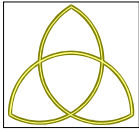


# Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

## ***Theology: 1 hour***



Completion of this study entitles the catechist to one hour of credit toward certification.

## **CATECHISM REFERENCES** #232-267

### **FOCUSING THE STUDY**

Catechists express difficulty developing a catechesis on the doctrine of the Trinity although it is at the core of Christian beliefs, worship and life patterns. The Trinity permeates creation and is woven into Christian constitution, worldview, worship service, sacramental theology and prayer. This study will focus on the Trinity as the Sacred being shown in the natural universe, the nature of humanity and humanity transformed and made whole through baptism.

### **INTRODUCTION**

There is a famous art icon of the Trinity that portrays three heavenly messengers who come to the home of Abraham and his wife Sarah. The visitors proclaim the fulfillment of the promise that Sarah will have a child and Abraham will become the father of nations. Although they do not recognize Yahweh with them through the appearance of the three guests, Sarah and Abraham are open to receive God and the activity of the Sacred that brings change in their lives and the life of the world forever. Readers of the scripture passage have the advantage of knowing that God is revealed through heaven and earth for all times in this story. Orthodox Christians remember the story, and gaze upon the icon created to portray it, for the action of the Trinity to take place within them. Something “outside” of the individual (the three guests) is taken “inside” to bring about inner change through the heightened attention and openness given to receive God.

Another well-known icon of the Trinity depicts the baptism of Jesus with the appearance of the Spirit in the form of a dove, and the voice of God from heaven that proclaims the identity and status of Jesus as “Son of God.” (Mark 1:9) This icon symbolizes inner change and the world’s awareness of it, and invites Christians to reflect upon their own baptism. It is hard to explain in words what happens to bring about dramatic change through icons and scripture stories, but it is this kind of transformation called “conversion” that is the work of God and the real business of catechists. Stories, icons, liturgies and religious experiences in the name of the three Persons of the Trinity (dogma) achieve the change of heart that doctrinal statements and creeds (kerygma) reinforce and proclaim, so the importance of both in catechetical programs should not be overlooked.

Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Denys the Areopagite and Thomas Aquinas, who expanded the doctrine of the Trinity for the Church, began their contemplation of the Trinity with the human experience of God (hypostases) instead of the essence (ousia) of God that would always remain unknown and beyond

## ***THEOLOGY: Theology of the Trinity Revealed in Creation***

### **THEME**

Humans are made in the image and likeness of God. Their social, psychological, physical and spiritual development depend upon relationships modeled after the Holy Trinity. (Gen. 1: 18-27)

### **CATECHIST COMPETENCIES:**

As a result of this study, the catechist will be able to

1. expand catechesis on the mystery of the Trinity as central to Christian faith.
2. contemplate the Triune God as Divine model of “unity is triune” in the daily lives of Christians.
3. increase awareness of the Trinity active in the nature of human “person-hood” that surfaces and thrives through social relationships and in relationship to all of creation.



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human comprehension. These church theologians accepted human limitations to penetrate the unknowable and understood that all knowledge of God comes from self-expressions of God in the world. Their theology (study of God), however, was based on the capacity of the intuitive human spirit to “know” what the mind is incapable of reasoning out on its own. Catechists should be acquainted with the history and development of Church doctrine concerning the Trinity. This study, however, directs attention to how the Trinity is manifest in the world and why the Triune God is ritually worshipped and celebrated by Christians.

God in the Three Dimensional World

### ***The Trinity Mirrored in Nature***

The Trinity, as ground of all being, is revealed in the multifaceted forms of existence that make up the one universe created to sustain and support life. The beauty and grandeur of nature are known to inspire works of art, music, literature, poetry and scientific discoveries that stretch the imagination and move souls to contemplate God. Gazing at nature, like looking at a religious icon, can alter a person’s state of being, self-concept and sense of harmony in relation to all of creation. Attention given to the ocean, a starry night, a flicker of candle light, fields of flowers and birds in flight takes people to new depths, heights and awareness of God and a deeper understanding of what it means to be human. It is as if a force is released by nature to move, stir and rearrange the human psyche for transcendence and an immanent encounter with the unfolding of mystery.

**“Christians are baptized in the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: not in their *names*, for there is only one God, the almighty Father, his only Son, and the Holy Spirit: the Most Holy Trinity.”**

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church #233*

Nature and the cosmos not only feed and maintain life, but can also trigger soul-felt reverence and awe that loosen boundaries for people to experience a oneness with heaven and earth. Most people speak of having a “religious experience” when the sight, sound and scent of physical nature interact with the open system of body, mind and spirit. At these times, people sense a shared source of being, a connectedness with the infinite varieties of life as one, and re-integration into the ecosystem of union, love and belonging. Something meaningful happens within the context of the three-dimensional physical world that gives a glimpse at the fullness of time and the fulfillment of the promise. It is the dynamism of the three in action when the unseen human spirit connects with God through the mediation of the physical world to experience the balance, flow and unity of the Three in One.

### ***The Trinity and the Mystery of the Human Person***

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity proclaims that there are three separate and distinct persons (hypostasis or expressions) in one God, and that the real distinction among them lies in the relationship of each to the others. (#252 – 255 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*) Social sciences theorize that the human personality (persona), too, develops out of the relational process. People inherit personal traits and capabilities from their parents, and acquire social identities from experiences gained and relationships formed with others.

In the process, no two people are ever exactly alike in the common ground that defines what it means to be part of the human family. The “persona” or mask worn by an individual reveals distinctive characteristics and expressions, but it also conceals from view the whole being of the person. People are complex, exist on several levels of being, and can only be known by what is revealed by them to others through action and communication. In a similar fashion, God is made known in the world by divine action that is studied by theologians who attempt to answer the question: “Who is God for us?”

**“The Trinity is One. We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the *consubstantial Trinity*. The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire.”**

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church #253*

A “person” is described by religion as having a mind, body and spirit; a will, understanding and soul. In psychology, a “person” is said to have an id, ego and superego that govern behavior, and history records the past and present of the future oriented “person.” The number three is used consistently throughout scripture to symbolize wholeness. St. Augustine spoke of the mind of the person as made up of intellect, will and imagination in dynamic relationship and all of creation is said to possess dimensions known, unknown and unknowable. A “person” has multiple identities from assumed roles, skills and social status that are often triadic (groups of 3) descriptions of relationships such as: wife, mother and daughter. These are diverse aspects of one individual developed over time and named in relationship to the culture of the community as a whole.

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The growth and identity of a “person” as well as the social order of a community depend on the individual’s ability to negotiate, coordinate and balance multiple roles dictated by culture. The individual, in turn, is gradually formed, educated, nurtured and ritually initiated into various areas of society. This is the same dialectic found in RCIA that demonstrates the responsibility of the church in the formation and initiation of the “person” into the culture, traditions and communal life of the people of God. Theologians describe God as a community of persons (manifestations) of one substance revealed to the world through three distinct expressions called the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – each separate person totally the one God. “The Trinity is One!” (#255, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*) Christians contend that the human personality formed in relationship to God makes all the difference in the world.

Scripture reveals, and Christian tradition upholds, that above everything else discussed, the human person is created in the image and likeness of the Triune God. This teaching emphasizes the inherent dignity and worth of the person and informs the Christian conscience to know when others have been dehumanized and cut off from their roles as co-creators, co-redeemers and co-enablers in the work needed to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Christian belief in the Trinity intuitively when unjust social practices deny the humanity of a person, offend God, and diminish society. The Trinity, celebrated and worshipped by Christians as model for human relations, is totally inclusive, full of compassion, freedom and justice, and in complete communion with the development and welfare of others and the environment.

**“...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”**

John 17:21

### ***Unity is Triune***

The Gospel of John (17:10; 21-22; 26) speaks of a unity that exists between the persons of God in communion with the baptized. In his prayer, Jesus asked “that all may be one” as the Father is in him and he is in the Father “that they may also be in us.” This passage teaches that people not only have a relationship *with* God and look for God *in* them, but that they are *in* God. This statement of Jesus in the gospel goes far beyond the concept of building relationships needed to establish “personhood,” but speaks of being through, with and in communion with God as the ultimate relationship that defines the human person. It is this three-dimensional communion with God that is the hallmark of the baptized and anointed which is celebrated in thanksgiving at every eucharistic meal. The norm of the completed rite of Christian initiation, including the practice of administering the sacraments in the name of the Trinity, is therefore appreciated and understood.

### **Conclusion**

This study began with the genesis of life and the Judeo-Christian story from scripture that says humans are “made in the image and likeness” of God. The study continued by exploring the three dimensional world of the person in time and space using mind, body and spirit to form relationships necessary for human knowledge, development, self-expression, self-understanding and communion with God. Christians worship God revealed to them as the three in one divinity, ground of all existence, profess belief that God saw that it was fit to become human for our sake.

**“The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the ‘hierarchy of the truths of faith.’ The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men and ‘reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin.’”**

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church # 234*

### **Reflection/Discussion Questions**

In order to complete this study and earn one hour of credit toward catechist certification, you must respond to the reflection/discussion questions in either of the following ways:

1. Write/type your responses (20-40 words each) and submit them to your catechetical leader;
2. Engage in a formal discussion of the questions (at least 30 minutes) in some forum approved by your catechetical leader; e.g. a catechist meeting, level meetings, team meetings, catechist pairings, etc.

### **Review Questions**

## ***Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert***

1. Read paragraphs #238 - #267 concerning the Trinity in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Briefly discuss the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and any new insights gained.
2. What is your understanding of the scripture passage that says humans “are made in the image and likeness of God?” (Gen. 1:27)
3. What are some of the manifestations of the Trinity in the physical world, in the development of the human person and in the daily lives of Christians?
4. Talk about human nature’s connection with the nature of the universe as they relate to “religious experiences” and encounters with the mystery of God.
5. What does the community of the three persons in God model for human community and human relationships?
6. Since God is the source of all being, give examples that demonstrate the Trinity revealed in creation.
7. How does the baptismal event of Jesus in Mark 1:9 set the norm for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults?
8. Discuss “personhood” and how it develops and grows out of relationships.
9. What is the meaning of “unity is triune” for Christians and how do Christians practice it in the community of the church, family, neighborhood, work-place and among friends as modeled by the Trinity?

### **Practical Applications/Critical Thinking**

1. Using a scripture story, develop an icon of the Trinity active and visible in your life. You may want to include personal relationships and encounters with mystery as they relate to different phases of RCIA. Name your icon and use it to meditate on the presence and work of God in your life and in the lives of others.
2. Few people who live in the city take opportunities to commune with nature. Many forget how trees, grass, flowers, rain, sun, birds and insects benefit life on earth, and can barely remember a starry sky. Contemplating nature can deepen awareness of the self and mediate communion with God and all of creation. Go to the Planetarium, Botanical Gardens, Aquarium or out in the park to remember the wonders of nature and the God who created it. Reflect upon feelings of awe, and Christian responsible action for the care of the environment as directed by God.
3. What are some of the attributes of God that have been revealed to Christians by the Creator, Redeemer and indwelling of the Spirit. How does the faith professed by the Church in the Triune God help to develop those attributes or traits in the lives of Christians?
4. At group meetings, set up a liturgical table of symbols, icons or other items used in catechesis that ritually symbolize the presence of God known through relationships developed between catechumens and the church. Be creative and let minds run free. Then reflect upon the work of the Trinity made known during the process of Christian initiative.
5. Ask catechumens to describe themselves as a person and as a group. What changes are occurring as a result of the Holy Trinity in the RCIA process? How are catechists and catechumens involved in this work of God?

*Sheila Bourelly is Pastoral Associate at St. Ambrose Church, Chicago. She has a Masters in Social Work and Master of Divinity with special interest in the initiation rite of Christians. About the author: Patrick Redington is the Consultant for Catechetical Events at the Office for Catechesis, Archdiocese of Chicago. A graduate of the Catholic University of America, he has served in school, parish and diocesan catechetical positions.*