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What has Nicaea to do with Canterbury? Creeds, Councils, Tradition, and the Fathers in the Church of England and the Anglican Communion

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Abstract: This article charts the Council of Nicaea's (325) relevance to the Anglican Tradition from the sixteenth century to the present day, as manifested through Anglicanism's engagement with the Nicene Creed, its attitude towards early ecumenical councils, its appeals to 'the Fathers' and its approach to 'tradition', particularly in relation to Scripture. To that end, this article examines key governing texts in the Church of England and the Anglican Communion – with particular focus on the Book of Common Prayer (BCP 1662) and the Thirty-Nine Articles – as well as relevant political and theological controversies. The findings include some counterintuitive results in relation to classic maxims of 'Anglicanism', including that the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds are second only to Scripture in importance while simultaneously mediating Anglicans' encounter with Scripture and setting the conditions for legitimate Scriptural interpretation.

If ever you were to startle upon a Dickensian *Spirit of Anglicanism* – imagine a wraithlike personage, vested haphazardly in preaching tabs, a mitre, and an Oxbridge scholar's gown – and you were to ask about the Council of Nicaea (325), a straightforward answer would be the last thing to expect. On a variety of topics, it would be entirely fitting to hear the *Spirit of Anglicanism* quote Walt Whitman:

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> Do I contradict myself?
> Very well then I contradict myself,
> (I am large, I contain multitudes.)[1]

After all, there is no consensus on what constitutes the Anglican Tradition, not among church partisans or scholars in the academy – neither in the past five centuries nor among today's 85 million[2] strong Anglican Communion. Despite 'Anglicanism' having the ring of 'an ideological movement of thought or practice' it is, as Paul Avis says, more accurately 'a portmanteau word, an umbrella term, an elastic concept that embraces a considerable variety of theology, worship, and ethical conviction, even within a single Anglican church, let alone the worldwide Communion'.[3] Even the terms 'Anglican' and 'Anglicanism' are anachronistic before the mid-nineteenth century. As Mike Higton explains, people of differing 'Anglican' identities resemble

> inhabitants of the differing worlds … [they] have different heroes and martyrs, different canons of hallowed texts, different claims about the deep genius or wisdom of Anglicanism, and they arrange the materials of the Church of England's history into different plots.[4]

Even a tripartite division of 'Anglicanism' into reformed, catholic, and liberal strands – to which some add a fourth charismatic strand – is misleadingly insufficient.

A contributing factor to this variety is that the Anglican tradition, historically and currently, has comparatively few doctrinally determining norms and structures. Hatchett puts it well:

> In other branches of Christianity decisions of certain councils (for example, Trent) or the writings of particular leaders (for example, Luther, Calvin, or Wesley) or certain confessional statements (for example, the Book of Concord or the Westminster Confession) have produced authority beyond that ever granted in Anglicanism to any council, individual, or confessional statement.[5]

Doctrinal authority is distinctly more 'diffuse' in Anglican churches, to use Oliver O'Donovan's term.[6]

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1 Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself' (1892 version), section 51.
2 Aleem Maqbool, 'What next for Church of England after Justin Welby's Resignation?', BBC News, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwygx1wj54zo (accessed 13 Nov 2024).
3 Paul Avis, 'Anglican Ecclesiology', in Paul Avis, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 252.
4 Mike Higton, *The Life of Christian Doctrine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020) p. 29.
5 Marion J. Hatchett, 'Prayer Books', in S. W. Sykes and John E. Booty, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1988), pp. 121–2.
6 Oliver O'Donovan, *On the 39 Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986), p. 12.

Nevertheless, there are a few key texts. There is near universal agreement that the Book of Common Prayer, along with the Ordinal and the Thirty-Nine Articles, must be included alongside Scripture as classic normative texts within the Anglican Tradition; their denominational impact is more significant, both *de jure* and *de facto*, than any other uniquely Anglican texts. More recently, their legal status and enforcement have diminished, and so more recent official documents, such as the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral and the Virginia Report must be taken into account as well. It is true that 'Anglicanism, since its beginnings, has been forged on the anvil of ecclesiological controversy',[7] making it challenging to define 'Anglicanism'. But conflict can be a reliable informant – it shows what has, in practice, been treated as intolerable or indispensable, from the English Reformation to twentieth-century theological debates. In these foundational texts and contentious ecclesial affairs, the Council of Nicaea *per se* rarely holds a prime position. The Council does, however, directly bear upon four loci of perennial importance within the Anglican tradition: the 'catholic creeds', the 'ecumenical' or 'general' councils, 'the Fathers' and Tradition in general.[8] I will touch upon all four loci, with some counterintuitive results in relation to classic maxims of 'Anglicanism'.

The Book of Common Prayer, Ordinal, and Thirty-Nine Articles

Returning to the Historic Formularies – as the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), Ordinal, and Thirty-Nine Articles are called – their use and subscription were legally enforced by the English state for several centuries. The Ordinal, which was first composed and authorised in 1550, set out the ordination services for clergy. The original 1549 Book of Common Prayer was paired with an Act of Uniformity – as have its successors – which made its liturgy and rubrics[9] the only legal option for public worship within the Church of England. Under Elizabeth I, the BCP and Ordinal soon came to dominate English spirituality: Judith Maltby has shown that despite resistance from more 'puritan' clergy and lingering attachments to the Latin rites, 'by

[7] Philip H. E. Thomas, 'Doctrine of the Church', in ed. S. W. Sykes and John E. Booty, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1988), p. 220.

[8] In Anglican discourse, the three 'catholic creeds' are the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed – more commonly called the Nicene Creed – along with the Apostles' Creed and Athanasian Creed; the 'ecumenical councils' is vague but includes at least: the Council of Nicaea (325), the First Council of Constantinople (381), the Council of Ephesus (431), and the Council of Chalcedon (451); 'the Fathers' includes texts of the pre- and post-Nicene early Church, whose supposed consensus the Council of Nicaea was taken as affirming until the nineteenth century. The commonly invoked 'three-legged stool' supporting Anglican thought and practice is Scripture, Tradition, and Reason.

[9] 'Liturgy' is the pre-set spoken words and the 'rubrics' indicate the surrounding conditions and appropriate actions, cf. spoken lines and stage directions within a script.

the last decades of Elizabeth's reign, most English people had become devoted to the new English Prayer Book, and had absorbed its spirituality'.[10] Covert illicit BCP worship persisted during the Commonwealth and Charles II re-established the Church with the Book of Common Prayer (1662).[11] Functionally, the Test Act of 1673, caused participation in Holy Communion to be the proof of membership in the Church of England well into the nineteenth century. Beyond England, the BCP was imposed throughout the British Empire and in missionary settings, becoming foundational within what became the Anglican Communion. To this day, the 1662 BCP remains *the* official prayer book of the Church of England – alternative liturgies were only authorised in the twentieth century. For centuries, 'So close [was] the felt connection between the Bible and the prayer book that the two were sometimes bound into one volume, so providing all that faithful Anglicans needed for their Christian faith, life, and worship'.[12]

As for the Thirty-Nine Articles, when this text reached its definitive form under Elizabeth I in 1571, the Ordination of Ministers Act (1571) combined with canon law required all clergy to subscribe to the Articles in full,[13] a requirement which continued into the modern era. Historically and currently, opinions vary on whether subscription required 'very precise assent' or 'merely to refrain from public dissent'.[14] The titular articles succinctly state Church of England doctrine, practices, and polity, but were not, as John Pearson expounded in 1660, 'a complete body of divinity, or a comprehension of all Christian doctrines necessary to be taught; but an enumeration of some truths which upon and since the Reformation have been denied'.[15] Certainly, the Articles did not become the 'foundational dogmas or ideological texts upon which all later Anglican teaching was based'.[16] Indeed, Anglicanism is often characterised as manifesting its theology in occasional texts, not systematic treatises. The Thirty-Nine Articles are one of the most important such occasional documents, asserting central self-convictions of the Church in England: that it was not the one true Church but the Church as it was in

[10] Bryan D. Spinks, 'Liturgy and Worship', in Anthony Milton, ed., *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume I; Reformation and Identity, c.1520–1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 160.

[11] Paul Avis, 'Prayer Book Use and Conformity', in Mark D. Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke, and Martyn Percy, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 129.

[12] Avis, 'Prayer Book Use', p. 125.

[13] Stephen Hampton, 'Confessional Identity', in Anthony Milton, ed., *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume I; Reformation and Identity, c.1520–1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 219–20.

[14] Peter Toon, 'Articles and Homilies', in S. W. Sykes and John E. Booty, ed., *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1988), p. 140.

[15] Quoted in Hampton, 'Confessional Identity', p. 226.

[16] Philip H. E. Thomas, 'Doctrine of the Church', in ed. S. W. Sykes and John E. Booty, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1988), p. 221.

England;[17] that it 'had a continuous history reaching back to Augustine of Canterbury and beyond'; that it was reforming itself in line with 'renewed conformity with the teaching of the Bible'; and finally that it could simultaneously faithfully retain 'ceremonies and ideas which were not explicitly contradicted by Scripture' as determined by the deliberation of the Church itself.[18]

These three historic formularies, their legal establishment, and their enforcement gave rise to a situation where many see 'Anglicanism' as 'articulated in worship and hedged by the boundary markers of the Thirty-Nine Articles',[19] a denominational charism often short-handed as *lex orandi lex credendi*. Hefling describes this position:

> Other churches may be anchored in confessional documents, or doctrinal formularies, or a systematically articulated theology, or the pronouncements of magisterial authorities. … The Anglican anchor is worship … Now the Book of Common Prayer is a *lex orandi*, a discipline of praying … Learning how to speak the Prayer Book 'language' is at the same time learning what can and cannot be affirmed by speaking it. To have learned it well is to have assimilated and made one's own a *lex credendi*, a grammar of belief.[20]

The BCP is meant to inculcate people in the one true faith, through its own particular form of the rites and ceremonies celebrated by all Christians.[21] Hence, the Book of Common Prayer functioned as the repository of Anglican doctrine[22] for most of its history, notably with a prominent place for the classical creeds in its main services.

Within the BCP, the three catholic creeds are treated as more alike than different; no liturgy contains more than one and repetition is avoided. For instance, the Solemnisation of Matrimony does not include any Creed, likely because the rubrics encourage the newly married persons to 'receive communion at the time of their marriage', which *would* involve the Nicene Creed. Similarly, the service of Communion for the Sick does *not* contain a creed, likely because its companion service, the Visitation of the Sick, *does* include the minister posing the Apostles' Creed in question form, to which the sick person affirms 'All this I

17 Unlike denominations which have claimed to be the only true Church, excluding all others.
18 Thomas, 'Doctrine of the Church', p. 221.
19 Paul Avis, 'Anglican Ecclesiology', p. 248.
20 Charles Hefling, 'Introduction: Anglicans and Common Prayer', in Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck, eds., *The Oxford Guide to The Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 2–3.
21 Hefling, 'Introduction', p. 2.
22 Avis, 'Prayer Book Use', pp. 127–8.

steadfastly believe'.[23] Since the rubrics do not treat the creeds as interchangeable, the implication is each fulfils the same role in its own way. The Apostles' Creed, which occurs most often, functions as the basic confession professed since antiquity, appropriate to all who are of age. The Nicene Creed, occurring during Holy Communion, acts as a less-frequent elaboration thereof, but is no less important thereby (just as Holy Communion was not less important for being less frequent than the Daily Office). The same elaborative role can be attributed to the Athanasian Creed – reserved for a baker's dozen of holy days – as it drew out Chalcedonian Christology in greater detail.[24] It has, however, often met with disfavour for what Jeremy Taylor called its 'uncharitableness' in the damnatory clauses.[25]

Rowell rightly observed that 'Cranmer in his compilation of the Book of Common Prayer emphasised the importance of the creeds by the place he assigned to them in the worship of the church'.[26] Indeed, the BCP elevates the classical creeds above all other non-biblical texts. This can be seen, first of all, in their frequency and placement within the Daily Office and Holy Communion. The BCP prescribes two services for daily use, reducing the monastic practice of praying the hours down to Morning Prayer (aka Matins) and Evening Prayer (aka Evensong). The Daily Office 'has been the daily prayer of cathedral, collegiate, and monastic communities, parishes, families, and lay people, as well as the mandated prayer of Anglican clergy'.[27] Furthermore, Matins has been the main Sunday service for Anglicans, until the twentieth century.[28] Both offices unfailingly include one of the classical creeds; the Apostles' Creed is sung or recited by all present after the second canticle. Here, it concludes the readings from scripture, before the Lord's Prayer, specified Collects, and other prayers which conclude the service. On

[23] The Order for the Burial of the Dead and the Churching of Women are the only BCP services which do not include a creed.

[24] O'Donovan, *On the 39 Articles*, p. 54.

[25] Jean-Louis Quantin, 'Perceptions of Christian Antiquity', in Anthony Milton, ed., *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume I; Reformation and Identity, c.1520–1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 295.

[26] Geoffrey Rowell, 'The Confessions of Faith in the Early Church as Seen in the Classical Anglican Tradition', *Anglican & Episcopal History* 60 (September 1991), p. 308.

[27] John Gibaut, 'The Daily Office', in Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck ed., *The Oxford Guide to The Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 451.

[28] 'The intended pattern in the Prayer Book was Morning Prayer, the Great Litany, and the Eucharist, with evening Prayer later in the day. With the decline of eucharistic celebration in the sixteenth century, and the consequent shortening of the Eucharist to ante-communion, Morning Prayer became the mainstay of Sunday celebration for centuries'. (Gibaut, 'The Daily Office', p. 454). The 20th century's Parish Communion Movement established the current norm of celebrating and receiving Holy Communion weekly.

13 'feast days' (e.g., on Christmas, Easter, and Trinity Sunday), the Athanasian Creed replaces the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed also has a central role as an affirmation of faith in the services of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Visitation of the Sick, as well as in the Catechism, about which more will be said below. The Nicene Creed, for its part, was integral to Holy Communion (also titled 'the Lord's Supper'), as it had been in the late medieval Roman Mass. Originally, Thomas Cranmer's 1549 BCP only included the Nicene Creed on Sundays, but he reversed this decision in the 1552 BCP, which universally required the Nicene Creed at Holy Communion.[29] In Holy Communion the creed is spoken by all present subsequent to the scripture readings, this time immediately following the Gospel reading and preceding the sermon or homily.[30]

Thus, while the BCP is overwhelmingly biblical in tenor, it is also very creedal. The creeds' regularity rivals that of the Lord's Prayer; they are manifestly the most important extra-biblical texts. Cranmer likely reinstated the Nicene Creed for every Holy Communion because it provided crucial expansions upon the Apostles' Creed.[31] The impact of frequent creedal recitation in the Daily Office and Communion was pervasive, no doubt causing creedal statements to become memorised by many simply through their attendance at church services. As Chapman and others have noted, 'reciting the creed … was an effective way of ensuring conformity' whether under Charlemagne or Constantine, in the home counties of England or across the empire.[32] The reverse of such uniformity was assurance; all laypeople involved in BCP services could rest assured that they were united by faith with the whole Church (corporate beyond the congregation) and that their worship was not heretical. Frequency supplied both *uniformity* and *assurance*. The antiquity and historical recitation of the creeds meant that creedal conformity also implied *unity* through space and time. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds' concluding reference to the Church is reflexive, rendering the gathered 'I's that declare their belief into a collective 'we', a 'we' at once inalienable and secured in the 'I' of Jesus Christ, whose body is the Church. In this way, the surrounding liturgy effects the meaning of the creeds.

What, then, was the all-important *content* of the creeds, as understood by the historic formularies? The BCP Catechism offers one answer. After the

[29] Mark D. Chapman, 'Why Do We Still Recite the Nicene Creed at the Eucharist?', *Anglican Theological Review* 87 (Spring 2005), p. 212.

[30] For unclear reasons, Cranmer's version of the Nicene Creed states 'I believe one, Catholick and Apostolick Church' omiting the words 'in' and 'holy'. Another odd omission appears in the Ordinal, where the Nicene Creed is not mentioned in deaconal ordination, but is for Priests and Bishops. Deacons, though, are charged with teaching the catechism, which includes the Apostles' creed.

[31] Chapman, 'Why Do We Still Recite?', p. 212.

[32] Chapman, 'Why Do We Still Recite?', pp. 210–11.

catechumen rehearses the Apostles' Creed, the catechist asks 'What dost thou chiefly learn in these Articles of thy Belief?' to which one replies,

> First, I learn to believe in God the Father, who hath made me, and all the world; Secondly, in God the Son, who hath redeemed me, and all mankind; Thirdly, in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me, and all the elect people of God.

This emphasis on Trinity and Christological redemption is borne out by the Thirty-Nine Articles. The opening five articles emphasise the unity and equality of the three persons as the one true God, the central salvific events of the Nicene Creed (incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection), and Christ's union of divine and human natures in his single person. Thus,

> the English Reformers rehearsed in traditional terms their faith … as they had received it from the early centuries of the church's development and as they held it in common with their theological adversaries, at least those on the Roman side. There was little polemical material in those articles, and what there was was directed, more incidentally than deliberately, at the Unitarian wing of the Reformation.[33]

Whereas other contemporary Articles and Confessions began with their theological method, the English Reformers were unusual in foregrounding a restatement of the gospel message and subordinating controversial material to later on.[34] This implicitly recognised the central truths proclaimed by the ecumenical councils and a sense of broader commonality with churches who recognise them. O'Donovan reflects on why the creeds were granted such an illustrious position:

> It is clear what the Reformers wished to establish by their selection of documents: points of contact with the pre-Nicene church, with the Niceno-Constantinopolitan settlement of the trinitarian question, and with the Chalcedonian settlement of the Christological question (to which the Athanasian creed gave the most convenient documentary access). And in establishing these contacts with the church of the first five centuries they intend to be free of the opinions of any individual theologian, however great, and associate themselves only with the most considered doctrinal confessions of the church speaking as a whole.[35]

Though the BCP was not seen as a Christian universal, the classical creeds were, as made clear by the BCP and the Articles.

[33] O'Donovan, *On the 39 Articles*, p. 49.
[34] E.g., the Church of Ireland articles of 1615 or the 1647 Westminster Confession, or two Swiss Confessions of 1536 and 1566. O'Donovan, *On the 39 Articles*, p. 18.
[35] O'Donovan, *On the 39 Articles*, p. 54.

The Catechism further substantiates the creeds' status as pre-eminent among non-biblical texts, because it outlines what every faithful Christian should know, preferably by heart. The sixteenth-century catechism itself contained 'the privileges and profession of a Christian, the Creed, the Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. In 1604 a section dealing with the sacraments was added'.[36] The Confirmation service stipulates 'that none hereafter shall be Confirmed, but such as can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments; and can also answer to such other Questions, as in the short Catechism are contained'. Evidently, the creeds are on a very short list of what an individual needs to know before confirmation or baptism in advanced years. Furthermore, the Thirty-Nine Articles are nowhere to be found. In fact, when the catechist asks the catechumen to 'rehearse the Articles of thy Belief' the stipulated reply is the Apostles' Creed.

The creeds' corporate recitation in the Daily Office and Holy Communion teaches that creedal faith is a collective endeavour; its importance to each *individual's* life of faith is clear in Baptism, Confirmation, and the Visitation of the Sick, as well as in the Catechism. In the baptism of 'such as are of riper years', the Apostles' Creed is recited in question form by the minister and those presented for baptism reply 'All this I steadfastly believe'. So too, in the Visitation of the Sick. In the 'Publick Baptism of Infants', the child's godparents must 'give their sureties' on behalf of the child to the Apostles' Creed, among other things;[37] the same is done in the church if a child was baptised at home in extremis. This is plainly not a promise simply to raise the child in the faith, but a promise of the infant's given by way of their godparents. Accordingly, at Confirmation one must 'ratify and confirm' what their 'Godfathers and Godmothers promised for them at baptism'. Unlike how some might approach confirmation today, the gist of the baptismal service and catechism is not that the child once grown will make a free rational choice among various worldview options, perhaps selecting Confirmation. On the contrary, the expectation, what they *ought* to do – with moral freight – is to confirm *what was already done* on their behalf by their godparents. The BCP centres the importance of an individual's creedal faith, though in an interdependent way.

It is impossible for the classical creeds to simply be propositional declarations of truth claims (in the manner of the Thirty-Nine Articles) when they are embedded within corporate Christian worship, within a life marked by the occasional services. In the Daily Office, liturgically positioning the Lord's Prayer after the Creed effects its meaning. The Apostles' Creed becomes a preamble, like the address on a letter, stipulating the addressee of the Lord's Prayer that follows, and making clear, for instance, that God's

[36] James Hartin, 'Catechisms', in S. W. Sykes and John E. Booty, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1988), p. 158.

[37] The BCP sums up the commitments as 'that he will renounce the devil and all his works, and constantly believe God's holy Word, and obediently keep his commandments'.

forgiveness through Christ is coupled with forgiving others in one's own life. Consequently, the Creedal articles cannot be taken as the entirety of Christian faith. Knowledgeable belief is only one element, an element that, as shown with the Baptism of Infants, may be held interdependently without compromising one's salvation or membership to the church. The classical creeds, within the BCP, become declarations of allegiance to a particular named God. In the end, doctrine becomes doxology, a rapturous praise of God.

The classical creeds' placement in relation to Scripture influences how both are understood. In the Daily Office, reciting the Apostles' or Athanasian Creed after scriptural readings, psalms, and canticles, positions it as an expression of the faith one comes to know through scripture. Likewise in the BCP Holy Communion, the Nicene Creed comes after the readings from Scripture and before the sermon. As Croxall says, 'This placing of the Creed after Scripture, means that after having heard the Scripture, we assert our belief in its fundamentals'.[38] Thus, the creeds' position and frequency cause them to *mediate* Anglicans' encounter with Scripture. Just as reading biblical books successively implies a fundamental cohesion about scripture, so too, consistently concluding with a creed implies the creeds are rightly concluded from Scripture, simultaneously de-legitimising any biblical hermeneutic which does not accord with the creeds. According to the BCP, the creeds are never understood alone, neither as one's own idiosyncratic confession nor as a text considered in isolation, but neither is Scripture understood apart from the creeds.

The relationship between the creeds, Scripture, and the ecumenical councils is further illuminated by the Thirty-Nine Articles, where Scripture is the ultimate foundation and yet, its interpretation depends upon the creeds drawn up by councils. The Nicene Creed is authoritative because it is warranted by Scripture, not because of the Council of Nicaea's authority; as Article VIII succinctly puts it, the catholic creeds 'ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture'. But things are not always as simple as they seem; Chadwick notes, 'some clauses in the Nicene and Athanasian Creed would admittedly be hard to "prove" in a "mathematical" sense if one had nothing but the Bible to do it with'.[39] Indeed, many contemporaneous anti-trinitarians (e.g., Servetus) would have argued that their positions were thoroughly biblically based. As a result, to state that the classical creeds are proven by Scripture not only asserts Scripture's authority; it also asserts that one test of Scriptural interpretation (a test of the legitimacy of one's biblical hermeneutic) is

[38] T. H. Croxall, 'Anglicanism and the Incarnation', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 3 (September 1950), p. 248.

[39] Henry Chadwick, 'Tradition, Fathers and Councils', in ed. S. W. Sykes and John E. Booty, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: S.P.C.K, 1988), p. 98.

whether its results are consonant with a Nicene and Chalcedonian doctrine of God.[40] Moreover, the BCP didactically reinforces this in liturgical practice every time a creed concludes the readings in both daily and sacramental services (matins, evensong, baptism, and communion); the creeds appear as a natural result of encountering scripture in the context of worship/prayer and corporate membership with the body of Christ. Scripture and creeds are not simply independent primary and secondary authorities; they mutually inform each other, and their meanings are mutually constitutive. Creeds derive their legitimacy from Scripture and yet also provide Scripture's hermeneutical frame.

Within this frame, the ecumenical councils are not viewed as infallibly authoritative bodies but as fallible ones held in great respect and honour. Article XXI on 'The Authority of the General Councils' asserts that 'they may err, and sometime have erred, even in things pertaining unto God', being assemblies of men who are not perfectly governed by the Spirit. A commentary by the group of people who compiled article XXI elaborated that, 'the preeminent four, Nicaea, Constantinople I, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, we embrace and accept with great reverence'.[41] In practice, the Christology of the fifth and sixth councils were unproblematic to sixteenth and seventeenth century Anglicans,[42] though the seventh was often held under suspicion.[43] Notably, the 1559 Act of Uniformity sets out the textual grounds for orthodoxy (and the legal grounds for charges of heresy) as Scripture and the 'the first four general councils or some other general council'.[44] The early councils may have rested on scripture for their authority, but there was no doubt that they did. Thus, the Anglican position was that the Council of Nicaea had not erred in its supposed development of the Nicene Creed; its insights were held with great honour and respect.

The authority of the Church further illuminates the classical creeds' significance. The Thirty-Nine Articles clearly acknowledged institutional church authority, rather than in a particular teaching office or occasional Spirit-inspired individuals.[45] Article XX asserts that the Church could not ordain anything contrary to Scripture or enforce anything unscriptural as necessary to salvation, but beyond this, it 'hath power to decree rites or ceremonies and authority in controversies of faith'. (The inclusion of matters

[40] Scriptural coherence is another 'test' derivable from Article XX, which states the Church 'may not so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another'.

[41] Henry Chadwick, 'The Status of the Ecumenical Councils in Anglican Thought', in ed. David Neiman and Margaret Schatkin, eds., *The Heritage of the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Georges Vasilievich Florovsky on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (Rome: Typis Pontificiae Universitas Gregorianae, 1973), p. 401.

[42] Chadwick, 'Tradition, Fathers and Councils', pp. 98–9.

[43] Chadwick, 'The Ecumenical Councils', p. 408.

[44] Chadwick, 'Tradition, Fathers and Councils', pp. 98–9.

[45] O'Donovan, *On the 39 Articles*, p. 113.

of faith within the Church's discretion perturbed Calvinists, and some printings omitted this clause.[46]) Matters of '*adiaphora*' ('indifference' to salvation) could be determined and enforced nationally by the Church of England. Importantly, this Anglican practice of *adiaphora*, O'Donovan explains, is 'unlike the Roman approach on the one hand, with its higher valuation of tradition, and unlike other Protestant approaches, which tend to pay less respect to patristic traditions, and have often laid greater stress on the freedom of the individual believer'.[47] In practice, the institutional Church explicitly has the authority over its particular national manifestation of Christianity and implicitly has the authority to judge what is truly of Scripture by way of the creeds. The Thirty-Nine Articles, which touched on matters of national particulars as well as Christian universals, thus declared their own status to be subservient to what was found in Scripture as understood through the classical creeds.

Early controversies

If the Historic Formularies were the legally enforced core of Anglicanism from their nascent forms under Henry VIII into the nineteenth century, then ecclesial controversies of these times illuminate the limits of acceptability. In the English church's schism from Rome, the English Civil War and Restoration, and the 'Latitudinarian' era, the inheritances of Nicaea were, more often than not, deemed essential rather than dispensable.

The English Reformation was preoccupied with, among other things, defending the *apostolicity* of the Church in England. Professing the classical creeds was the keystone of the English Reformers' defence; creeds encapsulated the apostolic faith. Furthermore, as Rowell explains, the creeds 'together with the early councils and the common traditions of the Fathers they represent the distillation of the faith derived from the scriptures and preached by the Apostles'.[48] They also gave argumentative footing to condemn both the illegitimate additions of Rome's extra-scriptural teaching and the illegitimate subtractions of theologians like Servetus and Sozzini who questioned the Nicene accounts of the incarnation.[49] John Jewel's early apologetic, *Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae* (1562), appealed to the first 600 years of the church and Scripture to argue that the Church of England was neither 'one of the "sundry sects"' nor degenerate like the Roman church.[50] James I later granted it the official seal of

[46] Chadwick, 'Tradition, Fathers and Councils', p. 98.
[47] O'Donovan, *On the 39 Articles*, p. 53.
[48] Rowell, 'The Confessions', pp. 314–15.
[49] Frederick H. Shriver, 'Councils, Conferences and Synods', in ed. S. W. Sykes and John E. Booty, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: S.P.C.K, 1988), pp. 190–1.
[50] Mark D. Chapman, *Anglicanism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 33.

approval.[51] Yet as always, Scripture prevailed over the Fathers, whom Jewel describes as 'the stars, fair and beautiful and bright; yet they are not the sun: they bear witness of the light, they are not the light'.[52]

At first, such appeals were not distinctively English, but in keeping with continental Protestants' patristics-based defences of *sola scriptura*.[53] From the 1620s, however, the idea developed that the Church of England had a particular connection to the 'primitive church', 'with more importance attached to apostolic traditions and an insistence that the Fathers, rather than modern divines, should form the foundation of theological study'.[54] Indeed, continental figures such as Hugo Grotius and Isaac Casaubon were among the first to advance the notion that the Church of England was uniquely faithful to Christian antiquity. Bishop Lancelot Andrewes famously asserted that Anglicans had 'one canon … two testaments, three creeds, four general councils, five centuries, and the series of Fathers in that period'. These 'determine the boundary of our faith'.[55] This has given rise to the notion that the Church of England and Anglicanism more broadly has no particular doctrines of its own, as advanced by Henry McAdoo and echoed in Rowan Williams' comment that 'Anglicans have always been cautious about laying too much stress on formulae over and above the classical creeds'.[56] As has been seen, however, the Church of England had its own particular doctrines, and practices which it mandated within its borders, even if it did not hold that they were necessary for salvation.

The English Civil War fractured the nation, including along 'Puritan' and 'Laudian' factional lines within the Church. Despite their many differences, however, the *fundamentals* of faith as delivered by the Council of Nicaea through the Nicene Creed were not in dispute. This led Jeremy Taylor, a prominent Anglican divine and one of the most popular writers of the day, to compose *The Liberty of Prophesying* (1650) in which, as Chadwick explains, 'He deplored excessive definition beyond the fundamentals of the Apostles' Creed, … Taylor had no doubt of divine assistance to synods of good bishops, like Nicaea, enabling them to articulate not indeed new doctrines, but the faith of Scripture, sound reason, and tradition'.[57] Everything else should be considered *adiaphora* and not fought over with such ferocity. A similar point was made by Herbert Thorndike in *Epilogue to the tragedy of the Church of*

51 Chapman, *Anglicanism*, p. 32.
52 Chapman, *Anglicanism*, p. 34.
53 Anthony Milton, 'Introduction', in Anthony Milton, ed., *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume I; Reformation and Identity, c.1520–1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 10.
54 Milton, 'Introduction', p. 11.
55 Rowell, 'The Confessions', p. 309.
56 Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd LTD, 2014), p. 1.
57 Chadwick, 'Tradition, Fathers and Councils', pp. 103–4.

England (1659), in which he assigned the creeds to the 'rule of faith' as opposed to the 'substance of faith' – that is, faithful practices – and recommended a return to the first six ecumenical councils for the re-establishment of Christian unity.[58] Though neither were successful in their interventions, at the Restoration the BCP and Thirty-Nine articles were restored along with their emphasis on a creedal faith and high regard for the ecumenical councils insofar as they are scriptural grounded. In both the schism from Rome and the controversy of the English Civil War, the classical creeds, ecumenical councils and tradition of the Fathers were a matter of agreement within the Church of England.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, there was little appetite for further conflict, and so legal provision was made for worship that did not conform to the Church of England's strictures. The limits on what constituted tolerable 'non-conformism', however, show that the Anglican rulers still considered the creedal faith to be indispensable. Chapman explains that limited 'freedom of worship was allowed for Trinitarian groups (but not to non-Trinitarians or Roman Catholics). [Non-conformist] Ministers had to subscribe to all but four of the Thirty-Nine Articles (or five for Baptists)'.[59] The Corporation Act of 1661 and Test Act of 1673 introduced significant restrictions for non-Anglicans: limiting where they could meet or preach and preventing them from attending Oxford or Cambridge or holding public office – these acts remained in force until 1828.[60]

The eighteenth century saw a challenge to creedal orthodoxy in the rise of Unitarian or Arian views (which rejected the Trinity and Christ's divinity) and Deism (which additionally rejected miracles). Many attacked the classical creeds (particularly the damnatory clauses of the Athanasian Creed) and chaffed at the illegal status of non-trinitarian worship.[61] An anti-subscription movement developed and presented the 'Feathers Tavern Petition' to Parliament in 1771, requesting that clerical subscription to the BCP and Articles be abolished; the House of Commons rejected it.[62] Thus, the state demanded institutional affirmation of the creedal Christian faith. Orthodox Anglicans also responded vociferously, such as William Law (*The Case of Reason*) and Daniel Waterland (*A defense of Christ's divinity*), most famously, Joseph Butler with *Analogy of Religion*. The newly independent Protestant Episcopal Church in America reflected the same process of questioning but ultimate approval of the creedal faith; its Prayer Book (1789/90) omitted not

58 Rowell, 'The Confessions', p. 311.
59 Chapman, *Anglicanism*, p. 56.
60 Chapman, *Anglicanism*, p. 56.
61 Rowell, 'The Confessions', p. 314.
62 Perry Butler, 'From the Early Eighteenth Century to the Present Day', in S. W. Sykes and John E. Booty, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1988), pp. 35–6.

only prayers to the royal family but also the Athanasian Creed, whilst retaining the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.[63] As for attending to tradition, councils, and the Fathers, Eighteenth-century Anglicans preferred either to spend time on reasoned philosophical arguments or engage in piety of feeling (e.g., the Evangelical Revival).[64]

Collectively, these controversies indicate that the Nicene Creed contributed to Anglicanism's central self-identification as an *apostolic* church. The Anglican attachment to creedal orthodoxy was part of a broader identification with the faith found in Scripture, the Apostles, and the Fathers/primitive church; all were taken as a fundamental to the Church of England and were legally enforced as such. Though these came under challenge and dissenters gained tolerance by degrees, such latitude was not granted allowance within the Church of England itself; latitude was given to *adiaphora*, which the creedal articles were not. Unlike the authority granted to the Augsburg or Westminster Confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism, or Roman Catholicism's conciliar decrees, as O'Donovan comments, 'One might almost say that Anglicans have taken the authority of the Scriptures and the Catholic creeds too seriously to be comfortable with another single doctrinal norm'.[65] In such circumstance, the inheritance of the Council of Nicaea looms larger in the life of Anglicanism not merely because of the place it is given, but also because there are no shadows cast by other looming figures of doctrinal authority.

Changing contexts and modern texts

The nineteenth century was a watershed period for Anglicanism as two shoots with roots in earlier centuries flowered and bore fruit into the twentieth century. First, this was the tipping point in decreasing conformity within the established church and its distancing from state power. Second, the Anglican Communion came into being. Beginning with the nullification of the Test Act in 1828, there ensued a diminishment of ecclesiastical courts and gradual devolving of Parliament's powers to Church of England self-governance (e.g., with the 1919 Enabling Act and the 1970 creation of General Synod). Functionally, the Church now nominates its bishops and controls its liturgy, doctrine, and discipline.[66] It does not, however, have robust enforcement mechanisms. As Hankey explains, 'there has been a general shift away from emphasis on fundamental doctrinal, moral and liturgical law of the Church to its

63 Bryan D. Spinks, 'Liturgy and Worship', in Anthony Milton, ed., *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume I; Reformation and Identity, c.1520–1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 263.
64 Chadwick, 'Tradition, Fathers and Councils', p. 104.
65 O'Donovan, *On the 39 Articles*, pp. 11–2.
66 Paul Avis, 'Anglican Ecclesiology', p. 251.

organizational and administrative arrangements'.[67] The same can be said of the Anglican Communion. Anglicanism beyond England was largely connected with colonisation and empire, beginning with sixteenth century Ireland and ultimately spanning the globe.[68] Calls for 'a synod of colonial churches' resulted in the first Lambeth Conference in 1867 – a decennial gathering of bishops that soon included independent churches too (e.g., the Episcopal Churches of Scotland and the United States).[69] Importantly, the 'Instruments of Communion' (i.e., the Lambeth Conference and Archbishop of Canterbury – and more recently the Primates Meeting and Anglican Consultative Council) have never had any legislative or jurisdictional power over members of the Anglian Communion.[70] At the latter end of the twentieth century, Hankey describes the Communion as 'a Church once united by fixed or very slowly evolving formularies (creeds, Articles, the Book of Common Prayer, etc.), … [attempting] to unite around projects and mission promoted through a synodical and consultative system, organised with all the machinery of contemporary bureaucracies'.[71] For the past few decades, the diffuse operation of authority has exacerbated fractious debates over women's ordination and sexual orientation.

Over this period, the decline of a unifying living liturgical experience and diminishing subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles have had implications for the Nicene Creed. For two centuries, increasingly antagonistic church parties have pushed the boundaries of permissibility regarding doctrine and worship within the Church of England. In the nineteenth century, this was mainly in matters of 'style and ceremonial'[72] (e.g., the Oxford Movement) while the liturgy did not differ greatly, either in England or across the Anglican Communion.[73] By the 1920s, however, there was a sense that the BCP (1662) needed revision – which the Church of England's attempted with the BCP (1928) but Parliament famously vetoed – and by mid-century, the 1958 Lambeth Conference acknowledged an inexorable period of liturgical change had arrived.[74] Currently within the Church of England, the BCP (1662) is still the official prayer book, but congregations freely use legal alternatives (namely, *Common Worship*'s numerous volumes) and many, furthermore, stray even from these with impunity. Flexibility among several options has now become the norm, as did Eucharist as the principal act of Sunday worship, the use of simple everyday speech, greater congregational

67 W. J. Hankey, 'Canon Law', in S. W. Sykes and John E. Booty, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1988), p. 208.
68 Shriver, 'Councils, Conferences and Synods', p. 193.
69 Chapman, *Anglicanism*, p. 114.
70 W. J. Hankey, 'Canon Law', p. 202.
71 W. J. Hankey, 'Canon Law', p. 208.
72 Butler, 'From the Early Eighteenth Century', p. 30.
73 Hefling, 'Introduction', p. 3.
74 Hefling, 'Introduction', p. 4.

participation, and more inclusive language.[75] Avis rightly states, 'uniformity is a dead letter. Diversity is the order of the day'.[76] Across the Anglican Communion it is 'an emblem of identity and independence[77]' for each church to have its own Book of Common Prayer imbued by inculturation, such as the Episcopal Church (United States)'s retention of 'the stately cadences of the BCP' or the 'creative and fresh' approach of *A New Zealand Prayer Book, He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*.[78]

The Thirty-Nine Articles' role has diminished as well. In 1968, the Lambeth Conference recommended that provinces within the Communion no longer require their ordinands to assent to the Articles and consider leaving it out of their prayer books.[79] Now, many Anglican churches grant the Articles only a marginal place or none at all.[80] In the Church of England, the expectations of subscription were loosened in 1865 and then removed in 1975; now ordinands affirm not the Thirty-Nine Articles but the faith to which the Thirty-Nine Articles bear witness, rendering it an 'historic formulary', (though Canon A5 does list the Articles among places where the Church of England's doctrine 'is to be found').[81] In the Church of England, Canon C15, however, makes clear that the classical creeds have not been so demoted: 'the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation' the historic faith of the Church 'uniquely revealed in the holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds'.[82] Furthermore, the ordinand declares a certain priority between them, that is the Scriptures and Creeds reveal the faith which the Historic Formularies (secondarily) then bear witness to.

The classical creeds have not been immune to liturgical change though they have proved more endurable than most of the BCP liturgy. Lambeth 1958 condoned liturgical change, but also identified half a dozen features in Books of Common Prayer that were 'essential to the safeguarding of the unity of the Anglican Communion', the first of which was 'the use of the canonical scriptures and of the Apostles' and Nicene creeds'.[83] Their use has continued, though with less frequency in the Church of England. *Common Worship* has rubrics which allow that the Apostles' Creed or an 'authorized affirmation of faith' may follow the gospel canticle in Morning and Evening Prayer; the liturgical text itself passes silently over this possibility, meaning it is very uncommon in practice. In *Common Worship* Holy Communion, the

[75] Hefling, 'Introduction', p. 5.
[76] Avis, 'Prayer Book Use', p. 132.
[77] Hefling, 'Introduction', p. 4.
[78] Avis, 'Prayer Book Use', p. 132.
[79] Toon, 'Articles and Homilies', p. 142.
[80] Avis, 'Prayer Book Use', p. 127.
[81] Toon, 'Articles and Homilies', pp. 140–1.
[82] Paul Avis, *In Search of Authority: Anglican Theological Method from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), p. xvii.
[83] Avis, 'Prayer Book Use', p. 134.

Nicene Creed is the norm but the Apostles' Creed or, again, an 'authorised affirmation of faith' may on certain occasions replace it. Using a classical creed is only mandatory when Communion or Morning Prayer is on a Sunday or principal holy day. That Holy Communion rather than Matins has become the norm for Sunday worship, however, does, mean that for many lay Anglicans, the Nicene Creed has overtaken the Apostles' as the prevailing creed in their corporate worship.

The language of the Nicene Creed has also seen several changes. The most obvious of these is substituting 'Holy Spirit' for 'Holy Ghost'. Some churches, such as the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, have permitted replacing the Holy Spirit's 'he' with 'who', a change that both is closer to the original Latin and Greek and responds to critiques of gendered language for the un-sexed Christian God.[84] Inclusive language for humanity is more common, such that Christ's redemptive work is not for 'us men and our salvation' but simply 'us and our salvation'. The Ecumenical Movement has given greater attention to the *filioque*, which added that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. The Lambeth Conferences of 1978 and 1988 recommended that churches 'omit the Filioque clause from future revisions of the liturgical text of the Nicene Creed'[85] – not because the 'doctrine was felt to be untrue, but because it was never canonically added to the Creed'.[86] This aimed to secure closer relations with Orthodox churches which object to the Western Church's addition of the *filioque*. As with many Lambeth Conference recommendations, its implementation has been patchy.

The creeds' liturgical and catechetical role has also attenuated somewhat. Since the nineteenth century, there has been disagreement over what recitation of the classical creeds signifies. Bishop Charles Gore and F. D. Maurice, for instance, held opposing positions. Maurice believed that only 'a simple liturgical assent to the creed' was necessary since God couldn't be 'pinned down in propositions' whilst Gore stipulated that 'a literal belief in the resurrection, ascension, birth to a virgin, and other apparently supernatural statements became a badge of identity of the catholic faith of the past, present, and future, with which Christianity stood or fell'.[87] To this day, neither position has won out. The Apostles' Creed is central to the Church of England's official catechetical course *The Pilgrim's Way*, but this is not true of all popular preparations for baptism or coming to faith in Anglicanism. *The Alpha Course*'s curriculum, for instance, which was developed in England and is now used worldwide, is 'distant from the creeds, and instead focuses on a few selected

84 Paul Bradshaw, 'Anglican Eucharistic Rites Today in the Light of Modern Scholarship', *Journal of Anglican Studies* 21 (November 2023), p. 227.
85 William Craig, 'Does Omitting the Filioque Clause Betray Traditional Anglican Thought?', *Anglican Theological Review* 78 (Summer 1996), p. 1.
86 Craig, 'Omitting the Filioque', p. 2.
87 Chapman, 'Why Do We Still Recite?', p. 221.

articles and a few things (like particular models of the atonement and charismatic experience) which are not in the creeds at all'.[88]

Turning to the ecumenical councils, one more wryly expressed aspect of Anglican self-identity, at least in the Church of England, is that Anglicans 'muddle through' or are prone to an 'Anglican fudge' rather than setting out clear, shared, and consistent positions. Views on the ecumenical councils follow this pattern. As shown in Nicodim's analysis of mid-twentieth century Anglican positions on the ecumenical councils, the authority granted to Scripture, the Articles, or the Church varied greatly between camps. He concluded that

> it is certain that [Anglicans'] attitude is vague, and, as far as there are more definite statements, they contradict one another. But this is true more of the definitions than of the actual attitude of the Anglican Church towards them. In practice, the dogmatic decisions of the first ecumenical councils are adhered to in a way which we should not expect if we were to judge by the vague and conflicting definitions.[89]

The approach, in practice, is to honour and esteem the ecumenical councils while maintaining their fallibility. Similarly, Wright finds that Anglican commentators agree on Chalcedon's authoritative status without having or expressing a need for any corporate mechanism to decide as much.[90] More recently, the Bethel Agreed Statement (2022) affirms that.

> The Anglican Communion has not expressly, or officially, defined, in its historic formularies or Canons, an exact number of those councils which it receives as Ecumenical, although there is a broad consensus in favour of the first four councils, and a respect for six and sometimes even seven.[91]

It also names the Council of Nicaea as foremost among the councils, whose creed 'has been received by the universal Church as defending a correct understanding of the person of Jesus Christ' and whose bishops acted 'together to defend the true reception of the revelation of God in Christ'.[92] Furthermore, the Nicene Creed 'should be a sufficient declaration of the truth of the nature of Christ to enable reconciliation, unity and shared mission'.[93] A typical trait of

[88] Chapman, 'Why Do We Still Recite?', p. 208.
[89] Nicodim Metropolitan of Sliven, 'Anglican Church and the Ecumenical Councils', *St Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 12 (1968), p. 27.
[90] J. Robert Wright, *Quadrilateral at One Hundred: Essays on the Centenary of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Forward Movement Publications, 1988), p. 238.
[91] Anglican–Oriental Orthodox International Commission, 'The Bethel Agreed Statement; The Inheritance of Ecumenical Councils in the Church' (2022), p. 6, https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/493671/The-Inheritance-of-Ecumenical-Councils-28-October-final-text_AOOIC_021122.pdf (accessed 12 Nov 2024).
[92] 'The Bethel Agreed Statement', p. 7.
[93] 'The Bethel Agreed Statement', p. 16.

this 'fudge' however, is that dissenters from the apparently Anglican position may remain within the Anglican fold: as Nicodim observed, 'Nevertheless, because of the vagueness of the Anglican attitude, there may exist, and do exist, members of the Anglican Church who are free to disregard any of those councils without being formally disloyal to the Anglican position'.[94] The Anglican muddle may allow variance among the ranks, but it also enables those who share the same attitude to join and hold together, even when their reasons and motivations vary widely.

In modern times, how Anglicans understand what 'holds together' Anglicanism is most influentially expressed by the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. William Reed Huntington, a rector in the Episcopal Church (United States of America), first proposed a four-part framework to unite American churches in his book *The Church-Idea* (1870). He argued that Anglicanism was not a vague feeling of Englishness, but had four essential features and that these points could further serve to unite Christians more broadly.[95] Chapman summarises the four points as follows (noting that England, 'Anglicanism', the Reformation, the BCP, and Thirty-Nine Articles are absent):

1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as 'containing all things necessary to salvation', and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.
2. The Apostles' Creed, as the baptismal symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.[96]
3. The two sacraments ordained by Christ himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him.
4. The historic episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration, to the varying needs of the nations and the people's called of God into the unity of his Church.[97]

The 1888 Lambeth Conference unanimously adopted this framework and it has been reaffirmed at the Lambeth Conferences of 1920, 1948, 1958, 1988, and 1998.[98] Though, as always, the churches of the Anglican Communion were under no obligation to uphold the Quadrilateral, it is one of the most enduring and impactful Anglican documents of the past two hundred years. After 1920, Anglicans established warmer relations with the Orthodox, the partial intercommunion with the Church of Sweden, and full communion with the Old

94 Nicodim, 'Anglican Church and the Ecumenical Councils', p. 28.
95 Chapman, *Anglicanism*, p. 120.
96 Chapman, *Anglicanism*, pp. 120–1.
97 Chapman, *Anglicanism*, pp. 120–1.
98 Colin Buchanan, *Historical Dictionary of Anglicanism* (Blue Ridge Summit, United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015), pp. 368–9.

Catholic Churches in 1931.[99] It has been instrumental in church unions in North India, South India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and Anglican rapprochements with Lutherans in North America.[100] Lambeth 1998 named the Quadrilateral 'as a basis on which Anglicans seek the full, visible unity of the Church and also recognize it as a statement of Anglican unity and identity'.[101] All this is to say, that the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds continue to be essential aspects of Anglican identity.

The Virginia Report, which was presented to the 1998 Lambeth Conference, further substantiates this point. In it, the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission considers the meaning and nature of communion at a time when the Anglican Communion's bonds were strained. The Nicene Creed's marks of the Church are interpreted as follows:

> It is to be one, as the Body of Christ, to proclaim and to embody the reconciliation of all things in Christ. It is to be holy, that is, to have about it the marks of the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit; it is to be catholic, that is, to be, as Christ was, for all people, at all times, in all places; and it is to be apostolic, to witness courageously and unceasingly to the authentic and liberating gospel of Christ, as taught by the apostles.[102]

This apostolicity is largely grounded in the Creeds, that is, in a church's 'consonance with the living elements of apostolic succession and unity: baptism and eucharist, the Nicene and Apostles' creeds, the ordered ministry and the canon of Scripture'.[103] The Quadrilateral is invoked as a norm for the Church in all times and places, though admittedly being incomplete and at times ambiguous. Importantly, member churches are not expected 'translate' Church of England ecclesiology into their context, but rather be 'a whole-hearted attempt to embody the saving presence of God in a given culture',[104] just as the Elizabethan church sought to be in acknowledging the authority of the Nicene Creed.

Later controversies and theological themes

Over the past two centuries of Anglican controversies, the theological inheritances from Nicaea do not fit easily along partisan lines. The main

99 Butler, 'From the Early Eighteenth Century', pp. 44–5.
100 Buchanan, *Historical Dictionary of Anglicanism*, pp. 368–9.
101 Buchanan, *Historical Dictionary of Anglicanism*, pp. 368–9.
102 The Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, 'The Virginia Report', 1997, https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/150889/report-1.pdf (accessed 24 Nov 2024) pp. 24.
103 'The Virginia Report', p. 24.
104 'The Virginia Report', p. 24.

thrust of Anglican theology remains creedal, albeit within a broader Anglican muddle. Some have even argued that a trinitarian or Christological emphasis is a distinctive trait of Anglican theology (cf. emphases in other traditions, e.g., God's grace or the cross). A. M. Allchin, for instance, traces a particular foregrounding of the Trinity and the incarnation from Richard Hooker, through Lancelot Andrewes and Samuel Johnson to F. D. Maurice and others.[105] This trinitarian and incarnational bent in Anglican thought perennially recurs through the recent era, even while rationales for it may be vague or sit uneasily together. At the same time those who would reject or radically re-interpret the classical creeds remain within the Anglican fold – the institutional mechanisms either do not exist or are not effectively used to quash them.

Modern Anglican disputes have taken place against a background of advances in patristics and biblical scholarship which challenged previously held settlements. Nineteenth-century scholarship, including from John Henry Newman, impressed upon many how diverse – and often averse to later orthodoxy – were the Christologies of ante-Nicene Fathers.[106] Relatedly, evangelical critics of the Apostles' Creed held that the apostles would have affirmed the creed's content but that it had no 'fixed or written form' until long after the apostolic era.[107] Simple appeals to the Fathers as a unified witness were no longer tenable. Nevertheless, the Tractarian movement championed and enabled wider study through dozens of volumes of primary sources in *The Library of the Fathers* series. At the same time, the more evangelical Parker Society published primary texts from English Protestant writers during the Reformation. Appeals to the Fathers began to appear partisan. Even so, as modern Anglicanism continues to lack unifying theologians of post-antiquity, drawing on the Fathers is more characteristically Anglican than looking to anyone else.

As for the Liberal Churchmen, *Essays and Reviews* (1860) caused great controversy by rejecting traditional views on Scripture's authority and inspiration in light of contemporary biblical criticism, revealing both a deep liberal strain in the Church of England and that distinguishing fundamentals from *adiaphora* was no longer straight-forward.[108] These developments travelled the Communion; Bishop John Colenso of Natal, South Africa, gained notoriety for disputing the historical accuracy of the Bible. It was not until the 'Cambridge Triumvirate' of Lightfoot, Westcott, and Hort demonstrated that biblical criticism need not result in biblical scepticism that

105 A. M. Allchin, *Trinity and Incarnation in Anglican Tradition* (Oxford: Fairacres Publications, 1977).
106 Rowell, 'The Confessions', p. 316.
107 Rowell, 'The Confessions', pp. 319–20.
108 Butler, 'From the Early Eighteenth Century', p. 37.

'biblical criticism [gained] greater respectability within the Church'.[109] The rise of biblical criticism, Tractarians, and 'liberal' theology had multiplied interpretive possibilities and troubled the credibility of appealing to Scripture's 'plain sense'. It is now necessary to justify any hermeneutic, even a Biblicist one, rendering consonance with classical creeds invaluable in adjudicating what are permissible interpretations. For instance, B. H. Streeter proposed in *Foundations* (1912) that the resurrection was a vision caused by the living Christ not a literal physical bodily resurrection, to which Bishop Charles Gore replied that 'insincere' clergy be expelled – the controversy only subsided with Archbishop Randall Davidson's diplomatic intervention, when both agreed to affirm the creeds and not unnecessarily burden others' consciences.[110]

Through the ongoing challenge of orienting Christian faith within modern societal developments, one can trace recurring trinitarian and Christological/incarnational appeals. For example, in *The Kingdom of Christ* (1838), F. D. Maurice saw the Church of England's vocation as holding together the polarities of English Christianity through 'Divine Order grounded in the Trinity'.[111] Later, Huntington's book *The Church-Idea* (1870) took the incarnation seriously and used it as the model for the Church living through a changing society.[112] Then in 1889, *Lux Mundi: a series of studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* (ed. Charles Gore) inaugurated an era of incarnational theology, stressing 'God's immanence, the use of evolutionary ideas, a critical attitude to the Old Testament and acceptance of some limitation of our Lord's knowledge by way of a 'Kenotic' Christology'.[113] In Charles Gore's ecclesiology, the church was an extension of the incarnation.[114] The *Lux Mundi* wave of 'incarnational theology' lasted into the 1930s, where an emphasis on Christological redemption (influenced by Barth) began to predominate.[115]

Anti-Nicene views, however, were to be found. In the 1920s 'Anglican Modernism' emerged, influenced by continental liberal Protestantism; at a 1921 conference of theirs in Cambridge, Christ's divinity came under question, leading to church-wide controversy and the creation of the Archbishop's

109 Butler, 'From the Early Eighteenth Century', p. 40.
110 Mark Chapman, 'The Evolution of Anglican Theology, 1910–2000', in Jeremy Morris, ed., *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 30–1.
111 Butler, 'From the Early Eighteenth Century', p. 37.
112 Thomas, 'Doctrine of the Church', p. 219.
113 Butler, 'From the Early Eighteenth Century', p. 41.
114 Paul Avis, 'Anglican Ecclesiology', in Gerard Mannion and Lewis S. Mudge, eds., *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church* (New York and London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), p. 209.
115 Butler, 'From the Early Eighteenth Century', p. 41.

Commission on Doctrine in 1922.[116] The broader Anglican Communion weighed on such theological debates, such as Frank Weston of Zanzibar who frequently attacked modernism and liberalism.[117] The Commission on Doctrine released its report in 1938, but took a more descriptive than prescriptive tenor, surveying the variety of doctrinal opinion within the Church of England without resolving them. It passed ambiguous judgement on liberal views that treated certain creedal statements as symbolic instead of factual or historical and acknowledged the challenges of holding creeds grounded in ancient contexts of thought while maintaining the need for some historicity to remain in Christian faith.[118] The Church of England did not endorse the report.[119]

In the 1960s there was a slew of publications that attempted to update the Christian faith into a form amenable to the 'modern' mind. The most prominent was *Honest to God* (1963) by John Robinson, bishop of Woolwich, who was influenced by continental protestant theology and advocated removing all supposedly superstitious or mythic elements of the faith.[120] (Such views were evident elsewhere in the Communion, as in the Episcopal Church (United States of America) where Paul Van Buren's *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (1964) made a splash.)

In the wake of the 1960s theological scandals, there has been a resurgence of creedal orthodoxy within Anglicanism. Consternation led to the Church of England's Doctrine Commission's 1976 report *Christian Believing: the nature of Christian Fatih and its Expression in the Bible and Creeds*, which addresses but does not resolve complicating factors in appealing to the scripture and creeds. The Commission's 1981 report *We Believe in God* actively wrote to restore creedal trinitarian faith by grounding it in the experience of Christian prayer. That this creedal resurgence had taken hold at an institutional level in the Anglican Communion was clear when church leaders from around the Communion wrote the Virginia Report (1997). They founded its discussion of unity, authority, and communion in Trinitarian theology proposing that 'the unity of the Anglican Communion derives from the unity given in the triune God, whose inner personal and relational nature is communion'.[121] Among theologians, one can see a Trinitarian and Christological turn manifesting in the published work of Rowan Williams (e.g., *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 1987), Kathryn Tanner (e.g., *Jesus Humanity and the Trinity* 2001; *Christ the Key*, 2010), Sarah Coakley (*God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On The Trinity'*, 2013), and Katherine Sonderegger (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (2020)). Furthermore, a desire to work

116 Butler, 'From the Early Eighteenth Century', pp. 40–1.
117 Chapman, *Anglicanism*, p. 125.
118 Rowell, 'The Confessions', p. 322.
119 Butler, 'From the Early Eighteenth Century', p. 41.
120 Chapman, *Anglicanism*, p. 125.
121 'The Virginia Report', p. 8.

within whilst expanding the articulations of creedal Christianity is evident in recent voices from the Anglican Global South.[122]

Seeing dissenters from creedal orthodoxy within Anglicanism might tempt one to think that the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds hold less significance than they once did, in the same way that the BCP and Thirty-Nine Articles have declined. This would be inaccurate. The change, instead, has been in the nature of governance, specifically the dearth of robust enforcement mechanisms in either the Church of England or the Anglican Communion. Within this context, nothing has surpassed or supplanted the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds as the most significant extra-biblical text. While their Trinitarian and incarnational doctrines are not strictly enforced, they do give greater theological life blood to the Anglican tradition than any other single theological locus, era, or theological figure.

This article has had no pretence of settling centuries-old debates about Anglicanism's identity, however construed. Nevertheless, among the controversies and few shared textual authorities, the Council of Nicaea's significance becomes plain. If Anglicanism is characterised as Reformed and Catholic, it would be mistaken to allot the Nicene Creed or invocation of the Fathers only to its Catholic components, as the English Reformers relied upon them to justify their apostolicity. It would be inaccurate to simply assign the Nicene Creed to the Tradition-leg of Anglicanism's 'three-legged stool' of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason (as if each were an independent authority in ranked order), because the creeds are a necessary hermeneutical condition for reading the Bible as Scripture. Concurrently, while councils have no independent authority on matters of salvation apart from scripture, their fallibility did not prevent Anglicanism from holding the first four ecumenical councils in the highest of respect while subjecting them to reasoned consideration. To say that Anglicanism has no particular doctrines because it only affirms the ancient Creeds where others have early modern confessions or councils is also misleading, since it is itself a distinctive doctrine to teach that *adiaphora* doctrine and practice may be determined and enforced by the national church. In the context of *lex orandi lex credendi*, the classical creeds take on a collective devotional significance greater than a series of propositional belief statements. All of this is especially interesting because the Nicene (and Apostles') Creed is so often overlooked in current debates over the nature of Anglicanism. Since the topic of Nicaea cuts across church-party battle lines, it offers a different perspective of what Anglicanism might be, albeit one that can only be discovered within the life of prayer, communion, controversy, and faith that has always been the human life of the church; throughout, the Spirit blows where it lists and one cannot tell whither Anglicanism will go.

[122] Stephen Burns and James Tengatenga, *Anglican Theology: Postcolonial Perspectives* (London: SCM Press, 2024).