

The background features a vertical gradient from light purple at the top to light blue at the bottom. Scattered throughout are several realistic water droplets of various sizes, some with highlights and shadows, giving them a three-dimensional appearance.

# **LESSON 1**

## **ATHEISM AND WHAT WE MEAN BY “GOD”**

# 9/11 BEFORE & AFTER

- BEFORE

- ATHEISTS CONSIDERED RELIGION TO BE HARMLESS FICTION
- EXCEPT FOR A FEW VIOLENT EXTREMIST

- AFTER

- RELIGION IS DANGEROUS
- MOTIVATE GOOD PEOPLE TO DO BAD THINGS
- “BLIND FAITH”
- SAM HARRIS AND RICHARD DAWKINS WROTE BEST SELLING DIATRIBES AGAINST RELIGION
- DAWKINS BOOK “THE GOD DELUSION” IMAGINES A WORLD WITH NO RELIGION WOULD BE A WORLD WITH NO SUICIDE BOMBERS OR 9/11

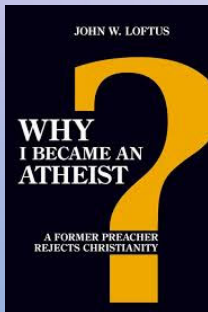


## Proverbs 18:17

He who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.

## Lesson Goals

- Better understand the arguments of Atheist
- Better understand our loving triune God
- To Share God with others in this skeptical world



# ATHEISM

- WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
  - GREEK WORD FOR GOD --- "THEOS"
  - GREEK WORD FOR WITHOUT --- "A"
  - "WITHOUT GOD" – WITHOUT THE BELIEF OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

## Atheism

Believing in one less god than you.

Seriously - that's all there is to it.

- TWO KINDS
  - STRONG ATHEISTS
  - WEAK ATHEISTS

### Weak Atheist

- Skeptical of claims made by strong atheist
- Might agree with Ps 14:1 – "The fool says in his heart, there is no God"
- Might say they cannot prove God does not exist, but they say ....
  - "I lack a belief in God"
  - "I am without God in my life"
- People who believe in God have to prove He exists

- Strong Atheist – Make a strong claim "God does not exist" or "There is no God"
- CCC 2125 states that atheism "rejects or denies the existence of God"

## AGNOSTICS

- DOES GOD EXIST?
  - "I DON'T KNOW"
- EVIDENCE IS INCONCLUSIVE
- PRACTICAL ATHEIST
  - INDIFFERENT
  - LACK MORAL CONSCIENCE
  - LACK BELIEF IN GOD BECAUSE THERE SEEMS TO BE NO GOOD REASON

# WHAT DOES “GOD” MEAN

**ST. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY – “THAT THAN WHICH NO GREATER CAN BE THOUGHT”**

**IPSUM ESSE – “THE SHEER ACT OF BEING ITSELF”** EXISTENCE ITSELF.  
APPLIED TO GOD AS SUBSISTENT BEING, OR THE BEING WHOSE ESSENCE IS EXISTENCE, I.E., WHO ESSENTIALLY EXISTS, OR WHO CANNOT NOT EXIST, UNLIKE CREATURES WHO CAN NOT EXIST.

**BEING WHOSE ESSENCE IS EXISTENCE**

**SAINT JOHN PAUL II -  
“THE GREAT EXISTENT”**

“CLOSER TO ME THAN I AM TO MYSELF AND HIGHER THAN ANYTHING I CAN POSSIBLY IMAGINE. (ST. AUGUSTINE) – MEANS THE ESSENCE OF OUR SOUL IS FROM GOD...OUR DIRECTION IS FROM GOD...GOD KNOWS US BETTER THAN WE KNOW OURSELVES. IF GOD IS BEING THEN THIS MAKES SENSE

## **CCC 40-41**

- Knowledge of God is Limited
- Language to Describe God is Limited
- Starting Point of All Creatures is God
- All Creatures Bear Resemblance to God and Reflect His Infinite Perfection

**WHAT THEY ARE**

**VS**

**THAT WHICH IS**

**GOD IS**

# GOD IS STRANGE (MYSTERY)

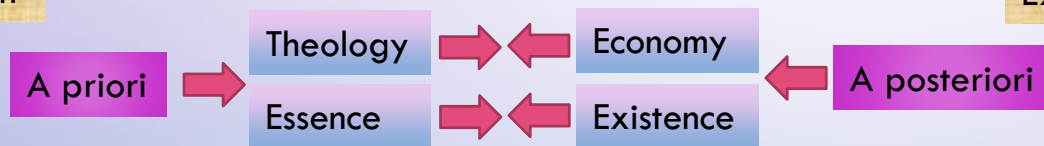
## CCC 236

- THEOLOGY (THEOLOGIA) – MYSTERY OF GOD'S MOST INMOST LIFE WITHIN THE BLESSED TRINITY
- ECONOMY (OIKONOMIA) – THE WORKS BY WHICH GOD REVEALS HIMSELF AND COMMUNICATES HIS LIFE

**Old Testament – Exodus 3**  
Burning Bush – When God Comes Close  
Luminous...Beautiful...Radiant  
Not Consuming...Not Competing

Reason

Experience



## CCC 237

- The Trinity is a mystery of faith in the strict sense, one of the "mysteries that are hidden in God, which can never be known unless they are revealed by God".<sup>58</sup> To be sure, God has left traces of his Trinitarian being in his work of creation and in his Revelation throughout the Old Testament. But his inmost Being as Holy Trinity is a mystery that is inaccessible to reason alone or even to Israel's faith before the Incarnation of God's Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

## New Testament

Incarnation  
Glory of God Revealed!  
Human Being Fully Alive

I BELIEVE IN ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST,  
THE ONLY **BEGOTTEN** SON OF GOD,  
BORN OF THE FATHER **BEFORE ALL AGES**.  
GOD FROM GOD, LIGHT FROM LIGHT,  
TRUE GOD FROM TRUE GOD,  
**BEGOTTEN**, NOT MADE, **CONSUBSTANTIAL** WITH THE FATHER

- BEGOTTEN COMES FROM GREEK WORD **MONOGENES** MEANING “PERTAINING TO BEING THE ONLY ONE OF ITS KIND OR CLASS, UNIQUE IN KIND”.
- ESSENTIALLY, GOD IS THE CAUSE OF HIS OWN EXISTENCE IN THE SECOND PERSON OF THE TRINITY
- CONSUBSTANTIAL MEANS “SAME SUBSTANCE” –WHICH MEANS SAME DIVINITY AND SAME ETERNITY



# TOP 10 REASONS WHY ATHEISTS CHANGE THEIR MIND

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- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 – **ACCIDENTLY SHOWED UP AT THIS BIBLE STUDY**



# TOP 10 REASONS WHY ATHEISTS CHANGE THEIR MIND

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- 9 – **BEAUTY**
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The great theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, wrote:

“Beauty is the word that shall be our first. Beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect dares to approach, since only it dances as an uncontained splendor around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another.”

# TOP 10 REASONS WHY ATHEISTS CHANGE THEIR MIND

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- 8 – **EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION**
- 9 – BEAUTY
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The case for the resurrection of Jesus had a significant impact on the former atheist, now Christian apologist, Alister McGrath.

“My early concern was to get straight what Christians believed, and why they believed it. How does the Resurrection fit into the web of Christian beliefs? How does it fit into the overall scheme of the Christian faith? After several years of wrestling with these issues, I came down firmly on the side of Christian orthodoxy. I became, and remain, a dedicated and convinced defender of traditional Christian theology. Having persuaded myself of its merits, I was more than happy to try to persuade others as well.”

# TOP 10 REASONS WHY ATHEISTS CHANGE THEIR MIND

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 – **MODERN ADVANCES AND LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE**
- 8 – EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION
- 9 – BEAUTY
- 10 – ACCIDENTLY SHOWED UP AT THIS BIBLE STUDY

Dr. Ben Wiker, Flew explains:

“There were two factors in particular that were decisive. One was my growing empathy with the insight of Einstein and other noted scientists that there had to be an Intelligence behind the integrated complexity of the physical Universe.”

# TOP 10 REASONS WHY ATHEISTS CHANGE THEIR MIND

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- 6 – **REASONABLE BELIEVERS**
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Leah Libresco— former blogger turned Catholic recalls the challenging impact of reasonable Christians in her academic circle:  
“I was in a philosophical debating group, so the strongest pitch I saw was probably the way my Catholic friends rooted their moral, philosophical, or aesthetic arguments in their theology. We covered a huge spread of topics so I got to see a lot of long and winding paths into the consequences of belief.”

# TOP 10 REASONS WHY ATHEISTS CHANGE THEIR MIND

- 1
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- 5 – **HONEST PHILOSOPHICAL REASONING**
- 6 – REASONABLE BELIEVERS
- 7 – MODERN ADVANCES AND LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE
- 8 – EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION
- 9 – BEAUTY
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Philosopher Dr. Ed Feser recounts the shocking effect of opening himself to the arguments for the existence of God:

“As I taught and thought about the arguments for God’s existence, and in particular the cosmological argument, I went from thinking “These arguments are no good” to thinking “These arguments are a little better than they are given credit for” and then to “These arguments are actually kind of interesting.” Eventually it hit me: “Oh my goodness, these arguments are *right* after all!”

# TOP 10 REASONS WHY ATHEISTS CHANGE THEIR MIND

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 – **HISTORICAL STUDY OF SCRIPTURES**
- 5 – HONEST PHILOSOPHICAL REASONING
- 6 – REASONABLE BELIEVERS
- 7 – MODERN ADVANCES AND LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE
- 8 – EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION
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Philip Vander Elst writes:

“The more I thought about all these points, the more convinced I became that the internal evidence for the reliability of the Gospels and the New Testament as a whole was overwhelming.”

# TOP 10 REASONS WHY ATHEISTS CHANGE THEIR MIND

- 1
- 2
- 3 – **EXPERIMENTATION WITH PRAYER AND THE WORD OF GOD**
- 4 – HISTORICAL STUDY OF SCRIPTURES
- 5 – HONEST PHILOSOPHICAL REASONING
- 6 – REASONABLE BELIEVERS
- 7 – MODERN ADVANCES AND LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE
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Wright soon received the answer (and effect) he did not expect:

“Something from beyond the reach of time and space, more fundamental than reality, reached across the universe and broke into my soul and changed me...I was altered down to the root of my being...It was like falling in love.”

Wright was welcomed into the Catholic Church at Easter in 2008.

Renowned sci-fi author John C. Wright recalls a prayer he said as an adamant atheist:

“I prayed. ‘Dear God, I know... that you do not exist. Nonetheless, as a scholar, I am forced to entertain the hypothetical possibility that I am mistaken. So just in case I am mistaken, please reveal yourself to me in some fashion that will prove your case. If you do not answer, I can safely assume that either you do not care whether I believe in you, or that you have no power to produce evidence to persuade me...If you do not exist, this prayer is merely words in the air, and I lose nothing but a bit of my dignity. Thanking you in advance for your kind cooperation in this matter, John Wright.’”

# TOP 10 REASONS WHY ATHEISTS CHANGE THEIR MIND

- 1
- 2 – **GOOD LITERATURE AND REASONABLE WRITING**
- 3 – EXPERIMENTATION WITH PRAYER AND THE WORD OF GOD
- 4 – HISTORICAL STUDY OF SCRIPTURES
- 5 – HONEST PHILOSOPHICAL REASONING
- 6 – REASONABLE BELIEVERS
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*C.S. Lewis writes in his autobiography:*

*“In reading Chesterton, as in reading MacDonald, I did not know what I was letting myself in for... A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading.”*



# TOP 10 REASONS WHY ATHEISTS CHANGE THEIR MIND

- 1 – **DEBATED THE EXISTENCE OF GOD WITH DEACON MARK**
- 2 – GOOD LITERATURE AND REASONABLE WRITING
- 3 – EXPERIMENTATION WITH PRAYER AND THE WORD OF GOD
- 4 – HISTORICAL STUDY OF SCRIPTURES
- 5 – HONEST PHILOSOPHICAL REASONING
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**QUESTIONS?**