

Of Gods and Men

Use the following questions to discuss ways in which the Trappist monks of Tibhirine, Algeria, lived out the true meaning of the Marks of the Church. Make notes of your answers on a separate sheet of paper so you can later share your thoughts with the class.

The Church Is One

1. What evidence did you see that the Trappist monks at Notre Dame d'Atlas in Tibhirine lived as **one**?

The Church Is Holy

2. What evidence did you see that these monks lived **holy** lives?

The Church Is Catholic

3. Describe the relationship you observed between the monks and the local villagers?
4. Why did the monks treat every sick person who came to their health clinic, whether that person was a local villager or a member of an extremist group? Do you see any symbolic significance in this?
5. If the local government authorities were willing to help defend the monastery, why did the abbot, Brother Christian, refuse their help?
6. Why would these Catholic monks choose to minister in a predominantly Muslim country without ever making any direct attempts to convert the local people to Christianity?
7. Brother Luc, the elderly monk and doctor, makes the statement, "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from a religious conviction." How does this statement illustrate his understanding of true **catholicity**? Is there a place for extremism in the Catholic Church? Explain.

The Church Is Apostolic

8. In one scene a couple of the monks say to some of the village leaders who happen to be Muslim, "We are like birds on a branch. We don't know if we'll leave." A Muslim woman who is present responds, "You [the monks] are the branch. If you go, we lose our footing." What does she mean? Does this reveal anything about the **Catholic** or **Apostolic** responsibility of the Church?
9. The monks must make a tremendously difficult decision about whether to stay in Algeria and possibly face death, or return to France. What does their decision to stay show about their **apostolic** spirit (their desire to continue the Good News of Jesus)?



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10. In what ways do you see these monks continuing the work of the Apostles?
11. The French government occupied the people of Algeria for many years, causing great harm to many people. Is this a reason for the monks to leave or to stay? Explain.
12. Do you think that Jesus would have treated illnesses and injuries of extremists or terrorists, as these monks did? Explain.
13. Can you think of an example of Jesus or his Apostles serving local people without asking them for anything in return?
14. What positive effects did the monks' solidarity with the mostly Muslim villagers they were serving have on the villagers? What positive effects did this solidarity have on the monks themselves?
15. How do you think the story of the monks ended? Even if you suspect that they suffered violence, do you believe they did the right thing? Explain.
16. Do you think that living the Marks of the Church can help to heal a broken, sick, and divided human race? Explain.

(The film quotations on this handout are from the DVD *Of Gods and Men*, directed by Xavier Beauvois [Sony Picture Classics, 2011].)

