

*A Brief Personal Introduction*

In 1969 I became a Christian.

Like most new converts, I started out with a vague concept that “the bible is the word of God”, without giving very much thought to just what that might mean. My conversion had been heavily influenced by a group of Christians in my college who were far more knowledgeable than myself, and I simply adopted their viewpoint. The bible was “The Book” and was God’s chosen way of communicating with us, and that was it.

In 1971 I joined the extremist “Children of God” sect (there’s more on this in *How to Survive in the Pharisee Church*). The Children of God regarded the King James Version from the 16<sup>th</sup> century as the only divinely ordained translation, and all the others as devil-inspired imitations designed to confuse. Not surprisingly they also believed that the world was created by God, ex nihilo, over a seven day period in 4004 BC. (I’ll call this idea **young earth creationism** from now on—it’s a key fundamentalist belief). I still knew little about the bible, but I knew quite a lot about science, and I had a big struggle with the creation issue. However, since I was very much in awe of the group members around me, I more or less came to terms with their belief.

In 1973 I was back in university, studying academic theology. On day one, there were quickly pointed out to me a variety of reasons why the idea of the KJV as God’s single flawlessly reliable translation was hopelessly flawed, and with I very quickly dropped it. With some relief I also quickly discarded the fundamentalist approach to science. I then took avidly to the rational approach to biblical study—treating the documents without preconceptions of any sort, and dealing with them in the same way as any rational analysis of any other ancient documents.

I found this rational approach to the bible very rewarding—it seemed to me to make a lot of sense, and relieved a lot of uneasy feelings that had been lurking at the back of my mind for a long time. But at the same time I found myself confronting a quandary that many theology students encounter. In the early mornings I was reading the bible in a devotional way, looking to hear from God from it in a way relevant to my day-to-day life; but later in the day I was studying biblical documents from a different standpoint, just seeing them as historical documents to be analysed by rational means. I was compartmentalizing my life, approaching the bible in two different ways and switching between the two according to the time of day.

Fairly soon—but probably after I’d finished the theology course and returned to studying medicine—I had a long hard think about that one. Compartmentalizing is always a potentially unhealthy activity. God is not compartmentalized, and neither should I be. Either the bible is one thing or the other. I had to decide which and follow that.

Finally I reached a rational conclusion. My study of theology seemed to be based on objective truth, as ascertained by valid analytical techniques. If that was so, I couldn’t go against that. Truth is truth and can’t be anything else, in every sphere. If that was so, then I shouldn’t really be treating it, in a devotional sense, as something other than what it objectively was, by virtue of its origins and nature.

I had to find another way to approach the bible in my day-to-day life that would still be compatible with my spiritual convictions, formed on the day of my conversion, and unchanged to this day. That is, that we have a supernatural God who sent his son as an atonement for our sins, and who is alive and working in the world today, doing miracles in people’s hearts and in the world at large, on a daily basis.

What I ended up with was an approach to the bible that I call the principle of **original intent**. It’s very simple—you just take each book or document, ask yourself **How did the writer of this book intend it to be read? Did he mean it to be historically literal, or figurative, or speculative, or allegorical, or devotional, or what?** And then I just follow that intent, read it the way it seems to me that the writer would have wished it to be read.

Having reached this less than startling insight, I now look back and wonder why it took me so long to get there. After all, it's such an obvious, common sense, way to approach anything at all, why such a struggle to get to the point of applying it to the bible also?

I'm not sure the answer to that one. I think that when we've just been through the massively supernatural experience of coming to know God for the first time in our lives, it seems very natural to automatically take on board a massively supernatural guidebook to the life experience, called the bible. It's a simple solution, and we embrace it willingly without examining it too deeply. I think there are a few other reasons as well, which will come out in what I say later, so I won't pursue the point here. I'll just conclude these introductory remarks by saying:

Reading the bible on the principle of original intent has been, for me, a revelation. All the problems of synthesizing the bible with science, external history, etc. just melt away. These books, I've realized, were written in an extraordinarily conscientious and honest manner; if they don't always match perfectly with science or history, it's because the writers never intended them to. They never made that claim, and probably never anticipated that anyone would suppose that they should.

I still read the bible devotionally—after all large tracts of it were clearly specifically intended to be read that way. The history I read as history. I enjoy the stories; and if the writer has used those stories as a rack on which to hang spiritual lessons, I try to absorb the those lessons in the way he intended that I should. Prophecy I read as prophecy. The authors clearly present them as supernaturally given, and I'm happy to read them as such.

Overall, I find the process of bible reading to be more meaningful, dynamic and vivid than it was before, as I focus on what was, after all, the primary purpose of the bible documents as they were intend. And finally, this gives me something I can present as a viable model to the non-Christian world with a straight face, without denying evident worldly realities, without demanding unlikely assumptions, and without any dishonest massaging of the facts.

Now, to . . . **why I am not a fundamentalist** (in no particular order, and leaving out the science.)

- **I don't think the bible was ever intended to be read from a fundamentalist standpoint** Everything else I read, I read according to the principle of **original intent**. That's how I read the newspapers. That's how I read medicine (would anyone really wish me to do other?). That's how I read fiction—as fiction, not fact. And to approach the bible in the same way seems to me to be good sound common sense.

Let's take an example . . .

An obvious one—the **creation story in Genesis**.

How did the writer intend it to be read? Did he want it read as literal historical truth on a rigid timeline, or what? If he were here with us now and we could ask him, what would he say?

I suspect his answer would be something like this:

*"I've written this account with as much care as I possibly could. I've tried to be true to what has been handed down as far as I can, because it's only right to treat these sources with maximum respect. The narrative seems to me to make a lot of sense—after all, we all know that the earth is a flat plate, with a bright blue canopy over the top held up by pillars. And we know that the sun, moon, and stars are embedded in that canopy, to endlessly traverse back and forth as night follows day. So can you give me a better explanation of where it came from?*

*But as to its being literally, factually, true in every detail—how could I possibly know? I do the best I can with the sources available to me, and that's it. That's all I can do—collate my material as carefully and responsibility as I can, draw the spiritual lessons that seem to be the most appropriate, and leave it at that."*

I don't think the writer of Genesis seriously expected us to take his book as literal truth. In fact, I expect that he assumed we'd have enough sense to understand that for ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

There's plenty in the bible that we can take literally of course. Read the historical sections of Jeremiah, for example. It's so vivid, so factually detailed, it's hard to doubt that it's an essentially accurate account, written down at the time it happened. And the prophecies themselves are prophecies, just what they claim to be—God speaking, directly, in a supernatural way.

I won't go into more examples. It's not for me to do—it's all our jobs, as we read the bible, to ask ourselves, how did the writers intend this to be taken? It's our responsibility, and it's also a big part of the fun of responsible bible study!

- **Does the bible claim to be literal or infallible?**

A good starting point for this is the gospel of Luke, since the writer, helpfully, gives a short introduction in which he explains exactly how the gospel came to be written. Here it is:

*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, <sup>3</sup> it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. (Luke 1.1-4)*

This is about as clear as it gets!

There were eye witnesses. They passed on what they saw and heard to others. I've taken what was passed down, and turned it into an orderly account. In the same way as others have done before me (Mark? Matthew?).

It's careful. It's responsible and reliable. It even claims to be authoritative. But it never claims to be inerrant. There's no suggestion of any magical process in the writing of this book. Luke has done his research, and done it carefully. Then he has turned it into a narrative; and if that means turning remembered stories into dialogue, or creating a timeline to make a readable story, we should be happy with that. Luke would have claimed no more for his book. That's what it was when it was written. And to try and argue that God has somehow taken this and turned it magically into something it was never intended to be seems not just unnecessary, but unhelpful.

Let's change tack:

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<sup>1</sup> I found an interesting insight to the question of how ancient writers approached the question of literal historicity in another book, written around 27BC, so somewhat later than Genesis but before the New Testament. This is Livy's *The Early History of Rome*, a key historical source document for our understanding of Roman history. On the first page, in his introductory remarks, Livy writes this:

*"Events before Rome was born or thought of have come to us in old tales with more of the charm of poetry than of a sound historical record, and such traditions I propose neither to affirm or refute. There is no reason, I feel, to object when antiquity draws no hard line between the human and the supernatural: it adds to the dignity of the past, and if any nation deserves the privilege of claiming a divine ancestry, that is our own . . ."* and so he goes on. Then he launches into all the old stories of the birth of Rome, Aeneas fleeing from the burning wreck of Troy; Romulus and Remus, abandoned by their mother and saved from death by a she-wolf who suckled them; and so on, with all the other legendary, though highly dubious, stories of Rome's foundation that were so dear to every Roman citizen's heart. Does this make Livy in any way dishonest, or a liar? Or course not. It's not the way a modern academic theologian would write, but why should it be? Livy doesn't claim it to be true, and doesn't expect us to take it that way.

- **Fundamentalism, Strict Constructionism, and Legalism**

Americans, I'm told, have two different ways of looking at their Constitution (determined, at least in part, by what party they support.)

One can be called **INTENTIONALISM**.

They say,

*"What were the authors really intending to convey? Let's look at the context, the historical circumstances, and use a bit of common sense in seeing what this might mean for today".*

Intentionalists are primarily interested in the **original intent**.

The other is **STRICT CONSTRUCTIONISM**.

On this approach, you simply look at the wording, the strict grammatical **construct** of it, to define a narrow legalistic meaning.

*"It doesn't matter what was in the writer's mind, what he wanted to convey, and what he would have said in a different age and circumstance. All that matters is the words."*

These two approaches to the Constitution are equally well applied to the bible. We can read the bible as intentionalists or as constructionists.

Fundamentalists are, almost by definition, Strict Constructionists. That's what fundamentalism is. It claims a perfection in the words that transcends any intention of the writer.

If I were an American I would approach the Constitution as an Intentionalist. For me that's the obvious, common sense, reasonable way to approach anything.

I can see why lawyers tend to be, and probably have to be, Constructionists. Intention is subjective and sometimes difficult to read. In a court of law construction may be the only way to go.

And there you have the nub:

Constructionism is legalistic in its approach. But the bible tells us that God hates legalism in every shape and form. It's cold. It's hard and unyielding. It's impersonal. And it's not God's way. So if we adopt a method of bible-reading that is fundamentally legalistic in outlook, there's a real danger that it will lead us away from God rather than towards him.

That leads to another problem which is:

Fundamentalism/constructionism tends to steer us towards extremism. It ignores the concept of balance. For an Intentionalist, if the bible says one thing once and another thing a hundred times, then we deduce that the second thing is probably more important than the first.

Fundamentalists are more liable to approach the bible as a series of 30,000 different verse-bytes or independent aphorisms, each with independent existence as "the Word of God."

That destroys the balance. With 30,000 verses taken in isolation you can virtually always find a verse to back up any idea you want to put up. With this approach you end up with a bible that does nothing more than back up your pre-existing prejudices.

- **Fundamentalism can end up being the product of political bias.**

In theory, Christianity might be expected not to influence our political leanings too much. In practice this seems not to be the case. Over the last 20-30 years there has been a pronounced movement towards Christians espousing right wing political viewpoints. In America, a lot more Christians—particularly Fundamentalists—tend to vote Republican than Democrat. It's a relatively new phenomenon—if you go back 50 years or so you don't find this association.

The association seems surprising. After all, the Old Testament Law, which presents itself as God's ideal for how nations should run their internal affairs, puts forward a relatively left-of-centre economic agenda.<sup>2</sup> It's also quite difficult to find in the teachings of Jesus Christ any real

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<sup>2</sup> The Law included sophisticated (by the standards of the day) mechanisms to prevent excessive accumulation of wealth, and reduce the rich-poor divide. The most important aspect of these were the Jubilee Laws. These specified that after the initial distribution of land to every family in the Promised Land,

support for an untrammelled and unregulated capitalist economic system. So there's no real reason for Christians to be any more on the right than on the left. But they are.

Right wing politics tends to emphasize the individual, and can be a short step away from being all about **me**. **My** fulfilment. **My** self-actualization. **My** talents which entitle me to more than lesser-talented people, Obviously a religion that affirms these sorts of values can be very attractive. It's a lot easier for a fundamentalist to extract this sort of philosophy from the bible than it is for an Intentionalist. Fundamentalists tend to see the bible more as a series of one-liners. More broad-based questions like, "*What sort of economic system does the Old Testament put forward as its ideal?*"—are less likely to be addressed by this approach.

Did fundamentalism spawn the right wing, or was it vice versa? I don't know. But I know that selfishness is close to the surface in all of us, and if we can find an approach to Christianity that not just tolerates selfishness but actually affirms it, then we need to be on our guard against it.

- I've noticed that often there's an **inverse relationship between the fervour of people's commitment to fundamentalist doctrines, and their actual obedience to Christ's moral teaching.**

With a lot of fundamentalists (many, but not all) who are fervently committed to a doctrine of literal and total inerrancy of scripture, I'm tempted to respond, "*If that's what you believe, then why don't you do what it says?*"

I notice that a lot of fundamentalists see belief in the fundamentalist position as being a moral issue.

It's not.

The biblical moral teaching put forward by Jesus and then by Paul is very simple. It comprises one single dictum of, *Love you neighbour as yourself*. Jesus expressed it in a parallel fashion as, *Do to others as you would be done by*. That's really very simple. And it's repeated so many times in the New Testament, in different forms and by different writers, that we can reasonably assume it to be the key moral teaching of our faith.

Believing in fundamentalist doctrines is not "moral"—just as believing in the intentionalist approach is not "moral" either. The question of how you get there may be moral—whether you've been honest and diligent in your search for truth. But the final belief is neither moral in one direction or the other.

There seems a tendency with Fundamentalists to see the mere belief in the fundamentalist position as somehow fulfilling God's moral law sufficiently to render love for neighbour superfluous. But God is far less interested in **what** we believe, and far more interested in **how** we react to those with whom we disagree. Do we love them and try to respect their viewpoints, or do we condemn them and criticise them?

In my experience, Intentionalists generally react to Fundamentalists with the attitude: "*I don't agree with them, but I understand where they're coming from and how they got there, and I try to respect them for that, and respect their right to reach their own conclusions.*" Fundamentalists are more likely to respond with, "They're wrong! They're in error and I'm going to put them right!" The question of how I would wish others to treat me if I were in their situation is not considered. In this respect I find Intentionalists more true to the gospel than are Fundamentalists.

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thereafter all subsequent land sales, in the countryside at least, could only be on a leasehold basis, with the land reverting back to the original owner after 50 years. This, in theory, would prevent big landowners from accumulating more and more land (the main financial asset of the time) at the expense of a dispossessed underclass.

Also the Law contains extensive "welfare" provisions, for free handouts to the poor. The Gleaning Law, which obliged farmers to leave the gleanings in the field at harvest time for the poor to come and help themselves, may seem quaint to us now, but at the time it was important in keeping the poor from starvation, as the book of Ruth makes clear.

- This leads into the question, **Does it really matter to God?**

Variations in doctrine can, as they always have, raise Christians to great heights of moral indignation, but how much do these variations really matter to God?

I think the answer from the bible is ***not very much***.

God's primary concern for us is over our moral behaviour. That's what sin is—moral failure. In contrast, being wrong about matters of fact is not a moral issue.

My integrity is a moral issue. My perseverance is a moral issue—if I'm too lazy to take the time to research the subject properly, then that's clearly a moral failing. But if I've done all the due diligence, and come to a certain conclusion regarding the facts which disagrees with others—within certain limits, which may be a lot wider than we as humans tend to put them—then it's likely that God doesn't mind.

Jesus avoided all doctrinal arguments when he possible could. He seemed to see them primarily as a smokescreen for avoiding dealing with our own moral shortcomings—a kind of denial mechanism. We virtually never hear of him pushing doctrinal points of view. All he was concerned about was, ***Are you walking in love to those around you?***

And if God doesn't mind then should we? I think God sees community primarily in terms of how we love and respect those with whom we disagree. He has little interest in perpetuating artificial concepts of unity through uniformity. Most non-Fundamentalists seem to understand this; a lot of Fundamentalists don't.

- **Does fundamentalism actually contribute anything positive to Christianity?**

Are we any better off with fundamentalism than without it?

The answer, for me, is No.

Christianity is true. I'm convinced of that. God is there. That's the basic underlying fact of the universe. What we think about it has no bearing on the underlying truth. Believing in a factually inerrant bible doesn't make it any more true. And believing in a bible that has a greater input from limited and fallible humans than the Fundamentalists would allow doesn't make it any less true.

God can do it any way he chooses to. He could have done it the Fundamentalist way with a massive supernatural input to the writing process, had he so chosen. And he could choose the non-Fundamentalist way with much less supernatural input, had he chosen that way. It's up to God to decide. He can do it this way or that way, as he chooses, and it's not really for us to second-guess.

Does that rigid certainty that Fundamentalism purports to convey make us better Christians, or bring us closer to God, than would a more flexible approach? I don't think so. Actually I think the opposite is true. The element of uncertainty, of judgment, that is required from us non-Fundamentalists is precisely the thing that draws us to the person of God, teaches us to be truly dependant on him. Fundamentalism helps us to put our trust in a book rather than a personal God, and that helps us not at all.

- **So why are fundamentalist ideas so popular?**

I think it says more about us than it does about God.

Our attraction to Fundamentalism is similar to our attraction to legalism. We love rules and certainties—we're all legalists at heart. We feel more secure that way. Everything neatly laid out in black and white.

But God's primary interest is in relationship. And trust. He wants us to trust him, even when we can't see the way ahead. When God says, "I know where we're going, but I'm not telling you till we get there," for us that's frustrating. It's a bit more open-ended than we might like.



With the fundamentalist “certainties”, we put our faith in the certainties, not the giver. But we seem to have a deep instinctive, defensive, leaning that draws us to look for these certainties. Perhaps that’s one reason why we find such an abiding fascination in the study of end-of-the-world prophecies in the bible—the apocalyptic. Which we’ll touch on in the next point.

- **So where did it come from?**

Where did fundamentalism come from? Was it always there, or is it new?

In the UK at least, fundamentalism is essentially a “new” doctrine. Until about 40 years ago most Christians saw no conflict between Christianity and science. For the generation of CS Lewis, the findings of science were generally accepted by Christians. Science is observation, and unless your methodology is somehow flawed, then what you see is what is there, and can’t really be denied. The results of scientific observation constituted a valid part of the overall reality. You couldn’t just close your eyes to it, pretend it wasn’t there, and then come up with a Christian world view that ran contrary to what was observable. It all had to meet in the middle somewhere.

If the bible appeared on the surface to be saying differently, then all that indicated was that we must be reading the bible in the wrong way. And if the bible taught that the earth is a flat plate with pillars round it and a tent over the top—and I believe that is precisely what it does say—and we believe it as literal truth, then we are definitely reading the bible the wrong way.

Over 40 years that has all changed.

There are probably a number of reasons for the change, some obvious and some a bit more speculative. Here are a few of the more obvious ones:

The last 30 years have seen a resurgence of fundamentalism sweeping through all religions across the world. Moslem fundamentalism is an obvious one—and like Christian fundamentalism, it leads easily into extreme doctrines which distort and radicalize the teachings of the founder. We have Hindu Fundamentalists. And we have Christian Fundamentalists. And it may well be that all these are manifestations of the same underlying spirits of extremism, intolerance, or irrationality. You could call it “the spirit of the age”—though whether this is a spirit along the lines of Paul’s ‘elemental spirits’ or more a spirit in the secular sense is hard to be sure.

This is closely allied to the spirits of anti-intellectualism and subjectivity that are abroad. And perhaps a spirit of contempt for the past—an idea that we are perhaps a bit cleverer, more insightful, than all those fumbling generations of rather limited people who came before us. This encourages us to “rediscover” the Christian faith—as if it had somehow been lost for 2000 years and only now is suddenly surfacing—a huge misconception. Rational analysis has given way to subjectivity in a way which would have seemed astounding only a few years ago. The crucial distinction between fact and opinion has been buried, and replaced by a simplistic philosophy of “I feel good about this doctrine, this interpretation, so it must be right. That good feeling is obviously the Holy Spirit affirming me.”

What is the role of apocalypticism in all this? In a way this is another relatively new doctrine. Although interest in the interpretation of biblical prophecies of the second coming etc. have always been around, the popular interpretations that are current now are relatively new, dating back to the work of John Derby and Cyrus Schofield in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Whether the interpretations have truth to them or not, I really don’t know. They do, however, contribute to at least one danger, which is this:

If we believe in the imminent return of Jesus in the next 20 or 30 years; and if we think that this return will coincide with the end of the universe as we know it, and the end of the physical laws that underlie it—the replacement of protons, neutrons, and electrons by something totally other—then the whole idea of physical laws starts to get a bit irrelevant. If the laws are going to change in the future, perhaps they could change in the past. Maybe they mean nothing at all.

In that case the whole concept of “evidence” can become irrelevant. If the laws are constantly changing then who can trust evidence for anything? So the whole idea of an evidence-based faith or an evidence-based world-view gets laid aside.

But . . .

- **The early church however never saw it that way.**

The proclamation of the gospel in the New Testament never sees Christianity as “a step of faith” that involves stepping out of the material and objective, and into a new spiritual reality. On the contrary, it sees the various component parts of the spiritual-material continuum fitting together in a smooth and seamless way. The New Testament always emphasizes that **objective reality points us towards the truth of the gospel**. *I’m not asking you to believe anything outlandish*, Paul would say to us. *If you want to know about the truth of the resurrection, go and talk to the people who were there at the time, who saw him and spoke with him. They’re still living (then)*. Objective fact. We start with the facts, and we place our faith on the basis of that faith.

So if we see science and Christianity as being somehow out of step, that you have to reject the one to accept the other, then we are, ourselves, seriously out of step with the bible. The bible says the opposite.

*“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the universe shows his handiwork!”*

—so said the psalmist. If we want to be biblical about it, we need to take the findings of scientific observation, recognise their validity, and then have a long hard think about how it all fits together into one unified whole.

“Why sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast” said the Red Queen to Alice—but Christianity was never supposed to be about believing the impossible.

- When we set science and Christianity in opposition, we forget that to a great extent, **modern science actually came out of Christianity**. Christianity gave the idea of a stable, predictable universe governed by laws laid down by a wise and loving God—laws intrinsically capable of being investigated and understood. That was the backdrop against which people like Isaac Newton worked. Not an arbitrary and capricious universe that could change on the whim of the gods.

And it has worked. We may doubt the long-term utility of many of the products of modern science, but we can’t really doubt the fact they do actually work—they fulfil their design specifications. The planes do fly, the bombs do explode, and the computers do actually function. It hardly makes sense to embrace the gadgets but deny the validity of the scientific methodology that made them possible.

- **Finally, an appeal to the historical roots of my own church, the Anglican.**

The Anglican Church came into being as an independent entity about 470 years ago, during the protestant reformation. This period was one of the pinnacles of church history, the most successful and fruitful period since the early church.

The presiding father of the English Reformation was Thomas Cranmer, during the reign of Henry VIII. Cranmer didn’t live to see the official Anglican statement of belief in its final form. This



was finalized in 1571 under the guidance of Matthew Parker, and is now known as the Thirty-Nine Articles. This is the historical bedrock of what makes us Anglicans.

The Thirty-Nine Articles embody the moderate and tolerant reformation over which Cranmer presided. Whereas many continental reformers decided to discard the entire Catholic structure and rebuild from scratch, Cranmer didn't do this. He changed what need to be changed and left the rest well alone.

On the crucial subject of the scriptures, Cranmer and his fellow reformers tried to take, as far as possible, an inclusive rather than a divisive role. The Thirty-Nine Articles have two things to say about the scriptures:

1. **They contain all things necessary for salvation, and that**
2. **They are authoritative.**

This first point, that the scriptures contain all things necessary for salvation, was clearly an anti-Catholic jibe, to contradict claims of ongoing revelation mediated through the popes. Nonetheless, taken as it stands, it gives a hugely valuable starting point. What it says is, **everything that you need to know to be a Christian is contained within the bible—you need nothing more.** Add in that it's authoritative—we submit ourselves to its teaching—and for me the picture is complete.

For me this is an inspired statement. It's inclusive—it brings people together rather than dividing them. And it's true—almost every protestant Christian I've ever met believes in this simple statement. And it's all we need. There's nothing more stringent that can be said on this that can in any way make us better Christians or bring us closer to God. So I take it as my bedrock. It's what Anglicans have stood for, for the last 440 years. And since I believe it and trust it, I'm an Anglican. And I sincerely believe that if we all confined ourselves to this simple article of belief, we'd get along a lot better than we do now.

For some years now, the Anglican Church has been hovering on the edge of crisis. It's not certain if we can survive as a single body, and division seems almost inevitable. The problem is, we've lost our fixed compass. Every leader has his own ideas, 'wise in their own eyes', and feels at liberty to push his own version of 'the truth' to the limit without love or respect. *"I'm right, anyone who disagrees with me is wrong, and that's all there is to it."*

In the midst of all this the Thirty-Nine Articles have been relegated to the bottom drawer. Few Anglicans even know what they say. If they do, they regard them as old fashioned and irrelevant. The idea that truth today might be the same as truth 440 years ago, or that the reformers of that era might have possessed a wisdom and spirituality to equal or even surpass anything available today, seems inconceivable.

I don't actually truly accept all the Articles, but I submit myself to them.

I'm not personally keen on infant baptism. But I recognise that infant baptism is a part of Anglican doctrine so I keep quiet on the matter. I'd never speak against it in public in an Anglican church. If I can't live with it, I should leave and go elsewhere. To respect the doctrine is the discipline I impose on myself

The Anglican Church is not a fundamentalist church. Cranmer and his associates never demanded we accept biblical inerrancy. I'm not sure if any of the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers ever contemplated such a belief. You can be an Anglican and be a Fundamentalist at the same time—no problem. But you need to recognize that it's not a core doctrine of our church; and if you start pushing it in the Anglican Church, then you're out of line.

If we could all accept that simple principle, perhaps we'd have a chance of surviving another 470 years.