

Two Greek Words

It could be set as a question in Senior Sunday School: ‘Where in *The Book of Common Prayer* will you find two transliterated Greek words?’ By comparison, there are many examples of Latin texts, not least in translations of the opening words of the Psalms and Canticles. In his 1550 Ordinal, Cranmer incorporated two untranslated rubrics in their original Sarum Latin; however, nowhere else are there any Greek words. And the answer to the question? They can be found in Article IX of The XXXIX Articles of Religion.

The XXXIX Articles of Religion comprise the essential, codified beliefs of the Anglican Church. Under the direction of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer a series of forty-two Articles were formulated in 1553, the year following the publication of the Second English Prayer Book. They were repudiated by Queen Mary I in her enthusiasm that England and Ireland should embrace again the Roman Catholic religion. On her accession to the throne in 1558 Queen Elizabeth was keen that reforms initiated during the reign of her half-brother Edward should be continued, but she was aware of pressures on her from both ends of the ecclesiastical spectrum; from extremists who, on the one hand, demanded a return to more Catholic forms of worship, from the days of her father, Henry VIII, and, on the other, those who insisted on various, reformed, Protestant principles. As a pragmatist Elizabeth was eager to satisfy the needs of both parties and arranged for an edited edition of the Articles to be formulated, albeit in somewhat ambiguous prose. This stratagem provided a broad definition of faith, specific enough such that it could not be accepted by Roman Catholics and Anabaptists, yet sufficiently flexible to allow for a wide variety of Protestant beliefs. She was eager to avoid unnecessary disputes and attempted to accommodate all of her citizens within one ecclesiastical authority, an authority that tolerated individual variations, yet confirmed her as the Supreme Governor of the established Church of England. She believed sincerely in her own faith, but she also recognised the need for some religious toleration; she

accepted that Catholics and Protestants were both part of the same Christian belief. Later in her reign she exclaimed, ‘There is only one Christ, Jesus, one faith, all else is a dispute over trifles.’ Elizabeth said that she had:

no meaning or intent that any of her subjects should be troubled or molested by examinations or inquisitions in any matter of their faith, as long as they should not gainsay the authority of the Holy Scriptures, or deny the articles of faith contained in any of the Creeds received and used in the Church: they might retain their own opinions in any rites or ceremonies appertaining to religion, as long as they should in their outward conversations shew themselves quiet and conformable, and not manifestly repugnant to the laws for resorting to their ordinary churches.

Based on Cranmer’s 42 Articles a revised set, The XXXIX Articles of Religion, was established by a Convocation of the Church in 1563. In 1571 Parliament made obedience to the Articles a legal requirement for all ordained clergy. That statutory demand no longer holds but, nevertheless, the Articles remain the bedrock of Anglican conviction. They have been widely adapted, often depending on local circumstances, and still form the creedal basis of many Anglican and Protestant churches, world-wide.

The first eight of the Articles cover Trinitarian theology and Holy Scripture; they are followed by six which concentrate on sin, redemption, salvation and justification. Article IX is entitled ‘About Original or Birth-sin’ and it contains the two Greek words *phronema sarkos* (φρονεμα σαρκος).

At the Council of Trent the Roman Catholic Church adopted a doctrine of Original Sin which was essentially a form of Pelagianism. Pelagius (360–420) taught that the human will was entirely subservient to the will of God and that sin only occurred when people deliberately performed wrong deeds. By contrast, the Anglican doctrine of Original Sin was different. Following the writings of Augustine (354–430), Protestant Reformers believed that the sin of Adam affected the very nature of all humans; human nature was essentially corrupt

and humans had a natural propensity to do wrong; wrong deeds sprang from that sinful nature. As a corollary, Anglican divines argued that original righteousness was a property added by God to the first humans, it was not a *de facto* element of their innate character. The purity of mankind was irretrievably lost when Adam sinned. Article IX argues that even baptised believers, who have been born again in the Spirit, still retain a predisposition to sin. The Greek words *phronema tes sarkos* (which may be translated as ‘disposition of the flesh’) were used by Saint Paul, in his Epistle to the Christian Church in Rome, to differentiate between those who are carnally minded with those who are spiritually minded (Rom 8: 6–7 AV). The former position leads to death, the latter to eternal life. The NRSV has, at verse six: ‘To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace’. Serious consequences await those whose minds are set on material things instead of heavenly things.

These two Greek words, then, are of the greatest significance in the moral life of a Christian. Could this be why the compilers of The XXXIX Articles included them in their text? If nothing else, they attract attention to the necessity to be spiritually minded (or, rather, not to be carnally minded), if, that is, anyone takes the trouble to read them.

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