



God

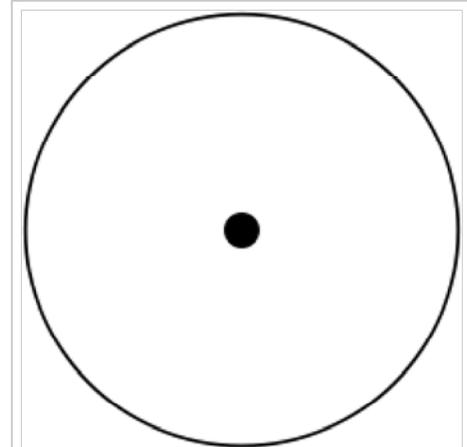
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In monotheism, **God** is conceived of as the Supreme Being and principal object of faith.^[3] The concept of God as described by most theologians includes the attributes of omniscience (infinite knowledge), omnipotence (unlimited power), omnipresence (present everywhere), divine simplicity, and as having an eternal and necessary existence. Many theologians also describe God as being omnibenevolent (perfectly good) and all loving.

God is most often held to be incorporeal (immaterial),^[3] and to be without gender,^{[4][5]} yet the concept of God actively creating the universe (as opposed to passively)^[6] has caused many religions to describe God using masculine terminology, using such terms as "Him" or "Father". Furthermore, some religions (such as Judaism) attribute only a purely grammatical "gender" to God.^[7] Incorporeity and corporeity of God are related to conceptions of transcendence (being outside nature) and immanence (being in nature, in the world) of God, with positions of synthesis such as the "immanent transcendence" of Chinese theology.

God has been conceived as either personal or impersonal. In theism, God is the creator and sustainer of the universe, while in deism, God is the creator, but not the sustainer, of the universe. In pantheism, God is the universe itself. In atheism, God is not believed to exist, while God is deemed unknown or unknowable within the context of agnosticism. God has also been conceived as the source of all moral obligation, and the "greatest conceivable existent".^[3] Many notable philosophers have developed arguments for and against the existence of God.^[8]

There are many names for God, and different names are attached to different cultural ideas about God's identity and attributes. In the ancient Egyptian era of Atenism, possibly the earliest recorded monotheistic religion, this deity was called Aten,^[9] premised on being the one "true" Supreme Being and creator of the universe.^[10] In the Hebrew Bible and Judaism, "He Who Is", "I Am that I Am", and the tetragrammaton YHWH (Hebrew: יהוה, which means: "I am who I am"; "He Who Exists") are used as names of God, while Yahweh and Jehovah are sometimes used in Christianity as vocalizations of YHWH. In the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, God, consubstantial in three persons, is called the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In Judaism, it is common to refer to God by the titular names Elohim or Adonai, the latter of which is believed by some scholars to descend from the Egyptian Aten.^{[11][12][13][14][15]} In Islam, the name Allah, "Al-EI", or "Al-Elah" ("the God") is used, while Muslims also have a multitude of titular names for God. In Hinduism, Brahman is often considered a monistic concept



The circled dot, an ancient symbol for the metaphysical Absolute. Early science, particularly geometry and astrology and astronomy, was connected to the divine for most medieval scholars, and many believed that there was something intrinsically "divine" or "perfect" that could be found in circles.^{[1][2]}

of God.^[16] In Chinese religion, God is conceived as the progenitor (first ancestor) of the universe, intrinsic to it and constantly ordaining it. Other religions have names for God, for instance, Baha in the Bahá'í Faith,^[17] Waheguru in Sikhism,^[18] and Ahura Mazda in Zoroastrianism.^[19]

The many different conceptions of God, and competing claims as to God's characteristics, aims, and actions, have led to the development of ideas of omnitheism, pandeism,^{[20][21]} or a perennial philosophy, which postulates that there is one underlying theological truth, of which all religions express a partial understanding, and as to which "the devout in the various great world religions are in fact worshipping that one God, but through different, overlapping concepts or mental images of Him."^[22]

Contents

- 1 Etymology and usage
- 2 General conceptions
 - 2.1 Oneness
 - 2.2 Theism, deism and pantheism
 - 2.3 Other concepts
- 3 Non-theistic views
 - 3.1 Agnosticism and atheism
 - 3.2 Anthropomorphism
- 4 Existence
- 5 Specific attributes
 - 5.1 Names
 - 5.2 Gender
 - 5.3 Relationship with creation
- 6 Depiction
 - 6.1 Zoroastrianism
 - 6.2 Islam
 - 6.3 Judaism
 - 6.4 Christianity
- 7 Theological approaches
- 8 See also
 - 8.1 In specific religions
- 9 References
- 10 Further reading
- 11 External links



Although God is usually thought of as an intangible spirit, and thus has no physical or even visual form, many religions use images to "represent" God in icons for art or for worship. Here are examples of representations of God in different monotheistic religions.

Clockwise from upper left: Christianity, Kaumaram, Shaktism, Vaishnavism

Etymology and usage

The earliest written form of the Germanic word *God* (always, in this usage, capitalized^[23]) comes from the 6th-century Christian Codex Argenteus. The English word itself is derived from the Proto-Germanic * *gudān*. The reconstructed Proto-Indo-European form * *ǵhu-tó-m* was likely based on the root * *ǵhau(ə)-*, which meant either "to call" or "to invoke".^[24] The Germanic words for *God* were originally neuter—applying to both genders—but during the process of the Christianization of the Germanic peoples from their indigenous Germanic paganism, the words became a masculine syntactic form.^[25]

In the English language, the capitalized form of *God* continues to represent a distinction between monotheistic "God" and "gods" in polytheism.^{[26][27]} The English word *God* and its counterparts in other languages are normally used for any and all conceptions and, in spite of significant differences between religions, the term remains an English translation common to all. The same holds for Hebrew *El*, but in Judaism, God is also given a proper name, the tetragrammaton YHWH, in origin possibly the name of an Edomite or Midianite deity, Yahweh. In many translations of the Bible, when the word *LORD* is in all capitals, it signifies that the word represents the tetragrammaton.^[28]

Allāh (Arabic: الله) is the Arabic term with no plural used by Muslims and Arabic speaking Christians and Jews meaning "The God" (with a capital G), while "ilāh" (Arabic: إله) is the term used for a deity or a god in general.^{[29][30][31]} God may also be given a proper name in monotheistic currents of Hinduism which emphasize the personal nature of God, with early references to his name as Krishna-Vasudeva in Bhagavata or later Vishnu and Hari.^[32]

Ahura Mazda is the name for God used in Zoroastrianism.

"Mazda", or rather the Avestan stem-form *Mazdā-*, nominative *Mazdā*, reflects Proto-Iranian **Mazdāh* (*female*). It is generally taken to be the proper name of the spirit, and like its Sanskrit cognate *medhā*, means "intelligence" or "wisdom". Both the Avestan and Sanskrit words reflect Proto-Indo-Iranian **mazdhā-*, from Proto-Indo-European *m̥nsdʰeh₁*, *literally meaning "placing (dʰeh₁) one's mind (*m̥n-s)", hence "wise"*.^[33]



The Mesha Stele bears the earliest known reference (840 BCE) to the Israelite God Yahweh.



The word 'Allah' in Arabic calligraphy

Waheguru (Punjabi: *vāhigurū*) is a term most often used in Sikhism to refer to God. It means "Wonderful Teacher" in the Punjabi language. *Vāhi* (a Middle Persian borrowing) means "wonderful" and *guru* (Sanskrit: *guru*) is a term denoting "teacher". Waheguru is also described by some as an experience of ecstasy which is beyond all descriptions. The most common usage of the word "Waheguru" is in the greeting Sikhs use with each other:

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh
Wonderful Lord's Khalsa, Victory is to the Wonderful Lord.

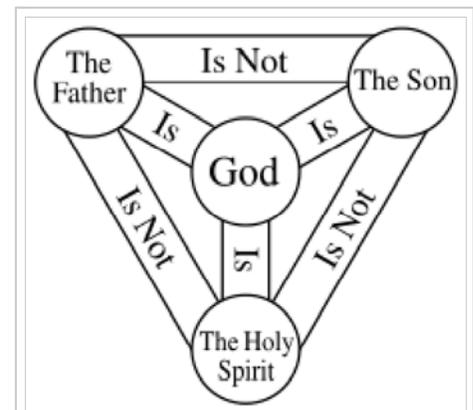
Baha, the "greatest" name for God in the Baha'i faith, is Arabic for "All-Glorious".

General conceptions

There is no clear consensus on the nature or even the existence of God.^[34] The Abrahamic conceptions of God include the monotheistic definition of God in Judaism, the trinitarian view of Christians, and the Islamic concept of God. The dharmic religions differ in their view of the divine: views of God in Hinduism vary by region, sect, and caste, ranging from monotheistic to polytheistic. Divinity was recognized by the historical Buddha, particularly Śakra and Brahma. However, other sentient beings, including gods, can at best only play a supportive role in one's personal path to salvation. Conceptions of God in the latter developments of the Mahayana tradition give a more prominent place to notions of the divine.

Oneness

Monotheists hold that there is only one god, and may claim that the one true god is worshiped in different religions under different names. The view that all theists actually worship the same god, whether they know it or not, is especially emphasized in Hinduism^[35] and Sikhism.^[36] In Christianity, the doctrine of the Trinity describes God as one God in three persons. The Trinity comprises The Father, The Son (embodied metaphysically by Jesus), and The Holy Spirit.^[37] Islam's most fundamental concept is *tawhid* (meaning "oneness" or "uniqueness"). God is described in the Quran as: "Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him."^{[38][39]} Muslims repudiate the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, comparing it to polytheism. In Islam, God is beyond all comprehension or equal and does not resemble any of his creations in any way. Thus, Muslims are not iconodules, and are not expected to visualize God.^[40]



The Trinity is the belief that God is composed of The Father, The Son (embodied metaphysically in the physical realm by Jesus), and The Holy Spirit.

Henotheism is the belief and worship of a single god while accepting the existence or possible existence of other deities.^[41]

Theism, deism and pantheism

Theism generally holds that God exists realistically, objectively, and independently of human thought; that God created and sustains everything; that God is omnipotent and eternal; and that God is personal and interacting with the universe through, for example, religious experience and the prayers of humans.

^[42] Theism holds that God is both transcendent and immanent; thus, God is simultaneously infinite and in some way present in the affairs of the world.^[43] Not all theists subscribe to all of these propositions, but each usually subscribes to some of them (see, by way of comparison, family resemblance).^[42] Catholic theology holds that God is infinitely simple and is not involuntarily subject to time. Most theists hold that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent, although this belief raises questions about God's responsibility for evil and suffering in the world. Some theists ascribe to God a self-conscious or purposeful limiting of omnipotence, omniscience, or benevolence. Open Theism, by contrast, asserts that, due to the nature of time, God's omniscience does not mean the deity can predict the future. *Theism* is sometimes used to refer in general to any belief in a god or gods, i.e., monotheism or polytheism.^{[44][45]}

Deism holds that God is wholly transcendent: God exists, but does not intervene in the world beyond what was necessary to create it.

^[43] In this view, God is not anthropomorphic, and neither answers prayers nor produces miracles. Common in Deism is a belief that God has no interest in humanity and may not even be aware of humanity. Pandeism and Panendeism, respectively, combine Deism with the Pantheistic or Panentheistic beliefs.^{[21][46][47]} Pandeism is proposed to explain as to Deism why God would create a universe and then abandon it,^[48] and as to Pantheism, the origin and purpose of the universe.^{[48][49]}

Pantheism holds that God is the universe and the universe is God, whereas Panentheism holds that God contains, but is not identical to, the Universe.^[50] It is also the view of the Liberal Catholic Church; Theosophy; some views of Hinduism except Vaishnavism, which believes in panentheism; Sikhism; some divisions of Neopaganism and Taoism, along with many varying denominations and individuals within denominations. Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, paints a pantheistic/panentheistic view of God—which has wide acceptance in Hasidic Judaism, particularly from their founder The Baal Shem Tov—but only as an addition to the Jewish view of a personal god, not in the original pantheistic sense that denies or limits persona to God.

Other concepts

Dystheism, which is related to theodicy, is a form of theism which holds that God is either not wholly good or is fully malevolent as a consequence of the problem of evil. One such example comes from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which Ivan Karamazov rejects God on the grounds that he allows children to suffer.^[51]



"God blessing the seventh day", a watercolor painting depicting God, by William Blake (1757 – 1827)

In modern times, some more abstract concepts have been developed, such as process theology and open theism. The contemporaneous French philosopher Michel Henry has however proposed a phenomenological approach and definition of God as phenomenological essence of Life.^[52]

God has also been conceived as being incorporeal (immaterial), a personal being, the source of all moral obligation, and the "greatest conceivable existent".^[3] These attributes were all supported to varying degrees by the early Jewish, Christian and Muslim theologian philosophers, including Maimonides,^[53] Augustine of Hippo,^[53] and Al-Ghazali,^[8] respectively.

Non-theistic views

Non-theist views about God also vary. Some non-theists avoid the concept of God, whilst accepting that it is significant to many; other non-theists understand God as a symbol of human values and aspirations. The nineteenth-century English atheist Charles Bradlaugh declared that he refused to say "There is no God", because "the word 'God' is to me a sound conveying no clear or distinct affirmation";^[54] he said more specifically that he disbelieved in the Christian god. Stephen Jay Gould proposed an approach dividing the world of philosophy into what he called "non-overlapping magisteria" (NOMA). In this view, questions of the supernatural, such as those relating to the existence and nature of God, are non-empirical and are the proper domain of theology. The methods of science should then be used to answer any empirical question about the natural world, and theology should be used to answer questions about ultimate meaning and moral value. In this view, the perceived lack of any empirical footprint from the magisterium of the supernatural onto natural events makes science the sole player in the natural world.^[55]

Another view, advanced by Richard Dawkins, is that the existence of God is an empirical question, on the grounds that "a universe with a god would be a completely different kind of universe from one without, and it would be a scientific difference."^[56] Carl Sagan argued that the doctrine of a Creator of the Universe was difficult to prove or disprove and that the only conceivable scientific discovery that could disprove the existence of a Creator (not necessarily a God) would be the discovery that the universe is infinitely old.^[57]

Stephen Hawking and co-author Leonard Mlodinow state in their book, *The Grand Design*, that it is reasonable to ask who or what created the universe, but if the answer is God, then the question has merely been deflected to that of who created God. Both authors claim however, that it is possible to answer these questions purely within the realm of science, and without invoking any divine beings.^[58] Neuroscientist Michael Nikolettseas has proposed that questions of the existence of God are no different from questions of natural sciences. Following a biological comparative approach, he concludes that it is highly probable that God exists, and, although not visible, it is possible that we know some of his attributes.^[59]

Agnosticism and atheism

Agnosticism is the view that, the truth values of certain claims – especially metaphysical and religious claims such as whether God, the divine or the supernatural exist – are unknown and perhaps unknowable.^{[60][61][62]}

Atheism is, in a broad sense, the rejection of belief in the existence of deities, or a God.^{[63][64]} In a narrower sense, atheism is specifically the position that there are no deities.^[65]

Anthropomorphism

Pascal Boyer argues that while there is a wide array of supernatural concepts found around the world, in general, supernatural beings tend to behave much like people. The construction of gods and spirits like persons is one of the best known traits of religion. He cites examples from Greek mythology, which is, in his opinion, more like a modern soap opera than other religious systems.^[66] Bertrand du Castel and Timothy Jurgensen demonstrate through formalization that Boyer's explanatory model matches physics' epistemology in positing not directly observable entities as intermediaries.^[67] Anthropologist Stewart Guthrie contends that people project human features onto non-human aspects of the world because it makes those aspects more familiar. Sigmund Freud also suggested that god concepts are projections of one's father.^[68]

Likewise, Émile Durkheim was one of the earliest to suggest that gods represent an extension of human social life to include supernatural beings. In line with this reasoning, psychologist Matt Rossano contends that when humans began living in larger groups, they may have created gods as a means of enforcing morality. In small groups, morality can be enforced by social forces such as gossip or reputation. However, it is much harder to enforce morality using social forces in much larger groups. Rossano indicates that by including ever-watchful gods and spirits, humans discovered an effective strategy for restraining selfishness and building more cooperative groups.^[69]

Existence

Arguments about the existence of God typically include empirical, deductive, and inductive types. Different views include that: "God does not exist" (strong atheism); "God almost certainly does not exist" (*de facto* atheism); "no one knows whether God exists" (agnosticism^[70]); "God exists, but this cannot be proven or disproven" (*de facto* theism); and that "God exists and this can be proven" (strong theism).^[55]

Countless arguments have been proposed to prove the existence of God.^[71] Some of the most notable arguments are the Five Ways of Aquinas, the Argument from Desire proposed by C.S. Lewis, and the Ontological Argument formulated both by St. Anselm and René Descartes.^[72]

St. Anselm's approach was to define God as, "that than which nothing greater can be conceived". Famed pantheist philosopher Baruch Spinoza would later carry this idea to its extreme: "By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of infinite attributes, of which each one expresses

an eternal and infinite essence." For Spinoza, the whole of the natural universe is made of one substance, God, or its equivalent, Nature.^[73] His proof for the existence of God was a variation of the Ontological argument.^[74]

Scientist Isaac Newton saw God as the masterful creator whose existence could not be denied in the face of the grandeur of all creation.^[75] Nevertheless, he rejected polymath Leibniz' thesis that God would necessarily make a perfect world which requires no intervention from the creator. In Query 31 of the *Opticks*, Newton simultaneously made an argument from design and for the necessity of intervention:

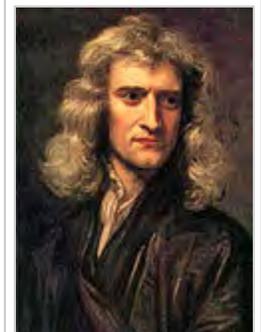
For while comets move in very eccentric orbs in all manner of positions, blind fate could never make all the planets move one and the same way in orbs concentric, some inconsiderable irregularities excepted which may have arisen from the mutual actions of comets and planets on one another, and which will be apt to increase, till this system wants a reformation.^[76]

St. Thomas believed that the existence of God is self-evident in itself, but not to us. "Therefore I say that this proposition, "God exists", of itself is self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject.... Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature—namely, by effects."^[77] St. Thomas believed that the existence of God can be demonstrated. Briefly in the *Summa theologiae* and more extensively in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, he considered in great detail five arguments for the existence of God, widely known as the *quinque viae* (Five Ways).

1. Motion: Some things undoubtedly move, though cannot cause their own motion. Since there can be no infinite chain of causes of motion, there must be a First Mover not moved by anything else, and this is what everyone understands by God.
2. Causation: As in the case of motion, nothing can cause itself, and an infinite chain of causation is impossible, so there must be a First Cause, called God.
3. Existence of necessary and the unnecessary: Our experience includes things certainly existing but apparently unnecessary. Not everything can be unnecessary, for then once there was nothing and there would still be nothing. Therefore, we are compelled to suppose something that exists necessarily, having this necessity only from itself; in fact itself the cause for other things to exist.
4. Gradation: If we can notice a gradation in things in the sense that some things are more hot, good, etc., there must be a superlative that is the truest and noblest thing, and so most fully existing. This then, we call God (Note: Thomas does not ascribe actual qualities to God Himself).



St. Thomas Aquinas summed up five main arguments as proofs for God's existence.



Isaac Newton saw the existence of a Creator necessary in the movement of astronomical objects.

5. Ordered tendencies of nature: A direction of actions to an end is noticed in all bodies following natural laws. Anything without awareness tends to a goal under the guidance of one who is aware. This we call God (Note that even when we guide objects, in Thomas's view, the source of all our knowledge comes from God as well).^[78]

Some theologians, such as the scientist and theologian A.E. McGrath, argue that the existence of God is not a question that can be answered using the scientific method.^{[79][80]} Agnostic Stephen Jay Gould argues that science and religion are not in conflict and do not overlap.^[81]

Some findings in the fields of cosmology, evolutionary biology and neuroscience are interpreted by some atheists (including Lawrence M. Krauss and Sam Harris) as evidence that God is an imaginary entity only, with no basis in reality.^{[82][83][84]} These atheists claim that a single, omniscient God who is imagined to have created the universe and is particularly attentive to the lives of humans has been imagined, embellished and promulgated in a trans-generational manner.^[85] Richard Dawkins interprets such findings not only as a lack of evidence for the material existence of such a God, but as extensive evidence to the contrary.^[55] However, his views are opposed by some theologians and scientists including Alister McGrath, who argues that existence of God is compatible with science.^[86]



Alister McGrath, a formerly atheistic scientist and theologian who has been highly critical of Richard Dawkins' version of atheism

Neuroscientist Michael Nikolettseas has proposed that questions of the existence of God are no different from questions of natural sciences. Following a biological comparative approach, he concludes that it is highly probable that God exists, and, although not visible, it is possible that we know some of his attributes.^[59]

Specific attributes

Different religious traditions assign differing (though often similar) attributes and characteristics to God, including expansive powers and abilities, psychological characteristics, gender characteristics, and preferred nomenclature. The assignment of these attributes often differs according to the conceptions of God in the culture from which they arise. For example, attributes of God in Christianity, attributes of God in Islam, and the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy in Judaism share certain similarities arising from their common roots.

Names

The word *God* is "one of the most complex and difficult in the English language." In the Judeo-Christian tradition, "the Bible has been the principal source of the conceptions of God". That the Bible "includes many different images, concepts, and ways of thinking about" God has resulted in perpetual "disagreements about how God is to be conceived and understood".^[87]

Throughout the Hebrew and Christian Bibles there are many names for God. One of them is Elohim. Another one is *El Shaddai*, meaning "God Almighty".^[88] A third notable name is *El Elyon*, which means "The Most High God".^[89]

God is described and referred in the Quran and hadith by certain names or attributes, the most common being *Al-Rahman*, meaning "Most Compassionate" and *Al-Rahim*, meaning "Most Merciful" (See Names of God in Islam).^[90]

The Brahma Kumaris use the term "Supreme Soul" to refer to God. They see God as incorporeal and eternal, and regard him as a point of living light like human souls, but without a physical body, as he does not enter the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. God is seen as the perfect and constant embodiment of all virtues, powers and values and that He is the unconditionally loving Father of all souls, irrespective of their religion, gender, or culture.^[91]

Vaishnavism, a tradition in Hinduism, has list of titles and names of Krishna.

Gender

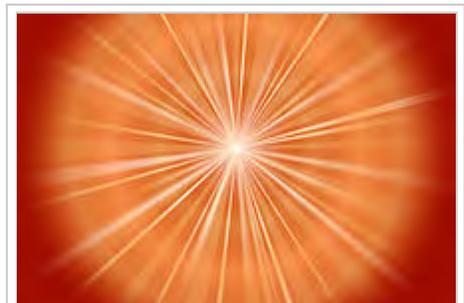
The gender of God may be viewed as either a literal or an allegorical aspect of a deity who, in classical western philosophy, transcends bodily form.^{[92][93]} Polytheistic religions commonly attribute to each of *the gods* a gender, allowing each to interact with any of the others, and perhaps with humans, sexually. In most monotheistic religions, God has no counterpart with which to relate sexually. Thus, in classical western philosophy the gender of this one-and-only deity is most likely to be an analogical statement of how humans and God address, and relate to, each other. Namely, God is seen as begetter of the world and revelation which corresponds to the active (as opposed to the receptive) role in sexual intercourse.^[6]

Biblical sources usually refer to God using male words, except Genesis 1:26-27

(<http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder2/?book=Genesis&verse=1:26-27&src=KJV>),^{[94][95]} Psalm 123:2-3 (<http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder2/?book=Psalm&verse=123:2-3&src=KJV>), and Luke 15:8-10 (<http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder2/?book=Luke&verse=15:8-10&src=KJV>) (female); Hosea 11:3-4 (<http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder2/?book=Hosea&verse=11:3-4&src=KJV>), Deuteronomy 32:18 (<http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder2/?book=Deuteronomy&verse=32:18&src=KJV>), Isaiah 66:13 (<http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder2/?book=Isaiah&verse=66:13&src=KJV>), Isaiah 49:15 (<http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder2/?book=Isaiah&verse=49:15&src=KJV>), Isaiah 42:14 (<http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder2/?book=Isaiah&verse=42:14&src=KJV>), Psalm 131:2



99 names of Allah, in Chinese Sini (script)



Supreme soul

(<http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder2/?book=Psalm&verse=131:2&src=KJV>) (a mother); Deuteronomy 32:11-12 (<http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder2/?book=Deuteronomy&verse=32:11-12&src=KJV>) (a mother eagle); and Matthew 23:37 (<http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder2/?book=Matthew&verse=23:37&src=KJV>) and Luke 13:34 (<http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder2/?book=Luke&verse=13:34&src=KJV>) (a mother hen).

Relationship with creation

Prayer plays a significant role among many believers. Muslims believe that the purpose of existence is to worship God.^{[96][97]} He is viewed as a personal God and there are no intermediaries, such as clergy, to contact God. Prayer often also includes supplication and asking forgiveness. God is often believed to be forgiving. For example, a hadith states God would replace a sinless people with one who sinned but still asked repentance.^[98] Christian theologian Alister McGrath writes that there are good reasons to suggest that a "personal god" is integral to the Christian outlook, but that one has to understand it is an analogy. "To say that God is like a person is to affirm the divine ability and willingness to relate to others. This does not imply that God is human, or located at a specific point in the universe."^[99]



And Elohim Created Adam by William Blake, c.1795

Adherents of different religions generally disagree as to how to best worship God and what is God's plan for mankind, if there is one. There are different approaches to reconciling the contradictory claims of monotheistic religions. One view is taken by exclusivists, who believe they are the chosen people or have exclusive access to absolute truth, generally through revelation or encounter with the Divine, which adherents of other religions do not. Another view is religious pluralism. A pluralist typically believes that his religion is the right one, but does not deny the partial truth of other religions. An example of a pluralist view in Christianity is supersessionism, i.e., the belief that one's religion is the fulfillment of previous religions. A third approach is relativistic inclusivism, where everybody is seen as equally right; an example being universalism: the doctrine that salvation is eventually available for everyone. A fourth approach is syncretism, mixing different elements from different religions. An example of syncretism is the New Age movement.

Jews and Christians believe that humans are created in the likeness of God, and are the center, crown and key to God's creation, stewards for God, supreme over everything else God had made (Gen 1:26); for this reason, humans are in Christianity called the "Children of God".^[100]

Depiction

God is defined as incorporeal,^[3] and invisible from direct sight, and thus cannot be portrayed in a literal visual image.

The respective principles of religions may or may not permit them to use images (which are entirely symbolic) to represent God in art or in worship .

Zoroastrianism

During the early Parthian Empire, Ahura Mazda was visually represented for worship. This practice ended during the beginning of the Sassanid empire. Zoroastrian iconoclasm, which can be traced to the end of the Parthian period and the beginning of the Sassanid, eventually put an end to the use of all images of Ahura Mazda in worship. However, Ahura Mazda continued to be symbolized by a dignified male figure, standing or on horseback which is found in Sassanian investiture.^[101]



Ahura Mazda (depiction is on the right, with high crown) presents Ardashir I (left) with the ring of kingship. (Relief at Naqsh-e Rostam, 3rd century CE)

Islam

Muslims believe that God (Allah) is beyond all comprehension or equal and does not resemble any of His creations in any way. Thus, Muslims are not iconodules, are not expected to visualize God.^[40]

Judaism

At least some Jews do not use any image for God, since God is the unimageable Being who cannot be represented in material forms.^[102] In some samples of Jewish Art, however, sometimes God, or at least His Intervention, is indicated by a Hand Of God symbol, which represents the *bath Kol* (literally "daughter of a voice") or Voice of God;^[103] this use of the Hand Of God is carried over to Christian Art.

Christianity

Early Christians believed that the words of the Gospel of John 1:18: "No man has seen God at any time" and numerous other statements were meant to apply not only to God, but to all attempts at the depiction of God.^[104]

However, later on the Hand of God symbol is found several times in the only ancient synagogue with a large surviving decorative scheme, the Dura Europos Synagogue of the mid-3rd century, and was probably adopted into Early Christian art from Jewish art. It was common in Late Antique art in both East and West, and remained the main way of symbolizing the actions or approval of God the Father in the West until about the end of the Romanesque period. It also represents the *bath Kol* (literally "daughter of a voice") or voice of God,^[103] just like in Jewish Art.

In situations, such as the Baptism of Christ, where a specific representation of God the Father was indicated, the Hand of God was used, with increasing freedom from the Carolingian period until the end of the Romanesque. This motif now, since the discovery of the 3rd century Dura Europos synagogue, seems to have been borrowed from Jewish art, and is found in Christian art almost from its beginnings.

The use of religious images in general continued to increase up to the end of the 7th century, to the point that in 695, upon assuming the throne, Byzantine emperor Justinian II put an image of Christ on the obverse side of his gold coins, resulting in a rift which ended the use of Byzantine coin types in the Islamic world.^[105] However, the increase in religious imagery did not include depictions of God the Father. For instance, while the eighty second canon of the Council of Trullo in 692 did not specifically condemn images of The Father, it suggested that icons of Christ were preferred over Old Testament shadows and figures.^[106]

The beginning of the 8th century witnessed the suppression and destruction of religious icons as the period of Byzantine iconoclasm (literally *image-breaking*) started. Emperor Leo III (717–741), suppressed the use of icons by imperial edict of the Byzantine Empire, presumably due to a military loss which he attributed to the undue veneration of icons.^[107] The edict (which was issued without consulting the Church) forbade the veneration of religious images but did not apply to other forms of art, including the image of the emperor, or religious symbols such as the cross.^[108] Theological arguments against icons then began to appear with iconoclasts arguing that icons could not represent both the divine and the human natures of Jesus at the same time. In this atmosphere, no public depictions of God the Father were even attempted and such depictions only began to appear two centuries later.

The Second Council of Nicaea in 787 effectively ended the first period of Byzantine iconoclasm and restored the honouring of icons and holy images in general.^[109] However, this did not immediately translate into large scale depictions of God the Father. Even supporters of the use of icons in the 8th century, such as Saint John of Damascus, drew a distinction between images of God the Father and those of Christ.

In his treatise *On the Divine Images* John of Damascus wrote: "In former times, God who is without form or body, could never be depicted. But now when God is seen in the flesh conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see".^[110] The implication here is that insofar as God the Father or the Spirit did not become man, visible and tangible, images and portrait icons can not be depicted. So what was true for the whole Trinity before Christ remains true for the Father and the Spirit but not for the Word. John of Damascus wrote:^[111]

"If we attempt to make an image of the invisible God, this would be sinful indeed. It is impossible to portray one who is without body:invisible, uncircumscribed and without form."



Use of the symbolic Hand of God in the Ascension from the Drogo Sacramentary, c. 850

Around 790 Charlemagne ordered a set of four books that became known as the Libri Carolini (i.e. "Charles' books") to refute what his court mistakenly understood to be the iconoclast decrees of the Byzantine Second Council of Nicaea regarding sacred images. Although not well known during the Middle Ages, these books describe the key elements of the Catholic theological position on sacred images. To the Western Church, images were just objects made by craftsmen, to be utilized for stimulating the senses of the faithful, and to be respected for the sake of the subject represented, not in themselves. The Council of Constantinople (869) (considered ecumenical by the Western Church, but not the Eastern Church) reaffirmed the decisions of the Second Council of Nicaea and helped stamp out any remaining coals of iconoclasm. Specifically, its third canon required the image of Christ to have veneration equal with that of a Gospel book.^[112]

We decree that the sacred image of our Lord Jesus Christ, the liberator and Savior of all people, must be venerated with the same honor as is given the book of the holy Gospels. For as through the language of the words contained in this book all can reach salvation, so, due to the action which these images exercise by their colors, all wise and simple alike, can derive profit from them.

But images of God the Father were not directly addressed in Constantinople in 869. A list of permitted icons was enumerated at this Council, but symbols of God the Father were not among them.^[113] However, the general acceptance of icons and holy images began to create an atmosphere in which God the Father could be symbolized.

Prior to the 10th century no attempt was made to use a human to symbolize God the Father in Western art.^[104] Yet, Western art eventually required some way to illustrate the presence of the Father, so through successive representations a set of artistic styles for symbolizing the Father using a man gradually emerged around the 10th century AD. A rationale for the use of a human is the belief that God created the soul of Man in the image of His own (thus allowing Human to transcend the other animals).

It appears that when early artists designed to represent God the Father, fear and awe restrained them from a usage of the whole human figure. Typically only a small part would be used as the image, usually the hand, or sometimes the face, but rarely a whole human. In many images, the figure of the Son supplants the Father, so a smaller portion of the person of the Father is depicted.^[114]

By the 12th century depictions of God the Father had started to appear in French illuminated manuscripts, which as a less public form could often be more adventurous in their iconography, and in stained glass church windows in England. Initially the head or bust was usually shown in some form of frame of clouds in the top of the picture space, where the Hand of God had formerly appeared; the Baptism of Christ on the famous baptismal font in Liège of Rainer of Huy is an example from 1118 (a Hand of God is used in another scene). Gradually the amount of the human symbol shown can increase to a half-length figure, then a full-length, usually enthroned, as in Giotto's fresco of c. 1305 in Padua.^[115] In the 14th century the Naples Bible carried a depiction of God the Father in the Burning bush. By the early 15th century, the Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry has a considerable number of symbols, including an elderly but tall and elegant full-length figure walking in the Garden of Eden, which show a considerable diversity of apparent ages and dress. The "Gates of Paradise" of the Florence Baptistry by Lorenzo Ghiberti, begun in 1425 use a similar tall full-length symbol for the Father. The Rohan Book of

Hours of about 1430 also included depictions of God the Father in half-length human form, which were now becoming standard, and the Hand of God becoming rarer. At the same period other works, like the large Genesis altarpiece by the Hamburg painter Meister Bertram, continued to use the old depiction of Christ as *Logos* in Genesis scenes. In the 15th century there was a brief fashion for depicting all three persons of the Trinity as similar or identical figures with the usual appearance of Christ.

In an early Venetian school Coronation of the Virgin by Giovanni d'Alemagna and Antonio Vivarini, (c. 1443) The Father is depicted using the symbol consistently used by other artists later, namely a patriarch, with benign, yet powerful countenance and with long white hair and a beard, a depiction largely derived from, and justified by, the near-physical, but still figurative, description of the Ancient of Days.^[116]

. ...the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. (Daniel 7:9)



Usage of two *Hands of God*"(relatively unusual) and the Holy Spirit as a dove in Baptism of Christ, by Verrocchio, 1472

In the Annunciation by Benvenuto di Giovanni in 1470, God the Father is portrayed in the red robe and a hat that resembles that of a Cardinal. However, even in the later part of the 15th century, the symbolic representation of the Father and the Holy Spirit as "hands and dove" continued, e.g. in Verrocchio's Baptism of Christ in 1472.^[117]

In Renaissance paintings of the adoration of the Trinity, God may be depicted in two ways, either with emphasis on The Father, or the three elements of the Trinity. The most usual depiction of the Trinity in Renaissance art depicts God the Father using an old man, usually with a long beard and



God the Father with His Right Hand Raised in Blessing, with a triangular halo representing the Trinity, Girolamo dai Libri c. 1555

patriarchal in appearance, sometimes with a triangular halo (as a reference to the Trinity), or with a papal crown, specially in Northern Renaissance painting. In these depictions The Father may hold a globe or book (to symbolize God's knowledge and as a reference to how knowledge is deemed divine). He is behind and above Christ on the Cross in the Throne of Mercy iconography. A dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit may hover above. Various people from different classes of society, e.g. kings, popes or martyrs may be present in the picture. In a Trinitarian Pietà, God the Father is often symbolized using a man wearing a papal dress and a papal crown, supporting the dead Christ in his arms. They are depicted as floating in heaven with angels who carry the instruments of the Passion.^[118]

Representations of God the Father and the Trinity were attacked both by Protestants and within Catholicism, by the Jansenist and Baianist movements as well as more orthodox theologians. As with other attacks on Catholic imagery, this had the effect both of reducing Church support for the less central depictions, and strengthening it for the core ones. In the Western Church, the pressure to restrain religious imagery resulted in the highly influential decrees of the final session of the Council of Trent in 1563. The Council of Trent decrees confirmed the traditional Catholic doctrine that images only represented the person depicted, and that veneration to them was paid to the person, not the image.^[119]

Artistic depictions of God the Father were uncontroversial in Catholic art thereafter, but less common depictions of the Trinity were condemned. In 1745 Pope Benedict XIV explicitly supported the Throne of Mercy depiction, referring to the "Ancient of Days", but in 1786 it was still necessary for Pope Pius VI to issue a papal bull condemning the decision of an Italian church council to remove all images of the Trinity from churches.^[120]



amous *The Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo, c.1512

God the Father is symbolized in several Genesis scenes in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling, most famously *The Creation of Adam* (whose image of near touching hands of God and Adam is iconic of humanity, being a reminder that Man is created in the Image and Likeness of God (Gen 1:26)). God the Father is depicted as a powerful figure, floating in the clouds in Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* in the Frari of Venice, long admired as a masterpiece of High Renaissance art.^[121] The Church of the Gesù in Rome includes a number of 16th century depictions of God the Father. In some of these paintings the Trinity is still alluded to in terms of three angels, but Giovanni Battista Fiammeri also depicted God the Father as a man riding on a cloud, above the scenes.^[122]

In both the Last Judgment and the Coronation of the Virgin paintings by Rubens he depicted God the Father using the image that by then had become widely accepted, a bearded patriarchal figure above the fray. In the 17th century, the two Spanish artists Velázquez (whose father-in-law Francisco Pacheco was in charge of the approval of new images for the Inquisition) and Murillo both depicted God the Father using a patriarchal figure with a white beard in a purple robe.

While representations of God the Father were growing in Italy, Spain, Germany and the Low Countries, there was resistance elsewhere in Europe, even during the 17th century. In 1632 most members of the Star Chamber court in England (except the Archbishop of York) condemned the use of the images of the Trinity in church windows, and some considered them illegal.

^[123] Later in the 17th century Sir Thomas Browne wrote that he considered the representation of God the Father using an old man "a dangerous act" that might lead to Egyptian symbolism.^[124] In 1847, Charles Winston was still critical of such images as a "*Romish trend*" (a term used to refer to Roman Catholics) that he considered best avoided in England.^[125]

In 1667 the 43rd chapter of the Great Moscow Council specifically included a ban on a number of symbolic depictions of God the Father and the Holy Spirit, which then also resulted in a whole range of other icons being placed on the forbidden list, ^[126]^[127] mostly affecting Western-style depictions which had been gaining ground in Orthodox icons. The Council also declared that the person of the Trinity who was the "Ancient of Days" was Christ, as *Logos*, not God the Father. However some icons continued to be produced in Russia, as well as Greece, Romania, and other Orthodox countries.



The Ancient of Days (1794)
Watercolor etching by William Blake

Theological approaches

Theologians and philosophers have attributed to God such characteristics as omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, perfect goodness, divine simplicity, and eternal and necessary existence. God has been described as incorporeal, a personal being, the source of all moral obligation, and the greatest conceivable being existent.^[3] These attributes were all claimed to varying degrees by the early Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars, including Maimonides,^[53] St Augustine,^[53] and Al-Ghazali.^[128]

Many philosophers developed arguments for the existence of God,^[8] while attempting to comprehend the precise implications of God's attributes. Reconciling some of those attributes generated important philosophical problems and debates. For example, God's omniscience may seem to imply that God knows how free agents will choose to act. If God does know this, their ostensible free will might be illusory, or foreknowledge does not imply predestination, and if God does not know it, God may not be omniscient.^[129]

The last centuries of philosophy have seen vigorous questions regarding the arguments for God's existence raised by such philosophers as Immanuel Kant, David Hume and Antony Flew, although Kant held that the argument from morality was valid. The theist response has been either to contend, as does Alvin Plantinga, that faith is "properly basic", or to take, as does Richard Swinburne, the evidentialist position.^[130] Some theists agree that only some of the arguments for God's existence are compelling, but argue that faith is not a product of reason, but requires risk. There would be no risk, they say, if the arguments for God's existence were as solid as the laws of logic, a position summed up by Pascal as "the heart has reasons of which reason does not know."^[131] A recent theory using concepts from physics and neurophysiology proposes that God can be conceptualized within the theory of integrative level.^[132]

Many religious believers allow for the existence of other, less powerful spiritual beings such as angels, saints, jinn, demons, and devas.^{[133][134][135][136][137]}

See also

- God (male deity)
- God the Father
- God the Father in Western art
- God the Son
- God the Holy Spirit
- Logos
- Logos (Christianity)
- Science and God
- Monad (philosophy)
- Absolute (philosophy)

In specific religions

- God in Buddhism
- God in Caodaism
- God in Christianity
- God in Gnosticism
- God in Hinduism
- God in Islam
- God in Jainism
- God in Judaism
- God in Sikhism
- God in the Bahá'í Faith

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