

The Augsburg Confession

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Lesson Two: Article I

Introduction

On what single doctrine does the true church rise or fall?

Important terms

None of these terms occur in the Scriptures, although the content is there clearly revealed. Such terms we call *ecclesiastical* because, though not found in the Scriptures, they were employed by the church as concise expressions of the truth presented in the Scriptures.

- Essence (or substance)
- Person
- Trinity

Article I

¹ We unanimously hold and teach, in accordance with the decree of the Council of Nicaea, ² that there is one divine essence, which is called and which is truly God, and that there are three persons in this one divine essence, equal in power and alike eternal: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. ³ All three are one divine essence, eternal, without division, without end, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, one creator and preserver of all things visible and invisible. ⁴ The word “person” is to be understood as the Fathers employed the term in this connection, not as a part or a property of another but as that which exists of itself.

⁵ Therefore all the heresies which are contrary to this article are rejected. Among these are the heresy of the Manichaeans, who assert that there are two gods, one good and one evil; also that of the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and others like them; ⁶ also that of the Samosatenes, old and new, who hold that there is only one person and sophistically assert that the other two, the Word and the Holy Spirit, are not necessarily distinct persons but that the Word signifies a physical word or voice and that the Holy Spirit is a movement induced in creatures.

General observations

Why have an article of faith about who God is?

Why refer all the way back to the Council of Nicaea—a Council held by the church in AD 325?

Why bother naming and reviewing all these ancient heresies?

What is the only way we can know and trust in the one true God? **Read John 1:18 and John 14:9-11.**

Plenty to chew on

- 1) God is one divine essence

- a. A single divine essence - **Deuteronomy 6:4**; 1 Corinthians 8:4; 12:6; Galatians 3:20; Ephesians 4:6
 - b. Eternal – **Psalm 90:2**; Hebrews 1:12; 2 Peter 3:8
 - c. Spiritual – **John 4:24**
 - d. Omnipotent – **Psalm 115:3**; 135:6; **Jeremiah 32:17**; Luke 1:37
 - e. Omniscient – Romans 11:33,34; Colossians 2:3; **1 John 3:20**
 - f. Infinite goodness – Psalm 33:5; 107:8,9; Romans 2:4; **1 John 4:8**
- 2) God is three coeternal persons
- a. Three persons – Matthew 28:19,20; 3:16,17; **2 Corinthians 13:14**; Numbers 6:24-26; Isaiah 42:1; 61:1
 - b. Of the same essence and power – Colossians 2:9; **John 10:30**
 - c. Coeternal – **John 8:58**; 17:5; Genesis 1:2
- 3) All contrary heresies that are condemned:
- a. The doctrine that there are two gods.
 - i. **Manichaeans**. Mani in Persia, AD 215-276. Taught a fantastically embellished dualism, featuring the conflict between good and evil in an elaborate system of ideas with Christian, Buddhist, and other elements.
 - ii. **Valentinus**. In Rome, about AD 140-160. Linked Christian ideas with polytheistic Gnostic teachings.
 - b. The teaching that there is but one person in God. Those who teach three persons but subordinate the Son and the Spirit to the Father.
 - i. **Arius**, AD 315, presbyter in Alexandria. “The Son is the foremost creature of the Father and is of a different substance from the Father.” “There was a time when he [Jesus] was not.”
 - ii. **Eunomius**, bishop of Cyzicus (Phrygia), died AD 392. Extreme Arian. “The Son is dissimilar to the Father in essence. The Spirit is the first creature of the Son.”
 - c. Those who teach but one person.
 - i. **Mohammed**, the founder of Islam. The Lutheran reformers frequently referred to Islam as an Antitrinitarian heresy.
 - ii. **Paul of Samosata**, bishop of Antioch, AD 270. Jesus was not divine in his nature but was a man specially endowed by the Holy Spirit (dynamic monarchianism).

Application and discussion

Evaluate: “Human reason finds this doctrine of the Trinity offensive.”

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Malachi 3:6. Reflect upon God’s attributes. Because God is who he is, what does that mean for us and our lives?

Roman Catholic *Confutation* to Article I: “This [teaching of the Trinity] is to be accepted because it agrees with the rule of faith and the Roman Church... Likewise, their condemnation of the heresies that are contrary to this article are also to be accepted.” React.

King Solomon said, “There is nothing new under the sun.” How are the false teachings mentioned in Article I still around today? Are there any major false teachings that this Article doesn’t mention?

Do we need to address false teachings in the same manner today? Why or why not?