

ST. MAXIMUS CATECHISM CLASS 2010 HANDOUT  
MAIN LECTURE 17: CREED 5 "ALMIGHTY"

*I believe in one God, the Father, Almighty...*

*St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Lecture 8.3* "For He is Almighty who rules all things, who has power over all things."

*St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Lecture 8.4* "But the divine Scripture and the doctrines of the truth know but One God, who rules all things by His power, but endures many things of His will. For He rules even over the idolaters, but endures them of His forbearance; He rules also over the heretics who set Him at nought, but bears with them because of His long-suffering: He rules even over the devil, but bears with him of His long-suffering, not from want of power, as if defeated. For he is the beginning of the Lord's creation, made to be mocked, not by Himself for that were unworthy of Him, but by the Angels (Job 40:14) whom He hath made. But He suffered him to live, for two purposes, that he might disgrace himself the more in his defeat, and that mankind might be crowned with victory. O the all-wise providence of God! which takes the wicked purpose for a groundwork of salvation for the faithful....so He permitted the devil to wrestle, that the victors might be crowned; and that when victory was gained, he might be the more disgraced as being conquered by the weaker, and men be greatly honored as having conquered him who was once an Archangel."

*St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Lecture 8.5* "God then rules all, and of His long-suffering endures even murderers and robbers and fornicators, having appointed a set time for recompensing every one, that if they who have had long warning are still impenitent in heart, they may receive the greater condemnation." As in Noah's day.

*The Question of Evil*

*Epicurus*, "Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?"

*Wikipedia, Problem of Evil 9/8/10* A more recent formulation of the question

1. God exists.
2. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.
3. A perfectly good being would want to prevent all evils.
4. An omniscient being knows every way in which evils can come into existence.
5. An omnipotent being, who knows every way in which an evil can come into existence, has the power to prevent that evil from coming into existence.
6. A being who knows every way in which an evil can come into existence, who is able to prevent that evil from coming into existence, and who wants to do so, would prevent the existence of that evil.
7. If there exists an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being, then no evil exists.

Evil exists (logical contradiction).

*Chris Bradley, Deeply Blasphemous, <http://deeplyblasphemous.blogspot.com/2008/10/question-of-evil-vs-christians.html>*

Almost all Christians try to talk about the *existence* of god. Like that's the only question. If only, they think, we can get atheists to acknowledge god exists then we've got 'em! Or, anyway, that's what I imagine they're saying to themselves.

Furthermore, the question of the existence of god is nice and . . . abstract. Since they acknowledge the world exists in the form it exists, they can assert the god of the gaps. Wherever we can't look is where their god is, operating in secret.

But there's really a much better way to expose the fundamental absurdity of religion - which is the question of evil. You know, if god is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-benevolent then why is there evil?

They'll try to derail the question with the question of free will. They'll say, "There's evil because people are evil." Don't fall for it! The argument isn't about free will, and what constitutes free will, and the limitations of free will. The question is one of *evil*.

Say, instead, "Why is there cancer? Why does your god allow little babies to die horrible, lingering deaths because of cancer?" Focus on the fact terrible things happen to innocent people - not as a function of anyone's will. Focus on disease and natural disaster. Focus on *real things* that happen to people.

Then sit back and enjoy. Because, at that point, they're stuck on the horns of of the dilemma of the problem of evil. Either their god isn't all-powerful or isn't all-benevolent. They will agree that their god *can do anything* but they can't offer any reason why their god hasn't stopped suffering that does not arise from human agency.

They will not admit, however, that the dilemma is real. Well, none I've met, anyway. They'll look for any kind of excuse they can think of to justify why terrible things happen to good people.

Eventually the have to come down to Leibniz's argument in some fashion: that this is the best of all possible worlds. It'll come out in some twisted version. They won't say that. They'll just insist that everyone happens for a "purpose". They don't know the purpose, but whatever it is, they will assure you, it's worth the untold suffering that disaster and disease bring. They must assert that their god both allows evil and is perfectly good.

It's really a much better way to argue than wasting your time talking about the creation of the universe. ;)

*St. John of Damascus, Book IV.19* Sometimes “[Evil] means what is evil by nature, and this is the opposite of virtue and the will of God: and sometimes it means that which is evil and oppressive to our sensation, that is to say, afflictions and calamities. Now these are seemingly evil because they are painful, but in reality are good. For to those who understand they become ambassadors of conversion and salvation. The Scripture says that of these God is the Author. It is, moreover, to be observed that of these, too, we are the cause: for involuntary evils are the offspring of voluntary ones.”

*St. John of Damascus, Orthodox Faith I.12* “For goodness is existence and the cause of existence, but wickedness is the negation of goodness, that is, of existence.” *ibid. II.4* “For evil is nothing else than absence of goodness, just as darkness also is absence of light. For goodness is the light of the mind, and, similarly, evil is the darkness of the mind.”

*St. Basil, Hexameron, Homily 2.4* It is equally impious to say that evil has its origin from God; because the contrary cannot proceed from its contrary. Life does not engender death; darkness is not the origin of light; sickness is not the maker of health....If then evil is neither uncreate nor created by God, whence comes its nature?...Evil is not a living animated essence; it is the condition of the soul opposed to virtue, developed in the careless on account of their falling away from good. Do not then go beyond yourself to seek for evil, and imagine that there is an original nature of wickedness. Each of us, let us acknowledge it, is the first author of his own vice.... Do not look for the guiding cause beyond yourself, but recognize that evil, rightly so called, has no other origin than our voluntary falls.

*St. John of Damascus, IV.20* “Evil is nothing else than absence of goodness and a lapsing from what is natural into what is unnatural; for nothing evil is natural. For all things, whatsoever God made, are very good, so far as they were made: if, therefore, they remain just as they were created, they are very good, but when they voluntarily depart from what is natural and turn to what is unnatural, they slip into evil.”

“By nature, therefore, all things are servants of the Creator and obey Him. Whenever, then, any of His creatures voluntarily rebels and becomes disobedient to his Maker, he introduces evil into himself. For evil is not any essence nor a property of essence, but an accident, that is, a voluntary deviation from what is natural into what is unnatural, which is sin.” *ibid.*

“When, then, comes evil? It is an invention of the free-will of the devil.” The devil not evil by nature. “But he voluntarily departed from the virtue that is natural and came into the darkness of evil, being far removed from God, who alone is good and can give life and light. For from Him every good thing derives its goodness, and so far as it is separated from Him in will (for it is not in place), it falls into sin.” *ibid.*

“God makes all his works good, but each becomes of its own choice good or evil.” *ibid. IV.21*

*Romans 3:23* “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

*Romans 3:10ff* (Psalm 13(14):1) “As it is written, ‘There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.’”

“Love may, indeed, love the beloved when her beauty is lost: but not because it is lost. Love may forgive all infirmities and love still in spite of them: but Love cannot cease to will their removal. Love is more sensitive than hatred itself to every blemish in the beloved...Of all powers he forgives most, but he condones least: he is pleased with little, but demands all.” Lewis, *Pain*, p. 46.

“When Christianity says that God love man, it means that God *loves* man: not that He has some ‘disinterested’, because really indifferent, concern for our welfare, but that, in awful and surprising truth, we are the objects of His love. You asked for a loving God: you have one. The great spirit you so lightly invoked, the ‘lord of terrible aspect,’ is present: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist’s love for his work and despotic as a man’s love for a dog, provident and venerable as a father’s love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes.” Lewis, *Pain*, pp. 46-47

#### Optina Elders’ Prayer

O Lord, grant that I may meet all that this coming day brings to me with spiritual tranquility. Grant that I may fully surrender myself to Thy holy will.

At every hour of this day, direct and support me in all things. Whatsoever news may reach me in the course of the day, teach me to accept it with a calm soul and the firm conviction that all is subject to Thy holy will.

Direct my thoughts and feelings in all my words and actions. In all unexpected occurrences, do not let me forget that all is sent down from Thee.

Grant that I may deal straightforwardly and wisely with everyone I encounter, neither embarrassing nor saddening anyone.

O Lord, grant me the strength to endure the fatigue of the coming day and all the events that take place during it. Direct my will and teach me to pray, to believe, to hope, to be patient, to forgive, and to love. Amen.

James 1:2-4 trials and tribulations “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and complete, wanting nothing.”

Romans 5:3-5 “...we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience, and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of god is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.”