

# Our Faith in the Son of God

By Archdeacon T. C. Hammond.

The second of the Thirty-Nine Articles deals with our faith in the Son of God. It is not possible to understand the Article fully unless we bear in mind that in the fourth century controversy arose within the Church as to the precise character and dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From the decisions then made at Niceae certain phrases have been introduced into the Article. This is important because it shows that the Church of England has not departed from the true Catholic faith as held from the days of the Apostles. The two words "begotten" and "substance" are used in the old sense that attached to them since those early disputes.

The word "begotten" is the nearest human parallel we can find to describe a Being Who is One in essence and yet is derived from a Being with Whom He is thus One. Remove the idea of time and we have an eternal relation in which there is no distinction of kind and yet there is a difference of order. "Substance" means "essence." That character which imparts to a being its distinctive features without which it could not be. There are some plainer English words in the Article which underline this definition. Our Lord is spoken of as "very and eternal God." "Very" has here its old meaning derived from the Latin "verus" and means "unquestionably true." Before however the words of the Ancient Creed are adopted, our article speaks of our Lord as "the Word of the Father." "Word" is a term adopted from St. John's Gospel. In the Greek original it means rational communication.

## Conveys A Meaning.

It expresses not merely a vocal utterance but a message that conveys a meaning to the hearer. This reminds us of our Lord's saying to Philip, "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father." If we wish to know and understand fully the nature and character of God we must have recourse to the life and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The article corrects the idea, recently revived, that while "the Word" existed in all eternity, the Son came into being at the moment of the Incarnation.

The Church of England quite definitely asserts that the Son is "begotten from everlasting of the Father." In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read of God bringing the first-begotten into the world (Heb. 1.6), which clearly

implies that the Incarnation is distinct from the begetting of the Son of God. The verb used means to lead towards and in itself emphasises the distinction between calling into being and bringing an existent being into a new experience.

## Very Man.

But not only is our Lord very God, He is also very man. He has a true humanity similar in all respects to that of Adam. Early Christians found it very difficult to grasp the fact of the two natures in one Person. Some exalting the divine nature reduced the human nature to a mere external similitude. Our Lord had, on this view, the appearance of a man, but in His own essential being He was God. Others emphasising the true humanity of our Lord derogated from His divine power and authority. They regarded Him as truly man but as merely possessing in a superlative degree the power of God manifested in a human life.

## Catholic Truth.

The Church of England preserves here also the Catholic truth that one single Personality is able to include both a perfect human nature and a perfect divine nature. And our Lord is still man and will ever remain man. When we approach Him we are coming to One Who can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. This inseparable unity of God and man in the One Person of our Lord Jesus Christ is the highest guarantee of an inseparable relation to God if we are in Christ. It places a crown of glory on our manhood. Alone of all 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.

creatures of His creation, God can unite to Himself man in all the fullness of His being, because in the image of God made He man. Other religions sought to identify divine Being with lower types of existence. The result was not to exalt the creature but to degrade the conception of God. But God can hold converse with man because man is also a true cause with capacity for purpose and self-determination. God stooped to man in order to redeem him. In stooping He lifted man to God.

## A Sacrifice.

The Article closes with a reference to the reality of the sufferings of Christ our Lord. It speaks of His death as a sacrifice. The idea of sacrifice reaches back to a very early period of man's history. It is important to notice that God includes this idea in His revelation of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. And the article speaks of our Lord reconciling the Father to us. This word has given offence to some. But the word "reconcile" means in this connection, to secure harmony between two persons. We are separated from God by the fact of sin. It is only when the penalty of sin is paid that God can in justice to His own solemn declarations, visit us with His salvation and receive us into favour. Later articles deal more fully with this.

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