

Torbay Inter-Faith Forum 4 Youth

God or No God....
that is the Question

at

Torbay Foyer, Teignmouth Road, Torquay

on

Monday, 28 January 2008

16.30 to 18.30

Programme

- Refreshments and Registration
- Introduction
- God Has An Image Problem!
- Arguments 'FOR' and 'AGAINST' God!
- Discussing the Question 'God or No God'
- What Difference does it make, anyway?

Some Useful Terms

Religious Believer	=	Believes that God exists and lives their lives based on this belief. They usually follow a specific religion.
Atheist	=	'Without God'. Rejects any belief in God. There are different types of Atheist e.g. Humanist and Communist.
Agnostic	=	'Does not know'. Believes knowledge of God is impossible. They are not able to come down on one side or the other in relation to belief in God.

Next Meeting will be on: Wednesday 02 July 2008
E-mail - torbayinterfaith@yahoo.co.uk for more
information

PICTURING GOD

Is God..... the Great Designer? An impersonal cosmic force?
An authority figure keeping a close, stern watch on us? A benevolent grand-dad?
An indulgent parent at our beck and call? Is there a God at all?

Who is God?

- Is God a 'HE' 'SHE' or 'IT'?
- Is God separate from the world or is there a bit of God in everything?
- What is God like in character?
- Is God good?
Why is evil allowed?
- Does God monitor everything?
- Can God be known? How?
- Does God communicate with people?
- What sort of relationship might there be between God and humans?

'God' in World Religions

Most world religions believe in a God. Each says distinct things about what God is like.

Hinduism:

God is everywhere and in everything.

Buddhism:

There is no explicit teaching about God.

Judaism:

God acts in history and can be known because of what He does.

Christianity:

God shows what He is like by coming in the human form of Jesus.

Islam:

God is beyond human experience. His revealed names show His attributes.

Sikhism

God is one with the entire universe and its spirit and is found by eliminating the ego.

The Baha'i Faith

God is too great and too subtle for the finite mind to understand accurately.

Some Ideas About God from a Western (Christian) perspective

(Influenced by Greek, Jewish and Muslim philosophy)

God is.....

- One - the only God
- Creator and Sustainer of cosmos and all life
- Omnipotent = all-powerful
- Omnipresent = ever-present
- Omniscient = all-knowing
- Eternal / Infinite
- All-seeing
- Provider
- Immanent = existing/operating within
- Transcendent = existence outside the created world
- Perfect
- Good
- Holy
- Loving
- Personal

Metaphors used for God

(Word or phrase used to show a resemblance betw things that are not literally connected.)

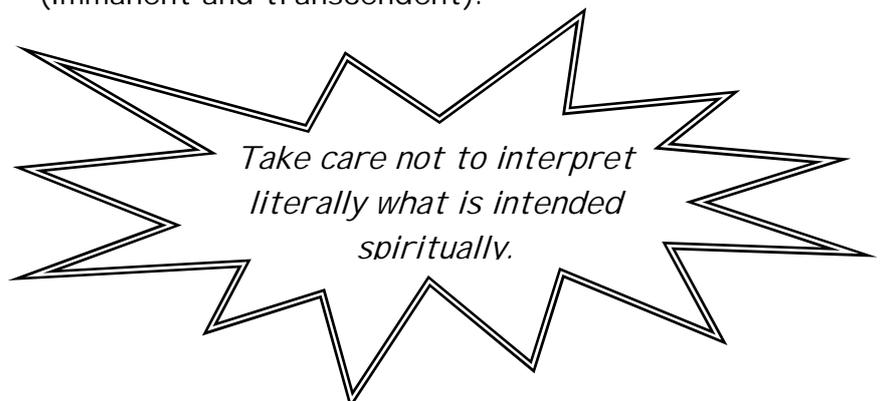
- King
- Shepherd
- Tower
- Rock
- Father

Paradox

(Statements that seem to contradict each other.

Religious truths are often expressed in paradox)

e.g. God is both close at hand yet beyond the cosmos (immanent and transcendent).



Traditional Reasons Why God Might Exist

1. God as Designer

- The order, sequence, design, beauty and purpose in the world must have come from some Designer e.g. night/day: seasons: balances of temperature, food, water, men & women, minerals etc
- It is not just that something exists but that something SPECIAL exists. The complexity of life and nature demands a Designer. It could not have happened BY ACCIDENT or CHANCE.

2. God as Creator

- Everything has a cause. So it is reasonable to suppose that the cosmos was started by God, the Creator, and is continually sustained by God. God Himself is outside of the creative process and uncreated.
- The idea of an unending series of events is unacceptable.

3. Personal Experience of God

- Throughout history people have experienced God in their lives and been changed by these experiences.
- This personal proof seems more convincing than intellectual arguments.

4. God as Goodness

- A God needs to exist to account for the goodness in the world.

5. God's Purpose for Humans

- Humans are different from other animals with art, music, culture and morality. Surely this points to some divine purpose for them.

6. Existence doesn't Depend on being Visible and Provable

- If God were literally visible and provable He would be diminished and become fully known to human beings, giving them some hold over Him. God's existence does not have to depend on His being visible or provable. There are many things that are not visible to humans e.g. atoms, love, electricity, hope, dreams, time etc, yet they exist. So God's existence cannot be denied because He cannot be seen!

7. People instinctively seek God

- People at all times and in all places have instinctively sought God. Just as humans need food and drink to satisfy hunger and thirst, so they need God to satisfy their spiritual needs.
- Belief in God, in spite of predictions that it will die out as human beings become mature and Science answers our questions, is still as alive as ever!

Reasons Why God Might Not Exist

1. No Designer God

- A well-designed universe might suggest the existence of a Designer but a Designer is not the same as an eternal, omnipotent God.
- Besides the appearance of order, there is plenty of disorder and chaos in the universe e.g. floods, earthquakes, desert, wasteland etc. which seem to be the result of Chance not God.
- Further, maybe it is we who invent the concept of order to give sense to the world we experience.

2. No Creator God

- The cosmos has always been. It was not created. It had no beginning. Just because everything in the cosmos has a cause, it doesn't mean that the cosmos itself has to have a cause.
- If you propose that a God started off everything, you then have to ask, 'Who made God?' (But perhaps God is not an item, but He made the list!)

3. It is not 'God' that is experienced by people

- How does a person know the experience of God's presence was real and not an hallucination, vision or dream, especially as such experiences often occur in times of trouble or suffering?

- People might bring these experiences on themselves through wishful thinking at a moment of great distress.

- The cause of the experience does not have to be God. It might be an unknown force, even generated by other people.

- People have invented God to meet their needs. The idea of God gives people comfort and security in a harsh, vast cosmos and helps them cope in a world of disease, distress and death.

4. Why is there Evil and Suffering if God is Good?

(Theodicy is the branch of Theology which defends God against objections relating to evil and suffering.)

- A God worth believing in, would not permit the evil and suffering in the world whether natural or man-made e.g. poverty, wars, disease, floods, earthquakes. It is argued that if God cannot stop evil and suffering, He is not all powerful and if He can but he will not, He is not all good.

- But perhaps some pain is needed to enjoy greater benefits. e.g. rain gets a person wet but it gives crops. However, God could have created a world where pain is not needed to provide benefits!

- If you argue that God has made the best of all possible worlds, that indicates He is limited in power and would be a 2nd rate God!

- Why doesn't God intervene and help people when they pray or are in terrible circumstances? What use is a God who does not inter-act with His creation and demonstrate His love and power?

5. Human Purposefulness

- Human beings have special abilities and achievements, but no God is required to explain them. Their purposefulness might just be because human beings are like that – it is in their genes!

6. Where is the Proof?

- Without God making Himself known to humans in some visible way, there is no proof that He exists. What is the point of having to believe in a non-provable God? Human beings do not want to be conned into believing in something that exists in a belief form and not actually!

7. Science and Technology have eliminated People's need to seek God

- Not everyone seeks God or recognises spiritual needs. Because some people seek God, it does not mean there has to be a God! Instincts and appetites are not automatically satisfied – some hungry people get no food. So spiritual instincts do not have to be met by a God.

- Science and technology provide proof and progress. They give explanations for events which in the past were attributed to God. They devise ways to progress without calling on God. There is no need now to concoct a God to explain what could not be understood in the past.

To conclude.....

- There is no proof from the different arguments for the existence of God.
- An inconclusive argument is not necessarily a false argument.
- There is no need to become atheists or abandon a belief in God just because there is no argument to prove God exists. It is just as hard to prove that many other things of which we are even surer, do actually exist.
- The fact that most or many people have believed in God, is a piece of evidence in God's favour.
- The arguments have given strong hints that God might well exist!
- Everyone faces a choice between God or Chance.
- It is not a question just for our minds, but for our whole being.
- Our responses should be prefixed with 'I believe in God.' or 'I believe in Chance.'
- Whichever response we make, will influence the way we live our lives.

QUOTATIONS TO PONDER on 'God or No God?'

- If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him. *Voltaire*
- When I see the glories of the cosmos I can't help but believe that there is a Divine Hand behind it all. *Albert Einstein*
- God is dead. *Nietzsche*
- When you are seeing something big, something infinite, then you are seeing God. *Van Gogh*
- May the force be with you! *Star Wars*
- Man is quite insane. He would not know how to create a maggot, and he creates gods by the dozen. *Michel de Montaigne*
- By night an atheist half believes a God. *Edward Young*
- The nature of God is a circle, of which the centre is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere. *Empedocle*
- I listened to the silence of the night and I felt as if I had all of a sudden penetrated the very heart of the universe. An immense happiness, such as I had never known swept over me with a flow of fulfilment. *Carlo Levi*
- 'There is no God', the wicked saith, and truly it's a blessing,
For what he might have done with us, it's better only guessing. *Arthur Hugh Clough*
- Twenty four scholars got together and tried to say what God is and were unable to do it...
God is something that must transcend being. Anything which has being, date, location does not belong to God, for he is above them all and although He is in all creatures, yet He is more than all of them. *Meister Eckhart*
- Faith consists in believing when it is beyond the power of reason to believe. *Voltaire*
- He who knows about depth knows about God. *Paul Tillich*
- When we talk about God we're talking about unfathomable mystery. *Colin Morris*
- In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass. *Walt Whitman*
- Either God exists or he does not. You must bet. If you bet that God exists, if you win, you win everything. If you lose, you lose nothing. Bet then that he exists, without hesitating. *Pascal*
- There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is miracle. The other as though everything is miracle. *Albert Einstein*
- Millions of people long for immortality who do not know what to do with themselves on a rainy afternoon. *Susan Ertz*
- My soul can find no stairway to heaven unless it be through earth's loveliness. *Michelangelo*
- Act as if everything depended on you; trust as if everything depended on God. *Ignatius Loyola*
- Dad, isn't it amazing that I exist? *A small child to her father*
- Faith consists in believing what reason does not believe. It is enough for a thing to be possible for it to be believed. *Voltaire*
- What a man had rather were true, he more readily believes. *Francis Bacon*
- The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mystery. *Albert Einstein*
- Apprehend God in all things. *Meister Eckhart*
- Our own life is the instrument with which we experiment with truth. *Thich Nhat Hanh*
- We are born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us, it is in everyone. *Nelson Mandela*
- The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being. *Socrates*
- There is extreme difficulty or rather impossibility, in conceiving this immense and wonderful universe, ... as the result of blind chance or necessity. When thus reflecting, I feel compelled to look to a First Cause having an intelligent mind in some degree analogous to that of man. *Darwin*

QUOTATIONS ABOUT GOD from the Sacred Scriptures of Religions

- Thou art the Primal God, the Ancient Spirit,
Thou art the Supreme Treasure-house of this universe,
Thou art the knower and the known, the highest Home,
By thee the universe is pervaded, O thou of infinite form.'
Bhagavad Gita, 11,38 Hinduism
- He truly knows Brahman who knows him as beyond knowledge; he who thinks that he knows,
knows not. The ignorant think that Brahman is known, but the wise know him to be beyond
knowledge.
Kena Upanishad 2.1-3 Hinduism
- Just as space is omnipresent, in all places, material or immaterial, yet without either arriving
or not arriving there, because space is incorporeal, in the same way Buddha is omnipresent,
in all places, in all beings, in all things, yet neither arriving nor not arriving there, because
Buddha's body is incorporeal, manifesting a body for the sake of sentient beings.
Garland Sutra 37 Buddhism
- Nothing can ever destroy the Buddha nature. The nature of self is nothing but the undisclosed
storehouse of the Tathagata. Such a storehouse can never be broken, put to fire, or plundered.
Though it is not possible to destroy or see it, one can know it when one attains the unsurpassed
enlightenment.
Mahaparinirvana Sutra 22 Buddhism
- In the beginning God made heaven and earth.
Genesis 1 Hebrew Scriptures Judaism
- I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, is not a body, and that He
is free from all the accidents of matter, and that He has not any form whatsoever.
Moses Maimonides 12th Century Judaism
- How great are God's riches! How deep are His wisdom and knowledge!
Who can explain His decisions? Who can understand His ways? *Romans 11:33 Bible Christianity*
- No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father,
He has made Him known.
John 1:18 Bible Christianity
- Say, He is God, the One!
God, the eternally Besought of all!
He neither begets nor was begotten.
And there is none comparable unto Him.
Qur'an 112 Islam
- Praise be to God, who knows the secrets of all things and proofs of whose existence shine in
various phases of nature. No physical eye has and will ever see Him. But those who have not seen
Him physically cannot deny His existence, yet the minds of those who have accepted His
existence cannot grasp the real essence of Divine Nature. *Nahjul Balaga, Sermon 54 Islam*
- There is one God, eternal truth is his name,
Creator of all things, and the all-pervading spirit.
Fearless and without hatred, timeless and formless.
Beyond birth and death, self-enlightened.
He is known by the grace of the Guru.
Mul Mantra Adi Ganth Sikhism
- Ever is He present with you - think not He is far:
By the Master's teaching recognise Him within yourself. *Adi Granth Sikhism*
- All-praise to the unity of God, and all-honour to Him, the sovereign Lord, the incomparable and
all-glorious Ruler of the universe, Who, out of utter nothingness, hath created the reality of all
things.....
Baha'u'llah Baha'i Faith
- Knowing God, means the comprehension and the knowledge of His attributes, and not of His
reality.....
'Abdu'l-Baha Baha'i Faith