

THE ARTICLES OF RELIGION

2. Of the Word or Son of God, which was made very Man

The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.

For the most part, what this Article says is identical to the content of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. The rest is derived from other important documents from the Early Church.

Jesus is first identified as the Son of God and the Word of God. These are two of his most significant titles or descriptions in the four Gospel books. The Word (in Greek: *logos*) is a borrowing from Greek philosophy – the *logos* is the divine mind, reasoning, or intelligence. For Jesus to be called the Word of God (John 1:1-18) is to exalt him as divine, on equal footing with the invisible God. Thus, in order to distinguish between the invisible God and the God-Man, Jesus, the terms 'Father' and 'Son' are employed to describe the relationship between them.

As the Son of God (Matthew 16:16), Jesus is “*begotten from everlasting of the Father.*” The difference between begetting and making is that the thing begotten shares in the identity of its begetter, whereas the thing made does not have that same relationship. So Jesus was begotten, not made – he and the Father are one (John 10:30). Thus Article 2 goes on to say that Jesus is “*the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father.*” In simple terms, this means that Jesus truly is God, always has been God, and is the same divine being as God the Father.

What follows is an explanation of how the humanity and divinity of Jesus are related. To say Jesus “*took Man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man*” is to say that the Son of God started off as only a divine person, but added to himself a human existence through his conception and birth from the Virgin Mary. So his human existence didn’t out of nowhere, but was received from his mother, just like everyone else. In that setting, his divinity and humanity were perfectly and completely linked, never to be divided again. Theologians use the Latin phrase *communicatio idiomatum* (communication of properties) to describe this perfect combination of humanity and divinity – once united in the person of Jesus, anything that can be said about his humanity applies also to his divinity, and vice versa. Thus, we are able to say that God died on the Cross, that Christians worship a Jewish man, and that to see the face of Jesus is to see the face of God.

It is as this perfectly united God-Man that Jesus “*truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.*” This we say of Jesus both as a human and as God; in fact, many theologians throughout history have argued (quite rightly) that Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross for the sins of the world is only possible and valid *because* he is both God and man. In him the two parties estranged by sin (God the Father, and the human race) are perfectly united in one person, so he is the natural (and only!) source of reconciliation between the two. In Christ alone our hope is found.

As for the distinction between “original guilt” and “actual sins,” a later Article will spell that out more clearly. Suffice it to say now that every sin and every effect of sin is dealt with by Christ’s perfect sacrifice made upon the Cross.