

## Catholic Identity: Celebrate the Difference

### Session 2 Participant Handout: A Catholic Understanding of God

Text: *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (USCCA)* – online version is posted at:

<https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/uscca/files/assets/basic-html/page-1.html#>

**PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENT:** please have a copy of this handout for Session 2.

- Read: *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, Chapter 5 & 7. Answer the following questions.
- Chapter 5/p. 61: Knowing that God is rich in mercy and that he is love, how does this affect your attitude toward Him and toward your neighbor? How did God progressively reveal his mystery as a unity of persons? How would you teach this doctrine about God to others?
- Chapter 7/p. 85: Why is it important to appreciate the truth that the person, words and deeds of Jesus as seen in the Gospel accounts are mysteries revealing to us the hidden plan of God for our salvation? What might happen when this is forgotten?

### Chapter I: Review and Discussion of Pre-Reading Material

#### Chapter II: Some Basic Definitions

- Theism: Belief in God
- Polytheism: Belief in many gods; the gods needed people to sustain them
  - Monotheism: There is one God; introduced to the world by God through the Jewish people.
- Agnosticism: I cannot be sure if there is a God so I remain in this place of doubt.
- Atheism: I do not believe in God.
  - “Historic” Atheism was not an all-out denial of God but a denial of the Judeo-Christian (commonly called “orthodox”) understanding of God in favor of something else.
  - The New Atheism: all-out denial of God’s existence.
    - + Began in the 1920’s with Existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre who admitted that the human person has a desire for God – but since God does not exist – Life is absurd! (not a very inspiring message)
    - + For more “modern” atheists, God interferes with our having fun and with our doing what we want. They believe that the things of this world – money, fame, sex, power – are what satisfy us. These folks are ignoring the reality of the human person’s deepest desires and longings, which are really a desire for God.
    - + Faith in God does not limit us in any way – in fact, it sets us free!
- *Reflection: Give a practical example of the effects of the New atheism, that is, God doesn’t exist, on your students as they search for personal happiness in this life.*

#### Chapter III: Do we all believe in the same God?

- The “Secular God” –or “Feel Good God”/ “Santa Claus God”/“Aspirin God”
- “Go to” Source only when I need or want; always nice and affirming;
- The “God of Islam” reveals what He wants (Muslim means “one who submits to God”)
  - Submission -- God never reveals who He is and is other; no relationship or understanding of God.
- The “God of Judaism” (perhaps closest to Catholic understanding yet incomplete understanding of God)
  - God reveals himself as intimate and relational via creation, prophets; however, Christ’s revelation of the Trinity, the God of infinite mercy and grace, etc. makes incomplete understanding of God.
- The “God of Mainline Protestants” (share faith in Jesus Christ, particularly the authority of Word of God)
  - Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Baptist, United Church of Christ—acceptance of moral relativism (trending social and cultural topics) creates God in their image and likeness.
- The “God of Evangelical Christians”
  - Fundamentalists, Pentecostals, Non-Denominational Churches
  - In common with Catholics: social teachings re: sexuality and respect for human life.

- Radical difference in the way we understand God’s desire to relate with his people. For the Evangelical, God relates with the individual alone – it is all about God and me (my “personal relationship with Christ”) ignoring God works in relationship through the community of the Church.
- *Reflection: What is one insight that you gained regarding these different monotheistic religions?*

#### Chapter IV: Catholic Belief about God.

- **BELIEF #1:** We believe in a Rational God with a Loving Plan for all of Humanity.
  - God is Intelligent & God is Free; pure goodness who desires to enlarge the Trinity through creation –human person who shares in his goodness.
  - Faith Seeks Understanding –reasons why we believe! *I believe that I may understand!* (St. Augustine)
- **BELIEF #2:** We believe in a God who desires a Relationship with Humanity.
  - God initiated the relationship; comes to us first! With a plan for the salvation of the human person
  - God is full of mercy and forgiveness; but demanding! Expectations for the Christian.
- **BELIEF #3:** We believe in a God of Providence
  - How can a good God allow evil to exist in the world? Why do bad things happen to good people? Evil – that which causes suffering – does not originate with God. Evil happens sometimes because of the choice of other people **or** because we live in a world that is finite and imperfect so there will be imperfect things like sickness and death.
  - God’s “Permissive Will” – God never wants people to be hurt or suffer, but he allows it because he can’t take away our freedom **and** in His Providence is able to bring good from it.
- *Reflection: From Father’s presentation on the God of Providence, how would you be able to explain to your students why “bad things happen to good people?”*

#### Chapter V

- **BELIEF #4:** Our Faith in God is **NOT** Incompatible with Science.
  - There is ONE Truth: there are many ways for us to come to an understanding of this truth (scripture, prayer, Church Teaching, Biology, Chemistry, Astronomy). Truth is Truth.
  - Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (during the Galileo Controversy): *It is the mission of theology to teach us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go! If there seems to be a conflict between science and the Bible, then we have misunderstood the Bible.*
- **BELIEF # 5:** We believe in a God who is a Trinity of Persons who lives in the present moment!
  - One God, Three Persons: A Community of Love; God is a person. God has the ability to recognize, the ability to love; someone who can speak and someone who can listen. **God is a personal God.**
  - The Holy Spirit of God: sent to make Jesus present
  - The Son, Jesus Christ: reveals the Father (CS Lewis – Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic or the Lord)
  - Father: Our union with the Father, the relationship with our Father God is the goal – a relationship with him in this life that will lead to an eternal relationship in the next life!
- **BELIEF # 6:** We believe that God’s desire goes beyond the individual: God desires a family, the Church.
  - The human person desires community; how do we get that community?
  - If humanity initiates the plan, it is a disaster that leads to further confusion and division.
  - If God initiates a union with the human family – success!
- *Reflection: Father states: God is not incompatible with science. What are some scientific topics that students might debate as incompatible with faith? Explain.*

#### Chapter VI: Closing Questions, Comments and Prayer

- There are many different understandings of God in the world; we seek to stand with other people of faith.
- As Catholics we are a people of HOPE – what we desire can be ours (a relationship with God, happiness in this life, perfect happiness in heaven).
- Our learning about God, as we have done in this session, demands a response. God always wants a response. God says – “This is who I am, what do you think?”... we respond with the Creed as we pray together...

**Reminder: Complete the Pre-Reading assignment and reflections for Session 3 which is found on the Session 3 handout and website at [Catholic Identity: Celebrate the Difference – phillyocf.org](http://CatholicIdentity:Celebrate the Difference – phillyocf.org)**