

During the course of our theological dialogue we envisage that interim recommendations will be referred from time to time to the appropriate authorities of each Church for advice and criticism. The Commission will not be empowered to make decisions, but is authorized to make formal proposals to the Churches in due course. In the case of the Anglicans the self-governing Churches of our Communion will decide upon the proposals in accordance with their various legislative patterns after considering whether they are consonant with Catholic Faith, Apostolic Order and the general and local canonical traditions of the Church. This is the procedure which the Anglican Communion normally follows in dealing, e.g. with resolutions of the Lambeth Conference or recommendations of the Anglican Consultative Council.

Although these would be independent decisions of each Anglican Church they would be preceded by close consultation within the Anglican family of Churches.

QUESTION 4 The position and authority of the Thirty-Nine Articles within Anglican tradition and in contemporary Anglicanism.

This question is answered in the article which follows.

The Thirty-Nine Articles

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The position and authority of the Thirty-Nine Articles within Anglican tradition, and in contemporary Anglicanism, is a question which will need to be carefully elucidated in our doctrinal discussions with the Orthodox Churches. Since the Articles constitute the one distinctive doctrinal statement made by the Church of England at the time of the Reformation, their significance cannot be ignored. On the other hand, it is clear that on this as on other matters, different views are held amongst Anglicans sometimes sharply contrasting with one another.

The attempt to make a statement on this subject which would be generally acceptable to Anglicans to-day is, however, made easier by the fact that the Commission on Christian Doctrine, established by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, made a unanimous report on *Subscription and Assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles* in 1968. Although the proposals of this report have not yet been acted upon, they have received wide acceptance, and the Report's statement of the present situation has been generally recognized as fair and accurate.

The Report describes the scope of the Articles in the following way:

"The Articles of 1571 cover the following ground: 1-5 restate and amplify the faith professed by the creeds in the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the true atoning death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ; 6-8 establish the Bible as the sufficient rule of faith for salvation; 9-18 deal with fallen man's inability to please God or merit his favour, and with the grace which justifies and saves us through Christ 'by faith only'; 19-39 determine questions about the Church, its nature, authority, ministers, sacraments, worship, ritual, discipline, relations with the State, and domestic organization. The Articles were evidently not meant as, nor were they ever claimed to be, a complete systematic statement of Christian truth; they had the more limited aim of determining questions - some of them, certainly, very important questions - which disturbed the peace of the Church in the mid-sixteenth century. They were thus intended to set boundaries within which the stream of Anglican theology was thenceforth to run."

As the Report goes on to make clear there have been differing schools of interpretation of the Articles within Anglicanism. One school has viewed the Articles as providing "the theological framework within which the other formularies (i.e. the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Ordinal*) are to be set". Another "has held that it is the Articles which should be interpreted in the light of the Prayer Book and Ordinal rather than the other way round" (paras. 13, 14).¹ Partly as a result of these differing principles of interpretation, the weight given to the Articles in theological teaching and in the education of the clergy varies considerably from one Province of the Anglican Communion to another, and even from one college to another within the same Province. In some places for instance, the study of the Articles forms the starting place for the study of Christian doctrine; in others they are simply referred to, from time to time, in the course of teaching. Furthermore, as is made plain in paragraphs 24-35 of the Report, the official position of the Articles in the various provinces is also not the same as from one Province to another. "The Church of the Province of Central Africa makes no mention of the Articles at any point in its formularies", and the situation is similar in the Church of the Province of the West Indies, for instance (para. 26). In the United States of America, in the Protestant Episcopal Church, the Articles are still printed together with the Standard Prayer Book, but that Church "never requires subscription to them as such". Ordinands are required simply to declare "I do solemnly engage to conform to the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America" (para. 30). Most Churches of the Anglican Communion however "retain the Articles in their Constitution", and of these, many require some form of explicit ministerial assent or subscription (para 35). One such Church is the Church of England in Australia, which in the first chapter of its Constitution refers not to the Articles and the Prayer Book, but to the Nicene and Apostles Creeds, the Holy Scriptures, the two Sacraments

¹ In the discussion with the Orthodox delegation to the 1930 Lambeth Conference and with the Romanian theologians at Bucharest (1935), the latter was stated to be the correct method of interpretation. It would be more accurate to say that it represents one tradition of interpretation.

and the historic ministry. Only in the second chapter are the Articles mentioned as a doctrinal standard, and they are always mentioned in conjunction with the *Book of Common Prayer*. As we shall see, a large majority of the Bishops at Lambeth in 1968 voted that ordinands should no longer be required to subscribe to the Articles. Since 1968, the Anglican Church in Canada has been engaged in the process of putting forward the current Canadian Prayer Book and Ordinal as the only local formulary to which assent is required. It retains in its Constitution an historical reference to the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and to the Thirty-Nine Articles. It appears that the number of Churches in which the Articles are not mentioned, or in which explicit assent to them is not required, is growing. In such Churches the priority of the Prayer Book currently in use as the authoritative local statement of the Church's faith is evident.

It is further interesting to note that the Report states that, "neither in the current Anglican-Presbyterian nor the Anglican-Methodist conversations has serious attention been given to the question of the Thirty-Nine Articles" (para. 38), though in fact the discussion of the Articles did enter into the later stage of the Anglican-Methodist conversations. (See *Anglican-Methodist Unity: the Scheme*, para. 277 and others.) It would seem that in no case of unity negotiations has an Anglican Province proposed the Articles as the starting point and basis for discussion.

As far as the Church of England is concerned, the Commission has proposed new forms of assent to the Articles which are set out below.

PREFACE

The Church of England is part of the Church of God, having faith in God the Father, who through Jesus Christ our only Lord and Saviour calls us into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This faith uniquely shown forth in the Holy Scriptures, and proclaimed in the catholic Creeds, she shares with other Christians in all parts of the world. She has been led by the Holy Spirit to bear a witness of her own to Christian truth, as in her historic formularies – the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. Through her preaching and worship, the writings of her scholars and teachers, the lives of her saints and confessors, and the utterances of her councils, she has sought, through her history, to further this witness to Christian truth. This responsibility remains.

You will therefore, in the profession you are about to make, affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith, as your inspiration and direction under God for bringing to light the truth of Christ and making him known to this generation.

THE FORM OF ASSENT REMAINS:

I, A. B., profess my firm and sincere belief in the faith set forth in the Scriptures and in the catholic Creeds, and my allegiance to the doctrine of the Church of England.

The report, though prepared for the Church of England, was discussed by the Bishops of the whole Anglican Communion at Lambeth 1968, who resolved as follows:

RESOLUTION 43 of *The Lambeth Conference Report 1968*:

The Conference accepts the main conclusion of the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Christian Doctrine entitled "Subscription and Assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles (1968)", and in furtherance of its recommendation:

- (a) "suggests that each Church of our communion consider whether the Articles need be bound up with its Prayer Book;
- (b) suggests to the Churches of the Anglican Communion that assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles be no longer required of ordinands;
- (c) suggests that, when subscription is required to the Articles or other elements in the Anglican tradition, it should be required and given only in the context of a statement which gives the full range of our inheritance of faith and sets the Articles in their historical context."

This resolution was passed on the final morning of the Conference, after a very short discussion. For a variety of reasons, there were 37 dissentients to section (b). Sections (a) and (c) however received unanimous approval from the bishops.

The Conference Report further contains an Addendum to the section on "Renewal in Faith", which elucidates the Form of Assent already quoted. It underlines further that the purpose of the proposals is to make it clear that the Articles can only be understood within their whole context, theological and historical. The differences of views which exist between Anglicans arise, often, from the different weight which the varying schools of thought give to the different elements within this whole tradition of teaching. But all acknowledge the unique place of the Scriptures, the rule of the faith "proclaimed in the Catholic Creeds set in their context of baptismal profession, patristic reasoning and conciliar decision", the place of specific sixteenth-century Anglican formularies again seen in relation to the continued tradition of teaching and life which has followed from them. "In this third strand, as in the Preface of the Prayer Book of 1549, can be discerned the authority given within Anglican tradition to reason, not least as exercised in historical and philosophical enquiry, as well as an acknowledgement of the claims of pastoral care."

With these recent proposals it may be useful to compare the paragraphs dealing with the Articles in the Report of the "Committee on Authoritative Standards of Doctrine and Worship" of the Lambeth Conference of 1888. It must be pointed out that this like the Committee Report already cited (i.e. Addendum to the Section on Renewal to Faith) is the Report of a Committee of the Conference, not of the Conference as a whole. Furthermore it should be noted that when it speaks of recognition and intercommunion it has in mind Churches newly founded in non-Christian lands by the work of Anglican or other missionaries. Nevertheless it may be taken as the expression of a view generally acceptable at that time, and such as would be widely accepted still to-day.

"With regard to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion we thank God for the wisdom which guided our fathers, in difficult times, in framing statements of

doctrine, for the most part accurate in their language and reserved and moderate in their definition. Even when speaking most strongly and under the pressure of great provocation, our Communion has generally refrained from anathemas upon opponents, and we desire in this to follow those who have preceded us in the faith. The omission of a few clauses in a few Articles would render the whole body free from any imputation of injustice or harshness towards those who differ from us. At the same time we feel that the Articles are not all of equal value, that they are not, and do not profess to be, a complete statement of Christian doctrine, and that from the temporary and local circumstances under which they were composed, they do not always meet the requirements of Churches founded under wholly different circumstances.

Some modification of these Articles may therefore naturally be expected on the part of newly-constituted Churches, and particularly in non-Christian lands. But we consider that it should be a condition of the recognition of such Churches as in complete inter-communion with our own, and especially of their receiving from us our episcopal succession, that we should first receive from them satisfactory evidence that they hold substantially the same type of doctrine as ourselves. More particularly we are of opinion that the clergy of such Churches should accept articles in accordance with the positive statements of our own standards of doctrine, and worship, particularly on the substance and rule of faith, on the state and redemption of man, on the office of the Church, and on the Sacraments and other special ordinances of our holy religion."

In future discussions with the Orthodox and with other Churches, it seems that it would be wise to concentrate our attention on the four major areas mentioned at the end of this last quotation, rather than to attempt to examine each article in detail. We should furthermore suggest that the positive teaching of the Articles as a whole should be considered, as well as their bearing upon certain controversial issues of the Reformation period. Looking at the four areas mentioned above, we might say:

a. *The substance and the rule of faith.* The articles re-affirm the faith of the ancient creeds in the Holy and Undivided Trinity, in the Incarnation of the Word or Son of God, in whom "two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very man", in the reconciling and atoning death of Christ, and in his true and bodily resurrection (Articles II-IV). As to the rule of faith there is the affirmation of the sufficiency of the canonical Scriptures as the final authority in all matters necessary to salvation.

b. *The state and redemption of man.* The articles affirm the faith that fallen man cannot save himself by his own efforts, and that his forgiveness and his whole salvation are the gift of God's free grace received by faith.

c. *The office of the Church.* The articles affirm that the Church is "a congregation of faithful men" gathered around the Word and Sacraments "duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite for the same" (Article XIX), and that "the Church hath power to decree Rites and Ceremonies, and authority in

controversies of faith", so long as it ordains nothing "contrary to God's Word written" (Article XX).

d. *The sacraments and other special ordinances of our holy religion.* The articles affirm the conviction that the two great sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel are to be distinguished from the other five ordinances "commonly called sacraments", and are not merely "badges or tokens of Christian men's profession", but are "certain sure witnesses, and effective signs of grace" (Article XXV). Of the other five ordinances, three are provided for in the *Book of Common Prayer*, i.e. marriage, confirmation, and confession and absolution, one, i.e. ordination, in the Ordinal. The other, the anointing of the sick, is in England provided for in forms authorized in the present century by Convocation. Though there has been and is much discussion among Anglican theologians about the interpretation of these rites, and as to whether they may rightly be regarded as "sacraments" in a broader sense of that term, the rites of ordination, confirmation and marriage, as provided in the formularies, have been in constant and universal use amongst Anglicans, and regarded as occasions on which the grace of God is imparted in answer to the prayer of the Church. Confession and absolution have usually been used in a public and corporate form, but a private and individual form is also provided.

In view of the great freedom of discussion commonly used amongst Anglican theologians, and their evident differences on certain questions of doctrine, if we are to get a truly balanced picture it is also important to emphasize the large areas of doctrine, where both in popular teaching and preaching, and in more academic theological writing, Anglicans have been and are guided by the main outlines of the faith as set out in the Thirty-Nine Articles. However varied methods of interpretation may be, there are constant elements which can be seen in each of the four areas listed above. For instance, in the matter of the rule of faith, while there may be much discussion of the role and value of tradition, no theory which made Scripture and Tradition two equal and independent sources of faith would be possible within Anglicanism. As to the substance of the faith in the Trinity and Incarnation, attempts to reformulate these doctrines in more contemporary language are not intended as attempts to *change* the faith of the Church. Again, in the doctrine of redemption, while many theologians may not wish to endorse all the Augustinian terminology of the Articles, no theory that man could save himself by his own merits could find a place within Anglicanism. Again, as to the office of the Church, while much may be debated as to its nature and structure, there would be no place in Anglican teaching for a theology which denied that the Church was an inherent part of the Gospel. Finally, in relation to the sacraments, different schools of thought will give varying weight to the repudiation in the Articles of Roman teaching about transubstantiation

and "the sacrifices of Masses", and the practices related to them, some accepting this as wholly relevant to-day, others seeing it in relation to the *status quaestionis* in the sixteenth century. But on many matters there is complete unanimity, for instance, in practice on the importance of the liturgy being in the language of the people, and incorporating an adequate ministry of the word, or the importance of communion in both kinds; in theology, on the repudiation of any theory which affirmed that the consecration abolished the substance of the bread and wine, or which said that the sacrifice of Calvary is repeated in the Eucharist, or which suggested that the sacrifice of Calvary availed only for original sin, and not for the actual sins of men.

These illustrations, which are not exhaustive, all indicate the way in which the freedom of discussion within Anglican tradition has not involved mere licence, but has been guided in its general direction by an understanding of the Christian faith, rooted and grounded in the Scriptures, sustained and expounded through the teaching of the early Councils, and the subsequent centuries of the Church, and, in relation to the controversies of the sixteenth century, finding its expression in the Thirty-Nine Articles.

The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar: 2

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Henri de Lubac has described von Balthasar's theology by contrast with Hegel's "speculative Good Friday" as a "contemplative Holy Saturday". This brings out clearly both the degree to which his material dogmatics is informed by his fundamental theological insights into the nature of faith as contemplation and the extent to which his theology centres on the *kenosis* of the Son of God which finds its term in the descent into Hell. (Here as elsewhere von Balthasar's theology is deeply indebted to the mysticism of Adrienne von Speyr.) Whereas in the first article I attempted to give some account of von Balthasar's fundamental theology, what I shall be attempting here is to indicate something of the richness of his material dogmatics and to show as it were by example what implications for material dogmatics such an emphasis on aesthetics may have.

De Lubac's description of von Balthasar's theology draws our attention to the central axis of his work: Christ's descent into Hell. No doubt this will strike most men as strange and perplexing. It is true that the idea is not uncommon in medieval mystery plays, being portrayed in scenes depicting the Harrowing of Hell; it is also taken up by the later medieval