

Who or What Is God?

One thing I know for certain, based on pure logic, is this. God doesn't want everyone to know exactly who or what He is, or even that He exists. If God wanted us to know these things with absolute certainty, then that is what would happen. Because this did not happen, I would logically assume that He wants most of us to remain at least partially in the dark regarding the details of His true nature. I use the pronoun "He" in the generic sense. Logic tells us that God should not be assigned a specific "human" gender.

The scriptures of various religions not only contradict one another, but they also contain many internal contradictions as well as historical and scientific errors. This is not to say that they are entirely wrong about God's true nature. However, we should not be relying solely on religious texts and dogmas for information about the personhood and nature of God, assuming God exists.

So where does that leave us? The best approach to our investigation, in my view, would be start with a few basic logical assumptions. These assumptions form an underlying basis for my investigations and conclusions. If you are in disagreement with these assumptions, then your conclusions may differ from mine, even if you proceed in a logical and orderly manner.

1. Our conclusions about the nature of God should be consistent with universally accepted physical science.
2. Our conclusions should be consistent with known and verifiable historical facts.
3. Subjective knowledge, based on individual and corporate human experience, may be considered as evidence, but not conclusive proof.
4. Human feelings and intuition may be relied upon only to the extent that they are universally experienced and agreed upon.
5. Regarding religious texts, the greatest weight should be given to teachings which are not contradicted by irrefutable extra-biblical sources of information.
6. Our investigation will be limited to answering only one question, "Who or what is God?"

What we know from science:

I would like to begin by examining evidence derived from the physical sciences. The general consensus of the scientific community is that all physical matter is basically immaterial in nature, composed of nothing more than waves of energy. I would deduce that a creator God would probably be immaterial as well. Almost all religious texts describe God as spiritual, or immaterial, in nature. Although many texts describe God as sometimes taking on a material form, this so called material form would not actually be physical at all. All matter, when reduced to its most basic and elemental components, is nothing more than vibrating strings of energy, temporarily blinking into existence as particles which then just as quickly blink out of existence. When we view any physical stationary or moving object what we are seeing is the illusion of something static and solid. In actuality what we are witnessing are particles rapidly blinking into and out of existence, similar to the illusion created when we observe the discontinuous frames of a motion picture. Fundamentally, our so-called reality is actually not real at all. It is only real in the sense that our experience of it is real. Our existence could best be described as a vivid dream that has no physical substance to it. In my view, the same could be said of God.

What we know from traditional religions:

Having postulated that God is an immaterial being, the next question I would ask is this. Is God a personal being? Does God have a distinct personality or ego capable of communicating with us on a person to person basis? Or is God instead some kind of unknowable impersonal force? Various religions describe God quite differently in this regard. Adherents to the Eastern religions describe God as an impersonal being who in some cases might temporarily take on a physical form. Some of these adherents would describe God in pantheistic terms as the “sum of everything that exists.” They would describe individual human beings as individual parts of a larger godhead, similar to the way in which drops of water are part of the ocean. In other words, our human spiritual DNA, which makes up the core of our being, would be an exact duplicate of the parent DNA of our creator God.

Most proponents of the western and near-eastern religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, on the other hand, tend to describe God as a personal being who exists independently from us. In their view, God communicates with us directly through prayer and also through intermediaries such as angels, prophets, priests, and ordinary people who lend us a helping hand or sympathetic ear. They tend to view humanity and the cosmos as primarily physical in nature, and they view God as basically spiritual or immaterial in nature.

So which is it? Is God an impersonal force of which we are all a part, or is God a personal being, separate and distinct from humanity who can relate to each of us on an individual, personal basis?

Almost all organized religions agree that God is immaterial in nature, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. The main difference among them has to do with a dualistic vs. a monistic view of reality. The western and near-eastern religions view reality in mostly in dualistic terms with a distinct division between the spiritual and material worlds. The eastern religions view reality mostly in monistic terms, with God being identical with and inseparable from all creation. Adherents of eastern religion view all reality as basically spiritual or immaterial in nature, and God would be defined as the “sum of all that exists.” They view God as mostly impersonal, yet completely infused into all that exists. Western religion views God as personal, yet separate from the material world.

In my view, the difference between these world views is partially semantic in nature. For example, Jesus’ view of Himself as “one with” and inseparable from the Father and his view of His followers as potentially “one with” and inseparable from both Himself and the Father hint of monism. The Apostle Paul’s view of God as the “ground of all being” also hints of monism. The teaching of Jesus that God is our Father also hints of monism, the idea being that we are made of the same “substance” as God in the same way that humans are replications of their parents and share the same DNA. The Apostle Paul reinforced this belief when He pointed out to the pagan Athenians on Mars Hill that we are all God’s “offspring.” Eastern religion explicitly teaches monism, while western religion mostly just hints at it.

Which view is correct? I believe both are partially correct and the greater truth is revealed in a synthesis of both views. Here’s what I mean. Eastern religion tends to deemphasize the personhood of God, while western religion tends to deemphasize the immanence, or nearness, of God. Each views God from a different perspective, but both are emphasizing a true and valid aspect of God’s nature. The Hebrews began with an extremely dualistic and anthropomorphic view of God. In their view, God was extremely holy and separate from us. Some even refused to pronounce God’s name. God was simultaneously loved and feared. Then Jesus came along and emphasized the Fatherhood of God, God’s love for us, and nearness to us.

What we know from human experience:

Human experience is where the rubber of religion meets the road, so to speak. It has to do with the practical application of religious knowledge. Much can be learned about the nature of God from both human intuition and human life experience. Intuitively, most human beings believe in some sort of “higher power.” This belief, however ill-defined, seems to be built into most, but not all, of us. Human intuition provides us with strong evidence that God exists, but not conclusive proof. More conclusive evidence for God’s existence would be found in the phenomenon of the Near Death Experience. These experiences also provide us with strong evidence that we are non-physical beings temporarily residing in physical bodies and we continue to exist after death separately from our physical bodies. Thousands of NDE’s have been documented over the years, and a high percentage of these experiencers report a strong sense of being “one with” the creator and a strong “connectedness” with all created beings. Even atheists have these experiences, and many become very religious afterwards.

It is interesting that during the NDE, God is almost never viewed as an individual “person” existing separately from the rest of humanity. Instead, God is viewed as an all pervasive and loving force that binds everything and everyone together. The persons who are encountered in the spirit world during the NDE mostly take the form of friends, relatives, spirit guides, religious figures, angelic beings, and the like. During the NDE, the experiencer views him or herself as intimately connected with both God and all of God’s creation and created beings and completely enveloped in God’s love. This supports the eastern monistic view of God, but at the same time it is not contradictory to the view, described by Jesus, of God as a loving heavenly Father whom no one can see. Jesus pointed out that, although God cannot be seen by our physical eyes, He can be seen in the person of Jesus himself. The Apostle Paul also pointed this out and further explained that we are each individually aspects of God’s “body.” He used the metaphor of the Body of Christ. According to Jesus and the Apostle Paul, God becomes visible to us when He takes the physical form of human beings. This is the way that God becomes “personal” and accessible to our physical senses.

Conclusion:

So who are we talking to when we talk to God in prayer? Based on the description of God in the preceding paragraphs, I would say that when we pray to God the Father, we are addressing a spiritual being who is as big as everything that exists and as small as our “higher self.” God is greater and at the same time smaller and more intimate and personal than we can possibly imagine. When we are talking to ourselves, we are talking to God. When interact with other human beings we are interacting with God. When we visualize and pray to God as our loving heavenly Father (or Mother if you prefer), we are also communicating with the God of all creation. We are also able to experience His personhood by means of our interactions with other human beings during our earthly walk and also in the heavenly realms after death.