



The African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Articles of Religion

The word African means that the church was organized by people of African descent and heritage. It does not mean that the church was founded in Africa, or that it was for persons of African descent only.

The church's roots are of the family of Methodist churches. Methodism provides an orderly system of rules and regulations and places emphasis on a plain and simple gospel.

Episcopal refers to the form of government under which the church operates. It means that the church is governed by bishops. The chief executive and administrative officers of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination are the Bishops of the church.

The Motto: *“God Our Father, Christ Our Redeemer, the Holy Spirit Our Comforter, Humankind Our Family”* is a great summary of what the African Methodist Episcopal Church believes.

Also known as the A.M.E. Church for short, the denomination is Methodist in terms of its basic doctrine and order of worship. It was born, through adversity, of the Methodist church and to this day does not differ in any major way from what all Methodists believe. The split from the main branch of the Methodist Church was not a result of doctrinal differences but rather the result of a time period that was marked by man's intolerance of his fellow man, based on the color of his skin. It was a time of slavery, oppression and the dehumanization of people of African descent and many of these un-Christian practices were brought into the church, forcing Richard Allen and a group of fellow worshippers of color to form a splinter denomination of the Methodist Church. To find the basic foundations of the beliefs of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, you need look no further than The Apostles' Creed and The Twenty Five Articles of Religion.

APOSTLE'S CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead; and buried. The third day he arose from the dead' he ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

ARTICLES OF OUR FAITH

1. OF FAITH IN THE HOLY TRINITY

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this God-head, there are three persons of one substance, power and eternity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

2. OF THE WORD OR SON OF GOD, WHO WAS MADE VERY MAN

The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the God-head and manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very man, who suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men.

3. OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Christ did truly rise from the dead, and took again his body with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and sitteth until he returns to judge all men at last day.

4. OF THE HOLY GHOST

The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty and glory with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

5. THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES FOR SALVATION

The Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation; so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scriptures, we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.

The Names of the Canonical Books:

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy
- Joshua
- Judges
- Ruth
- The First Book of Samuel
- The Second Book of Samuel
- The First Book of Kings
- The Second Book of Kings
- The First Book of Chronicles
- The Second Book of Chronicles
- The Book of Ezra
- The Book of Nehemiah
- The Book of Esther
- The Book of Job
- The Book of Psalms
- The Book of Lamentations
- The Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher
- Cantica, or Songs of Solomon
- Four Prophets, the Greater
- Twelve Prophets, the Lesser

All the books of the New Testament as they are commonly received, we do receive and account canonical.

6. OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and the New Testament, everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and man. Wherefore, they are not to be heard, who feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the law given from God by Moses, as touching ceremonies and rites, doth not bind Christians, nor ought the civil precepts thereof of necessity be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments, which are called moral.

7. OF ORIGINAL OR BIRTH SIN

Original sin stands not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk) but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.

8. OF FREE WILL

The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and works to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore, we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God; by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

9. OF THE JUSTIFICATION OF MAN

We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, by faith, and not by our own works or deservings; wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.

10. OF GOOD WORKS

Although good works, which are the fruit of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgments: yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively faith, insomuch that they by them a lively faith may be as evidently known, as a tree is discerned by its fruit.

11. OF WORKS OF SUPEREROGATION

Voluntary works, besides, over and above God's Commandments, which they call works of supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety. For by them men do declare that they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for His sake than of bounden duty is required; whereas Christ said plainly, "When ye have done all that is commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants."

12. OF SIN AFTER JUSTIFICATION

Not every sin willingly committed after justification is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable. Wherefore, the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after justification. After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God, rise again, and amend your lives. And therefore they are to be condemned who say they can do no more sin as long as they live here; or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

13. OF THE CHURCH

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

14. OF PURGATORY

The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, pardon, worshipping, and adoration, as well as images, as of relics, and also invocations of saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of Scripture, but repugnant of the Word of God.

15. OF SPEAKING IN THE CONGREGATION IN SUCH A TONGUE AS THE PEOPLE UNDERSTAND

It is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the primitive Church, (to have public prayer in the Church,) or to minister the Sacraments, in a tongue not understood by the people.

16. OF THE SACRAMENTS

Sacraments ordained of Christ are not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they are certain signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in Him.

There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord, in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.

Those five commonly called sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony and Extreme Unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel; being such as have partly grown out of the corrupt following of the Apostles; and partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures, but yet have not the like nature of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, because they have not any visible sign, or ceremony ordained of God.

The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about; but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same, they have a wholesome effect or operation; but they that received them unworthily, purchase to themselves condemnation, as St. Paul says.

17. OF BAPTISM

Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference; but it is also a sign of regeneration, or the new birth. The baptism of young children is to be retained in the church.

18. OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another, but rather is a Sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death; insomuch, that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ.

Transubstantiation, or the change of the substance of bread and wine in the Supper of our Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The body of Christ is given, taken and eaten in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. And the means whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper, is faith.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped.

19. OF BOTH KINDS

The cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the lay people: for both parents of the Lord's Supper, by Christ's ordinance and commandment, ought to administered to all Christians alike.

20. OF THE ONE OBLATION OF CHRIST, FINISHED UPON THE CROSS

The offering of Christ once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone. Wherefore the sacraments of masses, in which it is commonly said that that priest doth offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, is a blasphemous fable, and dangerous deceit.

21. OF THE MARRIAGE OF MINISTERS

The ministers of Christ are not commanded by God's law either to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from marriage; therefore, it is lawful for them, as for all other Christians, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve best to godliness.

22. OF THE RITES AND CEREMONIES OF CHURCHES

It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike; for they have been always different, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word.

Whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely, doth openly break the rites and ceremonies of the church to which he belongs, which are not repugnant of the Word of God, and are ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, that others may fear to do the like, as one that offendeth against the common order of the Church and woundeth the consciences of weak brethren.

Every particular Church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies so that all things may be done to edification.

23. OF THE RULERS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The President, the Congress, the General Assemblies, the Governors, and the Councils of State, as the delegates of the people, are the rulers of the United States of America^[1], according to the division of power made to them by the Constitution of the United States, and by the constitution of their respective states and the Councils of States delegates of the people, are the rulers of the United States of America, and by the Constitutions of their respective States. And the said states are a sovereign and independent nation, and ought not to be subject to any foreign jurisdiction.

[1] It is acknowledged that the African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in the United States. However, the African Methodist Episcopal Church is an international Christian body with constituents around the world, and a Christian witness that is both parochial and global. Article 23 presumes the duty, loyalty and patriotism of our constituents, as citizens of sovereign nations, to obey just laws, to recognize and respect the organizational structure, and to uphold the Constitution of the country or nation-state in which our members hold the rights and privileges of citizenship. Further, obedience to Civil Government is one of the principle

duties of all persons, and was honored by our Lord and His Apostles. Though differing in form and policy, all just governments rightfully commend the obedience, loyalty, support, and defense of all Christian men and women they control and protect.

24. OF CHRISTIAN MEN'S GOODS

The riches and goods of Christians are not common as touching the right, title and possession of the same, as some do falsely boast. Notwithstanding, every man ought, of such things as he possesseth, liberally, to give alms to the poor, according to his ability.

25. OF A CHRISTIAN MAN'S OATH

As we confess that vain and rash swearing is forbidden Christian men by our Lord, Jesus Christ and James, His apostle: so we judge that the Christian religion doth not prohibit, but that a man may swear when the magistrate requireth, in a cause of faith and charity, so it be done according to the prophet's teaching, in justice, judgment, and truth.

Above information taken from the official AME Church website:

<http://www.ame-church.com/about-us/>