

LESSON 1: The Nature of God

AIM

To explore the Christian understanding of how there are three Persons in God and to relate this to daily living (2.1.8)

OUTCOME

Learners are familiar with the Christian belief of God as Three Persons in One.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

The Trinity is one God, but three Persons, each distinct from one another and in relationship with one another. They are unique and different and each has a particular role to play that is ongoing.

They are complementary, working together in a perfect relationship the basis of which is total, intimate, unconditional love.

The Father is CREATOR, having created and continuing to create and sustain life in all its forms.

The Son is SAVIOUR. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus brings humankind back into a relationship with God.

The Spirit is SANCTIFIER. The Spirit's role is to make holy, which means putting things into the correct relationship with God. The Spirit was sent by Jesus at Pentecost to continue his work in the world.

The Trinity as the most perfect intimate community of life and love is a model for the family and by looking at the potential qualities of family life it is possible to reflect on how Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to one another.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Use the **example of a traffic light** to illustrate the idea of the relationship between different parts of a whole. Each of the red, green and yellow lights has a particular task and a traffic light is not complete without one of the lights. Emphasize that while this comparison helps us to make some sense of the idea of the Trinity, it does not tell us much about God's inner life which is essentially a mystery.
- 2 Ask how this can be related to the **Trinity**. Draw out the fact that the Trinity is a unit (community in relationship) where each Person has a role to play in the story of humankind. Discuss what those roles are.



WHAT YOU NEED

- * Picture of a traffic light (1)
- * Pictures of different types of families in different situations (4)
- * Bible (6)
- * Drawing or painting materials (10)
- * ♪ *Sing for Life – Bless the Lord* (p.107) (11)

The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father's work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen it in charity.

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2205)

FATHER Creator, bringing all things into being

SON Saviour, redeeming or preserving all creation in being

SPIRIT Sanctifier, bringing created beings to holiness or the fullness of being

- 3 We can talk about these roles because these are **the ways that Christians have experienced God**.

In the FATHER we encounter the Creator and God as loving Parent.

In the SON we encounter God as Saviour, Friend and Brother.

In the SPIRIT we encounter the ongoing work of God in our lives making us whole and bringing us to the fullness of life. We experience, in the Spirit, the Love that is God's life.

- 4 Display the pictures you have collected of family life. Introduce the idea of **the family** as a model of the Trinity and for our understanding of the Trinity. A well-known passage, [Genesis 1: 27], suggests this since God made us, the human family in God's image. Be sensitive in this discussion to the realities that the learners experience in their families. You can point out that we strive, with God's help, to live as God does. So, without getting into the question of the many problems surrounding family life, brainstorm qualities of the ideal family such as intimacy, community, commitment, belonging, and giving life.
- 5 As an **exercise** ask the learners to complete the following table. It is filled in for you, the teacher, but you should present it with the second and third columns empty, and with or without a list of the words to be filled in, depending on the ability of your class.

PERSON	ROLE	OUR EXPERIENCE
Father	Creator	Parent
Son	Saviour	Brother or Friend
Spirit	Sanctifier	Love

- 6 **Pray** the passage in Ephesians 3:14-21.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 7 Discover **other ways** of describing the Trinity in a daily living context. Where else does three-in-oneness occur? You might think of a triangle or a shamrock, for instance.
- 8 Explore ideas about the nature of God in other religions.
- 9 Begin a **prayer campaign** that families may become more like the Trinity in their daily lives.
- 10 Divide the class into groups of three. The groups will **draw or paint** their understanding of the three-in-oneness of God. Their first task will be to discuss their understanding of the idea, then to decide how they will illustrate it, and finally the group will agree as to who will illustrate the Father, who the Son, and who the Holy Spirit. The illustrations should be made in such a way that the three parts of the group's work can be combined to make a whole.
- 11 **Sing:** *Sing for Life – Bless the Lord* (p.107)

LESSON 2: Genesis and Creation

AIM

To help the learners understand what the Genesis creation accounts tell us about the nature and creative activity of God, and to develop an appreciation of this kind of text (2.1.9, 2.2.18, 8.5.4)

OUTCOME

Learners are familiar with what biblical texts say about God as Creator.

TEACHER'S NOTE

This lesson considers the nature of God by asking the question, "What do we learn about God from creation, and what do we learn about the meaning of life?" It is important to create an opportunity to highlight that the biblical creation accounts are not historical fact but theological truth and that there is therefore no conflict about scientific theories of creation. This is more fully explored in LESSON 3.



WHAT YOU NEED

- * Bibles or copies of Genesis 1-2 (2)
- * Picture of the ancient Hebrew view of the world or copies of the worksheet (4) ⇨
- * Any pictures that suggest or illustrate creation (5)
- * Bible (6)
- * *Brother Sun and Sister Moon or Sing for Life – Creation* (p.130) (7)

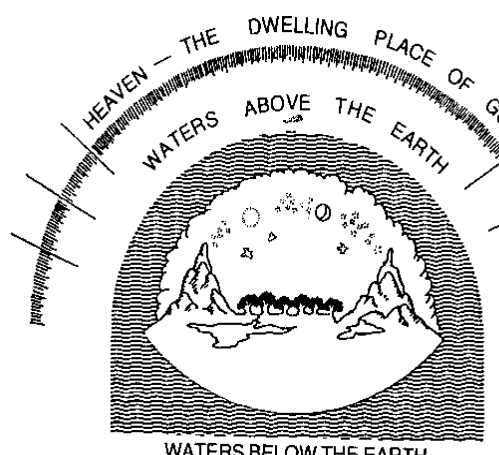
LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Briefly **brainstorm** 10 things we know and believe about God. Write them up on the board. Explain that we reflect about God in order to reflect on the meaning of life.
- 2 Divide the class into 2 groups. One group reads the **creation story** in Genesis 1:1-2:4, the other Genesis 2:4-25. Ask them to note what they learned about God - who God is and what God does - from these stories. Ask for feedback and record the ideas, making two lists.
- 3 **Compare the lists**, adding additional points from the list below that may not have been mentioned and make up a composite list which learners can copy under the heading:

THINGS WE KNOW ABOUT GOD FROM THE CREATION STORIES

- God is responsible for the creation of all things
- God created the universe from nothing.
- God creates through the Word and the Spirit.
- Everything God created is good.
- The earth is a home prepared for people who have been put in stewardship over the rest of creation.
- God created man and woman in his image and has a personal relationship with them.
- The Sabbath is a day for worship and glory when God invites us to celebrate the creation.
- God created everything out of love and to share his life and love in order to give glory to God.

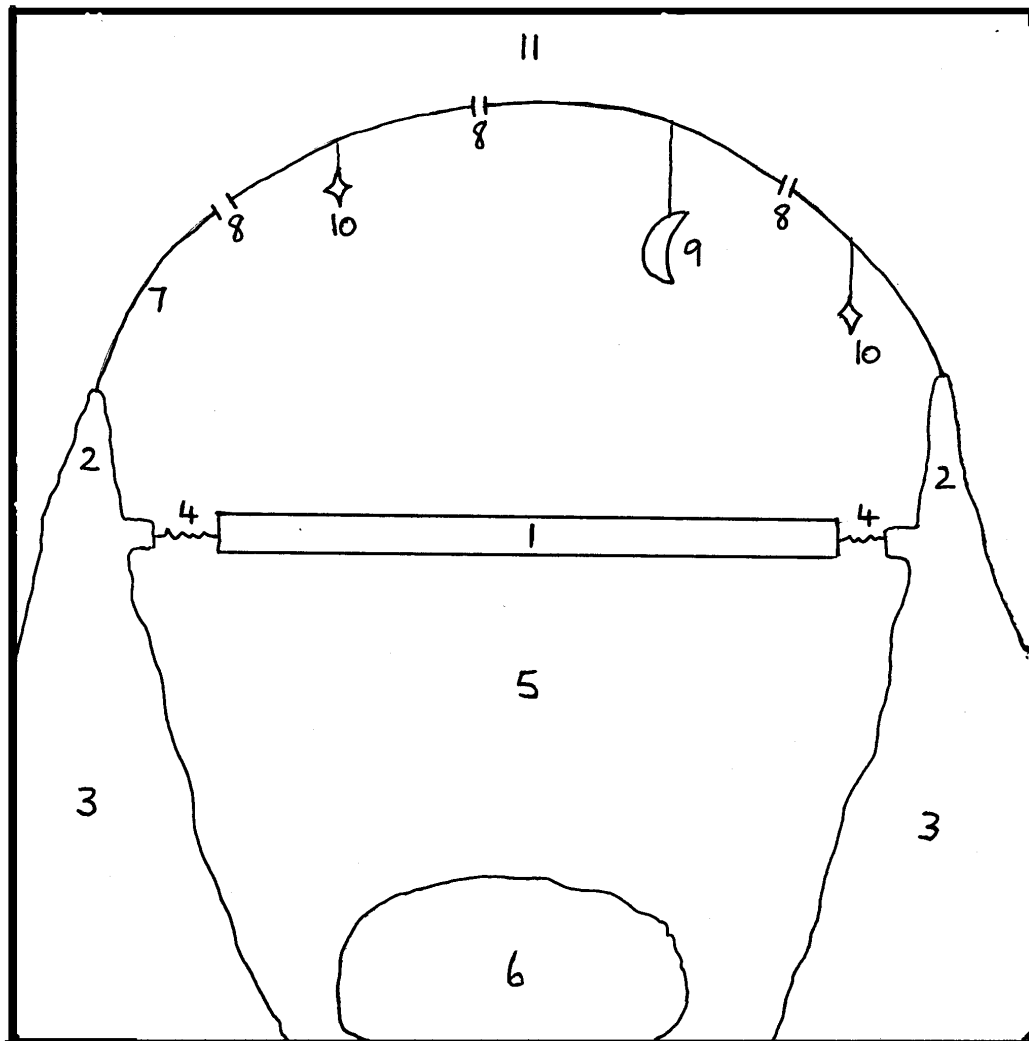
- 4 Bring out the fact that these stories were written at a particular time from a particular world-view and discuss how the writers saw God and creation at the time, and how we see it now. Briefly refer to evolution theory. Show the picture or distribute copies of the worksheet, and briefly discuss **the Jewish world** view at the time of Jesus. 📖 ➡



ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 5 Make a **creation collage** of the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2.
- 6 Ezekiel 37:1-14 is a dramatic account of **the Spirit's creative activity**.
- 7 **Sing** the song *Brother Sun and Sister Moon* or *Sing for Life – Creation* (p.130).
- 8 **Write a script** for a praise singer or compose a praise song to God's creation.
- 9 The Hebrews had to rely on their **eyesight and imagination** in forming their picture of the universe (see LEARNING ACTIVITY 4). Give the learners the following task: How would you describe creation if you could use only your eyesight and your imagination? What makes the sun move across the sky? Why does it rain? Where does the wind come from? What about the stars? How did everything come into being?

The Ancient Hebrew World View



If you like, colour the above picture. The key is as follows:

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|----|---|
| 1 | Earth - a flat disc | 7 | Firmament or dome separating the waters |
| 2 | Mountains | 8 | Sluce gates for rain |
| 3 | Pillars on which the firmament rests | 9 | Moon |
| 4 | Sea | 10 | Stars |
| 5 | Water under the earth | 11 | Heavens - water above the firmament |
| 6 | Place of the dead | | |

(Illustration based on the diagramme in Engelbrecht & others. 1987. *On Creation and Recreation*, p 10. Pretoria: Van Schaik)

LESSON 3: Science and the Bible

AIM

To reinforce the learners' understanding that there are different types of truth (2.1.10, 8.5.4., 8.5.5)

OUTCOME

Learners understand that the biblical story of creation and the scientific theory of evolution are not incompatible.



TEACHER'S NOTE

This lesson is concerned with the understanding and application of the Bible rather than with Bible stories or with Bible study as an inspirational activity. It is important to develop a sense of reverence for the Bible as God's Word but also to have a realistic appreciation of the Bible as God's word in human language which carries the understanding of the writers in their own time.

TEACHER BACKGROUND


Creation is a subject for study in itself with many aspects, such as history, geography, science, biology, anthropology, psychology, and theology. Our scientific knowledge about the universe has changed drastically especially since the beginning of the space age. Galileo, the Italian astronomer and physicist in the seventeenth century was banned by the Church because he said the world was round and revolved around the sun. In the ancient world, when the different books of the Bible were written down, the people believed the world was flat and rested on pillars in the sea. Those who wrote the creation stories also held the current scientific beliefs of the time.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 **Different Kinds of Truth in the Bible.** Introduce the topic of truth. Ask learners to write a definition - their present understanding - of truth. Is there only one truth, or not?
- 2 **Present the different kinds** of truth given in the worksheet, allowing for some discussion to clarify the ideas.  ⇒
- 3 **Exercise:** Challenge the learners to identify the kind of truth expressed in each of the statements given in the worksheet.  ⇒
- 4 Refer to the previous lesson on creation. Ask the learners to recall the **two stories** about creation encountered in those lessons. Provide a brief reminder where necessary. Divide the class into groups and allow them to discuss these amongst themselves as to which of them are true, and in what way.
- 5 Explain that different people believe in different stories. **Summarise**, helping the learners to realise that unless we recognise that there are different types of truth the question, 'Is the Bible true?' can never be answered satisfactorily. The biblical accounts are concerned with religious and theological truth and not scientific truth.



WHAT YOU NEED

- *  Copies of the worksheet (2)(3) ⇒
- * Bible (6)
- * Further information on different theories of creation (8) ⇒
- * Bibles (9)
- * Art materials (10)

- 6 Conclude the lesson with a **class reading** of Job 38:1-21. Job is trying to make sense of human suffering, and challenges God's wisdom. Yahweh answers him in a humorous way, saying in effect, that since he, Job, was there in the beginning, he would be able to answer all the questions that Yahweh asks in this passage. The text is arranged in two-line sections called couplets. Allow the learners to read the couplets individually, taking turns.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 7 Tell the **story of Galileo**, the father of modern science.
- 8 In collaboration with the science, geography, and/or history teacher set the learners a research project. They make a **comparison table** showing the main ideas of different scientific theories of the origin of the universe, for example, the Big Bang theory, the Steady State theory, and evolution. ⇨
- 9 There are **two biblical creation accounts** in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 which differ quite considerably in their details (see LESSON 2). Ask the learners to compare these two accounts with a view to identifying the points of disagreement in the two stories. Do these differences make the stories' religious teaching untrue?
- 10 Learners in groups interpret the reading from Job above in a **painting, collage or mural**.

MATERIALS

EVOLUTION AND THE BIG BANG THEORY

Where did the Universe come from? Scientists are not certain. But there are certain theories.

The Big Bang Theory is based on the observation that the galaxies of the Universe are receding from each other. In other words the Universe is expanding. This means that the Universe was much smaller long ago, and if you go back far enough everything we can see today originated in a hot dense fireball - the Big Bang. Primordial matter exploded, and the various particles became the galaxies, stars and planets which are still moving out and away from each other.

Another theory that was popular for a while is the Steady State Theory which holds that the Universe is infinitely old and did not evolve over time. As the Universe expands, new matter is continuously created. Very few scientists would support this theory today.

Evolution theory holds that over 5000 million years ago what is now the earth was a mass of hot gas, which is said to have broken off from the sun and started revolving in space. Gradually the gas began to cool down and become solid and rock was formed from about 4000 million years ago. Plants appeared about 3000 million years ago, 500 million years ago animal life started and man arrived about 4-2 million years ago.

Different Kinds of Truth

Historical truth. The Bible contains the history of the Hebrew people from the time of Abraham in about 1800 BC until 100AD. It is quite accurate but there are some discrepancies in the different books and terms such as 40 days or 40 years are often symbolic rather than intended to be accurate.

Geographical truth. The geography described is considered to be quite accurate. The books of Genesis which contain prehistory and myths or origin stories are not considered historical or geographically accurate.

Scientific truth. The writers show the level of scientific knowledge of the time. For example Psalm 8 speaks of setting the moon and the stars in their place.

Character truth. The writers described the personalities of the characters as good or evil people. Sometimes they use a technique of describing a person as good because he is successful and as evil if he is a failure.

Proverbial truth. Many of the Old Testament books are known as Wisdom literature and state such truths as "A stitch in time saves nine." or "Do to others as you want them to do to you."

Symbolical truth. There are many parables, legends and myths or origin stories. They contain symbols such as the Garden of Eden as a place that was perfect, and the snake as a symbol of evil.

Moral truth. The Ten Commandments and Jesus' two great commandments are moral truth.

Religious or theological truth. The main purpose of the Bible is to tell of people's relationship with God and their understanding of God. The Bible tells the story of this Covenant relationship where God makes an agreement with the people "If you will be my people, I will be your God." God was always faithful to this but people were not..

(Adapted from Kieran Sawyer. 1982. *Confirming Faith*. Ave Maria Press)

WHAT KIND OF TRUTH?

Identify the kind of truth expressed in each of the following statements. (You are not asked to decide whether the statement is true.)

The Earth revolves around the Sun.

.....

The clouds float by like silent ships.

.....

Israel is north-east of Egypt.

.....

Nelson Mandela was our first president.

.....

God loves all people.

.....

Stealing is wrong.

.....

One head does not make a council.

.....

Naledi is kind and friendly.

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