

# **THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES: A RE-STATEMENT**

By Philip Edgcumbe Hughes

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“I keep close to her (the Church of England’s) Articles and Homilies, which, if my opposers did, we should not have so many dissenters from her. But it is most notorious that for the iniquity of the priests the land mourns. We have *preached* and *lived* many sincere persons out of our communion. I have now conversed with several of the best of all denominations; many of them solemnly protest that they went from the Church because they could not find food for their souls. They stayed among us till they were starved out.”

George Whitefield, *Journals*, 12 April 1739.

## PREFACE

The Articles of Religion of the Church of England were 42 in number when first published by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1553. In the reign of Elizabeth I they were slightly revised and some adjustments were made, including the reduction of the number to thirty-nine. They have remained ever since a classical statement of Anglican doctrine.

The re-statement that I offer here is designed simply to clarify the languages and meaning of the Articles for the benefit of the modern reader. Because they constitute a historic and authoritative document, it would have been inappropriate to attempt to change their form or their teaching; accordingly, the student of the Articles will find here the authentic structure and flavour of the original.

The rediscovery of the Thirty-nine Articles in our day, after a period of neglect and depreciation, will do much to strengthen the Church in its teaching and its witness.

PHILIP EDGCUMBE HUGHES  
Th.D, D.Theol., D.Litt.

ii.

## **A RE-STATEMENT OF THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES OF RELIGION**

**1. The Holy**                      There is only one living and  
true God. His existence

## **Trinity**

is everlasting, without beginning or end. As a spiritual being, not limited by a body and bodily members, and free from bodily desires and impulses, His power, wisdom, and goodness are infinite. He is the Creator and Preserver of all things whether seen or unseen. In the unity of this one true God there are three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are one in being, power and eternity.

## **2. Of the Word or Son of God**

The Son, who is the Word of the Father (John 1:1), is the Son of the Father from everlasting to everlasting. He is truly and eternally God, one with the Father in being. He took our human nature to Himself in the womb of the Virgin Mary, so that two full and perfect natures, His divine and our human natures, were united in the one person of the incarnate Son, never to be divided. There is there-fore one

Christ who is truly God and truly man, and who truly suffered, was crucified, died and was buried. By Christ's sacrifice of Himself, not only for original guilt but also for all actual sins of men, God was reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).

3. **Christ's descent to the grave** As Christ died for us and was buried, so also it is to be believed that the giving up of His life was a reality.
4. **Of the Resurrection of Christ** Christ truly rose again from the dead. His was a bodily resurrection, with flesh, bones and all things that belong to the perfection of our human nature. His ascension was a bodily ascension into heaven, where He is now enthroned until the last day, when He will return to judge all men.
5. **The Holy Spirit** The Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son is one in being, majesty and

glory with the Father and the Son, and thus is truly and eternally God.

**6. The sufficiency  
of Holy  
Scripture for  
our salvation**

Holy Scripture sets forth everything that is necessary for our salvation. Consequently, nobody should be required to believe as an article of the Christian faith, or to regard as necessary for salvation, anything that is not found in Scripture or that cannot be proved from Scripture. By the term Holy Scripture we mean the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, namely:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos,

Obadiah, Jonah, Micah,  
Nahum, Habakkuk,  
Zephaniah, Haggai,  
Zechariah, Malachi.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John,  
Acts, Romans, 1 and 2  
Corinthians, Galatians,  
Ephesians, Philippians,  
Colossians, 1 and 2  
Thessalonians, 1 and 2  
Timothy, Titus, Philemon,  
Hebrews, James, 1 and 2  
Peter, 1 and 2 and 3 John,  
Jude, Revelation.

The books known as the  
Apocrypha are read by the  
Church as Jerome said,  
because of the examples  
they provide of heroic lives  
and faithful conduct; but the  
Church does not use these  
books to establish any  
doctrine.

## 7. The Old Testament

The Old Testament is not  
contrary to the New  
Testament. In the Old as  
well as in the New  
Testament, everlasting life is

offered to mankind through Christ; for Christ, who is both God and man, is the only Mediator between God and man. Therefore we must not pay attention to any who say that in the Old Testament the patriarchs and others were limited in their expectation to the transitory promises. Although the ceremonies and rites of the Law which God gave through Moses are not binding on Christians, and the civil precepts of the Law are not essential for the organization of any state or commonwealth, yet no Christian at all is free from obedience to the commandments known as moral.

**8. The three  
Nicene Creed, the  
Creeds**

2.  
The three creeds, namely the  
Athanasian Creed, and what  
is commonly called the

Apostles' Creed, should be received and believed without reservation, because they may be proved from Holy Scripture.

## 9. Original sin

Original sin does not consist in imitating the sin of Adam (as the Pelagians wrongly teach), but is the fault and corruption of the nature with which all the descendants of Adam are born. It is due to original sin that we have departed very far from the original righteousness in which we were created, and are naturally inclined to evil, with the result that there is a constant war between the flesh and the spirit.

Accordingly in every person born into this world, original sin is deserving of God's wrath and condemnation. This infection of our nature remains even in those who in Christ are reborn. Because of it the desire of the flesh is not submissive to the Law of God. True though it is that

there is no condemnation awaiting those who believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle asserts that all ungodly desires are in themselves sinful.

## **10. Free Will**

Since the fall of Adam man's state is such that he is unable, by his own natural strength and good works, to turn and dispose himself to believe and call upon God. Consequently, we have no power of our own to do good works that are pleasing and acceptable to God, unless the grace of God is first given through Christ, so that we may have a good will, and that same grace continues at work within us to maintain that good will.

## **11. Justification**

It is not because of any good works or deservings on our part, but only by faith which rests on the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that we are accounted righteous before

God. Therefore the doctrine of our justification by faith alone is most edifying and full of strength and comfort. (This doctrine is more fully explained in the Homily of Justification.)

**12. Good works**

3.  
Although good works, which are the fruits of faith and follow after our justification, cannot put away our sins, and are subject to the severity of God's judgment, yet, inasmuch as they are done in Christ and for His sake, they are pleasing and acceptable to God; for they spring necessarily from a true and vital faith, and are indeed the evidence of a vital faith, just as a tree is recognized by its fruit.

**13. Works before**

Works that are done before receiving the grace of

## **Justification**

Christ and the indwelling of His Spirit are not pleasing to God, because they do not spring from faith in Jesus Christ; nor is it true (as some say) that they render us fit to receive grace or are deserving of grace. On the contrary, the fact that such works are not done as God has willed and commanded them to be done can only mean that they have the nature of sin.

## **14. Works of Supererogation**

Works which are supposedly done voluntarily beyond and in excess of what is required by God's commandments (known as works of supererogation) cannot be taught without self-centred arrogance and irreverence; for it is claimed that persons who perform such works render to God not only as much as it is their duty to render, but actually do for God more than is of bounden duty required; whereas Christ

plainly stated, "When you have done all that is commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants' " (Luke 17:10).

**15. Christ alone  
without sin**

As our true fellow man Christ was like us in all respects, with the exception only of sin, from which He was completely free, both in His flesh and in His spirit. He came into the world to be the Lamb without spot or blemish, and by His once-for-all sacrifice of Himself to take away the sins of the world as the one in whom, as St John says, there was no sin (John 1:29; 1 John 3:5). But all the rest of us, even though we have been baptized and born again in Christ, continue to offend in many things; and "if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

4.

**16. Sin after**

**Baptism**

Not every serious sin committed after our baptism is an unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit. Therefore persons who fall into sin after baptism should be encouraged to repent. After we have received the Holy Spirit it is possible for us to turn away from the grace we have experienced and to fall into sin, and it is possible for us who have fallen to rise again and amend our lives by the grace of God. Therefore persons who say that they cannot sin any more as long as they continue in this life (claiming to have attained sinless perfection), or who deny any opportunity of forgiveness to those who truly repent, are to be condemned

**17. Predestination**

Predestination to life belongs to God's everlasting

## and election

purpose. By this is meant that before the foundation of the world, it is His unchangeable decree, in accordance with His secret counsel to deliver from the curse and damnation those whom He has chosen in Christ, and to bring them by Him to everlasting salvation, as vessels of His mercy (Rom 9:21 ff). Therefore those on whom such an excellent blessing of God is bestowed are called according to God's purpose by the Holy Spirit working in them in God's good time; through grace they obey this calling and are freely justified by God; they become the sons of God by adoption (Rom 3:24; 8:15 f); they are conformed to the image of His only Son Jesus Christ; they lead holy lives that are given to good works to the glory of God; and at last, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting bliss (Rom 8:29 f; Eph 2:8-10).

The reverent consideration of our predestination and election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable strength and comfort to godly persons, who feel the working in themselves of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly passions and drawing their thoughts upward to high and heavenly realities. This teaching is welcome to us both because it strongly establishes and confirms our assurance of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ and also because it kindles in us a fervent love to God. For unregenerate persons, however, who are moved by idle curiosity and who do not have the Spirit of Christ, to be constantly confronted with the doctrine

of God's predestination is dangerous and disastrous, since the devil uses it to drive them either to despair or to abandon themselves to immoral and ungodly living, which is no less perilous than despair.

Furthermore, we must accept God's promises in the way in which they are ordinarily presented to us in Holy Scripture, and in all that we do the will of God is to be followed precisely as it is revealed to us in the Word of God.

## **18. Salvation in**

They are to be condemned as false teachers who

## **Christ alone**

assert that persons will be saved no matter what beliefs they hold or what sect they belong to, provided they sincerely lead their lives according to those beliefs and to the light of nature; for Holy Scripture insists that it is only by the name of Jesus Christ that we may be saved (Acts 4:12).

## **19. The Church**

The visible Church of Christ is a gathering of believing people in which the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments are ministered with due order and discipline as ordained by Christ. Together with other churches, the Church of Rome has erred, not only in matters of conduct and ceremonial but also in matters of doctrine.

## **20. The authority**

The Church has power to prescribe rites and

**of the Church**

ceremonies and has authority in theological controversies; but it is not lawful for the Church to prescribe anything that is contrary to God's written Word, or to expound one passage of Scripture in such a way that it disagrees with another. Therefore, although the Church is a witness and a guardian of Holy Scripture, yet it is not open to it to prescribe anything contrary to Scripture, or to enforce anything not found in Scripture to be believed as necessary to salvation.

**21. The authority  
of General**

Even general councils may err when they meet, and sometimes have erred, even in issues of theological

## **Councils**

importance - for such councils are composed of men, not all of whom may be governed by the Spirit and the Word of God. Therefore, nothing declared by such councils as necessary for salvation has binding power or authority unless it is plainly taught in Holy Scripture.

6.

## **22. Purgatory**

The Romish teaching about purgatory, pardons, the worship and adoration of images and relics, and also the practice of praying to saints, is a futile deception, which, far from being grounded in Scripture, is repugnant to the Word of God.

## **23. Ministering in**

No man is permitted to take upon himself the office

**the congregation** of public preaching or ministrations of the sacraments before he has been called and appointed to fulfill this office. Those persons should be accepted as lawfully called and appointed who have been selected and called to this work by men entrusted with public authority in the Church to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard.

**24. The language of public worship** It is plainly incompatible with the Word of God and with the custom of the primitive Church to conduct public worship or to minister the sacraments in the Church in a language the people do not understand.

**25. The Sacraments** The sacraments prescribed by Christ are badges and tokens of our profession as Christians, and, more particularly, they are trustworthy witnesses and effectual signs of God's grace and good will to us. By them God works invisibly in us, both arousing and also strengthening and confirming our faith in Him.

Christ our Lord has ordained two gospel sacraments, namely baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The five that are commonly called sacraments, namely, confirmation, penance, ordination, matrimony, and extreme unction are not to be received as sacraments of the gospel, since they have in part developed from a false understanding of apostolic practice and in part represent states of life allowed in the Scriptures. Moreover, because they have no visible sign or ceremony commanded by God, they do not belong in the same category as the sacraments or baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The sacraments were not appointed by Christ to be a public spectacle or to be paraded for adoration, but to be used with due discipline. They have a beneficial effect or working only in those who receive them worthily; whereas those who receive them unworthily bring condemnation on themselves, as St Paul teaches (1 Cor. 11:27 ff).

**26. The  
unworthiness**

Although in the visible Church there is always a mingling of evil with good, and at times evil persons

**of ministers**

hold the chief positions in the ministry of the Word and sacraments, yet, because they do so not in their own but in Christ's name and perform their ministry by His commission and authority, we may avail ourselves of their ministry both in hearing the Word of God and in receiving the sacraments. The effect of Christ's ordinance is not taken away by their wickedness, nor is the grace of God's gifts diminished in the case of those who receive the sacraments rightly and by faith; for, although ministered by evil men, these are effectual on account of Christ's institution and promise.

Nevertheless, it belongs to the discipline of the Church that evil ministers should be investigated and that they should be accused by those who have knowledge of their offences, and, further, that, on being found guilty, they should by just judgment be deposed.

## 27. Baptism

Baptism is a sign of the faith we profess and a mark that differentiates Christian persons from those who are unbaptized; and it is also a sign of regeneration or new birth by which, as by an instrument, those who receive baptism rightly are grafted into the Church, the promises of forgiveness of sin and our adoption to be the sons of God are visibly signified and sealed, and faith is confirmed and grace increased by virtue of prayer to God. The baptism of young children is under all circumstances to be retained in the Church as a practice fully agreeable with the institution of Christ.

8

## 28. The Lord's

The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love

## Supper

that Christians ought to have among themselves for each other, but is especially a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death.

Accordingly, for those who rightly, worthily, and with faith receive it the bread that is broken is a partaking of the body of Christ and the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16).

Transubstantiation (the teaching that the substance of the bread and wine is changed into the actual flesh and blood of Christ) in the Supper of the Lord cannot be proved by Holy Scripture, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthrows the nature of a sacrament, and has given rise to many superstitions.

In the Lord's Supper the body of Christ is given, taken and eaten only in a heavenly or spiritual manner, and faith is the means by which the body of Christ is received and eaten in the supper.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not commanded by Christ to be reserved, carried about, lifted up or worshipped.

**29. The participation of unbelievers**

Though wicked persons, and all in whom a vital faith is absent, physically and visibly press the sacrament of the body and the blood of Christ with their teeth (as Saint Augustine says), yet in no sense are they partakers of Christ; on the contrary, they eat and drink the sign or sacrament of so great a reality to their own condemnation.

**30. Communion**

The cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the laity,

**in both kinds**

for both parts of the Lord's sacrament, the wine as well as the bread, ought by Christ's ordinance and commandment to be ministered alike to all Christian persons.

9.

**31. The one offering** Christ's offering of Himself on the cross, once for all,  
**of Christ finished** is the perfect redemption, propitiation, and  
**on the cross**

satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual, and there is no other satisfaction for sin, but that alone.

Therefore the sacrifices of masses, in which it is commonly said that the priest offers Christ for the living and the dead, to obtain

the remission of their punishment or guilt, are blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits.

**32. The marriage  
of priests**

Bishops, priests and deacons are not commanded by God's law to take vows of celibacy or to abstain from marriage; therefore it is lawful for them, as for all other Christian persons, to marry at their own discretion, where they judge that it serves better to godliness for them to do so (cf. Matthew 18:17).

**33. Excommuni-  
cated persons**

Any person who by open denunciation of the Church is rightly cut off from the unity of the Church and excommunicated ought to be treated by the whole company of the faithful as a heathen and a traitor, until such time as he is reconciled by penitence and received back into the Church by a judge with authority to do so (cf. Matthew 18:17).

**34. The traditions  
of the church**

It is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies should be uniform and identical in every place; for these have at all times been diversified, and they may be changed to accord with the diversities of countries, times, and human customs, provided that nothing be ordained contrary to God's Word. Anyone who by his private judgment willingly and deliberately breaks the traditions and ceremonies of the Church which are not repugnant to the Word of God, and are appointed and approved by common authority, ought to be openly rebuked so that others may fear to follow his example) as one who offends against the common order of the Church, undermines authority, and wounds the consciences of weak fellow Christians.

Every particular or national church has authority to prescribe, change and abolish ceremonies or rites of the Church which have been ordered only by human authority, providing all things are done for edification.

10.

**35. The Homilies**

The two books of Homilies, which were set forth in the times of Edward VI and Elizabeth I respectively, contain godly and wholesome teaching.

**36. The  
Archbishops and  
of bishops and  
ministers**

The form of consecration of bishops, and the ordering of priests and deacons, set forth in the time of Edward VI, contain all things necessary for such consecration and ordering and nothing that of itself is superstitious and ungodly. Therefore anyone who is consecrated or ordained according to these rites we declare to be rightly, orderly

and lawfully consecrated and ordained.

**37. Civil  
magistrates**

We do not give to our princes or rulers the right to minister either God's Word or the sacraments. The only prerogative which we recognize as having been given by God Himself in Holy Scripture to all godly rulers is that they should rule all states and classes committed to their charge by God, whether ecclesiastical or secular, and restrain with the civil sword stubborn persons and evildoers.

The Bishop of Rome has no jurisdiction in this realm.

Christians may be punished by the laws of the realm with death for heinous and grievous offences.

It is lawful for Christian men to carry weapons and serve in wars at the command of the civil ruler.

**38. Private  
Property**

The wealth and possessions of Christians are not common to all nor is their right and title to own private property to be questioned. Nevertheless, every person ought to give liberally and according to his ability from the things he possesses to the poor.

**39. Oath-taking**

While we acknowledge that vain and rash swearing is forbidden to Christians by our Lord Jesus Christ and by St James (Matthew 5:34-37; James 5:12), we judge that our Christian religion does not prohibit us from swearing an oath when it is required by the magistrate in the cause of good faith and charity, providing it is done according to the prophet's teaching in justice, judgment and truth.

