

Attributes of God

It is common for people who don't think much about God to say that all religions "worship the same God". It is true that only one God actually exists, but non-Christians define the characteristics of God very differently than Christians do. Recognizing the "Divine Attributes" of God is therefore important, not only for understanding the Catholic faith, but also for understanding exactly how false religions and philosophies differ from Christianity.

In many cases attributes of God can be described in simple, easy-to-understand terms as well as in theologically 'precise', but difficult words. For example, words such as "almighty", "pure spirit", "supreme", and "holy" are used in children's catechisms, while more precise words with similar meanings, such as "omnipotent", "incorporeal", "sovereign", and "impeccable" are used by theologians. In the following definitions, both common and specific words (in red) that reflect Attributes of God are identified in bold.

God is **Omnipotent**, **All-powerful** and **Almighty**.

God is **Omnipresent**, or **Present everywhere**.

God is **Omniscient**, or **All-knowing**. He is aware of and understands all things.

God is **Pure Spirit**. He created the physical universe, but exists outside of his creation. A theological word that describes God as pure spirit, independent of matter is **Incorporeal**.

God is **Self-sufficient**. He is independent, and **Self-existent**. God does not need or depend on his creation. The property of being self-existent can also be called **Asenity**.

God's will is **Supreme** or **Sovereign**, meaning he is in complete control and his activities are not subject to any limits imposed by any other force or being.

God is the absolute standard of **Good**, and all that he does is worthy and righteous.

God is **Gracious**, **merciful**, **kind** **compassionate**.

God is Holy and Sacred. He is separated from sin and incorruptible. More theologically precise words that describe God's holiness and perfection:

Impeccable (without sin)

Indefectible (without defect).

Immutable. His perfections are **Permanent** and do not change.

Immanent, meaning he is present at all times, pervading and sustaining the Universe.

Transcendent, meaning he exists outside the realm of space and time as human experience them.

The **Unity** of God describes his oneness, while the **Trinity** describes the three persons in one god. "We worship one God in Trinity, Trinity in Unity."

God is **Incomprehensible**. He cannot be fully known or fully understood by human faculties. Many aspects of God are called **Mysteries** because we cannot fully understand them.

God is **Eternal** or **Everlasting**. He exists outside the bounds of time, as humans perceive it.

God is **Immense**. He exists outside the bounds of space, as humans perceive it.

God is **Infinite** and **Perfect**. These describe most attributes of God including his holiness, mercy, love, power, and knowledge.

God is **Righteous**. This usually refers to his holiness and infinite justice.

Providence refers to God's intervention in the world. **General Providence** describes his consistent upholding of the natural order. **Special Providence** refers to extraordinary and personal intervention, including **Miracles**.

The **Simplicity** of God refers to the fact that that whatever he is, he is so entirely. He is not "partly just" and "partly merciful", but rather perfectly, wholly just can wholly merciful.

God's Attributes can be divided into those relating to his:

1. **Divine Nature**—Unchangeable, Eternal, Immense, All-present (Omnipresent)
2. **Divine Intelligence**—All-knowing (Omniscient), All-wise
3. **Divine Will**—All-mighty (Omnipotent), Holy, Just, Merciful, Truthful, Faithful

On God and His Perfections

Q. 162. What is a perfection?

A. A perfection is any good quality a thing should have. A thing is perfect when it has all the good qualities it should have.

Q. 163. What is God?

A. God is a spirit infinitely perfect.

Q. 164. What do we mean when we say God is "infinitely perfect"?

A. When we say God is "infinitely perfect" we mean there is no limit or bounds to His perfection; for He possesses all good qualities in the highest possible degree and He alone is "infinitely perfect."

Q. 165. Had God a beginning?

A. God had no beginning; He always was and He always will be.

Q. 166. Where is God?

A. God is everywhere.

Q. 167. How is God everywhere?

A. God is everywhere whole and entire as He is in any one place. This is true and we must believe it, though we cannot understand it.

Q. 168. If God is everywhere, why don't we see Him?

A. We do not see God, because He is a pure spirit and cannot be seen with bodily eyes.

Q. 169. Why do we call God a "pure spirit"?

A. We call God a pure spirit because He has no body. Our soul is a spirit, but not a "pure" spirit, because it was created for union with our body.

Q. 170. Why can we not see God with the eyes of our body?

A. We cannot see God with the eyes of our body because they are created to see only material things, and God is not material but spiritual.

Q. 171. Does God see us?

A. God sees us and watches over us.

Q. 172. Is it necessary for God to watch over us?

A. It is necessary for God to watch over us, for without His constant care we could not exist.

Q. 173. Does God know all things?

A. God knows all things, even our most secret thoughts, words, and actions.

Q. 174. Can God do all things?

A. God can do all things, and nothing is hard or impossible to Him.

Q. 175. When is a thing said to be "impossible"?

A. A thing is said to be "impossible" when it cannot be done. Many things that are impossible for creatures are possible for God.

Q. 176. Is God just, holy, and merciful?

A. God is all just, all holy, all merciful, as He is infinitely perfect.

Q. 177. Why must God be "just" as well as "merciful"?

A. God must be just as well as merciful because He must fulfill His promise to punish those who merit punishment, and because He cannot be infinite in one perfection without being infinite in all.

Q. 178. Into what sins will the forgetfulness of God's justice lead us?

A. The forgetfulness of God's justice will lead us into sins of presumption.

Q. 179. Into what sins will the forgetfulness of God's mercy lead us?

A. The forgetfulness of God's mercy will lead us into sins of despair.

On Unity and Trinity of God

Q. 180. What does "unity," and what does "trinity" mean?

A. "Unity" means being one, and "trinity" means three-fold or three in one.

Q. 181. Can we find an example to fully illustrate the mystery of the Blessed Trinity?

A. We cannot find an example to fully illustrate the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, because the mysteries of our holy religion are beyond comparison.

Q. 182. Is there but one God?

A. Yes; there is but one God.

Q. 183. Why can there be but one God?

A. There can be but one God because God, being supreme and infinite, cannot have an equal.

Q. 184. What does "supreme" mean?

A. "Supreme" means the highest in authority; also the most excellent or greatest possible in anything. Thus in all things God is supreme, and in the Church the Pope is supreme.

Q. 185. When are two persons said to be equal?

A. Two persons are said to be equal when one is in no way greater than or inferior to the other.

Q. 186. How many persons are there in God?

A. In God there are three Divine persons, really distinct, and equal in all things—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Q. 187. What do "divine" and "distinct" mean?

A. "Divine" means pertaining to God, and "distinct" means separate; that is, not confounded or mixed with any other thing.

Q. 188. Is the Father God?

A. The Father is God and the first Person of the Blessed Trinity.

Q. 189. Is the Son God?

A. The Son is God and the second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

Q. 190. Is the Holy Ghost God?

A. The Holy Ghost is God and the third Person of the Blessed Trinity.

Q. 191. Do "first," "second," and "third" with regard to the persons of the Blessed Trinity mean that one person existed before the other or that one is greater than the other?

A. "First," "second," and "third" with regard to the persons of the Blessed Trinity do not mean that one person was before the other or that one is greater than the other; for all the persons of the Trinity are eternal and equal in every respect. These numbers are used to mark the distinction between the persons, and they show the order in which the one proceeded from the other.

Q. 192. What do you mean by the Blessed Trinity?

A. By the Blessed Trinity I mean one God in three Divine Persons.

Q. 193. Are the three Divine Persons equal in all things?

A. The three Divine Persons are equal in all things.

Q. 194. Are the three Divine Persons one and the same God?

A. The three Divine Persons are one and the same God, having one and the same Divine nature and substance.

Q. 195. What do we mean by the "nature" and "substance" of a thing?

A. By the "nature" of a thing we mean the combination of all the qualities that make the thing what it is. By the "substance" of a thing we mean the part that never changes, and which cannot be changed without destroying the nature of the thing.

Q. 196. Can we fully understand how the three Divine Persons are one and the same God?

A. We cannot fully understand how the three Divine Persons are one and the same God, because this is a mystery.

Q. 197. What is a mystery?

A. A mystery is a truth which we cannot fully understand.

Q. 198. Is every truth which we cannot understand a mystery?

A. Every truth which we cannot understand is not a mystery; but every revealed truth which no one can understand is a mystery.

Q. 199. Should we believe truths which we cannot understand?

A. We should and often do believe truths which we cannot understand when we have proof of their existence.

Q. 200. Give an example of truths which all believe, though many do not understand them.

A. All believe that the earth is round and moving, though many do not understand it. All believe that a seed planted in the ground will produce a flower or tree often with more than a thousand other seeds equal to itself, though many cannot understand how this is done.

Q. 201. Why must religion have mysteries?

A. A divine religion must have mysteries because it must have supernatural truths and God Himself must teach them. A religion that has only natural truths, such as man can know by reason alone, fully understand and teach, is only a human religion.

Q. 202. Why does God require us to believe mysteries?

A. God requires us to believe mysteries that we may submit our understanding to Him.

Q. 203. By what form of prayer do we praise the Holy Trinity?

A. We praise the Holy Trinity by a form of prayer called the Doxology, which has come down to us almost from the time of the Apostles.

Q. 204. Say the Doxology.

A. The Doxology is: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. *Amen.*"

Q. 205. Is there any other form of the Doxology?

A. There is another form of the Doxology, which is said in the celebration of the Mass. It is called the "Gloria in excelsis" or "Glory be to God on high," the words sung by the Angels at the birth of Our Lord.