

*Let us thus think of the Trinity: Matters Essential and Matters Indifferent
in 17th Century English Theology*
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Introduction

The retrospective viewpoint is a common feature of Canadian literature. It is complemented by another viewpoint, the introspective viewpoint, that is to say, looking inward. The interplay of retrospection and introspection provides the narrative framework for certain novels, for instance the Manawaka novels of Margaret Laurence. Whether you are like Hagar in *The Stone Angel*, a ninety year old lady, looking back on her life and discovering the ways in which she has been doubly blind, both blind to herself and to others, realizing in a wonderful phrase that “*pride was my wilderness*,” or like Morag Gunn in *The Diviners*, divining an understanding of oneself through the activity of writing, the engagement with the past is altogether crucial for an understanding of identity. Indeed, the failure to come to terms with one’s past is destructive of identity. That recovery of the past, however, is actually a creative activity, for in remembering we re-appropriate the things that belong to our identity. The challenge is to have a free and honest relation to the past.

Some of you may know the story about Fr. Crouse in the early 60s, responding to a Bishop who was complaining about ‘the new theology’ that was beginning to infect seminaries and theological colleges. “*No, Bishop*,” he is said to have replied, “*not new theology, no theology*.” And now, we might ask, what would he say? Well, after a meeting of the Primate’s Theological Commission several years ago, his response was “*not much theology*.” But that’s progress. There is, it seems, at least some theology!

In a way, we are witnessing the rebirth of a more principled theological understanding. In and through what some might see as the unravelling of the Anglican Communion, there is, perhaps, the beginning of its being knit together. There is, to my mind, at least, a kind of providential miracle in the recovery of the Anglican mind. There has never been so much discussion and attention paid to the foundational documents of the Anglican way in the contemporary world as there has been in the last several decades and from most, if not, all sides of the theological spectrum. The very things which some, if not many, in the various echelons of ecclesiastical power have been quick to dismiss, have come back into prominence or at least into some kind of notice; such things as *the Thirty-Nine Articles*, *the Ordinal* and *the Book of Common Prayer*, and not merely among some group of eccentric antiquaries, like the “*Cranmer Club*” in P.D. James’ extraordinarily perceptive, if not prophetic, novel, *The Children of Men*.

The theological underpinnings of such things is to be found in what Dr. Ingalls has outlined in his paper and which I am tasked to continue in terms of seventeenth century English Theology. An impossible task, I merely hope to point out what I think are some salient features of the theology of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that

bear upon the questions of essential doctrine and matters indifferent or, to use the Melancthon's term, *adiaphora*, which weaves in and out of the period almost like the ghost of Hamlet's father. Far from being a retreat into some nostalgic and romantic Anglican past, all that I wish to suggest is what Stephen Hampton has pointed out in his *Anti-Arminians, The Anglican Reformed Tradition from Charles II to George I*, namely, that "*the Reformed theological tradition is an essential ingredient in any conception of Anglicanism.*"¹ Our interest will be to identify what is meant by reformed here. Our concern will be to negotiate the currents of the theological debates of the period which, in some sense, are perennial.

In our context, the theological concern is with the Reformed response in the English Church to two intertwined movements, the one dealing with the doctrine of salvation; the other, we might say, with the doctrine of God as it bears upon the defining principle of Christian Faith, the doctrine of the Trinity. The two movements, *intra* and *inter-ecclesial* in their scope, are Arminianism and Socinianism.

The burden of my paper is to suggest that the English Reformed Tradition, through its focus on the Creeds and the Liturgy as the devotional expression of Scriptural and Creedal doctrine, counters and, dare I say, contains, these divergent, and often overtly heterodox outlooks, and plays an important role in upholding the essential Catholicism of what has commonly been called Anglicanism. Such observations might be allowed to have some bearing upon our present confusions and uncertainties.

My argument, in brief, is that the Reformed theological tradition argues strongly for the essential Catholicism of the English Church as a full and integral part of the Church Universal, precisely through its insistence on thinking with the metaphysical traditions of the Patristic and Medieval periods at the same time as engaging with the new epistemological developments of early modernity, some of which were altogether dismissive of the forms of thinking from the past.

The Reformed tradition in the English Church from the mid-seventeenth century through to the early decades of the eighteenth century insisted on maintaining the formularies of the Faith – *the Creeds, the Articles, the Ordinal* and *the Book of Common Prayer* – against the explicit attempts to change or remove them. They did so through a double engagement of the mind, engaging intellectually the theological inheritance which they had received as well as the new forms of intellectual inquiry belonging to early modernity.

¹ Stephen Hampton, *Anti-Arminians: The Anglican Reformed Tradition from Charles II to George I*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, England, Oxford Theological Monographs, 2008), p. 273.

How the questions about grace and free will, on the one hand, and about the Trinity, on the other hand, were dealt with sheds light upon the understanding of matters essential and matters indifferent for the reformed Catholicism of the English Church.²

Arminianism and Socinianism

The terms Arminianism and Socinianism may seem remote from us and yet they are very much a part of the theological landscape of our contemporary world and communion. The terms are early modern but have a continuing force in the present. They also represent the recrudescence of earlier and heretical positions which were part of the cauldron of controversies out of which orthodox Christianity emerged. The early terms, to which Arminianism and Socinianism in all of their many and various forms, relate are, perhaps, better known as Pelagianism and Arianism: the one offers an incomplete view of the understanding of redeemed humanity; the other, an incomplete view of the divinity of Christ and, as a consequence, of God as Trinity. Socinianism would later become identified as Unitarianism.

Arminianism, as J.I Packer observes, is really quite a muddle, since “*all Arminian positions are intrinsically and in principle unstable.*”³ There are different Arminianisms that appear throughout the seventeenth century and beyond. At issue is the relationship between grace and free will. The counterpart to Arminianism on the Counter-Reformation or Roman Catholic side would be Molinism. Both represent attempts to reconcile grace and free will. Arminius was a Dutch theologian who remonstrated (which is why sometimes Arminians are called remonstrants), against the rigors of Dutch Calvinism with respect to predestination which are conveniently summed up in the acronym, TULIP.⁴ The Roman Catholic counterpart to this extreme form of Calvinism would be Jansenism. In the matter of the English Church, the contrast is between Reformed and Arminian.

The refusal on the part of the English Church to adopt, first, the Lambeth Articles of Archbishop Whitgift in 1595 and, later, to endorse the hyper-Calvinism of the Synod of Dort (1618/19) as further additions to *the Thirty-Nine Articles* has contributed to the labelling of the English Church as Arminian. In fact, it has become a commonplace to speak of the Arminianism of Anglicanism.

But, as Stephen Hampton has pointed out, this greatly overstates and misrepresents the robust forms of Calvinism or Reformed theology that remained a strong feature of English Theology. What is important for our consideration is the reasoning behind the

² On the matter of reformed Catholicism see David Curry, *The Recovery of Reformed Catholicism* (Toronto, The Prayer Book Society of Canada, The Machray Review, Number 3, 1993), pp. 1-23; an address given at Nashotah House, Wisconsin, on the occasion of its 150th anniversary, September 1993.

³ J.I. Packer, “*Arminianism*”: 17, <http://www.onthewing.org/> (accessed October 23, 2010).

⁴ TULIP: Total Depravity, Unlimited Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints.

refusal to add anything more to *the Articles of Religion*, especially with respect to the doctrine of salvation.

The moderate restrained Calvinism of *Article XVII* is buttressed by the articles that refer to the uniqueness of Christ alone without sin, the pure sacrifice, and the only name whereby men must be saved. Such buttresses were more congenial to Calvin's placing of the question in the later editions of the *Institutes* than to the developments after Calvin, such as Dort. He saw the need to bring the formal treatment of predestination under the doctrine of salvation rather than the doctrine of God; it has to be thought about in terms of the grace of Christ. Only so can it indeed be a great comfort and not a matter of anxious despair. Look to Christ, as Calvin puts it in his treatise on Predestination, for "*Christ is more than a thousand testimonies to me.*"⁵ Christ is our predestination.

At issue is how far should certain theological points of view be pushed and to what extent should they be required to be believed? The addition of articles on predestination runs the risk of eclipsing the creedal essentials of the faith; they run the risk of taking our eyes off Christ. Despite the overwhelming predominance of extreme views on predestination, Reformed Divines, like Lancelot Andrewes, resisted the addition of the *Lambeth Articles* to the *Thirty-nine Articles*.

The tendency before and after the Synod of Dort was for such questions to distort the shape of doctrine by becoming the most essential thing. Wrested from its scriptural and doctrinal moorings, predestination becomes something more than what it should be, bearing out Charles Williams' pithy observation:

*Predestination was safe with [Augustine], comprehensible in Calvin, tiresome in the English Puritans, and quite horrible in the Scottish presbyteries.*⁶

An additional and underlying theological concern is that of intruding the categories of the finite upon the infinity of God and overstating the importance of a particular doctrine. The debates about whether the divine decrees to election or reprobation are *supra* or *sublapsarian* involve a tendency to read temporal distinctions into the mind of eternity. The demand for further articles asserts a greater necessity to the doctrine than it can bear and so distorts both it and the order within which it can be thought. This was Andrewes' concern expressed in his Whit-Sunday sermon before King James in 1619, just after the Synod of Dort.

I speak it for this, that even some that are far enough from Rome, yet with their new perspective they think they perceive all God's secret decrees, the number and

⁵ John Calvin, *Concerning The Eternal Predestination of God* (London, James Clarke & Co. Ltd., trans. with an introduction by J.K.S. Reid), p. 130. Note also: "*Christ therefore is for us the bright mirror of the eternal and hidden election of God, and also the earnest and pledge.*" p. 127.

⁶ Charles Williams, *The Descent of the Dove* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Erdmans, reprinted 1971), p. 191.

*order of them clearly; are indeed too bold and too busy with them. Luther said well that every one of us hath by nature a Pope in his belly, and thinks he perceives great matters.*⁷

But the rejection of the hyper-Calvinism of Dort did not mean the endorsement of Arminianism. What is striking is *the refusal to add anything more to the Articles of Religion* out of a regard for the Creedal essentials of the Faith.

Socinianism derives from two sixteenth century Italian divines, who were related as uncle and nephew. It was the nephew, Fausto Paolo Sozzini (1539 -1604) who in his study of St. John's Gospel denied the divinity of Christ. This becomes the dominant theme albeit with many a shift and variation over the next hundred and fifty years and more. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Socinianism would gain force in the English Church resulting in the attempt to make changes to the liturgy of the Prayer Book by removing its (Athanasian) Trinitarian features. Once again, it would be Reformed Divines who would resist those changes and would argue for the orthodoxy of the English Church by maintaining its Articles and Liturgy. What is striking is *the refusal to take away anything* from the Creedal character of the Liturgy.

The Creedal Divines

"Sweet are the uses of adversity," the Duke almost casually says, perhaps too casually, in the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. He goes on to observe

*And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.*⁸

In the mid-seventeenth century, there were many who found themselves *"exempt from public haunt"* and in various forms of adversity during the period of the Commonwealth, more tellingly referred to later as *the Interregnum*, when the Puritans (so-called) were in the ascendancy and a Presbyterian polity was in force under Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate. During that time, the Episcopate and *the Book of Common Prayer* were both proscribed. And yet, like Israel during the Babylonian captivity, there was a recalling to mind of the essentials of the Christian Faith, particularly the Creeds, and the sense of their formative role in matters non-essential or indifferent. The fruits of this are captured in the works of what one might call *"the creedal divines"*.

John Pearson, George Bull and Daniel Waterland are the three great *"creedal"* divines of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, writing respectively on the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. All three produced remarkable works of historical scholarship and theological erudition. Two works, in particular, were

⁷ Lancelot Andrewes, *Ninety-Six Sermons* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, L.A.C.T., 1846), vol. III, p. 328.

⁸ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene 1, ll. 12-17.

written in English and with a view towards both the literate English reader and the erudite scholar of the ancient languages, namely, Pearson's *An Exposition of the Creed*, first published in 1659, and Waterland's *A Critical History of the Athanasian Creed*, first published in 1724.

George Bull's *Defensio Fidei Nicaenae* (1685) was written in Latin and not translated into English until the 19th century. It was directed against the views of Petavius and Simon Episcopius that denied that the ante-Nicene fathers held the same views as the Nicene fathers about the essential divinity of Christ. Bull's treatise argues for the pre-existence of the Son, the consubstantiality of the Son, the co-eternity of the Son, and the subordination of the Son – this latter point would be problematic and would play into the Socinian sensibilities. The work gained, however, the appreciation of no less a figure than the French preacher and theologian, Bossuet.

John Bramhall

The foundation for these explicitly creedal studies, however, lies with the true successor to Richard Hooker, namely, Archbishop John Bramhall, the "*Irish Canterbury*." An irenical apologist for the essential Catholicism of the English Church, his work and writings, most of them written on the Continent while in exile, offer a clear path of reasoning on matters essential and non-essential.

Bramhall's argument is based upon the idea of the unity of Scripture and Doctrine which is formally and formatively expressed in the Creeds.

*The Scripture and the Creed are not two different rules of Faith but one and the same rule, dilated in the Scripture, contracted in the Creed; the end of the Creed being to contain all fundamental points of Faith, or a summary of all things necessary to salvation.*⁹

Bramhall consistently argues that there are basically three categories of necessary things. Some things are *necessitate medii*, "necessary means of salvation"; some things are *necessitate praecepti*, "necessary as commanded", whether by God or man, the latter are not so necessary as the former; and some things have a respective necessity, a *secundum quid*, necessary by a necessity of convenience.

These categories of necessity reveal an hierarchy of truths essential and non-essential in an order of understanding. They belong to a reasoning within and upon the form of Revelation, the Holy Scriptures as God's Word written.

All truths that are revealed, are not therefore presently fundamentals or essentials of Faith; no more than it is a fundamental point of Faith that St. Paul had a cloak.

⁹ John Bramhall, *The Works* (Oxford: John Henry Packer, L.A.C.T., 1847), vol. II, "*Schism Guarded and Beaten Back*", p. 597.

*That which was once an essential part of the Christian Faith is always an essential part of the Christian Faith; that which was once no essential, is never an essential.*¹⁰

What, then, are the essentials of Faith? Bramhall persistently and consistently refers to the Rule of Faith, the Apostles' Creed, as expressing the saving content of Revelation.

*We have a certain rule of Faith, the Apostles' Creed, dilated in the Scriptures, or the Scriptures contracted into the Apostles' Creed.*¹¹

This is at once the irreducible minimum as well as the all-sufficient maximum; doctrinal restraint is doctrinal sufficiency:

*for the rule of Faith consists of such super-natural truths as are necessary to be known of every Christian, not only "necessitate praecepti" - because God hath commanded us to believe them, but also "necessitate medii" - because without the knowledge of them in some tolerable degree, according to the measure of our capacities, we cannot in an ordinary way attain to salvation.*¹²

This is not to say that there are not other things to be believed; rather, not everything which is to be believed has the same weight of necessity. There are some things which are necessary to be believed only upon the condition of their being known; once they are known, then they are to be believed. Such things are distinct, however, from "*the essentials or fundamentals of saving Faith*" which are "*necessary to be believed, not only because they are revealed, but because belief of them is appointed by God a necessary means of salvation*", *necessitate medii*.

*For though fundamentals only be simply necessary to be known of all Christians, yet there are many other truths revealed by God, which being known are as necessary to be believed as the fundamentals themselves.*¹³

They are necessary by a different kind of necessity than *necessitate medii*; they are necessary *necessitate praecepti*, by virtue of being commanded of God. Such things include the Commandments and the Dominical Sacraments. There are other things *necessitate praecepti* which have been commanded, not by God, but by man; they, too, have a necessity but not of the same order or same degree of necessity as the things commanded by God.

There is a reasoning *within* the things necessary to be believed, *necessitate medii*. There is a necessity of consequence with respect to those things, "*as he that believes that Christ is*

¹⁰ Bramhall, "*A Replication to the Bishop of Chalcedon*", Works, II, p. 279.

¹¹ Bramhall, "*Schism Guarded*", Works, II, p. 630.

¹² Bramhall, "*A Replication*", Works, II, p. 210.

¹³ Bramhall, "*A Replication*", Works, II, p. 89.

God, doth of necessity believe that He is eternal.” Moreover, “the hypostatical union of the two Natures, Divine and Human in Christ, is a fundamental truth; that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of God, that Christ had both a Divine and human will, are evident consequences of this truth, not expressly revealed.”¹⁴

The necessity of consequence is a self-limiting development within the essential shape of doctrine. There is a crucial difference between explication and addition. Consequently, when Bramhall refers to the Apostles’ Creed as the Rule of Faith, he does so in the larger context of the doctrinal explication of its inherent logical content: *“The Creed of the Apostles, explicated by the Nicene, Constantinopolitan, Ephesine and Chalcedon Fathers.”¹⁵ The Rule of Faith distilled from the Scriptures is “the Apostolical Faith professed in the Creed and explicated by the four first General Councils.”¹⁶ Moreover, Bramhall argues for the basic unity of the three catholic creeds as apostolic in doctrine. “The Nicene, Constantinopolitan, Ephesian, Chalcedonian and Athanasian Creeds, are but explications of the Creed of the Apostles, and are still called the Apostles’ Creed.”¹⁷*

How can the Creeds be the necessary form of saving doctrine? Partly because of their Scriptural and Apostolical authority – they are derived from the Scriptures and the teaching of the Apostles; partly because of their universality or catholicity – they contain *“the substantials of the Faith believed and practised by all Churches, in all ages, at all times”*;¹⁸ and, crucially, because they express the Faith into which we are baptised, the Faith with which we personally and corporately identify in the Body of Christ, the Faith of our actual incorporation and real participation in Christ Jesus. *“Into this Faith were we baptised, unto this Faith do we adhere.”¹⁹*

There is a reasoning upon the fundamentals or essentials of Faith. Such things follow from the establishment of the essentials of salvation qua essentials, to which nothing can be added, nothing taken away. Bramhall’s point is not that there is no subsequent development of doctrine, but only that there is no further development of essential doctrine, *necessitate medii*, beyond the achievement of the Fathers in their articulation of the essential doctrinal content of Revelation. *“No man dare say that the Faith of the primitive Fathers was imperfect or insufficient.”²⁰* It is precisely the achievement of doctrinal sufficiency or doctrinal completeness that provides for a subsequent development of doctrine in such matters as Sacraments and Discipline and requires that essential doctrine be the measure of their adequacy.

The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion are a particular example of a reasoning upon the fundamentals of the Faith. For English Reformed theology, the Articles constitute a

¹⁴ Bramhall, “A Replication”, Works, II, p. 90.

¹⁵ Bramhall, “Schism Guarded”, Works, II, p. 479.

¹⁶ Bramahll, “Schism Guarded”, Works, II, p. 352.

¹⁷ Bramhall, “Schism Guarded”, Works, II, p. 476.

¹⁸ Bramhall, “A Replication”, Works, II, p. 204.

¹⁹ Bramhall, “A Reply to S.W.’s Refutation”, Works, II, p. 288.

²⁰ Bramhall, “A Replication”, Works, II, p. 277.

kind of body of systematic theology, not a confessional statement, which embraces things essential and things non-essential in the hierarchy of their non-essentiality.

Bramhall is particularly clear about the purpose of the Articles; they are a system of theological truths which are ordered upon and towards the necessary truths of the faith and which build upon them without themselves becoming in any way confessions of faith. Primarily they have a positive and formative force precisely through their ordered relation to essential doctrine upon which they reasonably build and to which they recall us. As Bramhall observes of the Articles:

*Some of them are the very same thing that are contained in the Creed; some others of them are practical truths, which come not within the proper list of points or articles to be believed; lastly, some of them are pious opinions or inferior truths, which are proposed by the Church of England to all her sons, as not to be opposed; not as essentials of Faith necessary to be believed by all Christians "necessitate medii", under pain of damnation.*²¹

The Creed offers a way of gathering the images of experience and tradition into the pattern of saving doctrine. Bramhall develops a distinction of Bonaventure's theology through which the Creed gives shape to the thinking which follows after it: some things are *de Symbolo*; some things are *contra Symbolum*; and some things are *praeter Symbolum*.²² This becomes critical to the vindication of the essential Catholicism of the English Church.

Some things are "*de Symbolo*" - "*contained in the Creed.*" What sorts of things are these? They are the things which belong to a reasoning within the essentials and which constitute a reasonable explication of them: "*those things which are 'contained in the creed', [are] either in the letter or in the sense, or may be deduced by good consequence from the Creed, - as the Deity of Christ, His two Natures, the Procession of the Holy Ghost, the addition of these is properly no addition, but only a explication.*"²³

Bramhall seeks to vindicate the English Church as a true and integral part of the universal Church. Writing against Roman Catholics as well as non-Episcopal Protestants, he is at pains to articulate how there can be legitimate differences between churches which are still part of the true Church.

Time and time again, Bramhall comes back to the centrality of the Creed. His complaint with the Roman Catholic Church is not that it is not a true Church - he explicitly argues, as did Hooker, that it is a true Church but with errors. Bramhall calls it a true metaphysical church but one that is morally corrupt. Why? Because it has added to the foundations of the creedal faith other things as necessary to be believed. He has in mind the Council of Trent and additions to the Faith which he refers to as the Creed of Pius

²¹ Bramhall, "*Schism Guarded*", Works, II, p. 476.

²² Bramhall, "*An Answer to M. De la Milletiere*", Works, I, p. 25; and "*Schism Guarded*", Works, II, p. 475.

²³ Bramhall, "*Schism Guarded*", Works, II, p. 475.

IV. Not all of the additions at Trent are erroneous or wrong in themselves in his view; what is wrong is adding new things as required to be believed. He thinks that what Trent has mandated are not so much *contra symbolum* as *praeter symbolum*.

Bramhall argues that Faith, Sacraments and Discipline are the three essentials for Christian churches, and for determining the degree of communion between churches. I wonder if it might now apply to determining the degree of communion within a church. Sacraments and Discipline do not have the same weight and importance as matters of Faith. As he puts it, they “*are not reckoned among the credenda or, ‘things to be believed,’ but among the agenda or, ‘things to be acted.’*”²⁴

He objects to making the *agenda* part of the *credenda*, things which are to be believed *necessitate medii*, because this means adding to the foundation. “*That which was once an essential part of the Christian Faith is always an essential part of the Christian Faith; that which was once no essential, is never an essential.*”²⁵

This way of thinking is born out in the practical exercise of his episcopate as well. The Irish Church had adopted the extreme Calvinism of the Lambeth Articles in 1615. Bramhall successfully persuaded its Synod in 1634 to adopt the English Articles by way of the simple expedient of setting aside the Lambeth Articles.

The removal of the Lambeth Articles does not mean the embrace of Arminianism. Bramhall, however, recognized that there are some areas where charity and a restraint of mind are imperative. Richard Baxter, one of the great Puritan giants of the spiritual life, wrote against Bramhall by way of an attack on Hugo Grotius’ defense of episcopacy. Bramhall, in response, notes that Baxter, too, had come to recognize that much of the Arminian controversy was “*more about words than matter.*”²⁶ Baxter’s own position was a modified form of Arminianism known as Amyraldism.

A bit like Elizabeth the First’s astute observation, that “*we have no desire to make windows into men’s souls,*”²⁷ Bramhall observes, in relation to the Arminian/Extreme Calvinist debate, that “*nothing is more hidden than true grace: we understand it not certainly in another, hardly in ourselves.*”²⁸ It is the counsel of charitable restraint. The English Church would contain within its ranks both Arminians and Reformed.

With respect to Socinianism, however, Bramhall is much more adamant. “*As for Adamites and Quakers, we know not what they are; and for Socinians, we hold them worse than Arians. The Arians made Christ to be a secondary God, - ‘erat quando non erat;’ but the Socinians make Him to be a mere creature.*”²⁹ He anticipates the direction of the

²⁴ Bramhall, “*Schism Guarded*”, Works, II, pp. 470-471.

²⁵ Bramhall, “*A Replication*”, Works, II, p. 279.

²⁶ Bramhall, “*Vindication of Episcopacy*”, Works, III, p. 506.

²⁷ Queen Elizabeth I, <http://www.elizabethi.org/> (accessed October 24th, 2010).

²⁸ Bramhall, “*Vindication of Episcopacy*”, Works, III, p. 510.

²⁹ Bramhall, “*Schism Guarded*”, Works, II, p. 564.

controversy. *“Socinians and Arians may admit the Apostles’ Creed interpreted their own way, but they ought to admit it, as it is interpreted by the first four general Councils; that they do not, and so they believe not all fundamentals as they should do.”*³⁰

This would reach a point of crisis in the modified Socinianism of Samuel Clarke in 1712 who would take exception to the Athanasian Creed and the Athanasian elements of Trinitarian theology in the English Church, proposing their excision from the liturgy and wanting to return to a pre-Athanasian understanding of theology that better suited the deism of Isaac Newton with whom he is associated. Daniel Waterland, also a friend of Samuel Clarke, would undertake a magisterial apology of the Athanasian Creed against Clarke, especially vindicating the intellectual coherence of the forms of metaphysical theology which it embraces.

The constant emphasis on doctrinal restraint or doctrinal minimalism is a strong feature of the English Reformed tradition. Central to that idea is the Creed understood not merely as a set of formal statements but as foundational and formative principles which are embodied and expressed in the liturgy. A whole array of devotional works about *the Book of Common Prayer* bears witness to this sensibility.

Pearson and Waterland

In the 1650s, John Pearson (1612-1686) undertook a series of sermons *“upon such texts of Scripture as were on purpose selected in relation to the Creed”* for the parishioners of St. Clement’s, Eastcheap. In 1659 he published these lectures as *An Exposition of the Creed*, a work which he subsequently edited five times, the last edition at his hand being in 1683. An outstanding work of scholarly erudition and theological acumen, it illustrates the same theological tendency as Bramhall in terms of the unity of Scripture and Doctrine, the necessity of distinguishing carefully between things essential and non-essential, and a strong sense of the historical in interpreting the different ways in which essential concepts can be legitimately expressed. It breathes, in other words, the same air of doctrinal restraint and illustrates the same sense of the necessity of thinking upon the essentials. In his Epistle Dedicatory he notes that:

*The principles of Christianity are now as freely questioned as the most doubtful and controverted points; the grounds of faith are as safely denied, as the most unnecessary superstructions, that religion hath the greatest advantage which appeareth in the newest dress, as if we looked for another faith to be delivered to the saints: whereas in Christianity there can be no concerning truth which is not ancient; and whatsoever is truly new, is certainly false. Look then for purity in the fountain and strive to embrace the first faith, to which you cannot have a more probable guide than the Creed, received in all ages of the Church; and to this I refer you as it leads you to the Scriptures, from whence it was at first deduced....*³¹

³⁰ Bramhall, *“Schism Guarded”*, Works, II, p. 619.

³¹ John Pearson, *An Exposition of the Creed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd edition, revised and

The tendency of our age is the exact opposite. Anything new is surely better than anything old. Therefore we are called upon to re-image God, the Church and our humanity and to embrace an array of new creeds that are by no means compatible with the three great Catholic Creeds. Out with the old, it must seem. A complete contrast and opposition, it must seem.

And yet, such an opposition is overstated and false. The whole history of the Church is captured in the dialectic of the Holy Spirit, on the one hand, "*guiding us into all truth*"³² and, on the other hand, "*teaching us all things*"³³ precisely by recalling us to the words of Christ, "*bringing all things to our remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*"³⁴ Ultimately, everything is gathered into the divine communion of the Trinity.

Pearson begins his treatment of the Creed with a careful consideration of the nature of belief, engaging the philosophical and theological currents of the period, specifically alluding to the epistemological discourses of rationalism and empiricism and drawing upon them in his theological argument as well as speaking directly to the issue of atheism.

God, he says, echoing Descartes, can neither be deceived nor be a deceiver. What was for Descartes an argument for the possibility of any kind of certain knowledge beyond the bare emptiness of the thinking self, "*I think therefore I am,*" even if God is a deceiver, has become appropriated by Pearson in the self-same language to argue for the traditional attributes of the infinite goodness and the infinite wisdom of God. "*It is therefore most infallibly certain, that God being infinitely wise, cannot be deceived; being infinitely good, cannot deceive: and upon these two immovable pillars standeth the authority of the testimony of God,*"³⁵ a testimony which is distinguished from the testimony of man.

With respect to the first article, "*I believe in God,*" Pearson engages both the rationalist argument of Descartes about the ontological proof for the existence of God and the empiricist argument of John Locke about what is known through the senses. It is a sophisticated and thoughtful form of engagement that locates the place of the theological through an exploration of the philosophical in certain of its modern forms. Critical to the argument, and a point upon which everything turns, is the recognition of the metaphysical distance between God and man and the dangers of collapsing the divine into the world. "*It is true, indeed,*" Pearson says, "*that to give a perfect definition of God is impossible, neither can our finite reason hold any proportion with infinity: but yet a sense of this Divinity we have, and the first and common notion of it consists in these three particulars, that it is a Being of itself, and independent from any other; that it is that upon which*

corrected by Rev. E. Burton, 1847), p. x.

³² John 16.13

³³ John 14. 26

³⁴ John 14. 26

³⁵ Pearson, "*On the Creed*", p. 9

all things which are made depend; that it governs all things."³⁶ A more succinct and exact summary of the most basic and essential idea of God would be hard to find. This, however, leads him to the critical epistemological question; how do we know "*the existence of such a Being?*"³⁷

Pearson mentions without acknowledgment the Cartesian view of the idea of God and his existence as being innate in us – "*some have imagined that the knowledge of a Deity is connatural to the Soul of man*" – only to dismiss that idea because "*he conceives the Soul of man to have no connatural knowledge at all.*"³⁸ He argues, instead, that we know through the senses and in ways that suggests the epistemology of Locke. "*If the Soul of man be at the first like a fair smooth table, without any actual characters of knowledge imprinted on it (Locke's tabula rasa, the mind as a blank slate); if all the knowledge which we have comes successively by sensation, instruction and rational collection; then we must not refer the apprehension of a Deity to any connate notion or imbred opinion.*"³⁹ Exit Descartes, enter Locke.

Pearson goes on to interrogate the ontological argument from the standpoint of Anselm, where what is at stake are the modal qualities of the argument whereby the existence of God is captured in the idea of God itself. Pearson's response is essentially the argument of Thomas; while self-evident (perhaps) in itself, it is not so to us, since, as Pearson argues, if a man "*doubts of this truth,*" then, it is very irrational to tell him "*that he must believe because it is evident unto him, when he knows that he therefore only doubts of it, because it is not evident unto him.*"⁴⁰

I have troubled you with these particular aspects of his argument because they illustrate the quality of the engagement with the philosophical currents of the age and bring out the integrity of the theological argument. Descartes, of course, was very clear that his intellectual labours did not in any way trespass but only support the endeavours of the theologians. It was a different matter with Locke, whose deliberate silence about the Trinity played an important role in the attempt to denigrate, downplay and dismiss the Trinitarian character of Anglican liturgy and theology, most notably in America.

Pearson's subtle negotiation of these philosophical mine-fields is instructive. He provides a considered theological argument for the existence of God, based upon the evidence of its connection unto other truths, namely, the philosophical arguments about a first cause. In this, Pearson is following the argument of Thomas Aquinas.

This means that his lectures on the Creed anticipate the addresses that he gave as Lady Margaret Professor of Theology where he deliberately takes up the question about which texts should be used to teach theology: the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard or the

³⁶ Pearson, "*On the Creed*", p. 24.

³⁷ Pearson, "*On the Creed*", p. 25.

³⁸ Pearson, "*On the Creed*", p. 25.

³⁹ Pearson, "*On the Creed*", p. 25.

⁴⁰ Pearson, "*On the Creed*", p. 25.

Summae Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas. He argues for the latter and while Stephen Hampton suggests that this may be politically motivated and reflects the distaste for anything Calvinistic in the post-Commonwealth period, it may also be the case that Pearson has recognized the significant truth that what was missing in the controversies of the age was much in the way of a theological understanding about the transcendent qualities or attributes of God. Aquinas' text is much more direct on such basic points than Calvin. Stephen Hampton shows how much of that classical and medieval language and understanding had been lost by Tillotson, Clarke and others. Pearson's endeavour was to recover the integrity of the theological categories through which to think God in his majesty and truth.

Archbishop Tillotson, Archbishop of Canterbury (1691-1694), embodies the Arminian extremes allied with Socinian sympathies against which the Reformed divines contended. As C.J. Abbey candidly observed about Tillotson's preaching: "*in the substance no less than in the form of his writings men found exactly what suited them - their own thoughts raised to a somewhat higher level, and expressed just in the manner which they would most aspire to imitate.*"⁴¹ Are we the measure of the Word of God or is the Word of God the measure of us? This connects, too, with the assumption that everything should be accessible to the average man. The Latitudinarian approach was fundamentally anti-intellectual. This was the spirit against which Pearson was already taking issue and against which Daniel Waterland would also contend. It remains with us in terms of the doctrine of accommodation; God is measured by us.

Stephen Hampton points out that Tillotson in his sermons on the nature of God has inverted the nature of the theological language about God: the communicable attributes of God are to be understood univocally; for instance, the goodness of God means the same thing as the goodness of humans, while the incommunicable attributes are alone to be understood analogically but only as to become essentially meaningless. The former takes precedence over the latter, which is another way of saying that God is ultimately measured by us. What is lost is the richness of the theological language of analogy. Pearson rejected the distinction between the incommunicable and communicable attributes, preferring the categories of negative and positive attributes. Fundamental to the reformed divines was the importance of analogical thinking.

To think analogically is to think upwards. It means never to lose sight of the distinction between God and man and to refuse to collapse divinity into humanity. "*Not by conversion of Godhead into flesh but by taking of manhood into God*"⁴² is the way in which the Athanasian Creed expresses a fundamental theological sensibility that both an Arminian and a Socinian approach ignores or denies. If everything is to be measured by our experience and point-of-view, then God is nothing or an idol. Pearson, writing

⁴¹ C.J. Abbey & J. H. Overton, *The English Church in the 18th Century* (Project Gutenberg eBook), Ch. IV, Latitudinarian Churchmanship (1) Character & Influence of Archbishop Tillotson's Theology (C.J. Abbey), p. 93.

⁴² Athanasian Creed, BCP, Cdn. 1962, p. 697.

before the Latitudinarianism of a Tillotson, knew already the prevalence of idolatry over atheism.

This Athanasian sensibility became explicitly the interest of Daniel Waterland both in his remarkable work, *A Critical History of the Athanasian Creed* and in a host of other writings on the Trinity. Apart from the rigours of the historical argument about the reception of the Athanasian Creed and the exploration of the theories about its authorship, what stands out is his confidence in thinking metaphysically. Waterland provides the counter to the confused thinking of Trinitarians, like William Sherlock, and Anti-Trinitarians, such as Samuel Clarke.

The theological concept of “*person*” regarded as “*consciousness*” by Sherlock or as “*intelligent agent*” by Clarke proved altogether inadequate to the doctrine of the Trinity and a far remove from its metaphysical moorings as established by Augustine and Boethius as a way of speaking, first and foremost, about the divine relations and equally, as providing philosophical coherence to the images of Scripture about God in himself and in relation to us.

Philip Dixon, in his book *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* speaks of “*the fading of the Trinitarian imagination*” in late 17th and early 18th century English theology, and suggests that it was only through the liturgy of *the Book of Common Prayer* that some semblance of orthodox Christianity was preserved in the English Church.⁴³

Dixon demonstrates that the epistemological assumptions belonging to the English enlightenment and its nominalistic background, together with the turn to the practical and the moral, contributed to a loss of the analogical imagination so necessary in thinking the Faith. And yet, as Stephen Hampton points out, both Pearson and Waterland, among others, bear witness to a more robust reformed tradition that was consciously intent on the recovery of the integrity of theology and capable of engaging the various exuberances and extremes of enlightenment culture. “*Let [us] thus think of the Trinity,*” think of the Trinity in this way, the way of apophatic and cataphatic theology, the way of negation and affirmation.

Conclusion

Anglican theology has been consistently marked, it is fair to say, by theological disagreement. Yet, the foundational documents that define the Anglican character and identity have allowed for living with theological differences at the same time as providing for its claim to be an integral part of the universal church. In our history, there have been instances of the efforts to dismiss and remove the foundational documents that define an Anglican *magisterium*; in short, to marginalize the reformed

⁴³ Philip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century*, (London and New York: T & T Clark Ltd, *A Continuum Imprint*, 2003), Intro.

tradition and, by extension, the inheritance of patristic and medieval theology with which it is much more closely allied than many have appreciated.

The Anglican Reformed tradition, as Stephen Hampton puts it, "*continued to insist upon the evangelical teaching of justification by faith alone, upon the established scholastic way of expressing Trinitarian doctrine, and upon the broadly Thomist understanding of the divine nature which was shared by both Roman Catholic and Reformed theologians.*"⁴⁴

Fitzsimmons Allison, J.I. Packer, Gordon Rupp and others have been mistaken in the over-estimation of the Arminianism of English Church. As Hampton shows, the English Reformed tradition is much more substantial and robust in its clarity about the relation of Scripture and Doctrine and about thinking metaphysically. In its charity, too, it shows itself willing to embrace a number of inadequate or incomplete positions. On the matter of essentials and non-essentials, we have seen how this tradition resisted both the addition of articles to be believed as well as the deletion of matters that have been received as essential to Faith. It belongs to this approach to articulate a principled form of thinking upon the essentials formatively that guides the understanding of matters indifferent.

Rex Murphy's recent observation about Canadian identity⁴⁵ can apply to Anglican identity. Just as there is an essence to Canadian identity, so there is an essence to Anglican identity; with respect to both there is a core. It is that which enables the embrace of diversity. Not under the auspices of inclusivity, but out of respect for a kind of restrained comprehensiveness that is reluctant to insist upon what cannot be required.

At a time when the Anglican Communion is beset by the additions to what is required to be accepted and by the impulse to reject what has been formerly and formally received, the Reformed tradition of our Anglican heritage stands as a strong witness to the qualities of an Anglican identity grounded in theology. There is, it seems, some theology!

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Atlantic Theological Conference,
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⁴⁴ Hampton, "*Anti-Arminians*", p. 272.

⁴⁵ "Canada isn't a blank slate waiting for the inscriptions of unending diversity. There is an essence to this country. What we have in common, the core, is that which enables the embrace of diversity in the first place", Rex Murphy, <http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2010/05/29/michael-ignatieffs-out-of-country-experience>.