

Article IX

The Proof Of the Foregoing Article of the Trinity Of Persons In One God

"All this we know from the testimonies of holy writ, as from the operations, and chiefly by those we feel in ourselves. The testimonies of the Holy Scriptures, that teach us to believe this Holy Trinity are written in many places of the Old Testament, which are not so necessary to enumerate, as to choose them out with discretion and judgment. In Genesis, 1:26, 27, God saith: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, etc. So God created man in his own image, male and female created he them. And Genesis 3:22: Behold the man is become as one of us. From this saying, let us make man in our image, it appears that there are more persons than one in the Godhead; and when he saith, God created, he signifies the unity. It is true he doth not say how many persons there are, but that, which appears to us somewhat obscure in the Old Testament, is very plain in the New. For when our Lord was baptized in Jordan, the voice of the Father was heard, saying, This is my beloved Son: the Son was seen in the water, and the Holy Ghost appeared in the shape of a dove. This form is also instituted by Christ in the baptism of all believers. Baptize all nations, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. In the Gospel of Luke, the angel Gabriel thus addressed Mary, the mother of our Lord, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that holy thing, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God: likewise, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you. And there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one. In all which places we are fully taught, that there are three persons in one only divine essence. And although this doctrine far surpasses all human understanding, nevertheless, we now believe it by means of the Word of God, but expect hereafter to enjoy the perfect knowledge and benefit thereof in Heaven. Moreover we must observe the particular offices and operations of these three persons towards us. The Father is called our Creator, by his power; the Son is our Savior and Redeemer, by his blood; the Holy Ghost is our Sanctifier, by his dwelling in our hearts. This doctrine of the Holy Trinity, hath always been defended and maintained by the true Church, since the time of the apostles, to this very day, against the Jews, Mohammedans, and some false christians and heretics, as Marcion, Manes, Praxeas, Sabellius, Samosatenus, Arius and such like, who have been

justly condemned by the orthodox fathers. Therefore, in this point, we do willingly receive the three creeds, namely, that of the Apostles, of Nice, and of Athanasius: likewise that, which, conformable thereunto, is agreed upon by the ancient fathers."

This article sets forth the proof on the basis of which the faith of the Church that God is Triune rests:

I. Twofold proof:

A. From Scripture:

1. From the Old Testament:

a. Here only the plural "us" as used in Genesis 1:26,27; 3:22, is mentioned.

b. There are other proofs in the Old Testament, such as:

1)the appearance of the angel of Jehovah, Genesis 18:2; 19:1,24, etc.

2)the Aaronitic blessing;

3)Psalm 33:6;

4)the treshagion of Isaiah 6;

5)Isaiah 61, etc.

2. From the New Testament:

a. Mentioned are:

1)the baptism of Jesus;

2)the baptism formula;

3)the words of Gabriel to Mary;

4)the apostolic benediction;

5)I John 5:7.

b. And to these may be added: all those passages in which divine names, attributes, works and honors are ascribed to the persons of the Son and of the Holy Ghost in distinction from the person of the Father.

B. From their operations:

1. The article speaks of the operations of the three persons as proof of the doctrine of the trinity:

a. It is evident that the threeness in God must become manifest in the works of God.

b. These works or operations are either

1)without us: creation, providence, God's revelation in the work of redemption in Christ, His death, resurrection, etc.

2)within us, such as: God's preservation of our natural life and existence; His application of the salvation of Christ to us: regeneration, calling, sanctification, etc.

c. The article mentions:

1)the Father as Creator,

2)the Son as Redeemer,

3)the Holy Ghost as Sanctifier.

2. Meaning:

a. Not that the three persons may be separated, as if each performed a certain work without the others. Then

we arrive at the error of tritheism: three Gods.

b. But so that all the works of God are of the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

II. As basis on which the Church:

A. Defends this doctrine:

1. Over against:

a. Jews: i.e., unbelieving Jews. Their denial of the Christ leads them to deny the Trinity.

b. Mohammedans: believe in Allah, one God.

c. And several different heretics that are mentioned in the article.

2. In her earliest confessions:

a. The Symbol of Nice: 325.

b. The Apostolic Confession: about 500.

c. The Athanasian Creed. Probably not of Athanasius (died 373), but dating from about the eighth or ninth century.

B. Accepts this doctrine:

1. By faith:

a. The article emphasizes that this doctrine far transcends our comprehension: it is a deep mystery, indeed: I Timothy 6:16.

b. But the church believes it "by means of the Word of God". We must note here, that although the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery, it involves no contradiction.

2. In hope of perfection:

a. Not in the sense that we shall ever comprehend the Triune God;

b. But so, that hereafter, the covenant of God shall be perfected, and in that covenant we shall know and enjoy the fellowship of the triune God perfectly. I Corinthians 13.

ARTICLE X

That Jesus Christ is True and Eternal God

"We believe that Jesus Christ, according to his divine nature, is the only begotten Son of God, begotten from eternity, not made nor created (for then he should be a creature), but co-essential and co-eternal with the Father, the express image of his person, and the brightness of his glory, equal unto him in all things. He is the Son of God, not only from the time that he assumed our nature, but from all eternity, as these testimonies, when compared together, teach us. Moses saith, that God created the world; and John saith, that all things were made by that Word, which he calleth God. And the apostle saith, that God made the worlds by his Son; likewise, that God created all things by Jesus Christ. Therefore it must needs follow, that he, who is called God, the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ, did exist at that time, when all things were created by him. Therefore the prophet Micah saith, His goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. And the apostle: He hath neither beginning of days, nor end of life. He therefore is that true, eternal, and almighty God, whom we invoke, worship and serve."

I. The divinity of Christ:

A. How expressed in the article:

1. This article speaks specifically of the divinity of Jesus Christ:

a. In Article IX this was already mentioned in connection with the Trinity: the second Person of the Trinity is very God.

b. Here the subject is: "that Jesus Christ, according to His divine nature is the only begotten Son of God."

2. It teaches:

a. Negatively (in opposition to all heretics of early and modern times):

1)that Christ was not made nor created;

2)that He did not begin to exist at the time of His incarnation.

b. Positively:

1)He is the only begotten Son of God;

2)begotten from eternity;

3)co-essential and co-eternal with the Father;

4)the express image of His person (substance is better);

5)the brightness of His glory;

6)equal to Him in all things.

B. Importance of this doctrine:

1. This truth is denied:

a. In early times by the Arians (and others):

1) Christ was said to be a being of very high rank, even pre-existing before His incarnation;
2) but He is not co-essential and co-eternal with the Father.

b. Later by all unitarians and moderns:
1) whether they deny His divinity outright;
2) or teach that He is divine because He is truly human.

2. Essential to Christian faith:

a. Because the whole doctrine of vicarious atonement depends on this truth: if a mere man died on the cross, the blood of Christ cannot have the power to atone for sin;

b. Because on this truth rests the possibility of our actual deliverance from the dominion of sin and death. A mere man could not accomplish this deliverance.

II. The proof for this doctrine:

A. As given in the article:

1. Creation is ascribed to Jesus Christ:

a. This is shown by a comparison of Genesis 1 with John 1.

b. And directly stated in the Bible:

1) God made the worlds by His Son, Hebrews 1:2;

2) He created all things by Jesus Christ, Ephesians 3:9. Cf. Colossians 1:15 ff.

2. He is pre-existent:

a. This follows from the fact that all things are made by Him;

b. And is taught in Micah 5:2; Hebrews 7 (the latter passage, however, speaks of the priesthood after the order of Melchisedec).

3. He is called:

a. God;

b. The Word;

c. The Son.

B. Additional proof:

1. Other divine works are ascribed to Him:

a. He forgives sins, Luke 7:48,49.

b. He quickens the dead, John 5:20,21.

2. He declares that He is essentially one with God the Father, John 10:30.

3. Divine honor is paid Him:

a. He is worshipped as God, John 20:28;

b. We are baptized in His name, Acts 19:5.

Article XI

That the Holy Ghost is True and Eternal God

"We believe and confess also, that the Holy Ghost, from eternity, proceeds from the Father and Son; and therefore neither is made, created, nor begotten, but only proceedeth from both; who in order is the third person of the Holy Trinity; of one and the same essence, majesty and glory with the Father, and the Son: and therefore is the true and eternal God, as the Holy Scriptures teach us."

I. The Holy Ghost as the third person of the Holy Trinity:

A. Proceeds from Father and Son:

1. He proceeds:

a. He is not begotten, is not another Son, but personally distinct from the Son and from the Father.

b. His personal property is expressed in the name "Spirit". He is "breathed forth" and proceeds from the Father and the Son.

2. Double procession:

a. This is emphasized in the article: He proceeds from both, the Father and the Son (not as two Spirits, but as one Spirit, proceeding from the Father to the Son, and from the Son to the Father).

b. The doctrine led to an early schism between the Eastern and the Western Church, the former denying, the latter maintaining the double procession. The denial leads to separation of the work of the Father and of the Son.

3. Scriptural proof for this doctrine: John 14:26; 15:26: the Father and the Son send forth the Comforter. John 14:23: in the Spirit the Father and the Son make their abode with us.

B. Is a Person:

1. In order the third person of the Holy Trinity:

a. Not third in time, nor in majesty and glory;

b. But in order, because He eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.

2. And is a person:

a. Not a mere power or effluence, as those that deny the truth of the Trinity would have it.

b. But a distinct person.

3. Scriptural proof: personal properties and acts are ascribed to Him in the Bible: John 16:8,13; I Corinthians 2:10; Ephesians 4:30; II Corinthians 13:13; Acts 13:2; Romans 8:26,27, etc.

C. Is very God:

1. Thus in the article:

a. True and eternal God;

b. Of the same essence, majesty and glory with the Father and the Son.

2. Proof for this doctrine: He is called God, worshipped as God, honored as God, and divine works are ascribed to Him.

II. The Holy Ghost as the Spirit of Christ:

A. Given to Christ:

1. The article does not speak of the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ. By this we mean:

- a. The Holy Ghost.
- b. As He was given to Christ.
- c. And dwells in the Church.

2. This according to Scripture:

- a. John 7:39: He was not yet.
- b. Acts 2:33 Christ received the promise of the

Spirit.

B. As the Spirit of salvation:

1. By His Spirit Christ dwells in the Church. Poured out on the Day of Pentecost; abides with her forever.

2. And makes her partaker of the spiritual blessings of grace and salvation in Him.

Article XII

Of the Creation

"We believe that the Father by the Word, that is by his Son, hath created of nothing the heaven, the earth, and all creatures, as it seemed good unto him, giving unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices, to serve its Creator. That he doth also still uphold and govern them by his eternal providence, and infinite power, for the service of mankind, to the end that man may serve his God. He also created the angels good, to be his messengers and to serve his elect; some of whom are fallen from that excellency, in which God created them, into everlasting perdition; and the others have, by the grace of God, remained steadfast and continued in their primitive state. The devils and evil spirits are so depraved, that they are enemies of God and every good thing, to the utmost of their power, as murderers, watching to ruin the Church and every member thereof, and by their wicked stratagems to destroy all; and are, therefore, by their own wickedness, adjudged to eternal damnation, daily expecting their horrible torments. Therefore we reject and abhor the error of the Sadducees, who deny the existence of spirits and angels: and also that of the Manichees, who assert that the devils have their origin of themselves, and that they are wicked of their own nature, without having been corrupted."

I. The works of God in general: in this article the Confession begins to speak of the works of God. These may be distinguished as:

A. Indwelling and outgoing works:

1. The indwelling works, i.e., those that are eternally done within the divine being:

a. God is an eternally active God. He did not begin to work when He created the world.

b. Hence, we can speak of His indwelling works, His eternal activity within Himself. These are:

1) Personal: the Father generates the Son, the Son is generated by the Father, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

2) Essential: God eternally knows and loves Himself, etc.

2. And the outgoing works: i.e., either:

a. Those works of God that have respect to existence outside of God's being; or

b. Those works whereby beings outside of God's being, or in distinction from His being, are actually called into existence. Hence, another distinction:

B. In eternity and in time:

1. God's works in eternity are His counsel or decrees:
 - a. The decree of predestination: God's counsel with respect to the eternal destiny of His moral creatures, men and angels, distinguished as
 - 1) Election, and
 - 2) Reprobation. Of this later.
1. God's works in time:
 - a. In "nature"
 - 1) Creation, and
 - 2) In the upholding and government of all things: providence.
 - b. In grace: all the work of salvation in Christ.

II. The work of creation. This article speaks of: creation in general, of all creatures except man, of the angels, of the fallen angels.

- A. The work of creation as such:
 1. According to God's counsel: "as it seemed good unto him":
 - a. Creation may not be conceived as emanating from God's being.
 - b. It is an act of His sovereign will.
 2. Of the triune God:
 - a. Of the Father, through the Son, but also in the Spirit.
 - b. All the three persons of the Holy Trinity are active in the work of creation and providence.
 3. As an act of omnipotent will:
 - a. "Of nothing," i.e., there was nothing outside of God.
 - b. The calling of the things that are not as if they were.
- B. The created product:
 1. The whole creation as an organism:
 - a. All creatures as to their being, shape, form and several offices.
 - b. For the service of man, that man may serve his God.
 2. Special mention of the angels:
 - a. Messengers and servants of the elect.
 - b. Created good.
 - c. Some are fallen and are depraved, others remained steadfast.

Article XIII

Of Divine Providence

"We believe that the same God, after he had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that he rules and governs them according to his holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without his appointment: nevertheless, God neither is the author of, nor can he be charged with the sins which are committed. For his power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that he orders and executes his work in the most excellent and just manner, even then, when devils and wicked men act unjustly. And, as to what he doth surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire into, farther than our capacity will admit of; but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgments of God, which are hid from us, contenting ourselves that we are disciples of Christ, to learn only those things which he has revealed to us in his Word, without transgressing these limits. This doctrine affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father; who watches over us with a paternal care, keeping all creatures so under his power, that not a hair of our head (for they are all numbered), nor a sparrow, can fall to the ground, without the will of our Father, in whom we do entirely trust; being persuaded, that he so restrains the devil and all our enemies, that without his will and permission, they cannot hurt us. And therefore we reject that damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God regards nothing, but leaves all things to chance."

This article speaks of:

I. The doctrine of God's providence:

A. Negatively:

1. God did not:

- a. Forsake the things He had created.
- b. Nor give them up to fortune or chance.
- c. To this may be added that He did not leave the

world to run by its own laws.

2. This, that God did so leave the world to itself is the error:

- a. Of the old Epicureans, mentioned in this article.
- b. Of the modern Deists, who deny God's immanence in the world.

c. With application to man, of all Pelagians, who withdraw man's will from God's control and government.

B. Positively:

1. The doctrine of divine providence implies, first of all the truth of God's preservation of all things:

- a. This is not directly mentioned in the article,

though implied.

b. By God's preservation of all things is meant:

1) His omnipresent power whereby He upholds all things.

2) And whereby He gives them their continued existence.

2. God's government of all things:

a. This is mentioned in the article:

1) He rules and governs them according to His own will.

2) So that nothing happens in this world without His appointment.

b. This may be distinguished as:

1) Government of His moral creatures, called "cooperation."

2) Government of His brute creation, rain and drought, sickness and health, etc.

3. God's government and sin:

a. The article warns us that God is not the author, nor must be charged with the sins that are committed.

b. This does not mean that He does not accomplish His purpose even through the sins of men, nor that these are done without His providential government.

c. But it does mean that God remains holy, even when He accomplishes His purpose through the sinful acts of men and devils.

II. The consolation of this doctrine:

A. Our heavenly Father directs all:

1. He is:

a. Our Father in Christ,

b. Who loves us, and purposes to cause all things to work to our salvation.

2. He directs all things, so that nothing can befall us by chance; even the smallest things are kept under His power: the hairs of our head, the sparrow.

B. Protects us against our enemies:

1. He "restrains" them:

a. Better: "holds" them.

b. Surely not: He restrains them by common grace, as 1924 has it.

2. So that:

a. They cannot hurt us,

b. Must work for our good.

Article XIV

Of the Creation and Fall of Man, and His Incapacity to Perform What is Truly Good

"We believe that God created man out of the dust of the earth, and made and formed him after his own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy, capable in all things to will, agreeably to the will of God. But being in honor, he understood it not, neither knew his excellency, but willfully subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death, and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life, which he had received, he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life, having corrupted his whole nature; whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death. And being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, he hath lost all his excellent gifts, which he had received from God, and only retained a few remains thereof, which, however, are sufficient to leave man without excuse; for all the light which is in us is changed into darkness, as the Scriptures teach us, saying: The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not: where St. John calleth men darkness. Therefore we reject all that is taught repugnant to this, concerning the free will of man, since man is but a slave to sin; and has nothing of himself, unless it is given from heaven. For who may presume to boast, that he of himself can do any good, since Christ saith, No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him? Who will glory in his own will, who understands God? Who can speak of his knowledge, since the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God? In short, who dare suggest any thought, since he knows that we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but that our sufficiency is of God? And therefore what the apostle saith ought justly to be held sure and firm, that God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. For there is no will nor understanding, conformable to the divine will and understanding, but what Christ hath wrought in man; which he teaches us, when he saith, Without me ye can do nothing."

This article speaks:

1. Of man's creation and his state of rectitude:

A. His creatiain:

i. Formed out of the dust of the ground:

a. That he is made out of the dust of the ground means that he is related to the earth: he is earthy.

b. That God formed him out of the dust, and not simply

called him forth out of the ground as the animals, at the same time suggests at once that he is exalted above the earth.

2. Breathed into his nostrils the breath of life:

a. This is not mentioned in the article.

b. It means that he is also related to God and the spiritual world.

c. Thus, i.e., by this twofold act of God, man became a living soul.

B. His exalted state:

1. Created after God's image:

a. In general this means that:

1) He was made a creature capable of bearing God's image: a rational and moral creature;

2) that he actually resembled God in a creaturely way and measure.

b. Particularly, as to its contents, the image of God includes:

1) according to the article: that he was good, righteous, and holy.

2) to this should be added: that he was endowed with the true knowledge of God.

2. Made capable to will God's will:

a. Thus the article: capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God.

b. This was Adam's true freedom.

c. At the same time, he had not attained to the highest freedom: he could turn about and fall into sin and death.

II. His fall and condition after the fall:

A. His fall:

1. A willful subjection to sin:

a. There was nothing in his nature that impelled him to sin.

b. Nor was there anything outside of him that compelled him to sin.

c. His sin was willful: he understood not his being in honor, nor knew his excellency, i.e., he regarded them not.

2. A transgression of the commandment of life:

a. The law of his covenant God.

b. Negatively presented to him in the "probationary command."

3. Giving ear to the devil:

a. He rejected the Word of God.

b. To hear and obey the word of the devil: the lie.

All sin is the lie.

B. His condition after the Fall:

1. He is liable to death:

a. Corporal.

b. Spiritual:

1) darkened in his understanding: all the light

that is in him is changed to darkness;

2)unholy and corrupt in his whole nature: his righteousness and holiness are turned into the reverse;

3)perverse in all his ways: this refers to his actual life and walk in the world.

2. The few remains:

a. The article states that he lost all his excellent gifts, and retained only a few remains.

b. This refers to his natural light and power, of which he has sufficient to leave him without excuse.
