

## **“I would believe in God if...”**

Many years ago, I had a brilliant language teacher who was a professing agnostic.

Sonia doubted God’s existence simply because he did not meet her personal expectations. Her litmus test? “If there is a God, he would have destroyed my terrible neighbor by now. How can he exist when my awful neighbor still exists? However, if he does exist, he is powerless, or unjust and indifferent.”

But Sonia could readily believe in a god who would meet her specific requirements of character and conduct. And she wanted to deal with a god of her own criteria and on her own terms. Of course, she wanted a god she could easily manipulate. She thought of God as a genie she could command and control.

Ask any ten people to depict God, and you will get at least ten different descriptions. For example, one would be a God of unqualified love and unlimited tolerance; another would be stern and unforgiving. In every case, it would be a god each one of us would create (to some extent) as a reflection of ourselves.

Can you imagine a world with a God who would try to please every individual? I say *try*, because it would be ridiculous (and wrong) for him to try to gratify my selfish whims and wishes – even if I lived in complete isolation from other human beings. If he did try to please every member of an interrelating society, it would lead to instant and total chaos. A God worthy of his name and position would never allow himself to get into such a situation.

Actually, the true God does know what it takes to truly satisfy each one of us, and he has the solution. It has to do more with our pleasing him – theocentricity – than with his pleasing us. God put us together in such a way that we are truly happy, satisfied and fulfilled only when we are endeavoring to please our Creator. In *“The Hound of Heaven,”* poet Francis Thompson (1859-1907) found that he was fleeing from the very one he was seeking. Sadly, even when we believe in God, all too often we think we know ourselves and what’s best for us, better than he does.

I did tell Sonia that, according to his own words, found in the Bible, God has an immutable identity. He also has his own sovereign, predetermined, long-term plan and purpose for humanity. Conditional belief (“I would believe in God if...”) is nothing more than mentally creating him to my own liking, in compliance with my personal specifications. That kind of god does exist but, fortunately, only in my imagination.

I think one of Ashleigh Brilliant’s *Pot-Shots* speaks for a lot of people: “The kind of God I’m most willing to believe in hasn’t yet been invented.”

*“You thought I [God] was altogether like you...”* (Psalm 50:21).

Sonia couldn’t get past her horrible next-door neighbor. Tragically, she allowed the bad behavior of one ordinary human being to determine whether or not she would acknowledge God and pursue a relationship with him. She wanted to squeeze God into her tiny handmade cardboard box when, in reality, the universe cannot contain him.

God’s existence does not depend on my belief or behavior. He either exists or he doesn’t exist (1) whether or not I believe in him, (2) no matter what I think of him and (3) regardless of how I act toward others or toward him. ◇◇◇