

“The doctrine of the Trinity can be regarded as the outcome of a process of sustained and critical reflection on a pattern of divine activity revealed in Scripture, and continued in Christian experience. This is not to say that Scripture contains a doctrine of the Trinity; rather, Scripture bears witness to a God who demands to be understood in a Trinitarian manner” (Alistair McGrath)

- **In your groups – discuss/write down what you already know about the Holy Trinity.**
- **When you have finished read through the Nicene Creed attached. Compare what you have already discussed with the Creed.**
- **It states in the Creed that Jesus is incarnate. What does this mean and how does that work? Why is it important that Jesus is incarnate?**
- **It states in the Creed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Where is the scriptural evidence for this? Locate the evidence in your bibles.**

The Filioque controversy

The basic issue at stake in 1054, and which split eastern and western churches, is whether the Spirit may be said to proceed from the Father alone, or from the Father and the Son. The former position is associated with the eastern church, and the latter is associated with the western church. The Greek patristic writers insisted that there was only one source of being within the Trinity. The Father alone was the sole supreme cause of all things, including the Son and the Spirit within the Trinity. The Son and the Spirit derive from the Father but in different manners. The Son is begotten of the Father while the Spirit proceeds from the Father. – the Father pronounces his word; at the same time as he does so he breathes out in order to make the word capable of being heard and received. Here the Son is the word of God and the Spirit is the breath of God. (Alistair McGrath)

Why do you think it was important for early Greek writers to spend so much time distinguishing Son and Spirit in this way? And why would they not agree that the Holy Spirit should proceed from both the Father and the Son? How did Augustine, who reflects our understanding, understand the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son?

ACTIVITY (3 VOLUNTEERS NEEDED)

In turns Volunteer 1,2 and 3 talk for 30 seconds.

Volunteer 1 talks about God the Father.

Volunteer 2 talks about God the Son.

Volunteer 3 talks about God the Holy spirit.

Can our volunteers do justice to the “person” they are speaking about without mentioning one or both of the other persons in the trinity? If not what does this tell us about the Trinity?

Can you find biblical evidence for the activity of all three persons of the trinity in (i) Creation and (ii) Redemption?

(please note that whilst we believe that all three persons were active and present in these decisive moments it is appropriate to think of creation as the distinctive work of the Father and the work of redemption as being the distinctive work of the Son. (Alistair McGrath)

We’ve already identified the presence of the trinity in the Genesis story 1.1-3 – where else do we see evidence of the Trinity in the Old Testament?

see also

Genesis 1.1-3; Proverbs 1.20-3; Proverbs 9.1-6; Job 28; Ecclesiastes 2.12-17; Isaiah 55.10-11; Psalm 147.15-20; Isaiah 42.1-3; Ezekiel 36.26;Ezekiel 27.1-14.

Why is it important that there is evidence for the Trinity in the Old Testament?

How well do the following analogies help us to visualize the Holy Trinity – what are their strengths and what are their limitations?

- i. A spring, fount and stream
- ii. A chain
- iii. Lights on a CD player’s graphical display

Can you think of a better analogy? What is it?