

Frequently Asked Questions about “The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing” Office of Theology and Worship – Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Did the 217th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) vote to replace the language “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”?

In a word, no. The report states, “The language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rooted in scripture and creed, remains an indispensable anchor for our efforts to speak faithfully of God.”

What exactly did the General Assembly do?

The PC(USA) received and commended for study “The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing.”

What does “received and commended” mean?

It means that the paper will be recorded in the 217th General Assembly *Minutes*; it will be disseminated in the church; and the Office of Theology and Worship will develop study and worship materials.

What does “The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing” say about language for the Trinity?

- One of the ways to help us reclaim the doctrine of the Trinity in the church’s theology, worship, and life is to provide ways of speaking of the glory of the Triune God. These echoes of work of the Triune God are not replacements or alternatives to the anchor language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are ways to expand and enhance our appreciation of the one God: “If our lifeline to the anchor is frayed or severed, the historic faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic church risks being set adrift. With this anchor in place, however, we are liberated to interpret, amplify, and expand upon the ways of speaking of the triune God familiar to most church members.”
- This expansive language is an ancient tradition of the church, as familiar as the words of the well-known hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy”: “Perfect in power, in love, and purity.” Most, of these three-fold echoes of the Trinity do not correspond to one or another persons of the Trinity—they are ways to express the whole work of the Triune God: “As we read, proclaim, hear, and live out the message of scripture, the triune God is known to us as Speaker, Word, and Breath (Heb. 1:1; John 1:1; John 20:22; Ps. 104:30)” and “When we speak of God’s wrath in the face of evil, the triune God is for us Fire that Consumes, Sword that Divides, and Storm that Melts Mountains (Deut. 5:25; Matt. 10:34-35; Ps. 97:5).”

Do Presbyterians have to do what the report says?

No. This paper is not “theological policy” for the church. Only *The Book of Confessions* plays that role in the PC(USA).

Why was the paper written?

It was requested by a previous General Assembly growing out of a concern that a kind of “functional unitarianism” was replacing Trinitarian faith out of neglect of this essential doctrine.

Is the Trinity paper about language for God?

Actually, the heart of the paper is a deep and abiding affirmation and exploration of the gift of the Trinity: The doctrine of the Trinity is good news for the church because the Trinity is a summary of the gospel: “God loved the world and gave the Son for our salvation (John 3:16); Jesus Christ, God’s only Son our Lord, loved us and gave his life for us (Gal. 2:20); the gift of God’s love in Christ has poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:22). We know that God is this way because of God’s own self-revelation, not because we construct our own ideas of God.

To read the full action of the 217th General Assembly, go to <http://les-pcusa.org/Item.aspx?IID=193&> . To read the entire paper, go to <http://www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/issues/trinityfinal.pdf>.