
Who is God for YOU?

American Piety in the 21st Century, a very broad study of American religious beliefs and practices, was released by the Baylor University Institute for Studies of Religion in Texas, September 2006. Some of its findings may be very useful for Catholics engaged in evangelization:

- **Good News**—Between 85-90% of Americans say they believe in and pray to God.
- **Better News**—As many as 98% of young adults (ages 18-40) say they believe in and pray to God.
- **Not So Good News**—There are dramatic differences between what kind of God people believe in or to whom they pray—even among Catholics! (For more information about Catholic statistics, email: jbouch@dioceseoftrenton.org.)

“Who is God for YOU?” Individual Activity (5 min.)

Below are short descriptions of the major images of God that were surfaced in the Baylor University study. In silence, reflect for a while about your preferred image of God, the one you usually have when you pray, study, worship, or speak to others about the Lord.

Check the description of God that is closest to your image.

- Authoritative God:** highly involved in personal decision-making and world affairs—responsible for economic problems, earthquakes, tsunamis—desiring angry punishment for unfaithful people now and in the future.
- Benevolent God:** highly involved and active in our daily lives, but not in angry and wrathful ways—positive influence upon and deeply engaged in the world.
- Critical God:** does not interact directly with the world, but views it and us unfavorably. God’s displeasure with us will be felt in divine justice after we die.
- Distant God:** does not “do” things in the world nor hold any opinions about us or world events. God is a cosmic force that set the laws of nature in motion and walked away.

Sharing in small groups (3 or 4 people—20 mins.)

1. Go around the group and explain which of these major images is “God for YOU?” Why did you choose that image?
2. Next go back over the four images and put the initials of three people from your everyday life next to what you perceive is their primary image of God.
3. Share about the similarities and differences that you and one of these people from your everyday life have about the image of God.
4. Why is it important to understand what people’s operative image of God is when we reach out to share faith with them or evangelize them?

People-Homework Challenge

After this session, use this sheet to informally survey other people from your everyday life about “Who is God for YOU?” (You might plan right now to meet again as a group to talk about what happened when you tried this.)