelson, she is initially intrigued, then enthralled. She always asks him to go on. The notebook's narrative charts the ups and downs of Allie and Noah's courtship—his initial daredevil stunt on a Ferris wheel to get her attention, their growing utter joy in being in each other's company, their incredibly painful estrangement because of parental shenanigans and the difficult obstacles that had to be overcome before their eventual reunion, leading finally to their marriage and wonderful life together. Gradually, as time goes on, it becomes increasingly clear that the notebook is the elderly woman's own story about their story, her life with the elderly man reading to her, a story she herself wrote down in that very notebook but cannot now remember because of her Alzheimer's. That is why the old man is reading it to her with such tender, doggedly enduring devotion and love.

Eventually, the moment comes for which Noah has been waiting. Allie's eyes awaken, and she says, "How long do we have?" Noah replies, "We had five minutes last time." "I want to dance. Hold me close once again," Allie asks. Noah takes her in his arms, and they slowly dance—the very picture of recovery of self at last, of finally coming home again, of inner peace finally found, of a long journey finally completed.

But after a few splendid minutes of mutual rapture, enjoying the utter joy of once again mutually knowing one another's company, Allie cries out, "Who is this stranger grabbing me?" Noah bites his finger in angst. Paradise regained only to be lost again.

What a wonderful allegory of the human condition in general. Deceived by the foggy lies of human nature's millennia-long struggle with spiritual Alzheimer's, we find ourselves driven to push away from our Creator and his life-giving love, the One in whose arms alone we finally feel at home. Only the direct, on-going intervention of his heavenly wooing has the power periodically to break through our confused haze. By telling us once again the story of his dogged pursuit of a relationship with us, he calls forth from deep within us the recognition that his story is our story and so restores us to our true selves in his loving embrace. For the English Reformers, at the very heart of what it means to be church is being God's instrument through which he woos each generation in their own language in their own cultural context to love him and one another because of God's great, prior love for them.

### **Part One: The Visible Church as Human Institution**

To understand the beginnings of Anglican ecclesiology, we need to look at the sixteenth-century formularies to see how they describe being church. But, before we do, we need to understand a few fundamental assumptions of the English Reformers.

**Firstly, who is catholic.** The English Reformers did not see themselves as Protestants, i.e., as a second, different branch of Christianity. There was only one catholic and apostolic church. There could be none other. And they, the reformers of England, were amongst its true members, but the pope and his corrupt hierarchy weren't. The purpose of the Reformation was to restore the catholic apostolic character

of the church, not to replace it with something new. For them the phrase “Reformed Catholic” was a tautology. Only by reforming the church could it be Catholic. Those who did not reform the medieval church were simply not Catholic Christians in the eyes of the English Reformers.

**Secondly, the visible versus the invisible church.** Because the English Reformers saw themselves as true Catholics, they never questioned the post-Constantine assumption that “catholic” meant everybody in a Christian country would belong to the same church in that country, the one catholic church. Where they differed with Rome, however, is how they understand that one church. The Roman church identified the institutional church directly with God’s beach head of the kingdom of God on earth. The Reformers, however, rejected that identification. Let’s look at the Nicene Creed as found in the 1662 Prayer Book. Notice that the word “holy” is left out when describing the church. There were textual arguments, since disproven, which thought “holy” was a later insertion. However, the rejection of the word “holy” fit well with the Reformers estimation of the institutional church as primarily a human institution, through which God worked, rather than a divine institution in which humans were specially anointed to work.

In their eyes, nothing proved the “humanness” of the institutional church as much as a simple trip to Renaissance Rome, where the pope was as much as a secular ruler of a petty Italian fiefdom as ruler of an international spiritual dominion. Alexander VI—the Borgia Pope, Julius II breaching the walls of a recalcitrant city in shining silver armour, the breath-taking beauty of St. Peter’s new basilica paid for by selling an archbishopric and indulgences to boot. Sleaze in spiritual places is not new. Nor is sex

scandals stemming from problems associated with forced celibacy for clergy and members of religious orders merely a twenty-first-century phenomenon.

Therefore, the English Reformers made an important distinction between the perfect, truly holy, mystical catholic church which would be revealed at the end of the age, and the human, earthly, institutional church through which God worked to call his mystical church into being. They referred to this distinction as the difference between the visible and invisible or mystical church. In short, they followed what Paul Tillich called the “Protestant Principle,” the idea that there is a vast difference between God’s perfection and human endeavours. Consequently, the human institutions through which God works will always be subject to the idolatry of too closely identifying their efforts with his. According to the Protestant Principle, Christians must always be on the look out to see if they are worshipping and serving their own agendas but in God’s name. True to this principle, the English Reformers insisted on maintaining the distinction between the visible and invisible church. The former was a clearly human institution and the second the perfect community of which Christ was the head and only those chosen from eternity as his were members. Because no one knows who really belongs to God, the eternal church of Christ can only be invisible.

**Thirdly, the visible catholic church rooted in human society.** Because the church on Earth was primarily a human institution, rooted in human society, and because it was also catholic, i.e., incorporating everybody in that society, it was accountable to the divinely established authorities for regulating human society, like every other group in that society. This point is absolutely crucial for understanding the whole idea of royal supremacy. During the medieval period, when a person referred to the “Church”, he did not mean every baptized Christian, he meant those who had taken special vows to join the “Church”, i.e., clergy and members of religious orders. When a priest

committed murder, he did not appear before the King's officials for trial. Citing the verse "touch not my anointed," clergy could only be tried for crimes in a church court accountable ultimately to the pope, not the king. One of the issues that got John Huss in trouble with the church authorities was his insistence that the "Church" included both laity and clergy. The reformers insisted on the priesthood of all believers, that baptism, not further, special vows, made a person a member of the "Church." To show that distinction, Tyndale translated *ekklesia* with a new English word, "congregation." You will see that word used in the Articles. It does not refer to individual parish families but to the unity of lay, religious and ordained in one body as the church.

**Fourthly, monarchs are divinely established to govern all human institutions in their society.** Because the catholic church on earth was primarily a human institution incorporating everyone within the geographic area of Christendom, the Reformers believed it was to be organized along the lines of the divinely established authority for the rule of human societies within that geographic area, namely, kingdoms under the realm of monarchs. Just like King David, European monarchs were to be responsible for promoting the spiritual as well as temporal wellness of their subjects. Henry VIII was always only the head of the institutional Church of England, just as he was the head of every other human institution in his kingdom. Christ was the only head of his mystical church which would be revealed at the end of the age.

**Fifthly, the visible church, as a human institution, needs to be rooted in the particularities of each human society.** Because the catholic church on Earth was to be organized along national lines, to be effective, it needed to reflect accurately the specific culture of that nation. And, of course, culturally sensitive began with using the language of the people.

**Sixthly, so where is the Holy Spirit in this human institution?** Obviously, all of this has its own logical consistency. There's just one problem, isn't there? What is that? If the church is primarily a human institution, where does the divine come in? For a church without the supernatural presence and power of God, whatever it is, even if it is catholic in its universal nature, it still is not apostolic. How did the reformers understand the apostolic nature of the visible, institutional church? What was the medieval answer? Apostolic succession—that bishops were especially anointed to be the font of the Holy Spirit for their generation. They were responsible for interpreting and communicating the teachings of the Church. They were responsible for ordaining clergy who were then through the administration of the sacraments able to convey the benefits of the Holy Spirit to the people. For Rome, apostolic succession meant that the Holy Spirit was present and active in the church. And if the Holy Spirit came through an unbroken line of specially anointed holy leaders, how could a layman, someone not even a member of “the Church” as normally understood, claim to be the head of the church on Earth?

Not surprisingly, the English Reformers rejected the Roman understanding of apostolicity. It seemed patently obvious to them that the failure of apostolic succession to ensure apostolic teaching, not to mention apostolic morality, meant that the whole concept was bankrupt. They refused to accept the idea that bishops were automatically either infallible guides to divine truth or the source by which the Holy Spirit was dispensed through the Sacraments. Whereas the medieval church looked to the Bishop for these two important functions, the Reformers looked to the Bible.

**Eighthly, the role of Scripture in the church.** According to Thomas Cranmer's “Homily on Salvation,” the Almighty gave human beings the Bible as “a sure, a constant and a perpetuall instrument of salvacion.” On the one hand, Scripture was

God's chosen medium to tell human beings the truth about the world around them and the struggles within them: "In these booke we may learne to know our selves, how vile and miserable we be, and also to know God, how good he is of hymself and how he communicateth his goodnes unto us and to al creatures." On the other hand, the Bible was also the means through which God worked supernaturally to turn people's hearts to himself and the doing of his will: "[The words of Holy Scripture] have power to conuerte [our souls] through Gods promise, and thei be effectual through Gods assistance."

**Ninthly, the Reformers' understanding of church.** Because the Holy Spirit worked through the proclamation of the Gospel to tell people the truth about salvation and then also turned their hearts to embrace it, the Reformers believed that the church was the fruit of the Gospel. First the Gospel, then the church. After all, Jesus proclaimed the Gospel, then came the disciples. The disciples proclaimed the Gospel, then came churches. Thus, for the Reformers, the only way to be church was to be committed to the mission of constantly proclaiming the Gospel. Everything else was secondary. Including an ancient tie to Rome and other countries where Rome ran their churches.

We need to pause here for a minute. Because we live in post-Enlightenment times, we tend to see Scripture only as a source of knowledge, not as a source of the Holy Spirit. We see it in rationalist terms, not in supernatural terms. If we do not understand this point, we can't understand the Reformers or our founding formularies. How can a king be the head of the visible church? By ordering the Bible be made available to his people. And, of course, that's just what Henry VIII did, and he had a great big picture of himself handing bibles to his bishops and members of government at the front of every one of those bibles to make clear how he thought royal supremacy worked. The

Holy Spirit came to his people through the Bible, not through his own person. This is an unspeakably important point! Let's take a moment to listen to the "Homily on Scripture" talk about this turning side of the Bible:

The words of Holy Scripture be called words of everlasting life: for they be God's instrument, ordained for the same purpose. They have power to convert through God's promise, and they be effectual through God's assistance; and, being received in a faithful heart, they have ever a heavenly spiritual working in them.

For those who would "ruminate and, as it were, chew the cud" of Scripture, God worked through the regular repetition of biblical truths to engraft in them not only saving faith but also a steadfastness in the pursuit of personal holiness that would gradually transform their character to mirror what they were reading:

And there is nothing that so much establisheth our faith and trust in God, that so much conserveth innocency and pureness of the heart, and also of outward godly life and conversation, as continual reading and meditation of God's Word. For that thing which by perpetual use of reading of Holy Scripture and diligent searching of the same is deeply printed and engraven in the heart at length turneth almost into nature.

In short, the spiritual effect of God's supernatural agency through Scripture was the on-going reorientation of a believer's heart:

This Word whosoever is diligent to read and in his heart to print that he readeth, the great affection to the transitory things of this world shall be diminished in him, and the great desire of heavenly things that be therein promised of God shall increase in him.

Hence, "the hearing and keeping of [Scripture] maketh us blessed, sanctifieth us and maketh us holy." Little wonder, then, the "Homily on Scripture" urged that "[t]hese books . . . ought to be much in our hands, in our eyes, in our ears, in our mouths, but most of all, in our hearts."

With these things in mind, let's now take a brief look at the Articles.



### **Article XIX Of the Church**

*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 in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same. As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred: so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith.*

Not surprisingly, the proper proclamation of the Gospel through Word and Sacrament is basis for identifying a true catholic and apostolic church from one which is not. Because the visible church is fundamentally a human, rather than divine, institution, it can and has erred in its doctrinal decisions. Please note these two marks of the true church “Word and Sacraments.” When Cranmer says “Word and Sacraments,” for him they are two-sides of the same coin. On the one hand, the power of the Sacraments is made effective by the promise of the Word of God spoken during their administration. On the other, the promise of the Word of God is made visible by the powerful use of creaturely things.

### **Article XX Of the Authority of the Church**

*The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies and authority in controversies of faith; and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything contrary to God's word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ: yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of salvation.*

Since God has ordained Scripture to tell humanity his full saving truth and then worked through Scripture to turn humanity to saving faithfulness, church’s chief responsibility as promoting Scripture’s message and protecting its authority for salvation. Article 20 states that “the Church be a witness and keeper of Holy Writ.”

As a witness to Scripture, the church had to make the Bible available to its people. It also had the responsibility of providing clergy trained to help people understand its message. Hence, the Litany includes the petition that “it may please thee to illuminate all Bishops, Pastors, and ministers of the Church, with true knowledge and understanding of thy word: and that both by their preaching and living they may set it

forth and show it accordingly.” The Prayer for the Church during Holy Communion makes a similar request: “Give grace (O heavenly Father) to all Bishops, Pastors and Curates, that they may both by their life and doctrine set forth thy true and lively word, and rightly and duly administer thy holy Sacraments.” The ordination service to the priesthood lists the first duty of a minister as being a messenger who teaches: “And now we exhort you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . to be the messengers, the watchmen, the Pastors, and the stewards of the LORD: to teach, to premonish, to feed, and provide for the LORD’s family.” Those about to be ordained are encouraged to equip themselves for this task by devoting themselves wholeheartedly to the Scriptures:

And seeing that you cannot by any other means compass the doing of so weighty a work pertaining to the salvation of man, but with doctrine and exhortation, taken out of holy scripture, and with a life agreeable unto the same; ye perceive how studious ye ought to be in reading and in learning the holy scriptures, and in framing the manners, both of yourselves, and of them that specially pertain unto you, according to the rule of the same scriptures. And for this selfsame cause, ye see how you ought to forsake and set aside (as much as you may) all worldly cares and studies.

During the laying on of hands, the Bishop prays that the new priest would be “a faithful dispenser of the word of God, and of his holy Sacraments.” Afterwards, the Bishop gives him a Bible, saying, “Take thou authority to preach the word of God, and to minister the holy Sacraments.” Bishops are encouraged to be no less devoted to their role as teaching messengers of the Word. At their consecration, they are asked, “Will you then faithfully exercise yourself in the said holy scriptures, and call upon God by prayer for the true understanding of the same, so as ye may be able by them to teach and exhort with wholesome doctrine, and to withstand and convince the gainsayers?” After the laying on of hands, they, too, are given a Bible and told: “Think upon these things contained in this book, be diligent in them. Take heed unto thyself, and unto teaching, and be diligent in doing them.” Clearly, the *Ordinal* envisions a biblically literate clergy.

Since the essential task of the church is to proclaim the Gospel through Word and Sacrament, in times of religious controversy like the Reformation, being a faithful

messenger obviously also includes being a reliable determiner of what that Gospel message actually is. Consequently, Article 20 clearly states that the “Church hath . . . authority in controversies of faith.” Yet, this authority is only as a “keeper of Holy Writ.” In his private papers, Cranmer compared this responsibility to the executor of an estate who made his judgments based on careful study of the will’s written instructions. Hence, the article declares that “it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God’s word written, neither may it so expound one place of scripture, that it be repugnant to another.” In other words, the church was called not only to promote Scripture and its message but also to protect the Bible’s authority to determine its own message.

The church’s leadership, like everyone else, must seek the meaning of the Scriptures through diligent analysis and collation of the biblical canon. Their task was to discern how individual components of the biblical witness complimented each other and fit into the divinely designed overarching gospel unity. No interpretation of an individual passage could contradict the Bible’s inner coherence of free salvation through faith in Christ (Articles 6 and 11) and its fruit of a holy life as defined by biblical morality (Articles 7 and 12) and made possible only by the grace of the Holy Spirit (Articles 9 and 10).

#### **Article XXXIV Of the Traditions of the Church**

*It is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies be in all places one or utterly alike; for at all times they have been diverse, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's word.*

*Whosoever through his private judgment willingly and purposely doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church which be not repugnant to the word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly that other may fear to do the like, as he that offendeth against common order of the Church, and hurteth the authority of the magistrate, and woundeth the conscience of the weak brethren.*

*Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying.*

However, the church's role as protector of the Bible's authority to interpret itself did not mean that all practices within its common life had to be clearly based on scriptural precedent. We will talk more about that later. For now, it's just important to know that Cranmer made a decisive distinction between unalterable saving truth, divinely revealed in Jesus Christ and faithfully recorded in Scripture alone, and changing human traditions of the church by which the divinely established gospel message was expressed and conveyed to successive generations of Christians. Therefore, Article 34 states that every national church had the right to "ordain, change, and abolish" ecclesiastical ceremonies, since such rites are not divinely instituted, but are "ordained only by man's authority." Consequently, patterns of worship should reflect "the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners" of the human societies in which churches find themselves. "It is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly alike." The only caveat to a national church's power in the area of liturgy was "so that nothing be ordained against God's Word." Churches could not shape their liturgies so as to obscure the message of the Gospel they should be proclaiming. Here is the title deed for an Anglican Communion catholic in its global scope, apostolic in being united by a common Gospel, and culturally relevant by being committed to constantly rethinking how to faithfully proclaim that Gospel to the ever-changing varieties of human cultural.

### **Article XXXVII Of the Civil Magistrates**

*The Queen's Majesty hath the chief power in this realm of England and other her dominions, unto whom the chief government of all estates of this realm, whether they be ecclesiastical or civil, in all causes doth appertain, and is not nor ought to be subject to any foreign jurisdiction.*

*Where we attribute to the Queen's Majesty the chief government, by which titles we understand the minds of some slanderous folks to be offended, we give not to our*

*princes the ministering either of God's word or of sacraments, the which thing the Injunctions also lately set forth by Elizabeth our Queen doth most plainly testify: but only that prerogative which we see to have been given always to all godly princes in Holy Scriptures by God himself, that is, that they should rule all estates and degrees committed to their charge by God, whether they be ecclesiastical or temporal, and restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evil-doers.*

*The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England.*

We now end where we began our conversation this morning. As head of the visible church, the English monarch does not claim personal sacerdotal power nor to be a font of such empowerment for the clergy of the Church of England. Rather, royal supremacy means that the sovereign has the God-given responsibility to govern the institutional church, just like every other societal association in the monarch's realm, including the right to bring its clergy before civil courts for the execution of justice in cases of any criminal activity. Since God has entrusted the right administration of national churches to the divinely-appointed monarchs of each of those countries, the Bishop of Rome, the duly appointed sovereign leader of both civil and temporal affairs of a small Italian state, has no jurisdiction in spiritual matters beyond that state, just as in civil matters. Therefore, he certainly has no authority of any kind in England.

## SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ANGLICAN ECCLESIOLOGY

### Part Two: The Role of Scripture and the Fathers

It is so difficult for us in the Twenty-First Century to get behind centuries of the Catholic-Protestant split and enter the mental world of the English Reformers. Two questions yesterday after my talk crystallized the problem. On the one hand, one person expressed concern that by insisting that the English Reformers considered themselves Catholic, I was suggesting that they had a different mentality from the Protestants on the Continent. Now it is true, that some Anglican historians have tried to argue that the English Reformation happened in splendid isolation from the Continent, untainted by thought of such figures as Luther and Calvin. By no means am I suggesting that. My whole work is to show such notions are completely untenable. Rather, I am simply making the point that was brought home to me in Germany. In Germany I am not permitted to contrast Protestant and Catholic. I must always say Protestant versus Roman Catholic, for I am constantly reminded that Luther always saw himself as the true Catholic, not Leo X. To say that the English Reformers considered themselves catholic is just to state the standard mentality of all the Protestant Reformers.

On the other hand, another person was concerned that I began my lecture with the Sixteenth Century. Did I mean to imply that the Reformers saw themselves as starting the Anglican Church, i.e., that they saw themselves as making a clean break with all that had gone before and starting afresh from scratch. No, how could they, if they saw themselves as the true Catholics? They were seeking to reform a church that had left its true foundations by simply returning to those foundations. They were not seeking to lay a new foundation!

Let's think about this. Who and what is a true "Anglican" is much disputed today. To say that FCA represents true Anglicanism is not an attempt to break with the past, but rather to reconnect with the past. Indeed, the Jerusalem Declaration seeks to reconnect with specific elements of the past—the formularies of classic Anglicanism—which others feel have been rightly superseded by different, later events in the past like the Enlightenment. In short, our contemporary debates are just like those of the Sixteenth Century.

Where could the reformers turn to buttress their biblical arguments? Was there a large and long venerated corpus of Protestant writings which they could cite in support? No, for Cranmer and his fellow Edwardians, there was no Protestant culture to form them. Let's think about it. When did Cranmer die? 1556. What is the single most important book for shaping the culture of Reformed Protestantism, i.e., what is commonly called Calvinism? Calvin's *Institutes*. When was the final edition? 1559. What is the single most important book for Lutheranism? The *Book of Concord*. When was it written? 1580. For the first generation of English Reformers, as for their Continental colleagues, the tools they had at hand by which to define their Catholicism was only Scripture and the Fathers.

I want to spend a few minutes trying to help us to re-enter the mentality of those who wrote and first defended our founding formularies. I think a convenient way to do that is by taking the catch-words of the Reformation, *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*--a description applied to by those who came after, not by the Reformers themselves--and then putting them in proper context.

***Sola Scriptura.*** Without a doubt, the English Reformers were gospellers, people dedicated to and defined by their adherence to the power and pre-eminence of Scripture

with its message of the good news of salvation. They took seriously the claim of Erasmus that Jesus spiritually indwelt its message:

Christ's images made in wood, stone, or metal, some men for the love they bear to Christ, do garnish and beautify the same with pearl, gold, and precious stone: And should we not much rather embrace and reverence the sacred Bible, which does represent Christ unto us, more truly then can any image. The image can but express the form or shape of his body, if it can doe so much: But the Gospel doth represent and express the quick and living image of his most holy mind, yea, and Christ himself speaking, healing, dying, raising again and, to conclude, all parts of him'.<sup>1</sup>

They even quoted this passage in the Second Book of Homilies.<sup>2</sup> Because God indwelt his Word and worked through it to send forth his Holy Spirit, there was a vast gulf in the eyes of the Reformers between the apostolic writings of Scripture and the Fathers witness to and interpretation of those writings. Again, if you do not understand the turning side of Scripture, you cannot understand the English Reformers.

Yet, we said earlier that the Bible also had a telling side, and it is that function I want us to concentrate on now. For although *sola Scriptura* is certainly an accurate description of where the English Reformers looked for their understanding of saving truth, it is not an accurate description of how they looked. For the English Reformers looked to the Fathers to learn how to read those Scriptures to ascertain those truths. Let's take a look at Thomas Cranmer.

The Anglican triad of Scripture, tradition and reason did not originate with Hooker. Why should it have? Hooker did not claim to be presenting an original construal of theology. He claimed to be defending the accepted principles of the Protestant religion

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<sup>1</sup> Erasmus, *An exhortation to the diligent studye of scripture* (Antwerp: J. Hoochstraten, 1529), sig. A6r.

<sup>2</sup> See "An Information for them which take offence at certain places of the Holy Scripture."



as established in England. The first recorded reference that I can find to this fundamental tenet of Anglican hermeneutics is July 1539.

[T]he Archbishop collecting both his arguments, authorities of Scriptures, and Doctors together, caused his Secretary to write a fair book thereof for the king, after this order. First the Scriptures were alleged, then the Doctors, thirdly followed the arguments deducted from those authorities.<sup>3</sup>

From the Fathers, Cranmer learned the regulative principle in matters of salvation. In his 1532 edition of Basil writings in Greek, Cranmer made a marginal comment: “Holy Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation.”<sup>4</sup> He quotes Chrysostom to the same effect in his 1547 “Homily on Salvation” and, of course, the statement made its way into the Articles of Religion, the confession of faith that was meant to supplement the ancient creeds in giving instruction to Anglicans in how to read their bibles. Now what is the regulative principle? A key concept for understanding the role of Scripture in the English Reformation.

**Regulative versus Normative.** Regulative means you have to have a clear Scriptural injunction—a rule, a reference—on which something is based. Normative means that it is a standard which cannot be contradicted. So for the Roman Catholic Church in matters of salvation, is the Bible normative or regulative? It is normative. Nothing in the Bible says Mary was not bodily assumed into Heaven so that church tradition’s insistence on this point can be held by the Roman pope to be necessary for salvation. For the Fathers, Cranmer, and all the Protestant Reformers, the Bible is regulative in matters of salvation, i.e., *sola Scriptura*. But what about the changing human traditions of the church by which the divinely established gospel message is expressed and conveyed to successive generations of Christians. Is the Bible normative or regulative here? This question was the heart of the matter in Cranmer’s famous

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<sup>3</sup> John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (London: John Day, 1570), p. 1355.

<sup>4</sup> Commenting in Latin on a letter of Basil to Gregory the Theologian, *Works in Greek* (Basle: H. Froben, 1532), p. 506 [John Rylands Library, Manchester University, Catalogue Number 18173].

disputes with the more progressive reformers John Hooper and John Knox. In 1550 Hooper had refused to be consecrated as Bishop of Gloucester, since he would have to wear a surplice and cope, something he considered a shameful papist throwback to Old Testament practice.<sup>5</sup> Two years later, John Knox similarly objected to the retention of kneeling for receiving Holy Communion in the 1552 *Book of Common Prayer*. In both cases, Cranmer maintained his position already outlined publicly in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Ceremonies should not “be esteemed equal with God’s law,” hence, “the keeping or omitting of a ceremony (in itself considered) is but a small thing: yet the wilful and contemptuous transgression, and breaking of a common order, and discipline, is no small offence before God.” Cranmer utterly rejected Knox’s argument that “it is not commanded in the Scripture to kneel, and whatsoever is not commanded in the Scripture, is against the Scripture and utterly unlawful and ungodly.” Cranmer replied, “This saying is a subversion of all order as well in religion as in common policy.”<sup>6</sup>

In the both cases he prevailed. Consequently, when the Articles of Religion first appeared in 1553, they incorporated Cranmer’s distinction between matters of salvation and the ordering of the church’s common life. On the one hand, as we have seen, Article 20 (of the later Thirty-Nine Articles) stipulated that the church was “a witness and keeper of Holy Writ.” Consequently, “it ought not to decree anything against the [Scriptures], so besides the same, ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of salvation.” On the other hand, Article 34 stated that every national church had the right to “ordain, change, and abolish” ecclesiastical ceremonies, since such rites are not divinely instituted, but are “ordained only by man’s authority.” Consequently, patterns of worship should reflect “the diversity of countries, times, and men’s manners” of the human societies in which churches find themselves. “It is not

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<sup>5</sup> See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 471-82; Jennifer Loach, *Edward VI* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 118-20.

<sup>6</sup> MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 525-8; Bernard J. Verkamp *The Indifferent Mean: Adiaphorism in the English Reformation to 1554* (Athens, Ohio and Detroit, Michigan: Ohio University and Wayne State University Presses, 1977) 63, 67.

necessary that traditions and ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly alike.” The only caveat to a national church’s power in the area of liturgy was “so that nothing be ordained against God’s Word.” Churches could not shape their liturgies so as to obscure the message of the Gospel they should be proclaiming.

In short, according to the historic Anglican formularies, the essentials of salvation, that is, matters of faith and morals, had to be founded on divine authority and, therefore, on the Word of God alone—nothing in addition to it and nothing contrary to it. Rites and ceremonies, however, as particular expressions of the Gospel for different eras and cultures, were derived from the institutional authority of the church. They must merely not contradict Scripture. The church could use other sources, like ancient tradition, or it could institute new liturgies more in keeping with contemporary needs, even if such practices are not explicitly detailed in Scripture.

Thus, the formularies, like Cranmer their chief architect, held that Scripture was the rule for the essentials of faith and morals, but not the blueprint for everything else in life, not even for all matters of church practice, let alone for human society in general. Here is the origin of the constant refrain in the *Book of Homilies*, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Thirty-Nine Articles that the Bible contained all things necessary for *salvation*. Here is the crux of Richard Hooker’s dispute with those Church of England Puritans who were agitating for changes in the Elizabethan Settlement. Here is the prescient principle that enabled the English national church, with its own rich cultural heritage and history of specific insights into the apostolic faith, to evolve into a truly worldwide Communion that seeks to proclaim a common gospel through a myriad of culturally appropriate prayer books and practices.

**Interpreting the Bible.** Alright, we have seen that Cranmer learned from the Fathers the very important point that the Bible was regulative in matters of salvation but not in ordering the life of the church. How should one read Scripture for that saving truth? By insisting on Scripture as the ultimate interpreter of Scripture, of course. That’s why the sixteenth-century Anglican triad began with Scripture. Remember we said yesterday that the Article 20 refers to the church as a “keeper” of Scripture in the sense

that it is its duty to protect Scripture's role in interpreting itself. But where did Cranmer learn that principle of *sola Scriptura*? Of course, the Bible teaches the unique power of God's Word. Consider Isaiah 55:11, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Cranmer crafts one of his petitions for priests during their ordination accordingly: "Most merciful Father, we beseech thee so to send upon these thy servants thy heavenly blessing . . . that thy word spoken by their mouths may have such success, that it may never be spoken in vain."

Yet, the Fathers read their Bibles, and Cranmer read the Fathers, too. What did he learn from the first commentators on Scripture? For the principles of exegesis, Cranmer looked to Augustine and learned what became known as the commonplace method. According to this approach, the interpreter collects all the Scriptural passages on a given topic in one place (hence the name, common-place), so more difficult passages could be read in a broader Scripture context to ascertain its meaning. Cranmer quotes Augustine specifically on this method in his "Homily on Salvation."

Yet, even after employing the *loci communes* method, not all things associated with the Christian life were clear. Then the Fathers needed to be read as guide to right construal of Scripture. Cranmer was clear that the Fathers' authority rested on the quality of their biblical exegesis, not on an inspiration equivalent to the apostles, and therefore was variable. Yet, sixteenth-century commentators were no more privileged in their exegetical endeavours. Therefore, even though in Cranmer's view there was no authoritative Patristic consensus beyond what Scripture could clearly support, i.e., the Creeds and the first four councils, no sixteenth-century biblical interpretation was valid unless one could show that it was not unique, that there was Patristic precedence that others had come to the same conclusion based on Scripture. On this basis, he condemned Luther and Melancthon's lame Scriptural defence of Philip of Hesse's bigamy as a pastoral remedy in keeping with the Gospel. For Cranmer the fact that such a marriage was literally unprecedented in the whole history of the Christian church rendered such exegesis patently fraudulent. Cranmer would go to great lengths to

consult patristic precedent on the matter of the Eucharist in both the 1530s and 1540s, although to opposite conclusions.

Now let's think about what we have said. Anglican biblical commentators are first to compare biblical passages to one another and then their theological conclusions from such activity to the conclusions of earlier generations. That's a lot of comparing. And by the very nature of making a comparison, reason is involved in the process. Hence, as Hooker himself said, the third part of the Anglican triad is not autonomous reason in some post-Enlightenment sense, but rather "theological reasoning," derived from comparing sacred texts to each other and their interpretation by other faithful commentators. Moreover, if the Bible is only regulative in matters of faith and morals, but not in church government or worship, then the church must use prayerful theological reason, derived from the guidance of Scripture and tradition, to make decisions as to how to proclaim the eternal Gospel faithfully to specific cultures and eras. In short, reason was originally part of Anglican theological authority because grace-filled reason was an integral tool in the patristic process of interpretation and application.

Let me now close this point with one more important patristic biblical hermeneutical principle followed by the English Reformers, namely the context in which the Bible was to be read. From the Fathers Cranmer did not learn a hermeneutic of suspicion which characterizes so much of the approach of modern biblical criticism (note the very name!). Rather, Scripture was to be read devotionally. As Cranmer noted again in his copy of Basil's works, "prayer follows from reading."<sup>7</sup> Naturally, Cranmer thought such should be the case for individual study. However, he recognized the best place for a devotional reading of Scripture was in the midst of the community gathered together for corporate worship. Taking to heart a principle he learned from Basil's *Hexameron*, Cranmer decided to make sacred assemblies the place where the average person could learn his Bible. Surely it is not without significance that Cranmer

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<sup>7</sup> Cranmer commenting on Basil's *Works*, p. 506.

noted in the margin that it was Basil's practice to give daily bible teaching for common laborers in both morning and evening assemblies.<sup>8</sup> Here, rather than monasticism, would seem to be the origin of our daily offices.

**Sola gratia.** It's important we understand the difference between unconditional affirmation and unconditional love. Unconditional affirmation is what your dog gives you. He never challenges your right to be the center of your own universe. Love is not like that. Love by its very nature seeks a relationship, a union, with the beloved. And to enter into relationship the beloved has to give up a measure of autonomy to do so. Naturally, perfect unconditional love seeks to woo and draw out of the beloved an equally selfless, fully giving love in return. The English Reformers believed that the divine grace expressed itself in unconditional love which then sought to draw out a reciprocal love from the beloved. As we said yesterday, this was the whole point of telling the old, old story, to help humanity overcome its spiritual Alzheimer's and find their true fulfilment in God's embrace. For as the living mind of Christ, the Scriptures were the true spiritual DNA of humanity that needed to be reinserted into our minds and hearts so that our wills would be healed and we could respond more properly to God.

In this, Cranmer was also influenced by his reading of the Fathers. For they taught him that the purpose of Scripture was personal and society transformation through redirecting the human heart to truly love God and neighbour. In another comment on Basil's writings perhaps as early as 1532, Cranmer says that when it is imperative for a person to understand himself, he must devote himself to Scripture.<sup>9</sup> In his private theological notebooks around 1538, Cranmer wrote:

All Scripture is divinely inspired, etc. This text Saint John Chrysostom, Theophilactus, Thomas, with many other authors, both old and new, do expound plainly as the words be that whatsoever truth is necessary to be taught for our salvation, or the contrary to be reprov'd, whatsoever is necessary for us to do, and what to forbear and not to do, all is

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

completely contained in the Scripture, so that a man thereby may be perfectly instructed unto all manner of goodness.<sup>10</sup>

Not surprisingly, the quotation from Chrysostom made its way into the “Homily on Salvation” along with a reference to Augustine that said that all people are to be ‘amended’ by Scripture.

Therefore, for Cranmer **sola fide**—justification by faith—did not mean the real absence of an internal change within the individual. No, for Cranmer solifidianism could not mean a real absence of fruitful living. How could it? The Bible plainly calls a Christian to a holy life. Rather the whole point of justification by faith was to make clear the unconditional nature of God’s love, for only that would be able to allure a self-centred humanity to love God in return. “Allure”—that’s a favorite term of the English reformers for how God’s love brought people to saving truth. Here is Cranmer’s understanding of the power of God’s unconditional love made known in the good news of justification by faith:

But if the profession of our faith of the remission of our own sins enter within us into the deepness of our hearts, then it must kindle a warm fire of love in our hearts towards God, and towards all other for the love of God--a fervent mind to seek and procure God’s honour, will, and pleasure in all things--a good will and mind to help every man and to do good unto them, so far as our might, wisdom, learning, counsel, health, strength, and all other gifts which we have received of God and will extend,--and, *in summa*, a firm intent and purpose to do all that is good, and leave all that is evil.<sup>11</sup>

In short, for Cranmer, grace produces assurance. Assurance produces gratitude. Gratitude produces love. Love produces repentance. Repentance produces good works. Good works produce a better society. True to the patristic emphasis on transformation, Cranmer taught justification by faith as the only way to bring it about.

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<sup>10</sup> British Library Royal MS 7.B.XI, fol. 46r (spelling modernized).

<sup>11</sup> J.E. Cox, *Miscellaneous Writings of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1846), p.86

To sum up, then, the mind of the English Reformers, they were clearly Bible-people, not only because they read the Bible for themselves but also because they were following the example of the Fathers. Only when we understand this can we begin to make sense of the apologetics of John Jewel and Richard Hooker.



## SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ANGLICAN ECCLESIOLOGY

### Part Three: The Apologists—Jewel and Hooker

John Jewel (1522–1571) was a Marian exile who ended his life as Bishop of Salisbury. In the light of Pope Pius IV's call for a third session of the Council of Trent, Jewel wrote his famous Apology of the Church of England in 1562. In the light of England's recent return to Protestant teaching under the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559, Jewel's Apology argued that only by breaking from the Church of Rome and its false teachings could the Church of England stand in the true on-going stream of the church catholic. Not surprisingly, Jewel's key argument was that the medieval innovations of the Roman church had departed from the primitive church and the Fathers, to which the English Reformers had merely returned. The Church of England, not Rome, was faithful to the ancient catholic church. Let me quote a few excerpts from Chapter 5 of the Apology to give you a sense of his argument:

But here I look they will say, though they have not the Scriptures, yet may chance they have the ancient doctors and the holy fathers with them. For this is a high brag they have ever made, how that all antiquity and a continual consent of all ages doth make on their side; and that all our cases be but new, and yesterday's work, and until these few late years were never heard of. Questionless, there can nothing be more spitefully spoken against the religion of God than to accuse it of novelty, as a new come up matter. For as there can be no change in God Himself, so ought there to be no change in His religion.

Full well know they that nothing is more in the people's favour, or better liketh the common sort, than [the names of Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, the Apostles and Christ Himself]. But how if the things, which these men are so desirous to have seem new, be found of greatest antiquity? Contrariwise, how if all the things well-nigh which they so greatly set out with the name of antiquity, having been well and thoroughly examined, be at length found to be but new, and devised of very late?

And as for their religion, if it be of so long continuance as they would have men [believe] it is, why do they not prove it so by the examples of the primitive Church, and by the fathers and councils of old times? Why

lieth so ancient a cause thus long in the dust destitute of an advocate? Fire and sword they have had always ready at hand, but as for the old councils and the fathers, all mum--not a word. They did surely against all reason to begin first with these so bloody and extreme means, if they could have found other more easy and gentle ways. And if they trust so fully to antiquity, and use no dissimulation, why did John Clement, a countryman of ours, but few years past, in the presence of certain honest men and of good credit, tear and cast into the fire certain leaves of Theodoret--the most ancient father and a Greek bishop--wherein he plainly and evidently taught that the nature of bread in the Communion was not changed, abolished, or brought to nothing? And this did he of purpose, because he thought there was no other copy thereof to be found. Why saith Albertus Pighius that the ancient father Augustine had a wrong opinion of original sin? and that he erred and lied and used false logic, as touching the case of matrimony concluded after a vow made, which Augustine affirmeth to be perfect matrimony, indeed, and cannot be undone again? Also when they did of late put in print the ancient father Origen's work upon the Gospel of John, why left they quite out the whole sixth chapter? Wherein it is likely, yea, rather, of very surety, that the said Origen had written many things concerning the sacrament of the Holy Communion contrary to these men's minds; and would put forth that book mangled rather than full and perfect, for fear it should reprove them and their partners of their error. Call ye this trusting to antiquity, when ye rent in pieces, keep back, maim, and burn the ancient fathers' works?

The old fathers Origen and Chrysostom exhort the people to read the Scriptures, to buy them books, to reason at home betwixt themselves of divine matters--wives with their husbands, and parents with their children. These men condemn the Scriptures as dead elements, and--as much as ever they may--bar the people from them.

### **Hooker**

As a first generation reformer, Jewel's major preoccupation was identifying which visible church, England or Rome, was the true catholic church on Earth. Richard Hooker (1554-1600) was a generation later. He was not yet five when Elizabeth came to the throne, and he died while she was still queen. He had only really known a Protestant English culture. If his predecessors had made the case for the distinction between the visible and the invisible, Hooker had a different, double task.

**An English Church.** On the one hand he had to explain why the visible church should have an “English face” to quote the Coxians in the famous Frankfurt liturgical fight among the Marian exiles, rather than a purely “Scriptural face.” It seemed an obvious historical fact to Hooker that the visible church, as a human institution rooted in contemporary society, had with sound reason adapted its practices to succeeding cultural changes through the centuries.

But seeing those rites and orders may be at one time more, which at another are less available unto that purpose: what reason is there in these things to urge the state of one only age, as a pattern for all to follow? It is not, I am right sure, their meaning, that we should now assemble our people to serve God in close and secret meetings, or that common brooks and rivers should be used for places of baptism, or that the Eucharist should be ministered after meat, or that the custom of Church feasting should be renewed, or that all kind of standing provision for the ministry should be utterly taken away, and their estate made again dependent upon the voluntary devotion of men. In these things they easily perceive how unfit that were for the present, which was for the first age convenient enough. (*Laws* IV.2.3).

True to Cranmer and Article 34, Hooker maintained the distinction between the unchanging doctrine of the salvation revealed in Scripture and the need to adapt its proclamation to a variety of human societies across space and time.

Yesterday we spoke about Hooker’s need to defend Article 34 against the hotter sort of Puritan. For there were indeed those Puritans who conformed to the established church, such as Richard Sibbes and William Perkins. These Puritans concentrated on the reforming human souls until God’s grace provided a better day when a monarch would arise in England who would permit further reform of the church. However, as for those who advocated a Presbyterian church government, rather than the historic episcopate, Hooker argued that polity, like liturgy, was a thing indifferent and, thus, able to be left up to the theological reasoning of the local church authorities.

Neither can I find that men of soundest judgement have otherwise taught, then that articles of belief, and things which all men must of

necessity do to the end that they may be saved, are either expressly set down in Scripture, or else plainly thereby to be gathered. But touching things which belong to discipline and outward polity, the Church hath authority to make canons, laws, and decrees, even as we read that in the Apostles times it did. Which kind of laws (for as much as they are not in themselves necessary to salvation) may after they are made be also changed as the difference of times or place shall require. (*Laws* III.10.7)

While Hooker accepted the apostolic foundation of the episcopate, just like the customs of secret meetings and agape feasts which have passed way, for Hooker, apostolic practice (as opposed to apostolic doctrine) did not necessarily mean permanently binding for all time.

What then was the decisive factor in the retention or abolition of an apostolic practice? Effectiveness in proclamation of the Gospel. Mission determined order. As Cranmer had already made clear in the Prayer Book, Hooker argued that the burden of proof was on those who wished to change inherited forms to show how what had been received hindered the Gospel. In the case of England, that meant the retention of the historic three-fold orders, since as we have seen, Cranmer's *Ordinal* presented an episcopate dedicated to proclaiming the Gospel in Word and Sacrament as teachers and pastors of their flock. In short, to use the technical theological language, Hooker argued that the historic succession of three-fold orders was in England of the *bene esse* of the church (the well ordering of it) rather than of the *esse* of the church (its essential nature). In less exalted language, an English church with historic orders was simply the best possible boat from which to fish.

**The Mystical Church.** Nevertheless, for Hooker's era, it was not enough to concentrate on the visible church as distinct from the invisible church. He was equally concerned to show how the visible church, as a human institution thoroughly rooted in each nation's culture, would still fulfill its divine vocation ultimately at the end of the age by becoming one with invisible church. Therefore, he wanted to stress not the

difference between but rather the inherent connection of the visible and invisible church.

Hooker's very sophisticated understanding of the church is but an expression of his overall sacramental world view that God is working through all creation by his laws to reconcile it to himself. God works through finite things to bring them back into relation with the infinite. However, for convenience sake, let's just look at one aspect of Hooker's thought in this area. Human salvation. If one could say that Rome viewed the institutional church like Christ, both human and divine, but without error, Hooker viewed the institutional church as an example of his redemptive activity, thoroughly human in a post-lapsidarian sense, but an object of grace, divinely called for eventual reunion with God, but by three distinct steps: justification, sanctification, and glorification:

There is a glorifyinge righteousness of men in the Worlde to comme, and there is a justifying and sanctifying righteousness here. The righteousness wherewith we shalbe clothed in the world to come, is both perfect and inherente: that whereby here we are justified is perfecte but not inherente, that whereby we are sanctified, inherente but not perfecte. (*Just.* 3)

Justification was by imputation through faith alone. Sanctification was the result of receiving the Spirit of Adoption in the heart which infused virtues which then bring forth 'the fruites, the workes, the operacions of the spirit' (*ibid*). Although Hooker consistently stressed faith as the formal cause of justification, he stressed even more the importance of the habitual righteousness of sanctification that necessarily accompanied it.

Where then did sinners encounter the Spirit of God which made participation in him possible? Hooker was quite clear—the church. This was not a denial of the Protestant principle that faith came by hearing the Word of God preached, but once again putting

that principle in a wider theological context of divine law. As God made Eve from the rib of Adam, so God made the church out of Christ's wounded and bleeding side (*Laws* V.56.7). Salvation comes by participation in Christ through the divinely appointed means of his church. God as primary cause made the Church out of Christ, the secondary cause, who works to reconcile God and humanity by his sacrifice.

How does supernatural birth take place in the church? Through the traditional Anglican understanding of Word and Sacraments as divine instruments for administering the Spirit. Let's look more carefully at each one.

1) Word. Although usually overlooked, Hooker was just as insistent as Cranmer that the Word was an instrument of the Holy Spirit. He fiercely objected to the Puritan dislike of the "bare reading of the word of God" in the daily offices, because "they mightily strive to obscure" how "his gracious Spirit" is "the principal virtue" in Scripture which there manifests "itself for the endless good of men's souls, even the virtue which it hath to *convert*, to *edify*, to *save* souls." Although the Puritans stressed the importance of the exposition of Scripture for bringing people to salvation, Hooker accused them of appropriating the saving power of the Holy Spirit to themselves, rather than to the Scriptures. (*Laws* V.22.1). According to Hooker, "surely the power of the word of God, even without the help of interpreters in Gods Church worketh mightily, not unto their confirmation alone which are converted, but also to their conversion which are not" (*Laws* V.22.4).

2) Sacraments. For Hooker, Baptism and Communion are primarily marks to know when God imparts the grace of participation. As "moral instruments of salvation," they are the ordinary means of grace. In the rite of baptism, God accomplishes "the work of our new birth." Water is the instrument "whereby [grace] is received unto incorporation into Christ," his righteousness is imputed and "the first and most effectual

cause out of which our belief growth” is imparted. Through baptism, the person of Christ is wholly present in man. In Communion, we participate in his Spirit-quickened humanity by degrees. Christ is not in the consecrated bread and wine, but they are instruments which are “conducts of life and conveyances of his body and blood” to those who receive with faith. In other words, we receive their effects in us. Thus, the “real presence of Christ’s most blessed body and blood is not therefore to be sought for in the sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of the sacrament.” (*Laws* V.67.6). Baptism was the sacrament for participation in Christ through justification. Communion was the sacrament for participation in Christ through sanctification. Since the spiritual effect of Communion was to strengthen a believer’s inherent righteousness, Hooker can even speak of the transubstantiation of the recipient rather than of what was received.

Since the human earthly national Church of England was also the divinely appointed means of grace by which God would gather his mystical church, what Hooker said about individual Christians, can be said about his view of the visible church. In this world, because God has established this human institution for his divine purposes, i) like the justified, it is acceptable to God as his church, and his Spirit works through it, despite its many failings, ii) yet like those being sanctified, because God’s Spirit is at work in the human institutional church, it can reflect his character in a greater or lesser degree, and iii) like the glorified, one day the various human institutional churches will be purged and merged and become co-terminus with the mystical church. In that moment the church made manifest in the Eucharist will then be manifest for all eternity.