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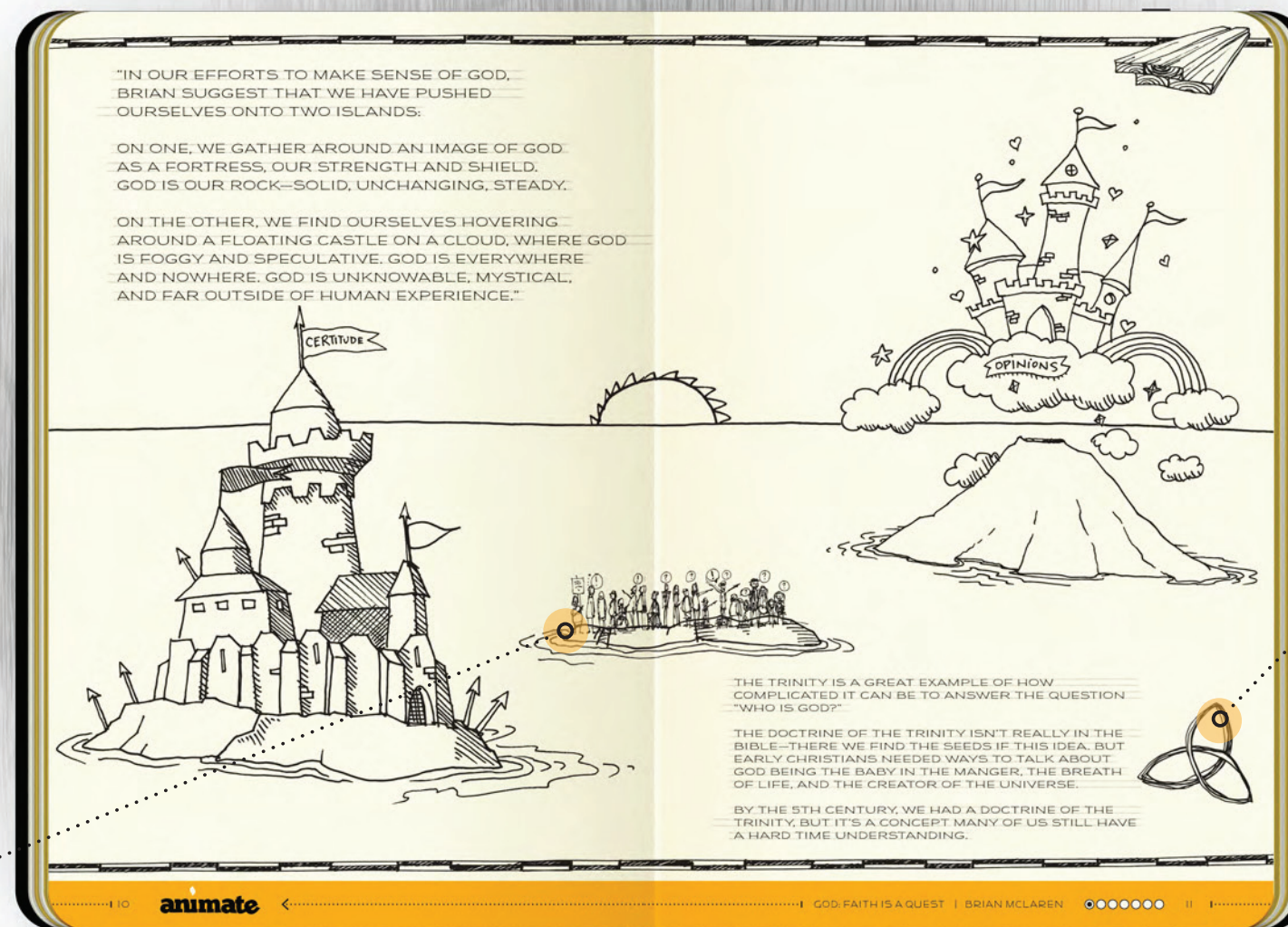
“IF FORTRESS PEOPLE REDUCE GOD TO CONCRETE FACTS, CLOUD PEOPLE REDUCE GOD TO FOGGY OPINIONS. IF FORTRESS PEOPLE TURN FAITH INTO A VICIOUS FIGHT ABOUT WHO’S MORE RIGHT, CLOUD PEOPLE REDUCE FAITH TO A KIND OF INCONSEQUENTIAL LEISURE ACTIVITY, LIKE DOING CROSSWORD PUZZLES OR COLLECTING REFRIGERATOR MAGNETS OR BEING WINE CONNOISSEURS.”

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IT WILL ALWAYS HELP YOU TO WATCH

the video once or twice in advance to develop your own thoughts and questions. As you listen to Brian, consider your group’s theological range. Will any feel like the villains in Brian’s presentation? Position Brian (as well as the other animate theologians throughout this course) as a helpful contributor to your conversation but not as the last word.



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“THE IDEA OF THE TRINITY, SO CENTRAL TO TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDINGS OF GOD, TAKES A GREAT DEAL OF IMAGINATION. THROUGH HISTORY, PEOPLE HAVE USED IMAGES LIKE THREE DANCERS MOVING IN A CIRCLE, OR THREE LEAVES OF A CLOVER, OR THREE STATES OF WATER TO TRY TO CONVEY THAT ONE GOD CAN EXIST IN THREE PERSONS OR THAT THREE PERSONS CAN CONSTITUTE ONE GOD.”

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In the video Brian uses the doctrine of the Trinity as an example of how complicated it can be to answer the question, “Who is God?” Invite group members to write the three persons of the Trinity at the points of the symbol in their Journals.

- How does this symbol represent how the Trinity is interconnected?
- How have you pictured the Trinity?
- What does the Trinity tell you about the nature of God?
- Can either castle claim that doctrine as its own? Why or why not?
- How would you describe to someone unfamiliar with the Trinity how God is three AND one?

Brian says that he feels like an atheist when he hears how some Christians describe God. (See the quote on the previous spread.) Bring in the atheist experience by engaging the ideas of people who do not believe in a god of any kind.

- What arguments have you heard against the existence of God?
- How do you react to those arguments?
- How do you process these ideas within your own beliefs about God?
- What argument would you make for the existence of God?

Watch the video together.

- What inspired you in the video? What challenged you? What concerned you?
- When have you been able to relate to Brian’s frustration: that the God he hears about from some Christians is NOT a God he believes in?
- Do you feel more like a Fortress of Certainty person or a Castle of Opinions person? Describe.

Brian helps us map our theological territory by providing two extremes—absolute certainty and total relativism. In their Journals, have group members mark where their beliefs lie between the islands. Perhaps they’re solidly on one side or another. Perhaps they’ve gone back and forth throughout their lives. Perhaps they’re stuck on the island in the middle or even sailing off into the horizon.

- What are the benefits of having beliefs about God that are absolutely certain? What are the drawbacks?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of having beliefs that are entirely relative and theoretical?
- Where did you mark yourself on this spread? Why?

NEO-ATHEIST WRITERS LIKE SAM HARRIS, RICHARD DAWKINS, AND CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS HAVE ATTACKED BELIEF IN GOD ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT IS NOT COMPATIBLE WITH SCIENCE AND A MODERN WORLD-VIEW; AND THAT RELIGIOUS PEOPLE MAKE THE WORLD WORSE.

Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2004); Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 2006); Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette, 2007).