

Trinitarian Heresies

Teacher Guide

Materials

- Trinitarian Heresies (1 per student)
- Athanasian Creed (1 per student)
- Teacher Guide for your own use

Answers

Sabellianism/Modalism: Named for a third-century teacher, Sabellius, this idea suggests that God acts in three different “modes” but is only one Person.

AC: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. . . . And in the Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another, but all three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal.

BR: John 1:1

ME: United Pentecostal, United Apostolic Churches, “Oneness” Pentecostals

Arianism: Named for the fourth century teacher Arius who taught that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were created by God the Father.

AC: Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. . . . The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

BR: John 1:1; Colossians 1:15–18

ME: Jehovah’s Witnesses

Subordinationism: Jesus and the Holy Spirit are eternal, divine beings, but they are of a lesser nature than the Father.

AC: For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. . . . As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one Uncreated,

and one Incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but one Almighty.

BR: John 17:5; Hebrews 1:3

ME: Some in Eastern Orthodoxy and in various forms among some other denominations

Adoptionism: This view teaches that Jesus was an ordinary man until, at His baptism, He was adopted by the Father and given supernatural powers and the status of “Son of God.”

AC: The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one Eternal. . . . And in the Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another, but all three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

BR: Colossians 2:8–10

ME: Not common, but present among some Unitarians

Unitarianism: This view holds that there is a single God with no distinct Persons.

AC: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.

BR: Matthew 4:16–17

ME: Unitarian Universalist, some Christian Churches, and many denominations with Unitarian in their titles

Tritheism/Polytheism: The three Persons described in Scripture are actually three distinct Gods.

AC: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance.

BR: Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10, 44:6–8

ME: Mormonism (focused on three gods though they believe there are more)

*AC=Athanasian Creed; BR=Biblical Reference; ME=Modern Examples

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Athanasian Creed Statement

Bible Reference

Modern Examples

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