

TEACHING THE CONCEPT OF GOD

Using the imagination to develop thinking about God

(cf. Chapter 7 p.118)

IF GOD WERE.....

a classroom exercise used by Penny Thompson

This is an exercise which helps pupils to develop the concept of God and makes use of the imagination. It was reported in *RE Today*, vol 12 no 2, Spring 1995, pp30-31. It builds on an exercise first published in Hammond and Hay, *New Methods in RE Teaching*, Oliver and Boyd, 1990. It supports the work of Olivera Petrovich¹ which shows that pupils of a very young age can think about God in mature and abstract terms. The lessons begins by asking pupils a series of questions:

- If you were a colour, which colour would you be?
- If you were a car, which car would you be?
- If you were a country, TV programme, piece of furniture, animal, flower... (the list is endless and pupils will soon make their own suggestions).

Pupils can write down their answers, talk about them, find out who chose similar answers etc. But don't spend too much time on it. Then, using the same examples (colour, car, country etc) ask them these questions:

- If God were a colour, which colour would God be?
- If God were a car, which colour would God be?
- If God were a country, TV programme etc. ...

There are several ways of following this up. I used to get pupils to write down their answers to each question and give a reason. God would be a Mercedes because... Getting pupils to draw a picture to express the particular concept of God is also very useful and revealing. I found that in no case did pupils attempt to 'draw God'. One good example was that of a pupil with a reading age of 8 who wrote: 'If God was a piece of furniture he would be a wardrobe because he is open to everyone.' His picture showed a wardrobe with an open door revealing an idyllic scene by the seaside.

The following table is my drawing up of examples from work with Y7s. I did this in order to further develop the idea with the pupils and introduced them to theological language.

GOD THE CREATOR:

CDT because God makes things, God is practical

CURTAINS because God is the opening to life

EAGLE because God has power

¹ Olivera Petrovich is a cognitive psychologist who teaches at the University of Oxford. See Petrovich, O, 2002, 'Science points to God', in U. Siemon-Netto (ed), *One Incarnate Truth*, St.Louis: Concordia Publishing House. Dr. Petrovich, the author of many academic articles, may be contacted at olivera.petrovich@psy.ox.ac.uk

GOD THE SUSTAINER and GOD AS OMNIPRESENT

COUCH because we depend on Him

CHAIR because He supports people

TABLE because He is needed everywhere

ARMCHAIR because God surrounds us

GOD IS UNIQUE, DIFFERENT

X FILES because He is different

ROLLS ROYCE because He is rare

GOD IS MYSTERIOUS

X FILES because He is a mystery to us and people believe in Him though they cannot see him

JUPITER because God is not far off but you can't see Him

VODKA because He comes in other forms

GOD IS LOVING YET NOT SOFT

ROSE because God is beautiful but punishes people

TIGER because God can be loving and yet inflict danger

GOD FASCINATES

MATCH OF THE DAY because people can't wait to see God

THUNDER because people would like to see God yet are scared

GOD IS QUIET ABOUT HIS EXISTENCE

ENGLAND because God doesn't boast about Himself

WATER because God is natural

PIGEON because God leaves little reminders behind !