

## Article 1

### **Of Faith in the Holy Trinity**

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

This Article treats two great truths: 1. the magnificence of God; and 2. the Triune nature of God's Being. We will take them in order.

### **The Magnificence of God.**

It is instructive that the Articles begin with God and not with the Bible. Why? If God is not Who he is, it really is not worth our effort in thinking through how we come to know Him.

Also, Christian doctrines are so interconnected and interdependent that no matter where we start, we must assume a great deal to be discussed later. There are other reasons why we should start with God: there was no controversy over the greatness of God at the time the Articles were formulated; it is always good to start on common ground.

Even today, in our skeptical culture, if you ask an atheist what "God" he is denying, the chances are it will be God as He is set forth in this Article. Lastly, since God is the center and key to everything, it is right and good to begin with Him. First things first.

What is God like and what are His characteristics or "attributes," as theology usually refers to them? The Article confesses

that God is One, there is none like Him and none alongside of Him. He alone is the only living and true God. “*Shema, shema* [Hear, hear], O Israel, the Lord our God is One” is the central Creed of Israel and the Old Testament. He is unlike idols of wood or clay or stone that are neither alive nor truly God. He alone is to be in the center of our hearts and lives.

And what is the One and true living God like? He alone is eternal, having neither a beginning nor an end, unlike all that He has created. That means He is always there to help us and to correct us if need be. It is His nature ever to be beyond our understanding, and this truth marks His difference from the creation which He has made and preserves in being. He does not change. He does not grow old or out of date. He is always what His characteristics declare Him to be: righteous, caring, merciful, loving, all knowing, wise, omnipresent, and omnipotent. He is pure Spirit, having no body and no parts.

This Article speaks of God’s “passions” in a particular manner, drawn from philosophy of the day. It meant that God cannot be limited or frustrated by powers other than Himself. There is no one or no thing on His level of Being. We could say it is an aspect of His sovereignty. We use the word “passion” differently today to refer to our desires and feelings, both of which God has plenty, as any reading of the Bible makes clear.

His glory is the magnificence of all His attributes taken together and shining forth so full and dazzling that we can only fall down and worship before Him. This is why the Westminster Shorter Catechism states that “man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”

Here we learn that His greatness is such that He is more than able to meet all our needs and rescue us from all difficulties, even from His own righteous judgment. He alone is worthy of our devotion, which is His due.

## **The Triune Nature of God**

Having made clear both the character of the One, true and living God and His attributes, the Article directs us to His threefold (or Triune) Being, to the doctrine of the Trinity. Stated simply, God is one Being and within Himself there are three Persons, or interrelated centers of self-awareness and activity. This is mysterious and beyond our comprehension, but the biblical revelation is unequivocal: God is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Numerous texts of Scripture make it clear that all three Persons participate in His relationships with us and in all His acts in time and space. The Risen Jesus commands His Church to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). So also St. Paul concludes a letter: “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you” (2 Cor 13:14).

Greatly significant is the fact that all three Persons cooperate in our salvation. Were we to deny the full divinity of the Person and work of any of the Persons of the Trinity, we would deny our salvation; for the Father sent the Son, the Son took our place and the Spirit opens our hearts to receive the grace given us in the Son, to the glory of God the Father.

When all is said and done, we celebrate the threefold nature of God because it is true, not because we fully understand its mystery.

## **Prayer**

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the unity: Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal

glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## **Scripture Texts**

2 Samuel 7:22 “Therefore you are great, O Lord God. For there is none like you, and there is no God beside you, according to all that we have heard with our ears.”

Galatians 4:6 “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. Which of the attributes of God do you most often consciously call to mind?
2. Why is God worthy of our ultimate dependence and worship?
3. Which Person of the Trinity do you think of first? Why?
4. What are the idols of our culture that people put in the place of God in their hearts?