

GOD'S IMAGES IN THE RELIGIOUS MARKET

Excerpts from the book "To Be Like Jesus" of P. Ribes, s.j published by the Gujarat Sahytia Prakash, Anand.

Intent of these jottins.

- ✓ *These materials were prepared as a model Lesson for a Catechism Book for our secondary schools However they been adapted here for personal reflection, talks, recollections, retreats, adult catechesis, and similar events*
- ✓ *The goals of that lesson were:*
 - *To make our students aware of the image of God they have.*
 - *To help them compare their image of God to the one given to us by our Lord Jesus.*
- ✓ *The image of God we have, conditions all our religious thoughts, feelings and practice.*
- ✓ *At the basis of a healthy spiritual life and practice there has to be a healthy "God-image".*
- ✓ *If we relate to false or distorted images of God, our religious belief and practice will be faulty. We shall live in a religious world of make-belief.*

PROCEDURE

Introductory Prayer.

- **Hymn:** "Father, we adore you", "I will never forget you", or a similar one.
- **Petition:** Heavenly Father, grant me that I may come to know you better, love you more and serve you faithfully"

Images of God in the Religious Market

Starter: Cobra! Cobra! (Story).

Once upon a time a group of Students went for a picnic.

They took along with them the most delicious food.

At lunch time, they opened their bags, spread their mats and sat down for their meal.

Then, all of a sudden, some one discovered a cobra coiled on a rock near by.

In a fright he shouted: "Cobra!", "Cobra!"

Terrified, all run for life. Their delicious food was trampled upon, scattered and spoiled.

A few courageous students picked stones and sticks to kill the cobra.

To their surprise, they found that it wasn't a cobra!

It was a thick, brown coiled rope lying on a rock!

It looked like a cobra, but it wasn't. Yet, all the same, their food was scattered and their picnic spoiled!

Points for discussion:

- Why and how their picnic was spoiled?
- What did they perceive? What did they see?
- What did they think? Why?
- How did they feel? Why?
- What did they do? Why?
- How could they feel scared if a cobra wasn't there?
- Why their delicious food was trampled under foot?
- Can you remember similar incidents of your past life?
- What have you learned from the story of the picnic and the cobra?
- What does actually influence us in our thinking, in our feelings and in our acting: **perception or reality?**

Points for Reflection and Teaching

(If you conduct a group session, you may write on the board the sketches found below)

Perception means what we see, what we hear, what we touch, what we smell, what we taste; in other words, what we grasp with our senses.

Perception may be true or mistaken.

If I see a cobra when actually there is a cobra my perception is true.

If I see a cobra when there is only a coiled rope, my perception is mistaken.

However, what actually does affect us in life is not reality (*what things really are*) but our perception – *whether true or mistaken* – namely, what I perceive, what I sense things to be.

Immediately after perception, - true or mistaken – automatically, three psychological processes take place within me:

<u>First::</u>	<u>My perception controls my thoughts</u>	If I –truly or mistakenly - see a cobra <u>I think there is a cobra</u>
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<u>Second::</u>	<u>My thoughts control my feelings.</u>	<u>If I think</u> that there is a cobra, <u>I feel afraid</u> of the cobra
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<u>Third::</u>	<u>My feelings control my behavior</u>	If <u>I feel afraid</u> of the cobra, <u>I will defend</u> myself from it.
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Consequences:

- The sum total of our perceptions – true or mistaken ones - about anyone or anything we have experienced we call “**images**”

- We refer to them, for instance as “**Self-image**” “**God’s Image**” “**People’s or any other thing’ image**”.
- We can refer also to them as “The Idea” we have, about people or things, like my idea of self, of God, of home, country, religion, caste, etc.
- **The image - the sum total of our perceptions – about persons and things, controls our thoughts, our feelings and our actions in relation to them.**
- **In real life we are not ruled by things, events or people around us as they really are, but by the image or idea we have of them!** For instance:
 - If a child has an image of his teacher as a very strict and stern person, he is likely to behave in class.
 - While shopping, we do not buy the goods for what they are, but by the image we have of them.
 - Advertising is the art of creating “images” and “brands” of the goods advertised.
 - Are those images and brands true or false? Mostly are not accurate, but false, exaggerated or inflated.
 - Very often we buy books attracted by the color and the beauty of their covers, not by worthiness of their contents.
- In order to change our way of thinking, feeling and inter-acting with others, with events or any other things, we have to change first our image or idea of them!
- And in order to change our image or idea of them, we have to change first our perception of them.
- We have to be always critical and question the validity of our perceptions!

God’s Image.

- All the above mentioned points have to be applied also to our “God-image”
- If our image of God is distorted or mistaken, we may feel bad, or frightened about Him.
- We shall relate with him in a faulty and deficient way.
- If our image of God is a loving and lovable one, we shall feel comfortable and loving towards Him.
- To improve our prayer life and our religious practices we have to improve our “God -image”

How our God’s Image has been shaped.

- The God-image all of us have has been shaped by the sum total of our perceptions of Him.
- All we heard of him, all we have been taught, and experienced of God from birth till today, will account for the God-image we have!
- Significant people in our lives – parents, close relations, teachers, friends, superiors, priests, sisters, etc. have been the most influential factor in the building of our “God -image”.
- What they taught us, and the examples they gave us of their love and devotion towards God, have influenced us most in the way we think, in the way we feel about God, and in the way we relate to God. .

Possible distortions of our God Image

- More often than not, without their realizing it, significant people have projected unto us a “distorted” image of God.
 - **Some of them by excess-** *Scrupulous and over-anxious parents; over strict teachers; legalistic minded superiors, narrow minded and antiquated confessors and priests etc.*
 - **Some others by default** – *neglectful parents, unworthy teachers, priests lacking in zeal, bad examples from elders and religious people. Etc*
- Therefore, it is necessary for all of us to examine our “God-image” and correct it whenever distorted.

Hunting for Distorted Images of God.

- Although the image of God each one has is “unique”; it is like a mosaic made of countless pieces - family background, education, friendships, good and bad deeds, different life experiences, etc - yet there exist some fairly common images of God in the minds and hearts of God fearing people.
- After compiling a list of them, we could, in a *caricature fashion*, name them thus:

1. The Benevolent Grandfather.
2. The Strict Judge.
3. The Vigilant Police.
4. The Slot-machine.
5. The Punisher. .
6. The Moody Person.
7. The Shop-Keeper
8. The Insurance Policy.
9. The Amulet.
10. The Avenger.

An evaluation of the first four distorted “God – Images” mentioned above.

You yourself may do the evaluation of the remaining ones keeping the pattern used to evaluate first four mentioned above. .

1. GOD “ The Benevolent Grand Father”.

Characteristics of this “God image”

- A goody, softy, sweetie god.
- Easy to bully.
- He will always say “yes” to our requests.
- A god that can be manipulated.

Consequences of having this “God – image”

- What will our feelings be towards that god? Not much reverence, taken for granted

- What will our behavior towards him be? Selfish, interested, indifferent, trying to knock out favors
- What will our prayers be? Petitions only, demanding, cajoling, little thanksgiving, no praise.
- When shall we pray? Only when in need or in trouble.
- What our favorite prayers will be?? – Selfish petitions, Sweet words, flattery Novena spirituality,
- If we do not get what we want how shall I react? – Anger, resentment, disappointment, complaints, grumbling

2 GOD “The strict Judge”

Characteristics of this “God-image”

- Stern. No allowances.
- Inflexible. Will not change his mind.
- Lack of feeling.
- Condemning.
- Demanding amendments and restitution.
- Legalistic. Law abiding person.
- Uncompromising.

Consequences of having this “God – image”

- Scruples Anxieties. Doubts.
- Doing satisfaction. Reparation. Sacrifices, offerings.
- Gaining indulgences. Doing good works...
- Trying to “pile merits”
- Compulsion - no freedom and spontaneity - in our religious practices
- Legalistic relationship with God. Follow the law. Do what is prescribed

3. GOD “The Vigilant Police”

Characteristics of this “God-image” .

- Heartless, cold, no positive feelings
- Strict. Unbending.
- Ever looking at the wrong we do, never at the good we did.
- Thankless, not encouraging, not giving recognition.
- Happy to get us on the wrong
- Impossible to please
- Ever watchful. Not allowing us rest or respite

Consequences of having this “God – image”

- Dishonesty on our part. Pretence, hiding, crookedness
- Trying to look good rather than being good...
- Fear, anxieties discomfort, restlessness.
- Legalism, just keep the law.
- Anger, resentment, dislike, hatred.

4. GOD “The Slot Machine”

Characteristics of this “God-image”

- Impersonal, no feelings.
- Automatic, machine – like.
- Under our control. Bound by our prayers.
- For our personal advantage.
- A universal panacea for all our ills

Consequences of having this God – image.

- Prayer like magic, “adacadabra”
- Novena spirituality. Use of “powerful prayers” Special devotions.
- Impersonal prayers.
- Selfish attitude towards religion and God.
- No much trust in God, but in our works and offerings.
- Feeling cheated when not heard.
- Grumbling against God.
- No devotion but devotions
- Unconcern for others...

You are welcome to evaluate on your own, the other images of God mentioned above.