



Archbishop said during a discussion event with the Revd Dr Sam

Photograph: Marc Gascoigne

The Archbishop of Canterbury has spoken about his experience of God as a father “who loves me unconditionally”.

The Most Revd Justin Welby said that calling God “father” for him means that “here is one that is perfect, that loves me unconditionally, that reaches out to me and knows me better than I know myself and yet still loves me profoundly.”

But the Archbishop also said that God is not a father in the same way that a human would be – and that descriptions of God are always “to some degree metaphorical”.

Speaking at St Martin-in-the-Fields in London on Monday evening, Archbishop Justin said: “It is extraordinarily important as Christians that we remember that the definitive revelation of who God is was not in words, but in the word of God who we call Jesus Christ. We can’t pin God down.”

He added: “God is not a father in exactly the same way as a human being is a father. God is not male or female. God is not definable,” he said.

The Archbishop was answering a question from the audience about what it means for him to call God his father, given his own complex personal experience of fathers, and being a father himself.

He said: “So, what does it mean for me to call God father, having had a rather confusing experience of fathers? It means that here is one that is perfect, that loves me unconditionally, that reaches out to me and knows me better than I know myself and yet still loves me profoundly. That loves me enough to make redemption and blessing possible and open. That offers me a way through life that can be very complicated and painful, and can be overwhelming and wonderful, but is always father... is always the one who in love embraces, draws, heals, blesses and will eventually call me to be present to God.”

The Archbishop was taking part in an event called “Encountering God”, where he was in conversation with the Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, the theologian Revd Dr Sam Wells.

His comments on God being neither male nor female in a human sense reflect ancient traditions and teachings of the Church. The Church of England’s Articles of Religion, which were agreed upon in 1562, state that God is “without body, parts, or passions”. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, meanwhile, states: “He is neither man nor woman: he is God.”

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