

## October 4, 2017 Study Guide

---



### *The Coptic Christian Martyrs*

### **God, Good and Evil. What does it mean?**

Christianity is one of the most dangerous religions in the world. Christians are persecuted in the middle east, China, North Korea and, even, Mexico. Why did these Egyptian Coptic Christians refuse to deny Christ and were beheaded by Islamic terrorists? All of this for a God who does not need us?

### **Creation from nothing suggests a God that doesn't need us**

St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Leon, Gaul was a Christian apologist in the Second Century *Anno Domini*. The master idea in St. Irenaeus is that God does not need us. Classical mythology was in vogue in Irenaeus time. The gods needed our praise and sacrifices and, in turn, the Greek gods manipulated and used human beings. What Irenaeus saw, was that the biblical God who made everything from nothing did not need anything from us. The God of the Israelites was complete in himself. His act of Creation was an act of love choosing the existence of the beloved. Love is an act of the will for the good of another as other. The Love of God is not a *quid pro quo*: that is, *you scratch my back and I scratch yours*. St. Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." We aren't in competition with God; we are the glory of God.

### **The God of Love and the Problem of Evil**

Why is there so much disorder in the universe? A serious argument against the

existence or goodness of God is the problem of evil. God is infinitely good and so why is there evil. John Stuart Mill argued that if there is evil God can't be all knowing, all loving and all powerful. We have to give up on his goodness, omniscience or his omnipotence. How do we answer?

- St. Thomas Aquinas, OP, thought that God is like an artist and all of space and time is his canvas. He is working with all of creation and is making something beautiful. In all art there is a play of dark and light. God doesn't cause or will evil, he permits it. Evil is a privation of being.
- Dante says all of creation is like a great book. In the course of this life, we don't see it all.
- Job suffers in a way that no one suffers. He is righteous and complains, "Why do the just suffer?" God answers him with an elaborate tour of the cosmos. God asks Job, where were you when "I laid the pillars of the earth?" (Job 38:4). The Book of Job is not so much an explanation of why evil exists, but a recognition of what can only be a mystery.

### **God and Evolution: Points to Ponder**

- Is evolution and our world possible without a universe freely organizing itself?
- Can evolution occur without one generation dying to make room for the next?
- If we couldn't feel pain, how would we know we had an infection? Is all suffering evil?
- What limits evil besides death and our choice not to succumb to being mastered by evil?
- How does human freedom, evil and God relate, if at all?

### **The Problem of Evil and Scripture**

#### **Scripture**

#### **The Temptation of Jesus in the Desert Matthew 4:1-11**

#### **The First Temptation:**

- The Devil tempts Jesus, who is hungry, "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread."
- As Jesus hung in excruciating pain on his cross, the bystanders said, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross" (Mt 27: 40).
- Christ was being challenged to establish his credibility by offering evidence for his claims.? This demand for proof is a constantly recurring theme in the story of Jesus' life. We make this same demand of God and Christ and his Church throughout the whole of history.
  - Jesus if you are God, why don't you make the world a better place

## The Second Temptation

- In the second temptation, “the devil cites Holy Scripture in order to lure Jesus into his trap. He quotes Psalm 91:11f., which speaks of the protection God grants to the man who believes: “For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” The point at issue is revealed in Jesus’ answer, “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test” (Deut 6: 16).
  - Can God be tried and tested like a chemical experiment or submit himself to one of our law courts?
  - What is proof? Could it be a mathematical formula or an experimental demonstration?

## The Third Temptation

- The devil takes the Lord in a vision onto a high mountain and offers him political power.
  - If you had all the political power that the world can offer, what would change?
  - Should that be the mission of the Messiah, to conquer evil and bring peace to the troubled nations of the world?
  - The only real power, ultimately, is life and death. How does being emperor compare?
  - ISIS, radical Islam and some American Christians believe that there is a political form to belief in God. Can you bring heaven to earth?

### **A point to ponder from Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman Salvation requires us to put it all on the line just like Christ**

Pope Benedict XVI wrote: “... that while God could create the whole world out of nothing with just one word, he could overcome men’s guilt and suffering only by bringing himself into play, by becoming in his Son a sufferer who carried this burden and overcame it through his self-surrender. The overcoming of guilt has a price: We must put our heart— or, better, our whole existence— on the line. And even this act is insufficient; it can become effective only through communion with the One who bore the burdens of us all. Ratzinger, Joseph. Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration (p. 160). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

### **Memorial of Saint Francis of Assisi, deacon Memorial Feast: October 4**