



Emmaus Programme

Images of God

Introduction

At the heart of Christianity is a paradox: God is utterly beyond our grasp and is so different from our understanding which is limited in its grasp and capacity; and yet this God wants to communicate with us. The Bible is the history of this communication (and our pretty poor response), and we receive the full communication of God in Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity (the Word, or logos) who became incarnate.

However, we need to be able to think about and talk about God, and so we inevitably use images. Two things follow from this:

1. We need these images, but they are only images of God. They are not God – but we treat them as if they were God.
2. Over time these images change and develop. An image that works powerfully and vividly at one time in our life, at others makes little or no sense.

Just because we have these images does not mean that others will have the same image.

Some Common Images of God

The Benign Policeman

God as a cop is on the side of justice and the good, but there are clear rules and laws – and God help you if you break them! Plus you have only got yourself to blame because you have been told what the rules are and you broke them.

The Angry (or disappointed) Parent

God is a parent who provides but has high expectations and is on a short fuse. When we fail, make mistakes or go our own way, then God is furious and the punishments could be hellish. Only with a lot of grovelling, scraping, apologies, and sacrifices will this God eventually calm down, and we can get him back on our side.

The disappointed parent is similar. God just feels very let down as he expected so much more ... rather like a teacher ...

God as the Insurance Policy

This view is that God is there when we need him. What we need to do is take out the policy (baptism and sign up to/agree on the fundamentals) and pay the premiums (pray, go to Church) and then nothing bad will happen. We are covered!

God as the Master Controller

God has set up the world and plans everything, and we have to conform to this plan. The plan is often very hard to follow as it is not clear what it is.

As he controls everything he decides when cars crash, cancer strikes and attackers attack.

The Watchmaker God

This God created the world and set it up with its laws, but now has withdrawn and left us to it.

Here are some common Biblical images or metaphors for God:

Rock	Father	Spouse	Builder	Lover	Friend
Brother	King	Ruler	Creator	Advocate	Judge
Mother			

Conclusion

1. You bring to your work your own images and conceptions of God. This will affect how you talk about and think about God.
2. These images change over time – based on experience in prayer, catechesis and God’s grace. Often they change as a result of an event or crisis – and this is the point that some people lose their faith. In fact they have stopped believing in an image of God that is not worth believing in – and that the Church does not teach either!
3. Progress in faith is often a question of purifying and changing our image of God. Often the images become much more mysterious and hard to express or articulate.
4. You will be talking/listening to someone else who will probably have different images from your own. Don’t assume anything.
5. When talking about God we often focus on God the Father. But as Christians we believe that God is Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We are usually more focussed on one of these three ‘persons’ of the Trinity. Your directee may be focussed on a different one from you.
6. The full revelation of God is found in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. So if you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus and his life and actions.
7. We need to believe in a God worth worshipping, one that we want to spend eternity with. Many people don’t.

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