

The Augsburg Confession

Article 1

The first article of the Augsburg Confession defines the person and nature of God. Every civilization in the world has a belief in “god” in one form or another. These “gods” are not all the same – there are many different “gods” which human beings choose to believe in. This is called “The natural knowledge of God.” By nature all people have a built in knowledge of God which is supported by the creation of the world around us. Paul writes: *“because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 2:19-20).*

- Belief in MANY gods is called: Polytheism
- Belief in ONE God is called: Monotheism

One True God

But there are not many gods, there is only one true God who alone is worthy of our praise and honor. In this article the reformers describe the God they believe in, who is distinct from all other gods: *“We unanimously hold and teach, in accordance with the decree of the Council of Nicaea, that there is one divine essence, which is called and which is truly God.”*

- **How many true Gods are there?**

Mark 12:29-32: *“Jesus answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments is: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’”*

John 17:3: *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*

1 Timothy 2:5: *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”*

Who is the true God - How is He described?

Deuteronomy 4:35: *“To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him.”*

Isaiah 44:6-8: ***“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.’”***

Three Persons in One God

Deuteronomy 6:4: ***“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”***

While there is only one God (essence), He is revealed to us in three persons: ***“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.”***

- The unique nature of the Hebrew word for God: It is commonly found in the plural “El” = God; “Elohim” = God(s).

Along with this plural form for the word God the Hebrew often uses plural pronouns when referring to God - Genesis 1:26: ***“Then God (Elohim) said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”*** (cf. Genesis 3:22; 11:7)

- The three-fold praise to God (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8): Holy, Holy, Holy!

“And one cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!’” (Isaiah 6:3).

- The three persons of God described together:

Matthew 28:19: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”***

1 Corinthians 12:4-6: ***“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.”***

2 Corinthians 13:14: ***“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”***

Revelation 1:4-6: *“John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

- The three persons of God working together:

Isaiah 42:1: *“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”*

Acts 2:32-33: *“This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.”*

Ephesians 2:18: *“For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”*

1 Peter 1:1-2: *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.”*

The Unity of the Three Persons of God

The reformers declared the unity of these three persons in one God: *“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.”*

- **The divine nature of the Father:**

1 Corinthians 8:6: *“yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.”*

- **The divine nature of the Son:**

Isaiah 9:6: *“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

John 14:6-11: *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.’ Philip said to Him, ‘Lord,*

show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.’”

(Read also the letter to the Hebrews, especially the first chapter in connection with the divine nature of Jesus.)

How can we reconcile the above with John 14:28; Matthew 24:36?

Philippians 2:5-8: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

Hebrews 2:14-18: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”

- **The divine nature of the Holy Spirit:**

Acts 5:3-4: “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’”

Psalm 104:30: “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth.”

Luke 1:35: “And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.’”

Acts 13:2-4: “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.”

1 Corinthians 12:1-11: *“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”*

Why is the Holy Spirit not spoken of as true God as often as Jesus?

John 16:13-14: *“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”*

The doctrine concerning the nature and persons of God is called: The Trinity (cf. The Athanasian Creed, TLH p.53)

Errors concerning the doctrine of God

Because of the propositions of Eck, which combined the teachings of the Lutherans with the errors of others both past and present, the confessors regularly condemned false teaching which might mistakenly be attributed to them in the articles of the Augsburg Confession. *“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; 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.”*

There are three types of errors which undermine the doctrine of the Trinity. These errors were taught in the ancient church, in Luther’s time, and continue to be taught by many today (the groups in bold are active still today).

1. Overemphasize the Unity of the Essence

Manichaeans - 3rd century dualistic religion (good vs. evil)

Valentinians - 2nd century gnostic religion

Arians - 4th century false teacher who taught Jesus was created

Eunomians - 4th century Arian who taught Jesus was unlike the Father

Mohammedans - 7th century religion known as Islam

Samosatenes - 3rd century followers of Paul of Samosata who taught that Jesus was a mere man - John Campanus and Hans Denck of Luther's day taught the same

Unitarians - modern gnostics who teach that Jesus was a God-filled human being

Jehovah's Witnesses - modern Arians who teach that Jesus is not true God

2. Overemphasize the Trinity of Persons

John Philoponus - 6th century tritheist (three gods)

Mormons - modern religions which teaches that Father, Son and Spirit are each a distinct god, who were once men but became gods

3. Misrepresent the relationship of the Persons

Adoptionism - 7th century teaching that Jesus was adopted as the Son of God

Subordinationism - teaching that the persons of the Trinity are inferior to one another