How Lutheran Was The English Reformation?

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She was a local high school teacher at Timber Lake, South Dakota. I was pleased to have her attend the service in our little mission chapel, the smallest of the four churches in town. She wasn't exactly a mission prospect, but she said she felt most at home at our Lutheran service. She was the daughter of the Episcopal bishop of Aberdeen. The non-liturgical services at the community Methodist and the Baptist churches were not to her liking, and the Latin of the Catholic Church, it seems, did not attract her. We were using page 5 of the "new" Lutheran Hymnal, just off the presses. It made her feel more or less at home.

Was she right in seeing a certain likeness between her church and the Lutheran? Are they perhaps kissing cousins that show evidence of a common ancestry? Did the Lutheran Reformation have any lasting influence on the Church of England?

I was asked to prepare something on Luther and the English-Reformation for this conference. I have entitled the presentation, asking the question: How Lutheran was the English Reformation? This question assumes that there were Lutheran influences that worked toward making England Lutheran. At the same time it assumes that the English Reformation was not simply a Lutheran Reformation. We need to look at both, the pro-Lutheran forces at work as well as the factors that prevented a Lutheran takeover. Time and space limitations do not allow for a presentation that is either extensive or exhaustive. We shall touch bases at some important places and close with a few conclusions.

I. Cambridge and "Little Germany"

It was inevitable that Luther's writings should find their way to England. The importance of Luther's use of the printing press cannot be exaggerated. How much the Lollards, who as condemned heretics had been driven underground, were active in bringing Lutheran books into England is difficult to determine. Dickens in his *The English Reformation* comments: "Considering the secret character of these transactions, it is surprising how many instances of them can be produced" (p.33). He quotes a bishop complaining in 1528: "There have been found certain children of iniquity who are endeavoring to bring into our land the old and accursed Wycliffite heresy, and along with it the Lutheran heresy, foster-daughter of Wycliffe's" (p37).

As we might expect, Luther's writings found entrance at the universities, Oxford and Cambridge. Latin writings would not even need translating to be read by students who were studying in a humanistic atmosphere such as prevailed at the universities of England. In fact, Erasmus' New Testament in Greek and Latin is credited with inspiring the kind of Bible study that could create interest in Lutheran theology and Luther's writings.

Cambridge became the nursery of the English Reformation where many of the English reformers and often martyrs first tasted of what was considered forbidden fruit. A tavern, the White Horse Inn, became the meeting place where a fellowship of young men shared their common interest in humanistic studies. This included writings of Luther that were crossing the channel from the continent. Because of their interest in Luther's writings and theology, their place of meeting became known as "little Germany." Although Cambridge witnessed the burning of books as early as 1520 and 1521, merchants in London and Antwerp continued to be a good source of supply for Lutheran writings, not only for business but also religious reasons.

It would hardly be correct to consider "little Germany" the beginning of a Lutheran Reformation in England. Too little can be known about the group. Its meetings appear to have been of an informal nature under the leadership of Bilney, then also of Barnes and Latimer. Erasmus' Christian humanism, which had produced the New Testament, contributed as much toward their studies as did Luther's writings. Yet the name this meeting place was given, the burning of Luther's books at Cambridge, and the fact that Bilney, an early leader of the group, finally became a martyr "on suspicion of being a Lutheran" compel us to connect it with early

Lutheran influence in England at a time when the king of England gained papal approval as the defender of the faith against Luther. It is also true that many of the people who significantly contributed to the Reformation in England were at one time at Cambridge and may have met at "little Germany."

There is also evidence that Luther's writings found their way to Oxford at an early date. In 1520, a bookseller in Oxford offered a long list of them for sale. In 1521, the Archbishop of Canterbury received letters informing him that Oxford was infested with Lutheranism.

II. Henry VIII and Luther

The first contacts between Henry VIII and Luther were not propitious toward England becoming Lutheran. In 1520, Luther wrote *The Babylonia Captivity of the Church*. This fell like a bomb on the Roman Catholic sacramental system. Four sacraments were summarily rejected: confirmation, marriage, ordination, and extreme unction. Penance, a fifth, Luther at first was ready to consider a sacrament because it does confer the grace of God, but in the end Luther preferred not to call it a sacrament. He writes: "It has seemed proper to restrict the name of sacrament to those promises which have signs attached to them... Hence there are, strictly speaking, but two sacraments in the church of God—baptism and the bread."

However, "the bread," or mass, has three captivities imposed by Rome. The first, withholding the cup; the second, transubstantiation; and the third and "by far the most wicked abuse of all," "that the mass is a good work or sacrifice" (*LW* 36,35). This writing attacked the very heart of Roman Catholic theology.

Such an attack could not go unanswered. King Henry, incensed by Luther's attack, came to the defense of Rome with *An Assertion of the Seven Sacraments*. Henry saw no reason to spare this enemy of the church "who by the instigation of the Devil, under pretext of Charity, stimulated by anger and hatred, spews out the poison of vipers against the church and Catholic faith" (Tj. p11). There is no need to pass judgment on the theological value or acumen of Henry's book. The pope considered it important enough to award Henry the title Defender of the Faith, a title ever since associated with the throne of England.

Henry's *Assertion* was published in the summer of 1521. Luther waited a year to reply. When he did, he answered in kind. Tjernagel says: "The Assertion had closed on a note of personal denunciation and vilification. Luther's reply began in the same tenor" (p 18). Avoiding much of the unpleasant details of this exchange, we conclude with Tjernagel that "the polemical exchange between them was an important factor in the history of the English church" and that "Luther's uncharitable and injudicious invective closed the door to Henry's later acceptance of the *Augsburg Confession*" (p 26).

Within two years, in September 1525, Luther sent a letter of apology to the king. Luther was encouraged to write such a letter by Christian II, the exiled king of Denmark. He and others at Wittenberg were led to believe that England might be responsive to the gospel. It was quite a contrast to his previous letter for Luther to write: "I can scarcely raise my eyes for shame to your majesty for having permitted thoughtless and malicious men to move me against such a high potentate and mighty king, I who am unworthy and despised, yes, a worm" (p27). Suffice it to say, the letter had no positive effect on the king but only evoked a letter of ridicule and rebuke some ten months later.

The time came when Henry on his part may have regretted the bitter polemical exchanges with Luther. Exactly when it was that Henry began to consider his marriage with Catherine of Aragon unscriptural is not clear. As long as Catherine kept on becoming pregnant and there was hope for a male heir, the question was not too critical. But when more than a half dozen pregnancies and a series of miscarriages yielded no more than one surviving child, and that a daughter Mary, Henry concluded that God was punishing him for marrying his brother's widow. True, the pope had granted a dispensation for the marriage which was considered to be contrary to Leviticus 20:21. Catherine also insisted that the marriage with Henry's brother had never been consummated. But by 1527 his scruples were intensified by the strong desire to have Anne Boleyn become the mother of a male heir. Cardinal Wolsy was assigned to secure from the pope the required annulment of the marriage for which an earlier pope had granted a dispensation. That in itself presented a problem. Added to that was the fact that Catherine of Aragon was the aunt of Emperor Charles V. The pope did not want to say "no"

and was not able to say "yes." So he did neither. The pope's procrastination led Henry to turn to the universities of Europe. Finally, through Robert Barnes, also Luther's opinion was sought. Since Henry was basing his request for an annulment on Scripture, he could hope that Luther might agree. Luther, however, reasoned that we are no longer under the Mosaic law in matters of this kind, but under civil law. The words of Scripture that applied to Henry's marriage was God's injunction; "What God had joined together let not man put asunder." Luther's conclusion was that the king is bound under pain of eternal damnation to retain the wife he has married.

The divorce issue was settled as far as Henry was concerned when Thomas Cranmer as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1533 dissolved the marriage to Catherine and declared the king lawfully wedded to Anne Boleyn. In the process of all of this, Rome had lost England, the monasteries were closed, and religious reform was set in motion during the reign of the king who had been given the title Defender of the Faith. We direct our attention now to several English reformers who contributed to the shape which the English church finally acquired.

III. English Reformers

James Edward McGoldrick considers Robert Barnes and William Tyndale as "Luther's English connection" in a book by that title. Barnes, having enrolled with the order of the Austin Friars, was sent to the University of Louvain, returned in 1521 as an Erasmian humanist interested in classical studies, including the study of Erasmus' recently published New Testament. Converted to Christ by Bilney, a leader at the White Horse Inn, he soon also became a leader of the "Cambridge Germans." Barnes, ever outspoken in his preaching and tactless in denouncing abuses, was arrested for anti-clerical views expressed in a sermon. At his trial Wolsey convinced Barnes to read a retraction, the latter expecting it to secure his release. It was only after six months of imprisonment that he was given some freedom under house arrest at the Austin priory in London. When he used this partial freedom to sell Tyndale's prohibited New Testament, he was condemned to be burned. Late in 1529 he escaped by pretending "suicide," fled to Antwerp, on to Germany, ultimately arriving at Wittenberg. There his close association with Luther and Melanchthon, and especially Bugenhagen, completed his personal conversion to Lutheranism.

While in Wittenberg Barnes wrote his *Supplication unto King Henry the Eighth* "to protest his steadfast loyalty to the monarch." He "endorsed the concept of royal supremacy in ecclesiastical affairs, while he attacked the English bishops as enemies of the king's lawful authority" (M p 17f). Under a safe-conduct he returned to England for an audience with Henry and at the encouragement of Thomas Cromwell began his nine years of service to the king. Politically the king found it expedient to form closer ties with the Smalcald League which had formed in Germany. Barnes could be of service in this. He also was engaged to get a favorable response from Luther on the question of the divorce. His failure in this did not provide a favorable beginning to his service on the continent as Henry's royal chaplain and foreign emissary.

As long as Henry was looking for a political alliance with the Lutheran Germans, Barnes, with his close ties in Wittenberg, was useful to the king. Under those conditions Barnes could hope to gain support for Lutheranism in England since the Smalcald Leagues would consider an alliance only with a Lutheran England. Since Henry would not simply sign the *Augsburg Confession*, efforts were made by Anglo-Lutheran conferences at Wittenberg and London to produce a Lutheran document acceptable in England. The *Wittenberg Articles* of 1536 and the *Thirteen Articles* of 1538, however, never met with acceptance.

In 1536, England produced its own *Ten Articles* "to establish Christian quietness and unity in the land and to avoid contentious opinions." They show the effect of Lutheran influence in England so that Atkinson calls them "a first attempt to construct a creed on which a pliant Lutheran and a pliant Romanist might agree." But these aimed at unity within the kingdom, presented no single doctrinal position, and were hardly adequate as a basis for an alliance with Germany.

The efforts of men like Barnes, a Lutheran, were considerable and success was always a possibility as long as Henry wanted an alliance with Germany. At the same time, there were men in high places, like Stephen

Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, who wanted to retain Catholicism, even if it was without the pope and who opposed the efforts of Barnes.

By 1539 under Henry's urging, Convocation and the House of Commons passed the *Six Articles*, clearly a move away from any Lutheranism present in the Ten Articles back toward Catholic tradition. Henry the next year divorced his wife, Anne of Cleves, the unhappy victim of a political marriage that had outlived its usefulness. It was her added misfortune not to possess the qualifications that might keep Henry's interest in her as his wife. Barnes, back in England after his diplomatic missions, no longer useful to Henry since his politics now did not include an alliance with the German Lutherans, could no longer count on the king's support and protection. His forthright Lutheran preaching in opposition to Gardiner soon earned him a condemnation of heresy. He was burned at the stake on July 30, 1540.

William Tyndale is the other English reformer named by McGoldrick in *Luther's English Connection*. Dickens calls him "unquestionably the most remarkable figure among the first generation of English Protestants" (p 70). His major contribution was the translation of the New Testament into English.

Tyndale acquired a Master of Arts degree at Oxford; thereupon he attended Cambridge for a brief time, possibly attracted by its Greek program. Soon he accepted a position as tutor to the children at Little Sodbury Manor. While there, 1522-23, he resolved to translate the New Testament into the vernacular, "because," as he put it, "I had perceived by experience how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth except the Scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue, that they might see the process, order and meaning of the text" (D. p 70). When he discussed theological questions, including the views of Luther and Erasmus, with clergy who visited the Manor, his appeal to the Scripture in confuting their sophistical arguments met with resentment and accusations of heresy. He sought patronage of the bishop of London for translating the New Testament. Unsuccessful in this, he went to work for Humphrey Monmouth, a rich cloth merchant who had Lutheran convictions. Leaving England with the help of his merchant patron, he went to Wittenberg, where Luther replaced Erasmus as his spiritual mentor. It was a good place to work on his translations so that by 1525 the New Testament was completed. He went to Cologne to have it published, but opposition forced him to have the work completed the following year at Worms.

The reformers in England distributed his New Testament and other writings that show how close he had come to Luther. However, the bishops and authorities in England considered Tyndale's translation dangerous since it contained introductions and notes that were clearly Lutheran, and consigned it to the flames.

Tyndale remained on the continent, residing in Antwerp at the English House of Merchant Adventurers in relative safety. Betrayed by a man, who seemed to be his friend, Tyndale was imprisoned and in October 1536 strangled and burned.

His importance as translator is not equal to Luther's, yet there are interesting parallels. Dickens comments on the importance and language of Tyndale's New Testament: His editions "provided a text at once splendid and homely in character, a text which has dominated all successive translations until our own day, for nine-tenths of the Authorized Version itself derived from Tyndale. Both here and in his original writings Tyndale showed himself a prophet of our language; he divined the genius of a predominately teutonic tongue and so remained more readable and less dated than most other writers for the next two over-latinized centuries" (p 71).

The Reformation in England owes much to Thomas Cranmer, six years Luther's junior, martyred ten years after Luther's death. Already in 1503 he entered Cambridge. Twenty years later he became Doctor of Theology. During this time Erasmus was one of his favorite authors, but it was Luther who drew his attention to the Scriptures and made him a diligent student of them.

In 1529, his suggestion that the king's divorce was a problem to be settled by theologians and not by canon lawyers found favorable response with Henry. Soon Cranmer was in Italy to secure the opinion of the Italian universities. In 1532, the king sent him as his representative to the Emperor. While in Germany, he made his Lutheran connection, becoming a close friend of Andreas Osiander of Nuernberg, and the husband of Osiander's niece. When he returned to England to become Archbishop of Canterbury he had to leave his wife in

Germany. Only later "he was tacitly allowed to bring over his wife, but had to keep her so far in the background as to give rise to the fable that he carried her about in a chest" (D., p 168).

Only reluctantly, but with the approval of the pope, he accepted the appointment as archbishop. At his consecration, he stated "that the oath which the archbishop-elect usually takes to the pope shall not bind him to anything against the king's prerogative, or to refrain from taking measure to reform the Church of England" (T., p 83).

One of the first acts of Cranmer as Archbishop was to declare Henry's marriage to Catherine void and to acknowledge as valid Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn, already consummated and in the process of becoming fruitful. He agreed to the break with Rome, which had caused the resignation of Thomas More as chancellor, as well as with subsequent actions proposed by Thomas Cromwell, the king's viceregent in matters relating to the Church of England. There was the Act of Supremacy in 1534 that made Henry Protector and Only Supreme Head of the Church and Clergy of England, the refusal of which made Thomas More a martyr. The suppression of the monasteries followed, bringing their wealth under Henry's control.

During Henry's reign there was a constant struggle for the king's support between the reform faction and the conservative, or Catholic, one. Providing leadership for reform were Cranmer and Cromwell. They could count on the support of Anne Boleyn, the mother of Elizabeth, and her successor, Jane Seymore, who died at the birth of son Edward. In 1536, the *Ten Articles* provided for at least a beginning of doctrinal reform. The *Bishop's Book* was an improvement on these, but met with royal resistance.

Already in 1534, Convocation called for a translation of the Bible into English. The Injunction to the Clergy issued in 1536 stated that there should be a whole Bible in Latin and English in every parish "for every man that will look and read thereon; and shall discourage no man from reading any part of the Bible, either in Latin or English; but rather comfort, exhort, and admonish every man to read the same, as the very word of God and the spiritual food of man's soul" (T., pp 115f). Since Tyndale was considered a heretic, Coverdale was enlisted as translator. Finally a combination of Tyndale's and Coverdale's translations, edited by John Rogers, and printed in Antwerp under the pseudonym of Thomas Matthew, found wide acceptance in a new edition in 1540, with a preface by Cranmer.

As the possibility and need for an alliance with Germany waned, the Catholic faction, led by bishops Gardiner and Bonner gained the ear of the king. In 1539, the Pro-Catholic *Six Articles* were passed by Parliament, in spite of Cranmer's opposition to them. In 1540, Cromwell became a victim to the abandoned German policy and the failure of the marriage with Anne of Cleves. Cranmer, however, continued in Henry's favor until the king's death in 1547.

Edward's reign gave full opportunity for reform. The *Six Articles* were repealed. A *Book of Homilies* was published. Communion in both kinds was authorized. The Nuernberg catechism was translated. There was reform at the universities. Cranmer prepared the *Forty-two Articles* for doctrinal and the *Prayer Book* for liturgical reform. All this while the Catholic bishops, Gardiner and Bonner, were kept in prison.

When it was evident that young Edward was dying, efforts to prevent the succession of Mary failed. Mary hated Cranmer, who had declared the annulment, making her illegitimate. Soon he found himself in prison and under pressure to recant. Finally in the hope of saving his life he signed a recantation. In this hope he was deceived. On the day of his burning, to the consternation and disappointment of his enemies, he publicly recanted his recantation, fearlessly confessed his faith, and held the offending hand that, as he said, had "written contrary to his heart," into the fire to be burned first.

IV. Exiles

During the reign of King Henry whatever efforts at reform there were showed the stamp of Lutheranism. Tjernagel sums it up as follows:

When Henry VIII died and England was in a position to formulate a theology without deference to Roman Catholicism, the religious formulas resulting from Anglo-Lutheran relations in Henry's reign were put to use in Thomas Cranmer's compilation of the *Forty-two Articles*. He

drew from Lutheran catechisms, litanies, and liturgies to devise the *Book of Common Prayer*. Tyndale had given England its Bible. Barnes, more than any other single reformer, had given it a Lutheran theology. Thomas Cranmer outlived the king to assure the permanence of the religious legacy of the reign of Henry VIII (p 151).

It may be interesting to speculate what course the Church of England would have taken, had a clear Lutheran testimony continued, especially during the reign of Edward. Different influences became strong as a result of Protestant exiles fleeing the empire following the Interim of 1548. Luther was dead. The Smalcald League was defeated. Charles V imposed an interim on the defeated German princes that would force their territories back to Catholic practices. Under Protestant Edward, England was a haven for the refugees from the Interim. From Strassburg came Martin Butzer, who had tried to bring Luther and Zwingli together and is the father of Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Peter Martyr Vermigli, an Italian turned Reformed, came from Basel. Jan Laski, a Pole of noble birth, had studied at Wittenberg but was a Calvinist. He came to England and served a congregation of exiles. Cranmer invited Melanchthon and Calvin to England for a conference at which a united confession of Protestants might be produced. The conference was never held, but it reveals the direction of Cranmer's thinking. Even prior to Butzer's arrival, he no longer held to the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

During Mary's reign there were many who chose exile rather than martyrdom. The Lutherans generally were unfriendly towards these exiles because of their denial of the real presence. Some went to Zurich, others to Strassburg and Frankfort and from Frankfort to Geneva. When they returned to England Calvin's influence increased significantly. This set the stage for the Puritans and the Independents in England and for Presbyterianism in Scotland.

V. Summary Conclusions

Historians seem to agree that the Lutheran influence that was dominant in the early Reformation in England diminished beginning with Edward but was not lost. McGoldrick writes by way of conclusion:

In appraising the enduring influence of Lutheran concepts in England, one must travel the paths first walked by Barnes and Tyndale. True, no English denomination of great size was to call itself the Lutheran Church, but the doctrinal content of Anglican theology bears unmistakable evidences of Lutheran teachings (p 200).

Referring to the Zwinglian and Calvinistic ideas that gained a large following during the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I he says: "The foundations of Anglican Protestantism, however, had been laid by an earlier generation of reformers, and prominent among them were the two men who represented Luther's English connection, Robert Barnes and William Tyndale" (p 200).

Tiernagel also sees permanent Lutheran elements in the Anglican Church. He writes:

The Lutheran imprint of the reign of Henry VIII has remained a permanent stamp on English theology. Save for the admittedly important doctrine of the Lord's Supper, the *Forty-two Articles* of the reign of Edward VI and the *Thirty nine Articles* of the Elizabethan settlement were and remain Lutheran. . . . The Lutheran imprint is also clearly impressed on the *Book of Common Prayer* and the form of Anglican worship. Unlike the Reformed churches, which tended toward iconoclasm and puritan regimentation, the Anglican Church followed the policy of Martin Luther in retaining as much of ancient religious practice and ceremonial as was compatible with a Scriptural theology. Like the Lutheran Reformers, Thomas Cranmer and his heirs combined music and a polished vernacular prose style to achieve new heights of grandeur in the service of God in worship (p 252f).

James Atkinson, the English historian of the Reformation period, agrees. Repeatedly he refers to Lutheran influences that have endured. Tracing the development of the *Thirty-nine Articles* to the time of Elizabeth, his comments are:

Elizabeth sought not to conciliate Rome but to unite the Protestants in England, and this on a Lutheran basis, the doctrine of Holy Communion excepted. When she retained crosses and candles in her own chapel it was not to conciliate Romanists but to maintain herself under the aegis of the Peace of Augsburg. . . (p 242).

Philip Schaff in his *Creeds of Christendom*, acknowledging that Germany gave to England the first impulse of the evangelical Reformation," (I, 600), however concludes: "It is not too much to say that the ruling theology of the Church of England in the latter half of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century was Calvinistic" (I, 604.). If we make the view on the Lord's Supper the major criterion in judging between what is Calvinistic and what is Lutheran (and for Luther this was extremely important), we will agree with Schaff. At the same time, a Lutheran reading the *Thirty-nine Articles* will recognize many phrases and sentences that derive from the Augsburg Confession.

How Lutheran was the English Reformation? In its early years, primarily during the reign of Henry VIII, the people working for reform were looking to Wittenberg and listening to Luther. Barnes, whose influence was doctrinal, was a student at Wittenberg and brought Lutheran doctrine to England. Tyndale, the translator of the Bible, translated in Wittenberg and Germany under Luther's influence. Cranmer had close associations in Lutheran Germany and followed Lutheran principles in liturgy and worship. The English church could have become a Lutheran church.

What was the end result? The exiles that came to England during Edward's reign and that went to the continent during Mary's reign represent strong Calvinistic influence. Cranmer, more like Melanchthon in being given to compromise and not a confessor like Luther, became a Calvinist in his doctrine of the Lord's Supper while retaining Lutheran liturgical principles. In the Elizabethan Settlement the Anglican Church retained enough of what England's early reformers had given it that it is not surprising that someone coming from an Episcopal church can feel comfortable in a Lutheran liturgical service.

Chronology

1509-47	Henry III
1518-25	Meetings at the White Horse Inn "Little Germany" Robert Barnes
1521	Henry's Assertion of the Seven Sacraments
1525	Tyndale's New Testament published
1527	Henry wants divorce from Catherine of Aragon
1529	Thomas Wolsey dismissed as chancellor
1531	Henry assumes title of "Supreme Head of Church and Clergy"
1532	Confiscation of Annates Resignation of More
1533	Cranmer Archbishop of Canterbury Cranmer declares marriage to Catherine void Anne Boleyn recognized as queen
1534	Act of Supremacy Thomas Cromwell vicegerent
1535	Thomas More beheaded Tyndale strangled and burned

1536-39	Dissolution of monasteries
1536	Anne Boleyn beheaded. Marriage to Jane Seymour Ten Articles Wittenberg Articles
1537	Matthew Bible (Rogers editors)
1538	Thirteen Articles
1539	Six Articles
1540	Anne of Cleves married and divorced Execution of Cromwell Execution of Barnes
1547-53	EDWARD VI Repeal of Six Articles Book of homilies
1549	Act of Uniformity Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer
1551	Cranmer's Forty-two Articles
1552	Second Acto of Uniformity Revised Book of Common Prayer (Butzer)
1553-58	MARY Repealed ecclesiastical legislation of Edward III and Henry VIII Protestant bishops sent to tower 300 martyrs - Thomas Cranmer 800 exiles on continent
1558-1603	ELIZABETH I
1559	Act of Supremacy Act of Uniformity
1563	Thirty-nine Articles

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