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THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES OF RELIGION: THE CHURCH AND ITS MISSION¹

Eliud Wabukala

The Thirty-nine Articles are indispensable for Anglican mission in its global context today because they establish the power of the gospel and the priority of Scripture. These two points bring a profound clarity to a number of challenges facing the Anglican Communion.

My dear brothers and sisters, I want to thank you so much for your kind invitation to deliver this lecture and for your very generous hospitality. I also thank God for this opportunity to visit and stand alongside you in your struggle for the gospel here in South Carolina. The subject matter of these lectures could never of course be treated as mere ideas and your context is a sharp reminder that we are not dealing with abstract theological debate, but with the reality of spiritual warfare and the need to contend for the gospel as ‘the power of God for salvation’ (Romans 1:16).

You do not need me to tell you that the faithfulness and integrity of our beloved Anglican Communion has been assaulted on a scale that would have been unimaginable even a generation ago, but I believe I do see being worked out the truth of our Lord’s words: ‘I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’ (Matthew 16:18). The boldness with which a false gospel has been promoted in the Anglican Communion has, to borrow a phrase once used by my good friend Archbishop Peter Jensen, awoken the sleeping giant of Anglican orthodoxy.

The main manifestation of that awakening is the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, which was launched at the first GAFCON in Jerusalem five years ago and has proved that it is a movement which is here to stay following the outstanding success of GAFCON 2013 held a few weeks ago in Nairobi. I count it a great privilege to have been called to be Chairman of this movement and its Primates Council, and I believe that GAFCON and its Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans is of great relevance to our topic this evening. Confessing Anglicans are uniquely placed to articulate a biblical theology of Anglican mission for the twenty-first century for two reasons:

1. The motivation of the GAFCON movement from the outset was missional. We could not stand by while a false gospel was being promoted

¹ Archbishop Eliud Wabukala’s talk was originally presented at The Ridley Institute, South Carolina, a confessionally Anglican school of theology at St. Andrew’s, Mount Pleasant on November 12, 2013. Archbishop Wabukala’s talk was part of a ten-week lecture series on Reformation Anglicanism. Subheadings have been added, and were not originally part of the text.

with all the confusion that brings. We defend the gospel because we want to promote the gospel and the Jerusalem Declaration of 2008 affirmed that the reason we gathered in Jerusalem was 'to free our churches to give clear and certain witness to Jesus Christ.'

2. Like any truly reforming movement in the Church, GAFCON simply recovered that which had been lost and I am thinking most particularly, though not exclusively, of the Thirty-nine Articles which were themselves intended by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer as the articulation of that which had been buried beneath layers of mediaeval scholasticism.

Let me remind you of the significance given to the Thirty-nine Articles in the Jerusalem Statement and Declaration. In the Statement we affirm that:

Our core identity as Anglicans is expressed in these words: The doctrine of the Church is grounded in the Holy Scriptures and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures. In particular, such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal.²

Then in the Jerusalem Declaration Clause 4 it is further affirmed that:

We uphold the Thirty-nine Articles as containing the true doctrine of the Church agreeing with God's Word and as authoritative for Anglicans today.

At this point we should pause to note how remarkable this is. Until recently, the default position throughout the Communion seems to have been to treat the Articles as of merely historical interest. In the Church of England itself, although the Articles still have legal status in defining doctrine, the clergy are not required to subscribe to them and in my own Anglican Church of Kenya our constitution merely gives individual dioceses the option to require subscription to the Articles.

Thanks to GAFCON, there is now renewed awareness of the Articles. It may seem strange to you that I as an African Primate am advocating a document that emerged out of the ecclesiastical and political crisis of sixteenth century England, but simply to dismiss the Articles because of their distance from us in time and space would be a superficial judgment. They are not of course on the same level as Scripture—indeed perhaps their greatest value is the assertion that the Church and its Councils are always themselves under the authority of Scripture—but like the Scriptural text, we must approach the Articles on their own merits and seek to understand the mind of the author, not impose our prior assumptions and prejudices.

² http://gafcon.org/news/gafcon_final_statement/

When we do that, I believe two great truths become clear which are vital for the recovery of an authentically Anglican understanding of mission, *the power of the Gospel* and *the priority of Scripture*.

The Power of the Gospel

Firstly, let us remember the very strong sense of the power of the gospel embodied in the Articles. They do indeed embody the teaching of the Apostle Paul that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. In his loving mercy and grace, God calls the dead to life through Jesus Christ. The gospel is not a call for moral reform and improvement. We are utterly unable to help ourselves and the power of God is displayed in the gift of new life as he reconciles lost humanity to himself in Christ. The influence of Augustine is very clear in the recognition given to the bondage of the human will. According to Articles 9 and 10 it is impossible for us to either please God or even turn to him in our own strength. And those who worry about the historical particularity of the Articles as a product of the British Isles over four centuries ago should be reassured by the fact that it is the theology of Augustine the African that shapes their understanding of salvation, not that of Pelagius the Briton!

Having established the helplessness of human nature apart from God, Article 11 then states the glorious truth of God's saving grace in justification by faith alone, righteousness before God that is ours solely through the substitutionary sacrifice of the cross of Christ. So axiomatic is this great truth that the Article refers the reader to the Homily on Justification³ for a more detailed treatment. Articles 12 to 14 then drive home the consequences for the way we understand good works as those actions and activities that flow from justification rather than contributing to it.

The Articles therefore give a central place to the power of the gospel as the only means by which mankind can be rescued from the grip of sin and death. Here we have a radical understanding of what it means to be saved because there is a sober realism about the helplessness of the human condition. The heart is held captive to sin expressed in Luther's memorable phrase as '*cor incurvatus in se*,' the heart turned in upon itself. Set against this dark backdrop, the gospel of grace alone through faith alone shines in all its glory.

Yet during the seventeenth century, a form of moralism established itself in the Church of England, despite the teaching of the Articles, and at its root was the Pelagian error of the freedom of the will. The fear of anarchy during the English Civil War (1642–1651) and weariness with religious conflict after the Restoration under Charles II encouraged a

³ 'Of the Salvation of all Mankind' Book 1, Homily 3.

focus on morality and its almost inevitable consequence, an indifference to doctrine. It is not difficult to see the attraction of this approach. England had been in the throes of religious upheaval for over a century and in a climate where there was a growing optimism about the powers of human reason, a rational morality seemed to offer the possibility of a stable social consensus in a way which the claims of revealed religion could not. By the end of the century this intellectual current had been clearly articulated by the philosopher John Locke and a gently sceptical moralism was to become an enduring characteristic of English Anglican culture.

The most thorough examination of this shift that I am aware of has been made by Bishop C. FitzSimons Allison in his book *The Rise of Moralism*, and he concludes that in the latter half of the sixteenth century:

There was an ineluctable movement away from the Christian faith of the earlier [Anglican] divines towards a moralism masquerading as faith which rent the fabric of soteriology and split the elements of religion so radically that true doctrine became almost irrelevant and ethics became so harsh as to be cruel.⁴

I am so thankful to God that Christianity as moralism was not, on the whole, the gospel brought from England and the West to Africa and what we now call the Global South during the great missionary initiatives of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the GAFCON movement coined the phrase ‘Confessing Anglicans,’ Provinces like mine which are the fruit of missionary endeavours have always been ‘confessing.’ For many of us the writings of John Stott and J.I. Packer simply were normal Anglicanism and too many of us assumed that the rest of the Communion thought the same way!

However, in the past thirty years it has become clear that the West has finally exhausted the capital of its Christian heritage. The combination of secularisation and the growth of global media and communications has laid bare a fundamental theological divergence between Western secularised moralistic Anglicanism and confessional Anglicanism. The resulting strains have seriously damaged the Communion—many faithful orthodox Anglicans have been marginalised or even ejected from the formal structures of their churches. Sexual immorality has not only been tolerated but held out to be holy and the Archbishop of Canterbury and the other formal instruments of Communion are no longer able to fulfil their basic purpose of gathering the Communion.

The root cause of our problems is that strand of Western Anglicanism which has never been able to shake off the moralistic tendencies of the seventeenth century. It has too often chosen to justify its existence by

⁴ C FitzSimons Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003).

various forms of moralism, but the indifference to doctrine which goes with this mindset means that it has a persistent tendency to adopt the morality of the prevailing secular culture—and it is ironic that bishops who are called to be guardians of the faith are often the leaders and catalysts in this process. The moral consensus is now governed by an overriding commitment to rights understood as individualistic self-expression, with ‘gay marriage’ as the latest manifestation of that trend and no doubt not the last. In contrast, the attempt to promote this new morality in the global Anglican Communion has been the catalyst for the recovery of what we may describe as Reformation Anglicanism with a solid theological basis in the GAFCON Jerusalem Statement and Declaration of 2008, buttressed by the reaffirmation of the authority and relevance of the Thirty-nine Articles.

A Reformed Catholic Understanding

On the basis of this brief historical survey, I therefore urge that the Articles are very significant for Anglican mission today because they bring us back to the Reformed Catholic understanding of the gospel that is truly Anglican and help us to correct the moralistic distortions that first appeared in the seventeenth century and are causing so much havoc today. The Articles alert us to the fact that effective mission must be based on clear theological convictions about the gospel. However, there is a great temptation on the part of those who have a vested interest in maintaining the institutional status quo in the Communion to function as the modern day equivalent of those the prophet Jeremiah charges with having ‘healed the wound of my people lightly’ (Jer 6:14). We hear appeals for unity for the sake of mission, for reconciliation, and for disagreement to be seen as healthy diversity, but none of this bears careful examination.

It is true that the Articles are on some points cautious, displaying reticence to go beyond the clear witness of Scripture and the pastorally orientated treatment of predestination in Article 17 is a very fine example. However, on the central truth of justification by faith alone, I see that the great positive teaching of Article 11 is reinforced by the denial of the possibility of justification by works in Articles 12, 13 and 14.

Following the spirit of the Articles, we respect diversity on secondary matters and the GAFCON movement models this in the variety of traditions it embraces and the recognition of principled difference about the role of women in church leadership. However, on those matters which touch the central message of the Church’s mission we need to also follow the spirit of the Articles, reinforcing the great positives of the gospel by stating the necessary negatives, especially in an intellectual environment

dominated by post-modernist relativism where it is assumed that truth claims are merely preferences.

As the Nairobi Communique from our recently concluded GAFCON 2013 puts is:

The Church is a place where truth matters, where it is guarded and promoted and where alternatives are exposed for what they are—an exchange of the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25).⁵

There must be a biblical penetration to our commitment to mission so that we do not end up colluding with those who heal the wound lightly. Reluctance to address what I call the ‘necessary negatives’ is deeply ingrained in the existing Instruments of Communion and their associated organisations. There has been a persistent failure since the Lambeth Conference of 1998 to exercise the necessary discipline that any organisation, secular or religious, needs if it is to maintain its basic identity. The Anglican story for the past fifteen years has been the attempt by the revisionist Provinces of North America, with significant support from the Church of England itself, to undermine the collegiality of the Lambeth Conference’s resolution on human sexuality. A false gospel has now become entrenched in parts of the Communion, as the Jerusalem Statement of 2008 correctly diagnosed, and the GAFCON movement has had to describe itself as a Confessing Anglican movement in the face of the confusion which has been allowed to take hold.

So keeping this recent history in mind, I want to take two current examples of where we need to apply the yardstick of the Articles to preserve the integrity of Anglican Mission.

Modern Day Moralism

The first is an example of modern day moralism that is being promoted heavily by the Anglican Communion Office in London. The Anglican Alliance was conceived at the 2008 Lambeth Conference (from which over 200 mainly Global South bishops were absent) and was presented as a catalyst for relief and development work around the Communion.

Such work is important and necessary, but this initiative institutionalises a concept of mission as humanitarian activism, which can be carried on largely regardless of any shared theological vision. In 2010 it took a decision to go ahead without an agreed theological basis for its work and by 2012 had only managed to produce an initial document, which dealt with the search for a theology for the Alliance. This paper, ‘Theological Basis for the Anglican Alliance: from the Margins

⁵ See <http://gafcon.org/news/nairobi-communique-and-commitment>

to the Center’ demonstrates the extent to which the term ‘Anglican’ is in danger of being devalued by being attached to ideas which are very far removed from its historic formularies. In this document there is no mention whatsoever of sin or the cross and all the weight falls on human discernment and achievement. For instance, we are told:

The fact is that in our times, everyone believes as they wish. One has to try and find God in his context and in the things we do every day...Those who love the Church don’t only concern themselves with her; they are also concerned for her. And this is what our Alliance is about, generating actions which help us to understand the other, the neighbour in each of our contexts. That, through concerted actions we can find solutions which help us to understand that another world or direction is possible.⁶

Here is nothing new, just a twenty-first century rendering of the gospel of moralistic optimism. And there is a sad irony—an organisation dedicated to economic empowerment is opening a door to spiritual impoverishment and I fear that is symptomatic of what ‘official Anglicanism’ is becoming—a global humanitarian organisation which has very little substance to say to a lost world and has lost its confidence in the Scriptures as the Word of God, from which we learn what it really means to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God (Mic 6:8).

Does Canterbury Define Anglicanism?

Secondly, we need to probe below the surface of the assumption that the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury, as one of the formal Instruments of Communion defines the narrative of what is to be taken as Anglican. In a recent interview with Vatican Radio the Archbishop of Canterbury observed that ‘Anglicans have always conducted their disagreements very openly, publicly, loudly,’ and he claimed to ‘rejoice in groups, like GAFCON, with many others across the Church, with lots of different perspectives, which call us in particular directions and remind us of the breadth and depth of Christian commitment that we need.’⁷

The assumption behind this comment is that there is an essential complementarity behind the various conflicting voices in the Anglican Communion. It is true that the GAFCON movement has never claimed to have a monopoly on orthodoxy, but we do stand by the objective standard of the historic formularies of the Communion and hold ourselves accountable to them. We cannot therefore allow ourselves to be seen

⁶ <http://www.americananglican.org/assets/News-and-Commentary-Files/2012/A9R2132.pdf>

⁷ http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/11/01/archbishop_welby:_no_sacrifice_too_great_to_obey_christ%E2%80%99s_call_to/en1-742687

as simply one interpretation of contemporary Anglicanism along with others. The appeal to be united for the sake of mission when there is no agreement on the substance of mission, and the indiscriminate affirmation of diversity, confuse the gospel message by seeking to hold together the gospel of secular moralism—which the Jerusalem Statement actually designates as a false gospel—with the biblical gospel of grace.

GAFCON Brings Clarity

It is clear that our contemporary context requires more than ever that we ask searching questions about what mission is, so let me conclude this first section of my lecture on a more positive note. One of the significant achievements of our FCA Leader's Conference held in London last year was to produce a summary statement in answer to the question 'What is the Gospel?'.⁸ GAFCON does not need to reinvent the Anglican Communion. We are simply calling it back to itself and seeking under God to bring clarity and remove stumbling blocks so that Anglicans can devote themselves to the great task of mission which lies at the heart of the Reformers' vision with confidence and without confusion. Article 19 makes clear their conviction that the gospel precedes the church; it is found where the gospel is proclaimed through Word and Sacraments, where 'the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments duly ministered.' As Dr Ashley Null has written:

Article 19 makes clear that the church is above all the fruit of mission. The Anglican church must be rooted in the absolute primacy of the power of the Gospel to create, sustain, renew, reform, enlarge, deepen, and eventually bring home into eternal unity the church militant with the church triumphant.⁹

The Priority of Scripture

At the beginning of this lecture, I spoke of two great truths we can take from the Articles for Anglican Mission today. The first was the power of the gospel and the second that I come to now is the priority of Scripture. The two themes are of course very closely connected. We have just seen that for the Reformers, gospel precedes church in the sense that it is the power of the gospel that brings the church into being, but that gospel

⁸ <http://gafcon.org/resources/what-is-the-gospel/>

⁹ Ashley Null, 'Anglican Ecclesiology: Summary of its History and Current Assessment,' in *The Truth Shall Set You Free* (ed. Charles Raven; London: Latimer Trust, 2013), p. 106.

is heard through the inspired Scriptures and this is the understanding reflected in our recently issued Nairobi Communique where we said:

The character and boundaries of our fellowship are not determined by institutions, but by the Word of God.¹⁰

The Articles clearly establish the authority of the Scriptures over the Church in a context where the reverse has been the case—the teaching of Scripture had been obscured or contradicted by Church tradition. In our own context, we face essentially the same challenge. As one of the Episcopal Church of the United States’ leading revisionist bishops said when asked why he was prepared to sanction same sex relationships despite the biblical injunctions against them:

Because we wrote the Bible and we can rewrite it. We have rewritten the Bible many times.¹¹

Likewise, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has written:

The revelation of God comes to us in the middle of weakness and fallibility...we read with a sense of our own benighted savagery in receiving God’s gift, and our solidarity with those writers of Scripture caught up in the blazing fire of God’s gift who yet struggle with it, misapprehend it and misread it.¹²

It is likely that nearly all Anglicans would accept the priority of the Bible in the general sense of it being a central reference point in the life of the Church, but these quotations and church history as a whole alert us to the key issue of how the Bible is to be interpreted. If it is the case that the original authors in their context were not free from error and if the mind of the contemporary church can override the apparently clear teaching of the Bible, it is not surprising if the task of hermeneutics comes to be dominated by the contemporary and particular context of the interpreter.

So we may pay lip service to biblical authority, but interpret it in such a way that all we hear is not the Word of God, but the echo of our voices. This was a concern for the Kenyan delegates at the last Anglican Consultative Council in New Zealand, ACC-15. Much was made of the Bible in the Life of the Church project, but the three Kenyan

¹⁰ <http://gafcon.org/news/nairobi-communique-and-commitment>

¹¹ Bishop Charles Bennisson, <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=11-05-006-e>

¹² Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgement* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1994), p. 159.

representatives, along with colleagues from the Church of Nigeria, issued a minority report entitled ‘What really happened in Auckland NZ at ACC-15 (Oct 28–Nov 7, 2012)’ which included the following:

While there were many reports and resolutions at ACC-15, we wish to highlight our concerns over the report and the resolution on ‘The Bible in the Life of the Church’ project. There is much to commend in this report on the central role the Holy Scriptures play in the life of Anglicans everywhere. We affirm the need to address the gap between the pulpit and the pew, the scholars and ordinary Anglicans who are seeking to apply the Bible to their daily lives. However, we are seriously concerned that the context in which people interpret the Bible is considered as important as what the Bible actually says.¹³

This is a serious problem for mission. It is commonplace to say that mission begins with the *missio dei* (God’s mission) and that mission is therefore to be sent by God to do God’s work. Mission is in principle not our invention, but if Scripture is at least in part a human invention and interpretation is a contextual kaleidoscope, the claim to be doing God’s work stands on a rather precarious foundation. If the objectivity of God’s word is so uncertain, it is almost inevitable that we look for a sense of objectivity in the Church as institution or to the moral consensus of the society in which we are set, and where confidence in Scripture has been lost, those two false objectivities may coincide!

The Articles and the Interpretation of Scripture

It is here that the Articles can be of great help to us. We shall never of course be free of subjectivity in interpretation, but the Articles give us some basic principles for the faithful interpretation of Scripture, which can help us to respect its objectivity and hear it as the Word of God. In brief:

1. Article 20 refers to Scripture as ‘God’s word written’ and Article 19 looks to the preaching of the ‘pure word of God’ as a mark of the authentic church. There is no hint that the words of Scripture are anything less than divinely inspired and therefore fully authoritative. The Church and General Councils are capable of error, even in matters of faith, according to Articles 19 and 21, but the clear implication is that the Word of God does not err as it is by this standard that they must be judged.

2. The Bible must govern the teaching of the Church and not the other way around. This principle is first set out in Article 6 and expanded upon in Article 20. The Church does have authority, but there are limitations.

¹³ <http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=16769>

It cannot authorise anything that goes against the teaching of the Bible, it cannot interpret one part of Scripture in a way that contradicts other parts and it cannot require anything not found in Scripture as necessary for salvation.

How then in times of division and confusion is the Word of God to be heard? This is not only a question of the health of the church, but also essential for the integrity of the gospel it proclaims. The Reformers were, we might say, suspicious of the church, seeing it as a human institution which could all too easily arrogate to itself an authority which belonged only to the Scriptures. Our contemporary problem is a different sort of suspicion, that of the Bible itself in a world which, at least in the West, has been deeply shaped by a naturalistic worldview. It is not really possible to hold both these suspicions together without falling into complete despair about the life of the church. If you are suspicious about the Bible, you need to be optimistic about the church, and if you are optimistic about the Bible (as we should be) then you can afford to have a degree of suspicion about the church, as indeed we see in the Articles.

Church Structure and Governance

What we see in the liberal dominated structures of the Anglican Communion is a necessarily resilient optimism about church structures because there really is no alternative once we have given up on the idea that God speaks clearly through his Word. On the other hand Confessing Anglicans can be more realistic because they do believe that there is firm ground to stand on in God's Word when the institutions of the Church are failing. However, this confidence needs to have some practical expression if it is to be of any use in recovering the clear voice of the gospel in Anglican Mission. To be precise, the challenge is how this is to be done without creating an Anglican magisterium.

For Anglicans, a magisterium, a body that has ultimate and decisive teaching authority for the whole Church, is alien for two reasons.

Firstly, it is not consistent with the Anglican polity which was articulated by the Lambeth Conference Constitution Report of 1930¹⁴ as more like that of the Eastern Orthodox Churches than that of Rome. Anglican Provinces are independent of each other, but have a family likeness through shared history and—in theory—shared belief. Belonging comes through mutual recognition, not through compliance with central authority.

Secondly, ultimate authority belongs to the Word of God, not to any institutional body which, as the Articles note, is always liable to error.

¹⁴ <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/downloads/1930.pdf>

So does this mean that we should give up on any form of Communion governance to safeguard the apostolic integrity of Global Anglicanism? The experience of the attempt to agree to an Anglican Covenant based on the Windsor Report and the disarray of the Instruments of Unity might suggest the answer is ‘yes,’ but I believe the Articles do give us the basis of a way forward.

Ashley Null observes that:

Since the essential task of the church is to proclaim the Gospel through Word and Sacrament, in times of religious controversy like the Reformation, being a faithful messenger obviously includes being a reliable determiner of what the Gospel message actually is.¹⁵

Although, as we have seen, Article 20 puts limits on the authority of the Church, it does give authority to be a ‘witness and a keeper of Holy Writ.’ Null goes on to make the interesting comment that:

In his private papers, Cranmer compared this responsibility to the executor of an estate who made his judgments based on a careful study of the will’s written instructions.¹⁶

In other words, Scripture gives us the principles for its own interpretation.

So while an Anglican magisterium is out of place, we should not reject the idea of a body with a more circumscribed authority to exercise the ministry of being a ‘witness and keeper of Holy Writ’ for the Communion as a whole. This is especially necessary now that Article 34 has taken on greater significance with the formation over the centuries of the Anglican Communion as a fellowship of national and regional churches. The Article affirms that diversity is legitimate so long as ‘nothing be ordained against God’s Word’ and recognises the authority of national churches in matters of rites and ceremonies. The strength of this understanding for mission is that the unchanging truths of the gospel can be expressed in culturally appropriate forms, but it also carries the risk that the culture may distort the message of the gospel. It is therefore a strength for a global communion to have a means by which local adaptations can be tested to ensure that they enhance the communication of the gospel rather than domesticating it to a particular culture.

We may therefore say that the formation of a Primates Council as agreed at the first GAFCON in 2008 and reaffirmed in Nairobi is a step towards Conciliar leadership which could be of great value in

¹⁵ Ashley Null, ‘Sixteenth Century Anglican Ecclesiology,’ in *The Truth Shall Set You Free*, p. 65.

¹⁶ Null, ‘Sixteenth Century Anglican Ecclesiology,’ p. 65.

sustaining and clarifying global Anglican mission. The Primates Meeting as an instrument of Communion has since its meeting in Dublin in 2011 abandoned any claim to be more than a forum for debate and I believe that our GAFCON Nairobi Communique simply recognised an emerging reality with the claim that:

We believe we have acted as an important and effective instrument of Communion during a period in which other instruments of Communion have failed both to uphold gospel priorities for the Church and to heal the divisions among us.¹⁷

Conclusion

The burden of this lecture has been that the Thirty-nine Articles are indispensable for Anglican mission today because they establish *the power of the gospel* and *the priority of Scripture* as normative core truths, which are essential elements of Anglican identity. Far from being of merely historical interest, they speak very directly to the confusions of our day. In particular they remind us of the essential link between missiology and ecclesiology. If the church is brought into being by the gospel, its life and governance must also be shaped above all else by the gospel. To put it simply, it makes no sense to claim that we are fulfilling God's mission if we are not submitted to God's Word. And that takes me to my final thought. I began this lecture by noting the apparent oddity of an African Primate in the twenty-first century advocating a summary of Christian teaching arising out of sixteenth century England; I want to close by saying that I believe the recovery of the teaching of the Thirty-nine Articles is actually critical for the future of the Anglican churches in Africa.

In the Articles, fundamental biblical teaching is recovered and applied and I hope I have shown that the Articles continue to speak powerfully today. The challenges come in very different forms, but their substance is remarkably similar. I wonder how different the Church of England and the English nation would be today if the Articles had not been allowed to recede into history? I suspect both would be in a much better place and I do not want future generations of Anglicans in Kenya to look back with regret and similarly wonder what their church and nation could have become. We prize the Articles above all because of what they point us to—God who is love, whose gracious Word comes to us through the inspired Scriptures and draws us to Jesus Christ in whom we are rescued from the power of sin and death so that we may be the people of God. Let my final words be those of Article 17 which so wonderfully describe the gospel hope of those who are called by God's purpose:

¹⁷ See <http://gafcon.org/news/nairobi-communicue-and-commitment>

They through Grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.

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