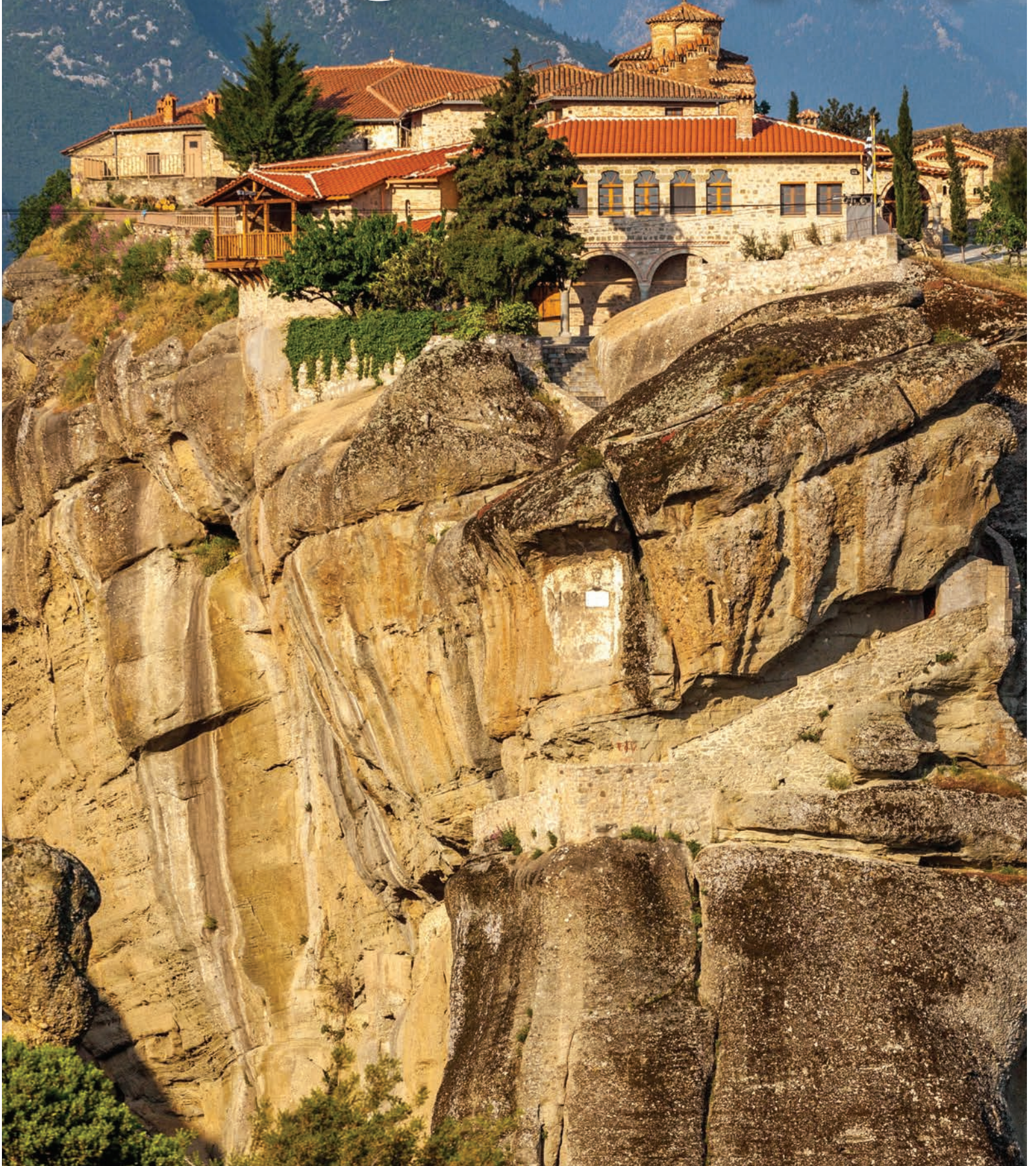


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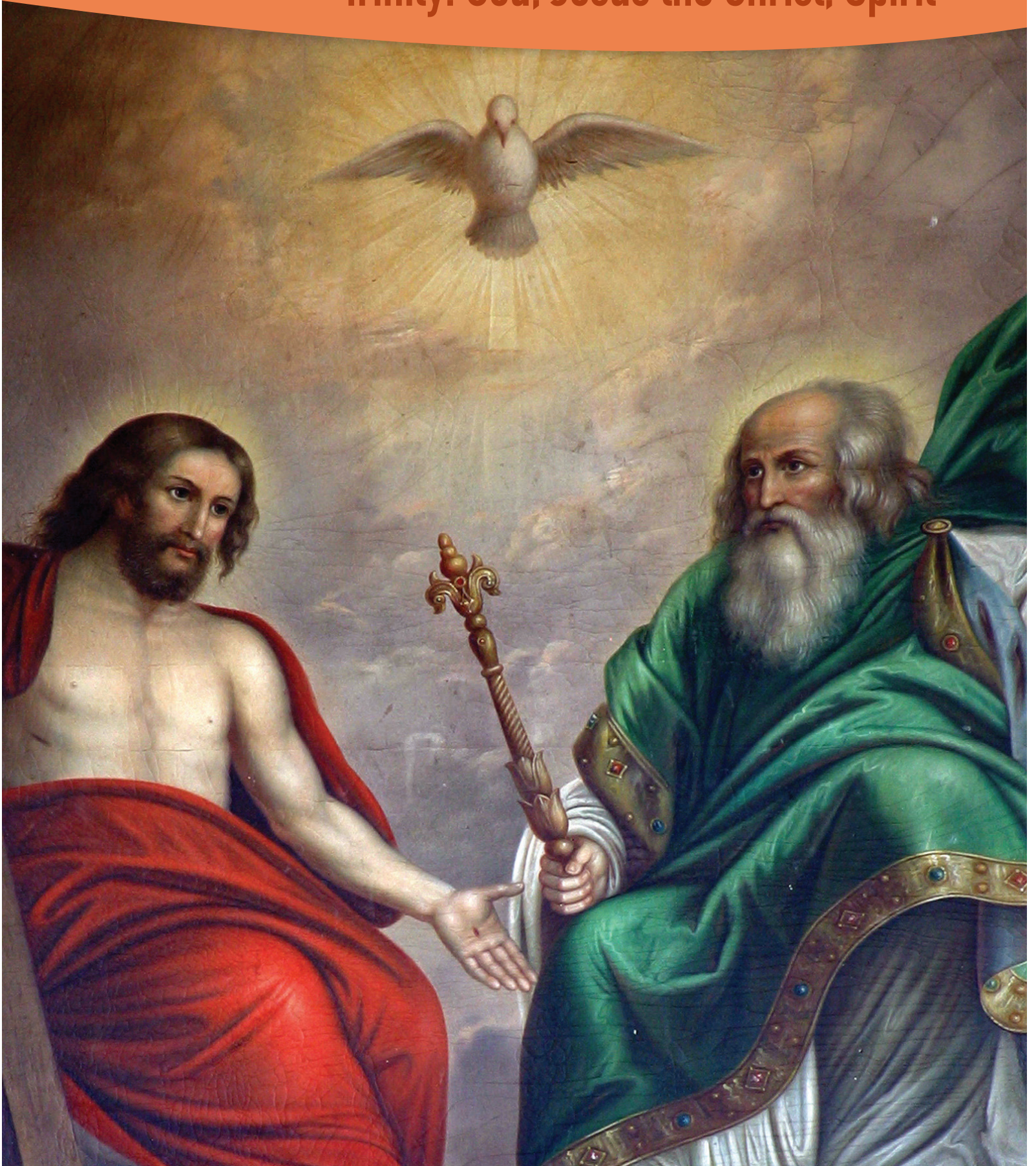
## BELIEFS





# CHAPTER 4

Trinity: God, Jesus the Christ, Spirit





## 4.1 Beliefs

In every religion there are core beliefs which make that religion unique. These beliefs are expressed in peoples' lives in a variety of ways.

The curriculum strand Beliefs encompasses three areas:

- Trinity: God, Jesus the Christ, Spirit
- human existence
- world religions.

Belief in one God is central to Judaism, Christianity and Islam but each religion expresses their belief in one God differently. Christianity expresses belief in God through the doctrine of the Trinity. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the apostles believed and preached that Jesus was more than human: he was also divine. In the days following the resurrection when Jesus appeared to the disciples,

Thomas' statement, 'My Lord and my God' (John 20:28), sums up the impact that Jesus as the risen Lord had on the majority of his followers. Later, when the Holy Spirit came to the disciples in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4) it was clear to them that besides God the Father and his Son, Jesus the **Christ**, there was a third divine personality to work in their lives. Explaining the reality of the three divine persons within the one God took several centuries but eventually statements of belief were formalised in the Apostles Creed and then the Nicene Creed. In this section we will explore the origins and development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

### Christ

'the Christ' is a title given to Jesus after the resurrection

## 4.2 Trinity

The doctrine of **the Trinity** concerns the Christian understanding of God and summarises the central truth of Christianity that there is one God but within God there are three 'persons': Father, Son and Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity has been described as a mystery of faith.

Have you ever had the experience of trying to explain something to someone but words seem inadequate to express the meaning you wanted to convey? All of our words seem to be inadequate when we try to explain the mystery of God. This is particularly the case when we try to explain the Trinity.

that the rain is very heavy. To be the 'apple of someone's eye' means that you are very special to that person and they are very proud of you. To have a 'bubbly personality' means that you are cheerful and happy, not that you are full of bubbles!

### The Trinity

The Trinity is a formal doctrine of Christianity which states that God is one but there are three persons in one God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

## Ways of speaking about God

When people speak about God they often use words and images which are familiar to them and symbols and ideas which are drawn from their own experience. Throughout history people have often used metaphor to help explain God and attributes of God.

A metaphor is a comparison between two things which are not usually connected to each other, for example, 'that was a step in the right direction'. You may have heard some of the following expressions:

- S/he has a broken heart.
- It's raining cats and dogs!
- He is the apple of my eye.
- She has a bubbly personality.

Her heart is not actually broken, rather, the expression means she has been hurt and feels sad and upset. It is not literally raining cats and dogs but the expression means



▲ **Figure 4.1** Jesus as a shepherd watching his flock is a common Christian metaphor

## ACTIVITY 4.1 Metaphors

- 1 Using the metaphors below, find or create some images for the metaphors. Then, explain their meanings.

Table 4.1

Metaphor	Image	Explanation
Covered in a blanket of snow		
He has a heart of stone		
His memory is hazy		
You light up my life		
That news is music to my ears		
Hold your horses		
He was caught: hook, line and sinker		
I swallowed my pride		

- 2 Table 4.2 contains some metaphors from the Bible. Read each metaphor within context, and explain it. The metaphor has been highlighted.

Table 4.2

Biblical metaphor	Explanation
The <b>Lord is my shepherd</b> , I shall not want (Psalm 23:1)	
Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ' <b>I am the light of the world</b> . Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.' (John 8:12)	
The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, ' <b>Here is the Lamb of God</b> who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29)	
So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, <b>I am the gate for the sheep</b> . All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <b>I am the gate</b> . Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. (John 10:7–9)	
The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this <b>temple</b> , and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' (John 2:18–20)	

Another figure of speech often used is simile. A simile is where two unlike things are compared. Some examples of everyday similes are: 'the tickets sold like hot cakes' or 'he is as brave as a lion'. An analogy is where a literal comparison is made between two things.

Symbol and metaphor are useful because they provide a means of being able to talk about God but they are limited and do not fully explain the mystery of God.

The following story, attributed to St Augustine, demonstrates some of the inadequacy of using human words, symbols and actions to describe God and the Trinity.

## ACTIVITY 4.2 Similes

Read the biblical similes in Table 4.3 and explain what you think they mean.

Table 4.3

Biblical similes	Meaning
I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. (Genesis 22:17)	
For they and their livestock would come up, and they would even bring their tents, as thick as locusts; neither they nor their camels could be counted; so they wasted the land as they came in. (Judges 6:5)	
The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matt 13:44)	
His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. (Matt 28:3)	
All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (Matt 25:32)	

St Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, was walking by the seashore one day contemplating and trying to understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity when he saw a small boy running back and forth from the water to a spot on the seashore. The boy was using a sea shell to carry the water from the ocean and place it into a small hole in the sand.

The Bishop of Hippo approached him and asked, 'My boy, what are you doing?'

'I am trying to bring all the sea into this hole,' the boy replied with a sweet smile.

'But that is impossible, my dear child, the hole cannot contain all that water,' said Augustine.

The boy paused in his work, stood up, looked into the eyes of the saint, and replied, 'It is no more impossible than what you are trying to do – comprehend the immensity of the mystery of the Holy Trinity with your small intelligence.'

The saint was absorbed by such a keen response from that child, and turned his eyes from him for a short while. When he glanced down to ask him something else, the boy had vanished.

## The Trinity in Scripture

The doctrine of the Trinity is not found in either the Old Testament or the New Testament. What the New Testament contains, however, are elements on which the doctrine is built.

### Early Christians and the Trinity

Throughout history, people have sought to explain and understand the Trinity. The first followers of Jesus were Jews and as **monotheists** they believed that God is one. The lives of the followers of Jesus were transformed by the resurrection of Jesus and so they looked for new ways to speak about God and speak to God. They began to speak of a triune God (Father, Son and Spirit). 'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you' (Romans 8:11).

They began to believe that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. They also developed a baptismal formula and baptised new members in the name of the *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*.

After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and as the message of Jesus spread, Greeks (non-Jews) began to join Christianity and a new way of thinking and talking about God developed. Greek-speaking people used Greek words and images to explain God rather than Hebrew words and images. God was referred to in Greek as *theos*, but to call Jesus *theos* was unthinkable to people steeped in the belief in one God, so they called Jesus *kyrios* which means Lord.

Some false teaching, known as **heresy**, began to emerge because some Greek converts thought of

#### **monotheism**

a belief in only one god

#### **Heresy**

belief or opinion contrary to orthodox religious (especially Christian) doctrine



▲ **Figure 4.2** Ruins of the cathedral in Iznik, Turkey, where the council of Nicaea took place.

Jesus as only partly divine and partly human rather than fully divine and fully human. One of the heresies proposed by Arius said that Jesus was not of the 'same substance' (*ousia*) as God the Father and therefore Jesus was not equal to God the Father. Eventually, the Council of Nicaea (325) was called so that church leaders could address the false teachings and heresies and eventually clarify as best they could the meaning of the Trinity.

### Council of Nicaea 325 CE

In 325 CE, the Emperor Constantine convened an ecumenical council of bishops at Nicaea, in modern-day Turkey, to quell the heresies and establish a formal statement regarding the Trinity. More than 150 bishops attended and they eventually wrote the Nicene Creed which reaffirms that Jesus the Christ is divine, the only son of God.

The Nicene Creed describes Christian faith from both a scriptural perspective and a Greek perspective. It uses the scriptural baptismal formula *Father, Son and Holy Spirit* and adds a Greek interpretation as well: 'God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father.' So the Council proclaims that Jesus is not another God different from God the Father but Jesus is the same God as God the Father and of the same substance.

Over the years, many believers, scholars and theologians have expanded understandings of the Trinity by using words, symbols and situations which were common to them at the time.

St Patrick, legend tells us, used the shamrock to help explain the Trinity to the people of Ireland. Just as the shamrock has one stem but three leaves, there are three divine persons in the Trinity but only one God.

Augustine of Hippo 354–430, in some way, pre-empted the thinking of the famous 20th-century psychologists Sigmund Freud and Karl Jung. Augustine believed that the human psyche had a three-fold structure: memory, knowledge and love. While these powers are distinct, they exist within one person. He likened his three-fold structure to the Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit existing in one God.

## ACTIVITY 4.3 The Nicene Creed

### Nicene Creed

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
He came down from heaven,  
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,  
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.  
I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## ACTIVITY 4.3 continued

- 1 Many of the words in the Nicene Creed are not used in everyday language and may be difficult to understand. Create your own glossary by finding dictionary definitions for the words below:
- 2 Read the following statements from the Nicene Creed and explain them in your own words.
  - a 'Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible'
  - b 'God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God'
  - c '... and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man'
  - d 'Rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures'
- 3 Read the Nicene Creed again slowly. Which statement captures your attention the most? Write your chosen statement and then draw a picture of what you think that particular phrase means.
- 4 You have been employed by the Catholic Church to help young people participate more fully when attending Mass. Your first task is to rewrite the Nicene Creed in a way that would allow teenagers to understand what Catholics believe. Keep the language simple, but make sure you do not leave anything out!

Glossary Word	Definition
1 Begotten	
2 Consubstantial	
3 Salvation	
4 Incarnate	
5 Crucified	
6 Accordance	
7 Ascended	
8 Glorified	
9 Apostolic	
10 Resurrection	
11 catholic (lower case 'c')	

Table 4.4

Nicene Creed	Your Version of the Nicene Creed
<p>I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.</p>	





## ACTIVITY 4.5 Trinity Dramatisation

Read this text aloud or act it out at the front of your classroom.

*Three Christians, all praying in different ways.*



- Christian 1:** *(Kneeling, with hands together)* Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name ...
- Christian 2:** *(Sitting, writing in a journal)* Jesus, my brother, my friend. I need to talk to you ...
- Christian 3:** *(Standing, with palms up)* Come Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit. Fill me with your fire ...
- Christian 1:** Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven ...
- Christian 2:** Jesus, I'm having a tough time at the moment ...
- Christian 3:** Breathe your life into me Holy Spirit ...
- Christian 1:** What are you saying? Who are you praying to?
- Christian 3:** The Holy Spirit ... you know, God.
- Christian 1:** You don't pray to the Holy Spirit.
- Christian 2:** Yeah, obviously! You pray to Jesus. He listens, he understands.
- Christian 1:** No ... You pray to the Father. You know 'Our Father'.
- Christian 3:** I'm pretty sure you pray to the Holy Spirit. Haven't you heard of Pentecost?
- God:** You're correct.
- Christians 1, 2, 3:** I knew it! (Pause) You're not right, I am.
- God:** Actually, 'I am'. You're all correct. I am the Father, I am the Son, I am the Holy Spirit. I am.

- 1 List the three aspects of God that make up the Trinity.
- 2 What does this text suggest about people's understanding of the Trinity?
- 3 In this text, God calls himself 'I am'. What do you think that means?
- 4 When you pray to God, what name do you use? Why?

## ACTIVITY 4.6 Images of the Trinity

The following images of the Trinity are from different periods of time and places around the globe. Study each image, read the key information and write a description about each image, detailing how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are presented.





Table 4.5

Images of the Trinity	Key Information	Description
	<b>Shamrock</b> – St Patrick used the shamrock to help explain the Trinity to the people of Ireland between 432–461 CE.	
	<b>'Trinity'</b> – painted by Andrei Rublev, between 1425–27. It now hangs in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.	



ACTIVITY 2.3 continued

Table 4.5 continued

Images of the Trinity	Key Information	Description
	<b>'Holy Trinity'</b> – painted by Luca Rossetti da Orta, between 1738–9. It now hangs in St Gaudenzio Church, Ivrea, Italy.	
	<b>Triquetra</b> – Also known as a 'trinity knot'. The design has been used as a Christian religious symbol of the Trinity since the Celtic Revival of the 19th century.	
	<b>'Holy Trinity'</b> – painted by Alcario Otero, in 2001, New Mexico.	
	<b>'Trinity'</b> – painted by Yvonne Lucia in 2013, New York. This image is from Lucia's series: 'Contemporary Icons of the Feminine Divine'.	

ACTIVITY 4.7 Design Your Own Image

For centuries people have tried to explain the Holy Trinity through art. Paintings, sculptures, frescos, icons and symbols have been created to illustrate the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Using your knowledge, as well as information from this textbook, create your own image of the Trinity.

- 1 Describe your image of the Trinity.
- 2 List the symbols included in your image of the Trinity and explain why you chose them (e.g. fire symbolises the Holy Spirit because that is what the Apostles saw at Pentecost).
- 3 How does your image of the Trinity illustrate the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?