

**THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND; THE ELEVENTH
OF THE PUBLIC COURSE OF
LECTURES, IN TRINITY TERM, READ
BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY, IN THE DIVINITE
SCHOOL, OXFORD, JUNE 1, 1842**

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The thirty-nine articles of the Church of England; the Eleventh of the Public Course of Lectures, in trinity term, read before the University, in the Divinite School, Oxford, June 1, 1842 by R. D. Hampden

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heard it.

Ch. Ch. June 4, 1842.

LECTURE XI.

AND now that we may be supposed to have gone through the several studies indicated in our analysis—to have satisfied ourselves as to the canon of Scripture, the genuine text, the laws of interpretation, the authenticity and credibility of the volume of Scripture and its doctrines, and the confirmation of the truth to be obtained from ecclesiastical history,—including under that study an acquaintance with the patristic remains, and all the documents and institutions of the Church,—we may proceed in due order to that which may properly be called the business of Exposition, as distinct from the Investigation of Sacred Truth, and as it is a superstructure to be raised upon it.

The business of Exposition will be found to consist of two parts:—1st, That of drawing forth the doctrines of our religion into the several particulars into which they are branched; stating them correctly; and giving them their relative place and due importance in the scheme of religion. 2nd, That of applying them to the instruction and edification of the Church. The first consideration would be briefly expressed by the term Systematic Theology; the second, by the term Practical Theology. The first will form the subject of this day's Lecture; the

second, that of to-morrow's, and the conclusion of the present Course.

I remarked at the beginning of these Lectures, that in collecting the information of Scripture we were necessarily led—led, that is, by the constitution of our minds—to form a System of theology. In the Bible itself we have narrative, doctrine, and precept interspersed with each other; and when we come to study the Bible, we naturally proceed to distribute the particulars belonging to each into their respective heads, and then further to arrange these several particulars in their due order and place in each department. Thus we have Scripture-histories, giving the events recorded in Scripture, detached from the other matter, and chronologically arranged. We have treatises of Christian ethics, and selections of Christian precepts; and we have also summaries of Christian doctrine,—Creeds, and Articles of religion. It is to these last, in the most proper sense, that the term Systematic Theology applies, since these undertake to state the truths of religion as such; and they comprise accordingly the Science of theology. This department also obtains the name of Dogmatic Theology; but this appellation denotes rather the several formal propositions of which our theological System consists than the whole sum of them, which is what we mean when we speak of Systematic Theology.

I assumed the truth, you will remember, at the outset, of our Creeds and Articles, in order to cha-

acterize our Theology, amidst the various discordant views which might be taken of the subject; that we might, in fact, enter on our business in the spirit of Church-of-England theologians. Our received formularies referred us to the Scriptures as the object of our study in the search after divine knowledge; and we have accordingly been engaged in exploring the Scriptures, examining into their divine character, and acquainting ourselves with their contents. We have now to ascertain the character of our guide—to shew that it is faithful and true to those Scriptures to which it conducts us—not encroaching on the prerogative of Scripture, nor inconsistently enunciating any other doctrines for divine, except what are found in the volume itself of Scripture. We shall thus establish at once their truth and importance—their truth, as being scriptural; their importance, as helping us to a right collection and understanding and keeping of Scripture-truths.

Articles of Religion appear to differ from Creeds in this respect, that they are designed principally for teachers of the faith, whereas Creeds are designed for the body of believers at large. Both are Confessions of the Faith. Both are summaries of what is to be believed. But while the Creeds enable the believer to know and profess summarily the great doctrines of revelation, Articles provide him with an accurate enunciation of them, and enable him, as by an outline, to define them with precision, distinguishing

them from similar or erroneous views of the same points, and thus to maintain a consistent body of truth. Every believer indeed, hearer as well as teacher, may thus apply a system of Articles to his own edification in the faith. But this office of Articles is clearly of primary and direct importance to the teacher, as it is indispensable that the doctrinal statements of the teachers of the Church should all speak one language, that language carefully guarded from error; and that amidst the diversity of expositions they should know clearly, by the public voice of the Church, what they are required to teach.

Creeds, as the more indispensable, since it concerns every Christian to know what he is called upon to believe, at his very entrance into the Christian faith, and to make some profession of it in order to his baptism, naturally come in the history of Systematic Theology before Articles. Creeds, accordingly, appear to have existed from the earliest times of the preaching of the Gospel. The Apostles' Creed, for example, though there is no evidence to prove its being the work of the Apostles, undoubtedly descends to us from apostolical times. There would be little occasion *comparatively* for Articles of Religion in the primitive ages, when the teachers of the Gospel had the teaching of their Lord and His Apostles as yet sounding in their ears; and whilst the Church *at large*, however divided in place or time, remained, with some partial exceptions, uncorrupted. Errors

indeed there were, and gross errors, of *doctrine*, accompanying the first propagation of the Gospel. But those errors had not at first infected the catholic body of the Church, so as to call for the remedy of formal Articles of religion, until the time of the Council of Nicæa, in A.D. 325. For the first Council of the Apostles and Elders and the whole Church at Jerusalem was directed rather to the preservation of liberty and peace in the Church, than to the inculcation of doctrine; enjoining as it did the refraining from imposing any burthen on Christians, beyond abstinence from "meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication;" and of the like nature, for the most part, were the subsequent provincial Councils antecedent to that of Nicæa.

The Decrees of Councils, accordingly, in the early ages, occupied the place of Articles of Religion. They were decisions of points of doctrine, for the instruction of the whole Church, called forth from time to time, by peculiar needs, by the rise of errors, affecting this or that doctrine of the Faith; having immediately in view, as we may observe, the teachers in the Church, and the doctrine to be taught by them. Thus the Council of Nicæa condemned the Arian teachers, and their doctrine, and set forth the true Faith, according to the Scriptures, as that which alone should be professed and taught in the Church. The second General Council, that of Con-