

Handout A

A Word from a Saint

“You ask, . . . ’aren’t there people who don’t know God?’ – These people do not know the true God, but they do know that He exists – everyone confesses this. Believing that there is a God, and wishing to define more precisely that He exists, they have gone astray and called God that which is not God: some call the sun God, others the moon or stars, other say something else. Not everyone, however, has strayed so grossly

“Of the Eastern peoples the Persians and Indians, both Asian and American, have the most elevated concept of God (The Greeks and Romans belittled God, so to speak.) The American Indians, for example, call God the Universal Spirit – invisible, all-embracing. This is a very lofty notion, and in and of itself, it cannot be carried further than this.”

From a letter of St. Theophan the Recluse

- 1 In the first paragraph St. Theophan says that pagan religions arose as people used their imaginations to describe God (“wishing to define more precisely that He exists”). Why could they not but make mistakes in this attempt?

- 2 In the second paragraph St. Theophan sees the American Indians as having the loftiest natural religion. What does he mean by saying that “in and of itself it cannot be carried further than this”?