

# Study of Concordia - The Lutheran Confession of Faith

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## The Unaltered Augsburg Confession



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### Review/Summary from Introduction:

Christian theology will speak in ways like: "our Christian confession of faith" or in Lutheran Circles we have the "Lutheran Confessions" (as found in the Book of Concord) especially the chief of them, the "Augsburg Confession." For both Immanuel and St. Paul's congregations the official name of the congregations includes "of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession" and the constitutions state that qualifications for membership in the congregations is familiarity with and acceptance of the Augsburg Confession. You may ask, why is such a confession of faith important, especially to laymen?

The word confession comes from the Latin, *confiteri* or *confessio* which simply means "acknowledge." Thus, the business of theology is to rethink God's thoughts. To acknowledge the way God has revealed to us that he thinks and works.

When theology insists on doing this task of rethinking God's thoughts on God's premise as revealed in Scripture, we learn that God is not abstract—as in various philosophies and ideas—rather he is a God in action. He is in action to accomplish a tremendous task—the salvation of mankind.

God's revelation was practical both in nature and purpose. It was concerned about the problem of man's salvation from the power of Satan and sin. God's purpose was not to furnish an elaborate intellectual system. The purpose of His thoughts and plans was to produce a salvation that would restore sinners to fellowship with God.

Our interest should be to grasp the sweep of the moving drama that produced our salvation in Christ as well as to become familiar with the underlying plan and its sequence. Our task is to enter into God's thought-world, to study it in the light of His revelation of Himself in sacred history, and to penetrate ever more fully into the depth of His world.

Only when the objective of theology is to lead men into an ever deeper and fuller experience of this salvation does it deserve the name of a Christian confession.

Why is this important?  
IT IS THE GOSPEL!

This was the primary interest of the Lutheran Confessors at the time of the Reformation (while indeed also putting into writing what they believe, teach, and confess to make a defense against the charge of Rome they were teaching heresy) and remains our primary interest as Lutheran confessors today.

*Read Isaiah 43:1-7. What does God reveal about who He is and what He has done for His people?*

# Chief Articles of Faith

## Article I: God

<sup>1</sup> Our churches teach with common consent that the decree of the Council of Nicaea about the unity of the divine essence and the three persons is true. <sup>2</sup> It is to be believed without any doubt. God is one divine essence who is eternal, without a body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. He is the maker and preserver of all things, visible and invisible [Nehemiah 9:6]. <sup>3</sup> Yet there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Matthew 28:19]. These three persons are of the same essence and power. <sup>4</sup> Our churches use the term *person* as the Fathers have used it. We use it to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

<sup>5</sup> Our churches condemn all heresies [Titus 3:10–11] that arose against this article, such as the Manichaeans, who assumed that there are two “principles,” one Good and the other Evil. They also condemn the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Muslims, and all heresies such as these. <sup>6</sup> Our churches also condemn the Samosatenes, old and new, who contend that God is but one person. Through sophistry they impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Spirit are not distinct persons. They say that *Word* signifies a spoken word, and *Spirit* signifies motion created in things.

Note: Martin Luther never intended to start a new church, but rather to purify the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. The Augsburg Confession strongly affirms the doctrine of the Trinity confessed at the Council of Nicaea (325), and later affirmed by the Council of Constantinople (381). God is one divine essence in three distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Scriptures reveal this great mystery, confessed by all Christians.

During the Reformation, radical groups espoused various forms of earlier heresies. The Augsburg Confession condemns the ancient heresies concerning God. Article I proves that Lutheranism is deeply anchored in the historic doctrine of biblical Christianity. It embraces the faith of the Church through the ages and rejects all the errors the Church has rejected. (See also Ap I; SA I.)

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). [\*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions\*](#) (p. 31). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

### **Outline of the Article:**

- I. GOD
  - A. Congregations teach what Nicea Confessed (1)
  - B. One divine essence (1-2)
  - C. Three persons (3)
  - D. Equal (3)
  - E. Person: that which exists of itself (4)
  - F. Rejected: (5,6)
    1. Manichaeans—dualism
    2. Valentinians—Gnosticism
    3. Arians—Son was of different substance
    4. Eunomians—extreme Arians
    5. Mohammedans (Muslims)—anti-Trinitarian
    6. Samosatenes—denied personality of Son and Spirit

*Why did the confessors begin with a statement about the Council of Nicaea’s decree and statement about God?*

*Is there a need to root our confession of faith in the historic confession of God still today?*

The Confession states that God tells us about His essential nature, that He is one God [Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4], one indivisible essence, but three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit [Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14]. The Father is fully God (1 Cor. 8:6); the Son, who became a man in the person of Jesus, is fully God [1 Joh 5:20; Rom. 9:5]; and the Holy Spirit is fully God [Acts 5:3,4].

*Christians confess the triune God—one God in three persons. Why is it critical that Christians confess God in this way? Why is it important to make the distinction of persons?*

The Confession also states that God also tells us that He is eternal [Ps. 90:1,2]; without a body [John 4:24, Luke 24:39; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17]; without parts [John 10:30]; of infinite power [omnipotent] (Luke 1:37); wisdom (can also be translated “all-knowing”-omniscient) [John 21:17]; and goodness which can be described by his being: holy and sinless [Lev. 19:2]; entirely just, fair and impartial [Deut. 32:4]; always faithful to His promises [2 Tim 2:13]; entirely good and kind [Ps. 145:9]; merciful [Ps. 145:9]; and gracious, loving and forgiving [Ex. 34:6,7; 1 John 4:8].

*Why is it important that we know these attributes (characteristics) of God?*

The Confession also states that God “is the maker and preserver of all things, visible and invisible [Nehemiah 9:6].”

*Why is it important that Christians confess God as “creator and preserver of all things visible and invisible”?*

Mani and his followers (3rd century) believed in two equal, eternal and antagonistic existent principles or gods: darkness and light (or good and evil). Valentinus and his followers (2nd century) taught that God and the material world are distinct and eternal. To understand the ultimate nature of things the meaning of Scripture, one needs a superior wisdom or “gnosis” according to his teaching. Thus they were Gnostics which held the notion that the flesh is evil and is the problem in having the sufficient knowledge of God. Correspondingly, since God could not be evil they denied the incarnation—that Jesus was truly human. Arius and his followers (4th century) believed that Jesus was not truly divine. There were also the Mohammedans (Muslims - who were also the fanatical Turks pressing the eastern defenses of Emperor Charles’ empire). In their teaching, Christ was simply a Hebrew prophet. In rejecting the incarnation of Christ, they also denied other chief Christian doctrines also.

*In what ways do these heresies deny and contradict the biblical truth about the triune God?*

*Why is it important to make the distinction of pointing out “the negative” (to condemn)?*

*If the Confessors wrote today what false teachings about God would they confront and condemn?*

*On the practical implication side—In what ways does faith in the Trinity bring comfort and hope in the midst of life’s problems?*