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Confessing the Trinity Today

Introduction to Papers from the 2003 LCMS Theology
Professors' Convocation Papers

Who is the only true God?

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord, our God, the Lord is one!" Deut. 6:4

"There is no other God but one." 1 Cor. 8:4

"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." Matt. 28:19

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." 2 Cor. 13:14

This is what we believe, teach, and confess concerning God.

In the first place, it is with one accord taught and held, following the decree of the Council of Nicea, that there is one divine essence which is named God and truly is God. But there are three persons in the same one essence, equally powerful, equally eternal: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three are one divine essence, eternal, undivided, unending, of immeasurable power, wisdom, and goodness, the creator and preserver of all visible and invisible things. What is understood by the word "person" is not a part nor a quality in another but that which exists by itself, as the Fathers once used the word concerning this issue.

Rejected, therefore, are all the heresies that are opposed to this article, such as the Manichaeans, who posited two gods, one good and one evil; the Valentinians, the Arians, the Eunomians, the Mohammedans, and all others like them; also the Samosatensians, old and new, who hold that there is only one person and create a deceitful sophistry about the other two, the Word and the Holy Spirit, by saying that the two need not be two distinct persons since "Word" means an external word or voice and the "Holy Spirit" is a created motion in all creatures.¹

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod theology professors—called, ordained, and full-time at the seminaries and universities/colleges—convened in Dallas, Texas, on 7-9 March 2003. "Confessing the Trinity Today" was the theme for this first Theology Professors' Convocation. The

¹Augsburg Confession, Article I. *Concerning God in The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press): 36. Hereafter referred to as *The Book of Concord*.

convocation was convened for the purpose of theological discussion and joint work on theological issues for the benefit of the church.

Twelve major papers were presented, representing perspectives from the biblical narrative in the Old Testament and the New Testament, from the church fathers, the Lutheran Confessions, and Luther, from contemporary theology and philosophic considerations, relating the trinitarian faith to worship and the current context. *Concordia Theological Quarterly* offers most of the major papers as a contribution to the life of the church, engendering thoughtful reflection on the subject of all theology, the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The witness of the Holy Scriptures to God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is solid and firm. One who believes otherwise about God stands outside the church of Christ. Luther succinctly expresses the doctrine of the Trinity in the Large Catechism as he explains the Creed:

For in all three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart and his pure, unutterable love. For this very purpose he created us, so that he might redeem us and make us holy, and, moreover, having granted and bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has also given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. For, . . . we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.²

Our faith is one God in three Persons. Accordingly, Martin Luther asked us to begin each day under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and to end each day under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We are baptized under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Living in baptismal grace we receive absolution under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. At confirmation we confess before the Church the Trinitarian faith into which we were baptized. Receiving the Lord's Supper we are strengthened and preserved by the body and blood of our Lord in the true faith. In marriage we are pronounced husband and wife under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Called to serve in the pastoral office the candidate is ordained and

²Large Catechism, Second Part: The Creed: 64-65 in *The Book of Concord*.

consecrated under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. At our burials our bodies will be committed to the ground under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Confessing the Trinity today makes it possible for us to face up to anything the day or night might bring. We begin afresh each morning and close each day in peace because we are baptized in the name of the Triune God. God is in every moment of life for us.

I bind unto myself today The strong name of the Trinity

By invocation of the same, The Three in One and One in Three.³

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³Hymn #172 in *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982).