

# 1.4 The Trinity



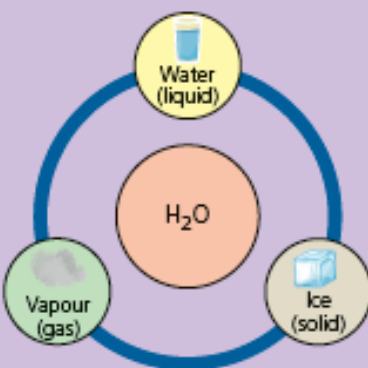
## Aim

To examine the concept of God as a Trinity of persons



## Starter

Water can come in three different forms but is still ultimately  $H_2O$ . Is it fair to say that it is still the same thing, whatever form it takes?



## Key word

**Trinity** – the Christian concept of God as one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit



■ A traditional icon of the Trinity

## Father, Son and Holy Spirit

The vast majority of Christians believe that God has been revealed to the world in three persons: the **Trinity**. Christians also believe that the understanding of the Trinity is a mystery that cannot be fully understood by humans.

By describing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as persons, Christians emphasise the possibility of having a relationship with God in different ways and at different times but always with the same God.

Christians are clear that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not the same as each other but are all God. They are also not subdivisions of God: each one is fully God on its own. So great is the mystery that many Christians describe the relationship as a 'communion of love'. If any of the persons were not fully God, they would not logically be able to fulfil their purpose properly.

| Father   | Son   | Holy Spirit  |
|--|---|--|
| Creator<br>Transcendent<br>Protector<br>Eternal<br>Judge | Saviour<br>Immanent<br>Incarnate<br>Resurrected<br>Ascended | Guide<br>Comforter<br>Inspiration<br>Active in daily life<br>Power |

## Biblical evidence

Christians see the presence of the Trinity from the moment of creation: God the Father as creator, the Son as the Word (who was made flesh – see John 1) who speaks at creation and the Spirit hovering over the face of the waters:

**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ... and the Spirit of God was hovering ... And God said... (Genesis 1:1–3)**

Jesus' final words in Matthew's Gospel are a clear statement of the Trinity, even though the word 'Trinity' is not used anywhere in the Bible. Paul, in his letters, also makes clear references to all three persons of the Trinity: by the time he was writing (10–20 years after Jesus), the Trinity seems to be being discussed.

## Sources of authority

'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...' (Matthew 28:19)

'Grace and peace to you from God our Father ... we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus ... your love in the Spirit.' (Colossians 1:1–8)

**Key words**

**Polytheism** – the idea that there are many gods

**Creed** – a statement of beliefs

## Other interpretations

Some Christians reject the idea of the Trinity as being too difficult or not fully evidenced in the Bible. They believe that the wording of views on the Trinity ends up as **polytheism** and that belief in one God is ultimately the most important to preserve. The debate goes back to the early Church. The hard work in the first 400 years of the Church to establish basic Christian beliefs can be found in the early **creeds**, such as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, which are still used in worship today.

Some examples of these views are:

- The belief that Jesus is the Son of God but only the Father is God. The Holy Spirit is the active force that God uses to make things happen on Earth. This is the view, for example, of Christadelphian and Jehovah's Witness communities.
- The belief that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are united in their purpose but are separate to each other, each with distinct roles. This is the view of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as the Mormon Church).

**AO2****Does it matter if Christians understand the concept of the Trinity?**

| Yes  | No   |
|--|--|
| Christians need to understand God if they are going to be true followers.  | God is a mystery and it would be wrong of humans to claim they could understand God fully. |
| It is in the Bible and so should be understood by Christians.  | As long as Christians understand that Jesus saved the world, that is all that matters.     |
| Christians could argue that they will understand the different persons of the Trinity at different times in their lives and that as long as they can access this belief when they need to, this is all that matters. |  |

**Activities****Review**

- 1 Write three bullet points to explain the Trinity.
- 2 Give details of one Christian group that rejects the concept of the Trinity.

**Develop**

- 3 Look up either the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed as a further source of authority and make notes on what it says about each person of the Trinity.

**Link**

- 4 What does studying the Trinity add to our understanding of the nature of God? Review and develop your notes from spreads 1.2 and 1.3.

**Debate**

- 5 To what extent can only people who believe in the Trinity call themselves Christians?

**Stretch**

- 6 Some people believe that Paul did not fully believe in the Trinity as we do now. Look at these passages and decide what you think the evidence points towards – and whether it matters: Romans 8:9–11, 1 Corinthians 12:3, 2 Corinthians 13:13, Galatians 4:4–6, 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14 and 1 Timothy 1:17.



## 2.9 Pilgrimage



### Aim

To explore the purpose and impact of pilgrimage



### Starter

What places have special meaning or significance for you and/or your family?



### Key word

**Pilgrimage** – a journey to a place of significance



### Top tip

You need to understand the purpose of pilgrimage to each of the four locations discussed in this spread in the same amount of detail.

### Source of authority

'Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover.' (Luke 2:41)



- A pilgrimage is as much about the journey as the destination

## Why go on pilgrimage?

Humans have always had special places that they go to for reflection, peace and inner healing. Often, the journey to that place is long and the journey itself is a time of renewal as much as the arrival at the destination. This is the concept of **pilgrimage**, which in the Christian tradition is a journey to anywhere significant for the faith.

Ultimately, Christians go on pilgrimage to become closer to God and to strengthen their faith. They see it as having a long-term impact. Some places of pilgrimage, such as Lourdes, Jerusalem, Rome and Walsingham, are visited with the possibility of more than just a spiritual impact: sick people can be taken there in the hope that healing them is a part of God's plan.

Pilgrimage is not meant to be an easy time: a hard journey or difficult schedule helps show commitment. It is also a time of community: pilgrimage usually happens in a group and this reinforces the communal nature of Christianity, sometimes expanding an individual Christian's horizons in terms of the size of the Church. Individuals or communities can return from a pilgrimage with a renewed sense of commitment or the resolution to move in a new direction. For some people, visiting a place of pilgrimage makes them commit to becoming a Christian – either through a spiritual experience or through the experience of seeing many people worshipping together.

## Places of pilgrimage

Pilgrimage can be to a place of significance for Jesus or for the Church as a whole, or it can be to the place of a miracle. Some Christians reject aspects of pilgrimage for being idolatry or for focusing on a saint or living person when Christians should focus on God.

### Jerusalem Holy Land





- Jesus went on pilgrimage here.
- He spent the final week of his life here and many of the places he visited are key stops on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
- Christians from all denominations come on pilgrimage to worship where he died and rose.

### Rome, Italy



- This is historically the centre of the Church and now the home of the Catholic Church.
- It is a place full of history for Christians to unite with their past.
- The Pope lives here and often preaches here. It is a place of amazing art and architecture to emphasise the glory of God.

| Walsingham, England   | Lourdes, France   |
|---|---|
|  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mary appeared in a vision to a widow in the eleventh century, instructing her to build a holy house, which took place miraculously.</li> <li>• A spring of water was discovered here and people go to drink from the spring for healing (spiritual or physical).</li> <li>• Worship is quite traditional and traditional members of the Church of England and Catholics attend.</li> </ul> |  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mary appeared in a vision to a young girl who discovered a spring in the nineteenth century.</li> <li>• People visit to bathe in the baths and some go on pilgrimage to help the sick there.</li> <li>• It is a Catholic site and some reject its importance because it has become very commercialised.</li> </ul> |

## AO2

## Are pilgrimages actually important to a Christian's life?

| Yes   | No   |
|---|--|
| A pilgrimage is such a great commitment that it is an important event for a Christian to go through to show their dedication.       | We are saved through our faith not through our deeds. Pilgrimage is a deed.                                    |
| Any opportunity to draw a person closer to God should be accepted by Christians – even if it is not helpful for all Christians.     | The good things that people get from pilgrimage could be achieved through church worship or individual prayer. |
| Some Christians might support pilgrimages to places like Jerusalem but reject pilgrimages to places that focus on Mary or the Pope. |  |

## Activities



## Review

- 1 Why do many Christians support the idea of pilgrimage? Use examples to justify your points.
- 2 Why do some Christians think that pilgrimage is not a good use of time for Christians?

## Develop

- 3 In groups of four, take one of the four places of pilgrimage each, research it and share your findings.

## Link

- 4 Think about work you have completed on salvation and worship. Is pilgrimage a form

of worship that will help someone get into heaven?

## Debate

- 5 'The time and money spent on pilgrimages would be better spent helping those in need or the work of the local church.' How fair is this view?

## Stretch

- 6 Find out about arguments for and against healing miracles that some Christians say take place at Lourdes. What are the strongest arguments for and against these miracles being real?