

God, Christ, and the Church

An Advent journey
to the Catholic Faith

PART 1

Does a
supreme being
exist?



Name that atheist:

“ Look at the universe we live in. By far the greatest part of it consists of empty space, completely dark and unimaginably cold. The planets which move in this space are so few and so small in comparison with the space itself that even if every one of them were known to be crowded as full as it could hold with perfectly happy creatures, it would still be difficult to believe that life and happiness were more than a byproduct of the power that made the far larger universe.

Earth likely existed without life for millions of years and may exist for millions more when all life has ended. And what is our life like while it lasts? It is so arranged that all the forms of life can live only by preying upon one another. For lower lifeforms this process entails only death, but in the higher there appears a new quality called consciousness which enables it to experience pain. Life's creatures cause pain by being born, they live by inflicting pain, and in pain they mostly die. In the most complex of all the creatures, Man, yet another quality appears, which we call reason, whereby he is enabled to foresee his own pain which is preceded with acute mental suffering, and to foresee his own death while keenly desiring to not die.

It also enables men by hundreds of ingenious methods to inflict a great deal more pain than they otherwise could have done on one another. This power they have exploited to the full. Their history is largely a record of crime, war, disease, and terror, with just sufficient happiness mixed in to give them, while it lasts, an agonized apprehension of losing it, and, when it is lost, the poignant misery of remembering it. Every now and then they improve their condition a little and what we call a civilization appears. But all civilizations pass away and, even while they remain, inflict particular sufferings of their own probably sufficient to outweigh what alleviations they may have brought to the normal pains of man.

But even that matters little because ultimately every race that comes into being in any part of the universe is doomed; for the universe, according to our science, is running down, and because of entropy will someday become an infinite expanse of homogeneous matter at a low temperature.

If you ask me to believe that this is the work of a benevolent and omnipotent spirit, I reply that all the evidence points in the opposite direction. Either there is no spirit behind the universe, or else a spirit indifferent to good and evil, or else an evil spirit.

Answer: C.S. Lewis

After his conversion to Christianity,
he asked of himself:

If such a pessimistic case were true and
the universe were even half as bad as that,
how on earth did human beings throughout
history come to attribute it all to
a wise and good Creator?



How can a human being naturally find God?

A natural sense or awareness of “the spiritual”

If there were a lion in the next room, you'd feel afraid. But if I said there were a ghost in that room, you'd feel a dread. If I said there were a mighty spirit, you'd feel awe. That effect is universal. Every culture believes something about the spiritual. Even atheists understand the concept. But we've never experienced it. Something in human nature invariably interprets the universe this way. We understand it like we understand the concept of beauty.

Either this is a defect of the human brain, or else it's some kind of legitimate experience of something.

How can a human being naturally find God?

A natural sense or awareness of “moral laws”

Mankind throughout history has acknowledged the existence of some kind of rules of morality. That certain actions must cause shame or guilt.

The consciousness of a moral law that everyone universally agrees to is quite remarkable when you compare that to mankind's inability to universally agree on anything else, even things as basic as a universal language, currency or form of government.

How can a human being naturally find God?

Religion happens when man connects these two universal experiences and assigns to a spiritual source the authority that this moral law came from

This is also a leap because experience says this universe, which the 'spiritual authority' exists in, bears no resemblance to the behavior that morality demands of us.

As much as we naturally don't want it – as much as we'd rather do what we want and what feels good – this moral law is surprisingly difficult to resist. Whether you're in church or in prison, some amount of morality is always sneaking in. Once again, this may be a defect of the human mind that evolution has never been able to fix, or else it's what could be called *revelation*.

How can a human being naturally find God?

Christianity has a fourth element found in history, when 2,000 years ago a man appeared who claimed to be a part of this supernatural source of our moral laws, and who witnesses say performed supernatural deeds as his proof.

It's a claim so shocking that only one of two conclusions are possible: either he was completely insane or he wasn't. If, based on the evidence, we can conclude that he was not insane, then that means that everything claimed by Christians becomes credible, and that this man holds the secret to helping us find this spiritual authority and getting to know more about it.

Part 2

How can a God that is all-good and all-powerful permit evil in the world?

Either he must not be all-powerful or all-good.

True or False:

The cause of evil is
the bad decisions of our free will.

St. Augustine and the problem of evil

Is the cause of evil my free will?

If so, didn't God make me?

And isn't God supreme good?

Then where did I derive this ability to will evil?

If the devil is responsible, where did the devil come from?

If he was a good angel who fell because of his evil choice, what was the origin of the evil in him that turned him into a devil?



Something that is indestructible is superior to things that are destructible.

God is indestructible, because if He weren't, a human mind could conceive of something better than God, which is impossible.

God is supremely good.

What God creates is good, but it isn't God so they aren't supremely good or indestructible.

Things prone to destruction are good, because their destructibility would be impossible if they were either supremely good or not good at all (if they were supremely good they would be indestructible, whereas if they were not good at all there would be nothing that could be destroyed).

Destruction is obviously harmful, yet it can only do harm by diminishing what exists, which is what makes it good.

Therefore, all things which suffer harm are being deprived of some good. Which means if something were deprived of all good, they would cease to exist.

Therefore as long as it does exist, they have some good.

Everything that exists is good, then; and so evil cannot be a “substance”, a thing, because if it were, it would be good.

God made all good things, and there is nothing that exists that God didn't make. But he didn't make all things equal.

To God, evil has no being at all, since apart from God, nothing can burst in and disrupt creation.

To us, certain things can be mistakenly seen as evil because they don't suit other parts of creation, but those things do fit in elsewhere, and are good in and of themselves.

But on the other hand, an illness or disease is different.

“Evil” is the depriving of good. A human body being subject to a flu is having its good health reduced. Sickness is an evil. Likewise a cut on your arm is not a 'thing', it's a situation where you're deprived of a good: some of your skin. God did not create sickness or cuts.

What's interesting is that when a sick person is cured, the “evil” that was present (the sickness or wounds) doesn't get cast out and go somewhere else – it simply ceases to exist.

Again, evil isn't a substance: the wound or disease is a defect of the good body.

So that also means whatever defects there are in a soul are the reductions of a natural good. And when a cure takes place for the soul, those reductions aren't transferred somewhere else, but simply stop existing.

Evil's existence isn't incompatible with an all-powerful source of good. All of nature is good, since the Creator of all nature is supremely good. But nature is not a supreme and unchangeable good as is the Creator of it. Which means the good in created things can be diminished and augmented.

Finally, to ask that a world of total freedom have all evil removed is logical nonsense. With God, all things are possible, if they're *things*. He can perform miracles but He doesn't perform nonsense.

You sometimes hear children ask 'can God make a rock so heavy that even He can't lift it?'. That's a self-contradictory question. If you give that to a computer it'll give you an error and say you've made a mistake. Nonsense is still nonsense, even to God.

PART 3

Who is this all-powerful, all-good spiritual source of our morality?' What do you mean by “God”?

God is a spiritual, substantial, personal being, infinite in intelligence, in will and in all perfection, unchangeable, fully happy in Himself and by Himself, and infinitely superior to all that is or can even be conceived apart from Himself.

His infinite perfection makes Him incomprehensible by all created intelligences, but He is also knowable regarding his existence as living creator and Lord of heaven and earth, almighty, eternal, immense, and distinct from all that He has created.

Why did an all-powerful God who is self-sufficient create the world and people? Does that mean he wanted something that he didn't have?

God's creations are his free operations unrelated to his existing. He didn't create in order to acquire something he needed for himself, but rather to bestow what he had on others.

If I work to acquire something, that means I lack something I want. But if I work to give to others, that proves not that I lack something but that I have a superabundance of something.

Of all the evils that exist in the world, why is it God's will that people should suffer from terrible diseases and other painful experiences that aren't the results of man's misuse of free will? I know evil has to exist for man to choose freely, but God seems more responsible for those.

Because he permits a world of free will, God's own will has both a positive aspect and a permissive aspect.

God positively wills all the good that happens. Suffering is something he permits to occur, but only when he foresees that a greater good can result from it.

He positively wills that I should be holy. But if he foresees that I'll make use of good health to sin so greatly that I lose my soul, he may mercifully permit my health to be ruined and thus lead me back to him where otherwise I'd be lost.

There would have been no disease or any other evil in the world if man had not originally sinned. God did not will sin, but having made men free, he permitted it and its consequences. This permission was a greater good than having our freedom taken away.

What is the reason God gives us free will as well as suffering? What is the end purpose he has in mind for us? (a.k.a. What is the meaning of life?)

Man was created to praise, love and serve God in this life in their unique ways, and by doing so to gain an eternal life with him afterward. That means this is not our only life and once we complete this life and endure all of its trials and sufferings, God will rectify and compensate all evils and injustices that were done.

God reveals Himself



God began revealing himself progressively and in different ways to his people, but the fundamental revelation was when Moses encountered God in the burning bush.

Moses did something very interesting and very practical: he asked what is your name?

Today, we think of someone's name as some convenient identifier and not much more. But to earlier cultures a name expressed a person's essence and identity. Telling someone your name made you accessible, known to others, capable of being known personally and more intimately.

God told Moses his name is “I AM WHO AM”.

This wasn't the kind of name that people would expect, say, some Egyptian god to have. This name is incredibly mysterious and has a lot of implications.

It's a name we say with respect because of the holiness it represents. The Jews do not pronounce the name of God, but rather replace it in their readings by the divine title *Lord*. It's under that title that the divinity of Jesus is acclaimed when we say “Jesus is Lord”, which is to say, Jesus is YHWH.

What does God reveal by telling us his name?

God alone “is”

God does not change through all eternity. What he says in the past is as true as if he said it today, and the promises he makes to his people also do not change.

If God is “He who is”, that means God is truth, and all that he says and promises is trustworthy.

The reason he revealed his name in the first place is that God is love. His very being is love, a love that can be compared to a father's love for his son, a mother's love for her children, and a bridegroom's love for his beloved that even overcomes infidelity.

God's love is everlasting. “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.”

Implications of believing in this God

This is only the beginning of an understanding of God, but already it means several things.

We begin to get an idea of God's greatness, and that it's serious enough that He needs to become the first priority in our lives.

He is the source of all that we have, and that we must constantly live in a state of thanksgiving.

Our fellow man has great value since they too came from God. It means looking differently at created things. Since they are not God, their value lies in their ability to bring us closer to God as opposed to being used for our own purposes.

God should be trusted in every circumstance of our lives.

God is a father to mankind

This revelation of God to us continues throughout scripture. As it does, we start to get a picture of God not just as a kind spirit who is nice to us, but as a father to mankind who takes great interest in even the slightest details of our lives.

“I will be a father to you and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty”.

The Being of God is a Trinity

We later learn after the Incarnation of Christ about God's being as a Trinity of distinct persons. This trinity is a mystery, one that simply can't be known or understood unless revealed by God.

But it's not a stumbling block on our journey. Rather it's a sign that there are many wondrous things awaiting for us at the end of the journey.

What God does

God creates from nothing, out of sheer generosity

The world was created for the glory of God. God created all things not to increase that glory but to show it forth and to communicate it. God has no other reason for creating than his superabundance of love

God continuously upholds and sustains creation

God does all of this because he has a plan for creation. The universe was created “in a state of journeying” toward an ultimate perfection. Through *divine providence*, God guides everything, from the least part of creation to the greatest events of the world, toward this end.

Mankind takes part in God's plan, either knowingly or unknowingly

What do we know of this creation that God made?

Genesis: After each of his works of those first six days, God saw that it was good. We must recognize the particular goodness of everything that God created.

God wills the interdependence of creatures. Each part of creation is good, but all of creation seen together is very, very good.

Creation is also very beautiful, with order and harmony.

There is a hierarchy of creatures, and man is the summit of God's work, made in His “image and likeness”.

On the seventh day, God rested and blessed that day.

PART 4

If God ordained that we should worship him, how are we supposed to do that?

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.”

God's first command of his people is that man accept him and worship him.

God's First Commandment to His people

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them.

This first commandment teaches faith hope and charity.

Faith because our duty to God is to believe in him and be faithful to his commands.

Hope is the confident expectation of achieving the ends that this commandment is meant to bring us to.

Charity is how we are to respond to God's charity towards us.

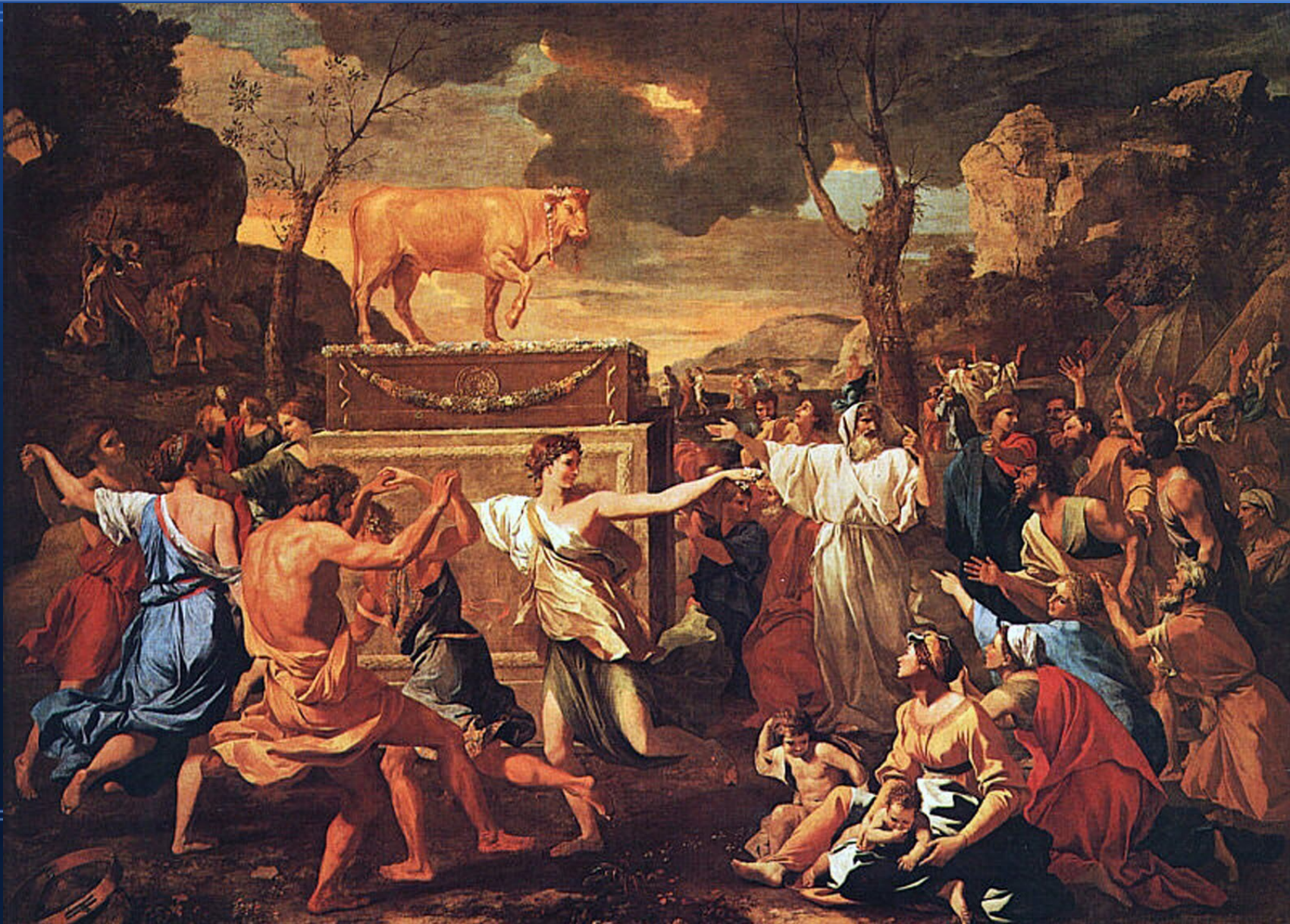
You shall have no other gods before me.

We are to serve God only, which we do through

- Adoration
Recognizing God's greatness and our nothingness in comparison
- Prayer
- Sacrifice
- The fulfillment of promises and vows
Confirmation, holy orders or personal devotions

It forbids **superstition**, which is what happens when we let our worship of God be taken over by our feelings, as well as **idolatry**, “**divination**”, where we go to manmade 'authorities' on reading the future; magic or **sorcery**; the **testing of God's** goodness and power; deliberate **atheism** and agnosticism.

**You shall not make for
yourselves graven images**



You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain

The word vain means, among other things, idle, without real value.

Again, we see the power behind what we'd today consider “just a name”. God is holy. His name is also holy.

There are certain ways we may use this great name. *“You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him and swear by his name”.*

Any oath you take or swear you make is to take God as a witness to what you say. You have to be extremely careful if you ever choose to do that. Christ later says “You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘you shall not swear falsely’ But I say to you do not swear at all.”

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy

The day the Lord showed us we should rest and be refreshed.

A memorial day of Israel's liberation from Egypt.

A sign of God's covenant, that the day is holy and set apart for the praise of God, his making of creation, and his saving Israel.

That's accomplished by the outward, visible, public and regular worship of God that all of his creatures come together to partake in.

The Jews celebrate it on Saturday, the 7th day; Christians celebrate it on the 8th day.

Sunday is the day we should repay to the Lord what belongs to Him, and not just refrain from work ourselves, but not be the cause of other people having to work. This is a day for God and the family and friends He created for you.

