

Of Gods and Men¹

In this 2011 [feature film](#), based on real-life events in a Cistercian monastery in Algeria, eight monks must make a life or death decision when their simple way of life is threatened by terrorists in the region. Two statements from the film reveal the thinking of these men of faith. The first is from the monastery's doctor who runs a clinic for the local Muslim villagers. The other is from the abbot, a scholarly man, a natural leader, and a man devoted to service.

Screenwriter Etienne Comar comments: "*Of Gods and Men* bears witness to the reality of the monks' commitment and the strength of the message of peace they wish to share by staying among their Muslim brothers: the possibility of a fraternal and spiritual common ground between Christianity and Islam."

Letter by Brother Luc

"I was recently reading this 'pensee' of Pascal's: 'Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it for religious conviction.' Here there is confusion and violence.

"We are in a 'risky' situation but we persist in our faith and our confidence in God. It is through poverty, failure and death that we advance towards him.

"Heavy and devastating downpours have not curbed the violence that is infiltrating itself everywhere. Two opponents are present, one wants to hold on to power, the other seize

¹ It is generally accepted that these monks were killed on May 21, 1996 at Tibhirine, Algeria.

it. They are fighting with their backs against the wall. I don't know when or how it will all end. In the meantime, I perform my duty . . .

"Caring for the poor and the sick, awaiting for the day or the time to close my eyes. My dear friend, pray for me, may my exit from this world be done in the peace and joy of Jesus."

Brother Christian's testament²

"Should it ever befall me, and it could happen today, to fall victim to the terrorism which seems to now want to engulf all the foreigners living here, I would like my community, my church and my family to remember that my life was GIVEN to God and to this country.

"May they accept that the Unique Master of all life could not be a stranger to this brutal departure. May they be able to associate this death to so many other violent ones, consigned to the apathy of anonymity.

"I've lived long enough to know that **I am complicit in the evil that**, alas, seems to prevail over the world and even of the one that would strike me blindly.

"I could never desire such a death. In fact, I don't see how I could ever rejoice in this people I love being indistinctly accused of my murder.

"I know the contempt the people of this country may have indiscriminately been surrounded by. And I know which

² Christian de Chergé had been French soldier fighting in Algeria in 1958, when a Muslim friend "takes a bullet" for him and is killed. De Chergé believes his friend was motivated by religious faith and this experience contributed to De Chergé's Conversion.

caricatures of Islam a certain Islamism encourages.

"This country and Islam, for me, are something else. They are a body and a soul.

"My death will of course quickly vindicate those who hastily called me naive or idealistic, but they must know that I will finally be freed of my most burning curiosity and will be able, God willing, to immerse my gaze into the Father's in order to contemplate with him his children of Islam as he sees them.

"In this THANK YOU, where from now on all is said about my life, I include you of course, friends of yesterday and today, and you as well, friend of the last minute, who knew not what you were doing.

"Yes, for you as well I want this THANK YOU and this FAREWELL which you envisaged.

And may we meet again, happy thieves in paradise, if it pleases God, the Father of us both.

AMEN! INCH'ALLAH!