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***REFORMED FOUNDATIONS, REFORMING FUTURE:***

**A Vision for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Anglicans - Church Society Conference Report**

By David Meager

On Saturday 1st June, approximately 80 people gathered at Oak Hill College for the Church Society annual conference and AGM. Revd Lee Gatiss, Church Society Director, spoke on the 39 Articles - this year is their 450th birthday, whilst Revd Dr Peter Adam, former Principal of Ridley College Melbourne, spoke on the topic of how to reform the church today.

Lee Gatiss opened the conference by speaking on “confessional” Anglicanism, and the usefulness of the 39 Articles. Lee began his talk by outlining the history, and work of Church Society, and the strategic role it plays in seeking to reform the church today. Following his introduction, Lee then explained how the Church of England, at the time of the Reformation, had come to embrace “The True Profession of the Gospel...the Protestant Reformed religion,” and how this is still our official constitution today, even after the many ups and downs of church and national history.

Following this historical outline, Lee then examined in more detail the theological character of the Articles. The Articles are ‘catholic’ (in a universal sense), Trinitarian, Protestant, Reformed, Not Anabaptistic, and Established. They also take sides on some of the key debates of the Reformation. For example their view of the sacraments are Calvinist, and not Lutheran or Zwinglian. In short, their doctrine stands with the ‘international reformed movement’ which included notable reformers such as Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli. Lee then outlined the various Church of England formularies (Canons A2 and A5, and the Declaration of Assent) where the Articles are cited – reference to the Articles is still required by all clergy today!

Lee then explained how the Articles can be of use today. Lee encouraged us to sharpen our evangelical identity by studying and applying them – at the very least an Anglican evangelical should be Anglican – that is, theologically Reformed. We should also use the Articles when engaging in current debates in the Church of England, such as the women’s ministry debate. Article 20 – *Of the authority of the Church*, is particularly pertinent.

Following Lee’s talk, Church Society held its Annual General Meeting, Chaired by Viscount Brentford, the Society’s President. During the AGM the Council election was held resulting in several new members being elected. The Council now consists of men and women in all kinds of ministries, lay and ordained, with a broad spectrum of ages (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s).

Following a short break, Peter Adam then spoke on the topic of reforming the church today. Peter first outlined the positive aspects within the Church of England, such as the many thriving parish churches, and the good theological training that many receive. Peter explained that the root problem of the church is sin - including our sin - which we need to take account of when analysing the current Anglican landscape.

Peter then outlined two areas that need to be kept in view if the church is going to be reformed today. Firstly, we need to trust our sufficient Saviour, Jesus Christ, because it is *his* responsibility to build *his* church. Christ knows his churches strengths and weaknesses, and he tends them by speaking to them through his Word.

Secondly, under six headings, Peter encouraged us to take our responsibility to reform the church

seriously. First, we must continue to evangelise the nation. Secondly, we must recognise the influence that ordinary lay people and clergy can have in the re-reformation of England from below. Thirdly, we must engage and work hard in the structures of the Church of England – ‘democracy is demanding, and what it requires is engagement.’ Fourthly, we must apply Paul’s instructions about how to relate to false teachers (2 Tim 2 vv22-26) - we must aim to win people, and not just arguments. Fifthly, we must remember that reformation takes time – ‘reforming a church takes 20 years: reforming a denomination or association takes longer.’ Sixthly, we need to engage in a godly manner - we need to honour and pray for those in authority over us. Peter then closed his talk by praying that our lives, and the life of the church would be reformed according to God’s word.

Overall the day was a great encouragement as we were reminded by Lee about the truly Reformed nature of the Church of England’s confession of faith, and by Peter, about how to reform the church today. It was also a good time to meet fellow Church Society members, and other visitors, and to encourage one another in gospel ministry, for the glory of God and the good of England.

Both talks are available to listen to on the Church Society website.

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