Beliefs and Ideas about God

Teacher Background

It is Catholic teaching that the desire for God is written in the human heart. The human person is created by God and for God. The Church teaches that each human individual is created in the image and likeness of God and therefore has inherent worth and dignity. The human person is called to search for God, to be in relationship and communion with God and thus to find authentic truth and happiness.

The question ‘Who is God?’ naturally arises for human beings. The Church teaches that human reason has the ability to know God and to speak about God. Human reason and human language though, is limited. Finite human beings can only come to know something of the infinite God by taking created realities as a starting point. Our human words and images always fall short of the mystery of God who transcends all creation. It is important therefore not to confuse human responses to the question ‘Who is God?’ with the reality of God.

In responding to questions like ‘Who is God?’ ‘What does God look like?’ ‘Who is God for me as human person?’ and ‘How do I name God?’ the Church draws on the riches of its living Judeo-Christian heritage. What is seen as best and most worthwhile in creation and human experience - truth, goodness, beauty - are seen as reflecting the perfections of God, as the starting point for human responses to questions about God. In the Christian tradition God is love. Where love is, God is present. God is imaged as Creator and Lord of all creation. Jesus addressed God as Abba - “Father”. The Church affirms that God and the world created by God are good.

Diverse images and ways of understanding and speaking of God are found throughout the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, in Christian tradition, in art and literature and in the Christian lives of individuals and communities. Particular images and ways of understanding and speaking of God reflect historical and cultural contexts and are interpreted in relation to the historical and cultural perceptions of particular times and places. Images, understandings and ways of speaking of God need reflection and critique as to their contemporary appropriateness and relevance for individuals and groups. In educational settings images, understandings and ways of speaking about God need to be suited to the age and maturity of learners.

The Church sees the created world as reflective of the goodness and glory of God. At the same time the Church makes a clear distinction between God and the divine creation. God transcends creation. Thus Christians are not pantheists worshipping created realities such as the sun or the moon as if they themselves were God.