



## Nature of God: secondary teachers' guide

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### Introduction

This guide, produced by Westminster Abbey, contains key information on Christian beliefs about the nature of God, to support the delivery of Religious Education within your classroom.

Westminster Abbey has a distinctive role within the Church of England, which is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. It is neither a cathedral nor a parish church, and it stands outside the normal jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London. It is instead a 'Royal Peculiar', which was a status granted to it in 1560 by Elizabeth I, under which the Dean and Chapter are directly answerable to the Sovereign. Building upon its origins as a monastery and the Benedictine importance placed on education, Westminster Abbey today strives to be a school of the Lord's service.

This resource discusses the nature of God in broad terms based on Christian teachings. All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

### Defining the nature of God

Christians use the following words to define God:

- Omnibenevolent: God is all-loving and infinitely good, showing kindness to human beings.
- Omniscient: God is all-knowing with an awareness of everything that has happened and will happen.
- Omnipotent: God is all-powerful and has unlimited authority.
- Monotheistic: This refers to the belief by Christians in the existence of only one God.
- Judge: Christians believe that when a person dies, they are subject to God's judgement about eternal life.
- Eternal: God has no beginning or end. God is not bound by limitations of time or space.
- Transcendent: God is above and beyond the world He has created. God is not constrained by it.
- Immanent: God is in the world, interacting with creation in the past, present and future.
- Personal: God is personal, allowing Christians to develop a relationship with Him.
- Forgiving: God constantly seeks to reconcile those who have sinned back into relationship with Him.



God is Trinity and God is Incarnate.

### Omnibenevolent God

God's all-loving nature is most explicitly evident by the sacrifice of His only son Jesus to save humanity in order to give humans the opportunity to have eternal life with God. In John's gospel, it states,

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God." (John 3:16-18)

Christians believe that God has unconditional love (or agape) for all human beings and that human beings themselves are encouraged to love others unconditionally too. There are many instances of reference to God's love in the Bible, such as:

"I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another" (John 13:34)

"But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." (Psalm 86:15)

### Omniscient God

Christians believe that God is all-knowing and considered to be the source of all knowledge in contrast to human knowledge which is limited and finite.

"whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything."  
(1 John 3:20)

### Omnipotent God

When considering the omnipotent nature of God, Christians learn that everything from sky to land, from animals and fish to human beings, was created by God out of nothing (or ex nihilo). At the end of the sixth day,

"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good". (Genesis 1:31)

The Book of Genesis also explains how God created humans in His image and likeness:

"So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

Even for Christians who do not take a literal view of the Creation story, it is considered to be a clear demonstration of God's power.

There is also evidence of God's power in the Lord's Prayer, which is the prayer Jesus gave to his followers when they asked him how to pray. The line about daily bread shows Christians that God has the power to provide humans with what they need to survive.

"Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11)

### Monotheistic God



The existence of only one God is a fundamental belief in Christianity.

“To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him”. (Deuteronomy 4:35)

The first of the Ten Commandments, a set of important rules that tell Christians how they should live and behave, explicitly requires Christians to only believe in one God.

“Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:1-3)

This monotheistic belief is shared by the other Abrahamic faiths, Judaism and Islam. However, Christians believe God is Trinity. This unique belief, central to Christian teaching, can be explored further in this [teacher guide](#).

### God as Judge

Christians believe that the entire world will be subject to God’s judgement. All people will receive this judgement, which will relate to how they have lived on earth. One place where Jesus explains this is in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25:31-46). In keeping with other Biblical references to shepherds and their flock, this parable told by Jesus uses a farming metaphor by classifying people as either sheep or goats, which would have been clearly understood by a predominately pastoral audience.

“All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.” (Matthew 25:32-33)

Those on the right, the sheep, are told they are blessed because of the actions they did on earth:

“for I was hungry and you gave me food, and I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Matthew 25:35)

Jesus describes how the righteous, confused, ask when they did each of those actions and are told,

“And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40)

Then those on the left, the goats, are repeated the same list and that they did not help in all of those instances. Again, it is asked when they did not do each of those actions and are told,

“Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”” (Matthew 25:25)

Jesus shows that how people do or do not act will determine eternal life or eternal punishment.

“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46)

This parable echoes the teachings of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), where Christians are taught to help anyone in need of help, rather than those that they might consider within their own community, whether that be defined by geography, race or culture.

### God as eternal

With no beginning and no end, God is described as eternal.

“Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,



the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.” (Isaiah 40:28)

### God as transcendent

Developing the belief of God as eternal, Christians believe that God exists beyond worldly constraints and physical laws.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

God is above and beyond creation. It is thought that because of this, humans who exist within His creation can never fully understand God.

### God as immanent

Christians believe that God is in the world and cares about the lives of the people who inhabit it. His involvement in the world, such as answering prayers and performing miracles, is not seen to conflict with human’s free will on earth.

“The LORD is just in all his ways,  
and kind in all his doings.  
The LORD is near to all who call on him,  
to all who call on him in truth.” (Psalm 145:17-18)

Christians believe that God’s immanence is expressed through the power of the Holy Spirit, who is always present. God the Holy Spirit is a constant source of guidance and wisdom for Christians on earth.

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.” (John 14:16-17)

A distinctive and essential Christian belief is that God is Incarnate through Jesus. When Christians look at the life and teachings of Jesus, they see precisely what God is like. This belief can be explored further in this [teacher guide](#).

### A personal God

Christians believe that their relationship with God grows through prayer. In the Bible, the use of personal pronouns reveals a connection between God and those who believe in Him.

“Do not fear, for I am with you,  
do not be afraid, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

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### A forgiving God

Christianity is a faith grounded in reconciliation. God shows his omnibenevolent nature by pardoning people who are sorry for doing wrong. This can be seen in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). It tells the story of two sons who are equally given property, but one son foolishly spends the wealth and returns to his father to apologise.

“Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” (Luke 15:21).

The father forgives him and celebrates his return, which angers the other brother.

“But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.” (Luke 15:29)

The father explains his reaction,

“Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.” But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.” (Luke 15:31-32)

This forgiveness is also evident within the Lord’s Prayer,

“And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.” (Matthew 6:12)

In 2 Corinthians, the ministry of reconciliation is explained,

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting the trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

### Nature of God within Westminster Abbey

In churches, artwork, stained-glass windows and symbols are used to depict divine attributes. For example, at Westminster Abbey, the following can be seen:

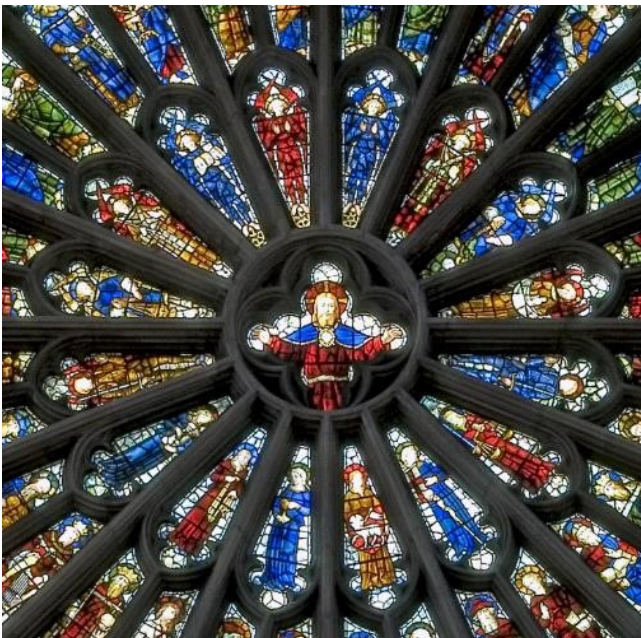


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In Henry VII's Lady Chapel, there is a carving on the lid of the font showing a pelican feeding its young blood from the breast. This is often used as a symbol for Jesus' sacrifice, highlighting God's omnibenevolent nature.



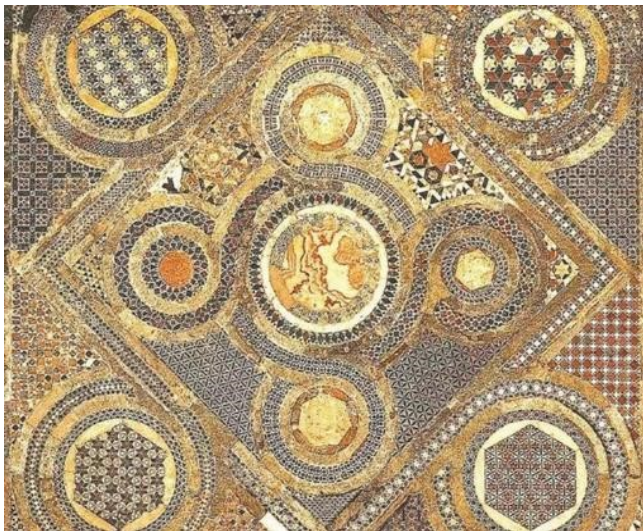
In the very centre of the rose window in the South Transept, Jesus Christ is portrayed. His central role in the stained-glass window depicts Christ as the Word and Wisdom of God, "the firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1:15).

# Westminster Abbey

## Learning



Amongst many wall paintings in the Chapter House, there is a “Doom Painting” which depicts how medieval people imagined the Last Judgement. This portrays human beings being judged after death.



Circles are often seen in Church art - the never-ending shape represents the eternal nature of God. At Westminster Abbey, the Cosmati pavement in front of the High Altar is a good example of this. While from above the beauty of the four-fold symmetry is clear, when looking in closer detail, the variations are endless. No two roundels are the same, adding to the uniqueness of this pavement. Circles also feature in the rose windows, the stalls of the quire and within the stonework.



Church is a space both for public worship and private prayer, through which Christians grow in their personal relationship with God, as well as with other Christians. Members of the clergy are always on hand at Westminster Abbey for conversation and prayer if people wish to discuss anything in their relationship with God. Many Christians also choose to light a candle as a sign of their prayer.

### [Finding out more](#)

You may also wish to look at our other [Christian beliefs teaching resources](#).