

# Bishop's Note: Article 39 -

## A Christian Man's Oath

In this, the last of the 39 Articles, we see again a sense of distinguishing Anglicans from Anabaptists. You see, the Anabaptists and the Quakers made a pretty big deal about not swearing oaths to one another or to the Crown. Because a Christian man's word is to be his bond the feeling that to swear an oath was considered offensive - as in... "I've given you my word why would I need to swear to it."

Of course, we Anglicans feel the same way - we are to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth as is said in TV courtroom dramas. The issue for the thirty-ninth article is divided into two parts - "vain and rash swear" and "oaths" to the Crown or to the magistrate.

### **Article 39 - A Christian man's Oath**

**As we confess that vain and rash swearing is forbidden Christian men by our Lord Jesus Christ, so we judge that Christian religion does not prohibit a man from swearing when the magistrate requires in a cause of faith and charity, so it be done according to the Prophet's teaching in justice, judgement, and truth.**

Regarding vain and rash swearing - using the Lord's name in vain or speaking lightly about the Lord would fall under this provision and all Christians should oppose this sort of speech.

However, it is important to note that in the first century the use of oaths permeated society both religious and economic. The Torah spoke to the importance of fulfilling your words: "**If you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin. You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth.**" (Deuteronomy 23:21-23 ESV) the problem was that people would swear an oath on anything and everything and thereby trivialized the Word of God. Jesus opposed this when he said during the Sermon on the Mount: "**But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.**" (Matthew 5:34-37 ESV)

This seems straight forward and direct and yet, the scriptures are full of examples of godly men taking oaths and if one followed this literally then they could not fulfill scriptures admonishment to obey those in Authority for the authority comes from God - Romans 13:1-7.

Furthermore St. Paul himself swore by heaven "**I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit**" (Romans 9:1 ESV)

Ultimately, the argument of this article is simple: our words are important and should always be made in honesty. Because scripture allows for oaths and in order for

Christians to assist in the administration of the law by testifying in court - and since in the sixteenth century English government and courts were admittedly Christian - Christians should not be prohibited from service by forbidding the taking of an oath.

I end the series on the 39 Articles of Religion with an exhortation to the Diocese of San Joaquin to always speak the truth in Love - to be honest to a fault - and to allow your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no.

May the Lord bless your week ahead and your worship on the Lord’s Day!

Bishop Menees