

Teaching The Trinity

A Reflection

The Trinitarian reference in the SIAMS Schedule relates to the character of worship.

The regular use of the words of the Grace in worship as one of the formal prayers/responses – of all prayers it is particularly Trinitarian in its content.

The words of the Grace explained to pupils, not just recited, so they have a sense of the work of each member of the Trinity. Perhaps as follows ...

- An awareness what it means to have God as Father – celebrating his love, his creation etc
- An awareness of the way God shows his grace (and what this means) through Jesus His Son – the One who demonstrates God's love to the world (incarnation) and supremely the One who is God 's way of bringing us forgiveness (a lot here from Easter and in the Eucharist celebrated in some schools)
- The use in prayer of the phrase “in the name of Jesus” (having explained why to the pupils why we do this). This is often lacking at the end of prayers in school worship
- An awareness of the way God works in our lives through the Holy Spirit – ways of describing this (eg “the One who comes alongside us”)

The main issue is that pupils regularly encounter references to all three Persons of the Trinity as a natural part of school worship.

In the Schedule there is an emphasis on “age appropriateness” leaving some areas to “inspectors’ professional judgement” for a number of areas. This will always have to be the case (and always has been).

The descriptors attempt to set out the extent to which worship introduces pupils to the Trinity - a strong focus in worship with understanding for “outstanding”, down to limited or no reference in worship in satisfactory or worse.

Inspectors can assess pupils’ awareness of the Trinity in pupil interviews and get a general sense of the place this occupies in worship without being too zealous in

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plumbing the depth of understanding. It is also one aspect amongst others in the section on worship.

Look at the differentiated statements in the descriptors.

Taken from <http://www.re-handbook.org.uk/section/traditions/christianity#tab-2>

God the Father is the first person of the Trinity.

- **I believe in God, the Father almighty**
 - “Father” indicates the personal character of God
- **Creator of heaven and earth**
 - “... almighty, creator ...” asserts the power of God and role as creator
 - “heaven and earth” conveys the totality of the range of creation, embracing all that is.

Jesus, God the Son, is the second person of the Trinity.

- **I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord**
 - “Son” signifies one with God or “God made man” - NOT a separation or subordination
- **He was conceived**
 - This asserts that he had no human father
- **by the power of the Holy Spirit**
 - the belief that he is divine and born of the Virgin Mary: Mary is his human mother – He is human. “Jesus is true God and true man” - Council of Ephesus, 431
- **He suffered under Pontius Pilate**
 - emphasising the historical reality
- **and was crucified, died and was buried**
 - asserting the nature and fact of his death
- **He descended to the dead**
 - ie visited human beings who have died on earth but who still “are”, still exist but are not in heaven
- **On the third day he rose again**
 - crucified on Good Friday – risen from the dead on Easter Sunday
- **He ascended into heaven**
 - “Heaven” is the eternal presence of God, after human death

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- **and is seated at the right hand of the Father**
 - an anthropomorphic visioning of the relationship within the divine oneness of God
- **He will come again**
 - Jesus spoke of a “last judgement” in Matthew 25:31-46
- **to judge the living and the dead**
 - parable of the sheep and the goats, taking place at the end of time

God the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity

- **I believe in the Holy Spirit**
 - the on-going presence of God in the world
- **the holy catholic Church**
 - “Church” is the community of Christians
 - “catholic” means universal
 - “holy” means sharing in the holiness of God
NB: “catholic” does not mean the institution of the Catholic Church led by the Pope, the Bishop of Rome
- **the communion of saints**
 - “saints” includes all followers of Jesus Christ
 - “communion” means the union/unity of all “saints” – those alive on earth and those who have died and passed to eternity. Since Christianity believes that all are made in the image and likeness of God, so the ultimate meaning of this is the entirety of humanity, every single person
- **the forgiveness of sins**
 - “sin” is a failure to love God and neighbour, near and far, and “sins” are actions or omissions that demonstrate sin.
 - “forgiveness of sins” is the love of God for a person transcending a person’s “sins”
- **the resurrection of the body**
 - signifies belief in eternal life in a form [body] that has
- **life everlasting**
 - continuity with life on earth before death. Thus, having come into existence [birth], a person will never cease to be, to exist, but will continue to “be” for all eternity, with God, in heaven.

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