THE NATURE OF GOD

Aim
To understand how people may describe God.
To think about how God may be experienced.
“Creation of Adam”. Michangelo, 1512
“God the Father”. Pieter de Grebber, 1654
Baroque Trinity, Hendrick van Balen, 1620.
The Trinity, oil on canvas by Tintoretto, 1564
“Glorification of the Eucharist”. Salimbeni. 1600
An *immanent* God?

- God is present in the universe and involved with life on earth.
- People can experience God in their lives.
- God acts in history and influences events.
A **transcendent** God?

- God is beyond and outside life on earth and the universe.
- God is not limited by the world, time or space.
- He existed before the creation and so is separate from it.
- A God who is eternal, almighty, all-seeing and all-knowing must be beyond the world.
- God is therefore impersonal – does not act within the world or in human lives.
A personal God?

◦ God has ‘human’ characteristics and we can have a relationship with God.
◦ God responds to prayers.
◦ God might be seen as being a ‘merciful Father’ or ‘mighty King’.
An *impersonal* God?

- God is more like a force than a person.
- No human characteristics.
- God is an absolute being.
So what’s God like then?

- Many believers would say that God is all 4 of these.
- Some would emphasize one description more than another.
- God is beyond human understanding – a mystery.
Problems??

- Personal – How can God be everywhere at the same time, care for all and answer prayers if he is a person?
- Impersonal – How can people have a meaningful relationship with a ‘force’ or ‘impersonal spirit’?
- Immanent – If God is ‘in the world’, does He become part of the world? How can He have created the world?
- Transcendent – If God is remote and separate, how can people relate to God?
Religious Responses

**CHRISTIANITY**

- God is close to people when they pray and acts in history.
- God is beyond human understanding, is eternal, all-knowing.
- God is 1 yet is 3 – Father, Son, Spirit.

**HINDUISM**

- God is Brahman – without form, the source and sustainer of life, is outside human experience and understanding.
- Deities and their avatars help Hindus to relate to Brahman.
Can we know God?

- Some would say NO – we can only know things we can see, touch, taste, feel and smell.
- God is greater than everything that exists – we’re not created to understand in full.
- God can’t be described well enough in pictures and words – ‘I am who I am’
- Certain qualities of God might be understood but not God in all His ‘holiness’.
- God is pure mystery and cannot be known.
God is revealed through -

- Religious leaders
- Worship
- Direct personal experience
- Religious writings
- Nature
- Conscience
- Reason
General Revelation

- Experience of knowing God is available to everyone.
- Comes indirectly through nature, reason, conscience, morals.
- Experience God in worship, reading holy books.
- These DO NOT CONVINCE everyone that God is real as they depend on people’s interpretations of them.
- Bart Simpson – Faith Off
Special Revelation

- An occasion when people experience God directly in a particular event.
- This may be a dream, a vision, a miracle, a prophecy or hearing “God’s call”.
- This can happen on individually or to a group.
- Can change people’s lives.
- DO NOT happen to all religious believers and DO NOT happen often.
Opinions

◦ Many say you don’t need a special revelation to know God. God’s unchanging nature is always there for people to discover.

◦ Others would say you do. Some Christians say that only in Jesus, the fullness of God’s revelation can be seen.