

Lecture Notes: God and Our Relation to God

Introduction

- **Topic:** God and our relation to God.
 - **Primary Source:** The Bible.
 - **Central Questions:**
 - What is ultimate reality?
 - What is our relationship to that reality?
 - **Thesis:** We find joy and purpose when rightly related to the true God. Life becomes disordered when we are out of right relationship with Him.
-

Understanding the Bible

1. **The Bible as a Collection of Texts:**
2. The Bible is not a single text but a collection of texts with various genres.
3. Includes poetry, mythological literature, historical accounts (ancient, not modern history), biographies, letters (epistolary), and apocalyptic writings.
4. Approach different genres with different interpretive methods.
5. **Not Everything in the Bible is What it Teaches:**
6. Quote from William Placar: "Not everything that's in the Bible is what the Bible teaches."
7. Look for overall themes, patterns, and trajectories in the Bible.
8. Example: Slavery is mentioned, but abolitionist movements rooted in biblical themes suggest that the Bible does not advocate for slavery.
9. **Reading the Bible Within Tradition:**
10. Compare the Bible to reading Shakespeare: You wouldn't hand a person *Hamlet* without any context.
11. The Bible should be read within the grand interpretive tradition of the Church.

Encountering God in Exodus 3:14

1. **Moses and the Burning Bush:**
 2. Context: Moses' life of privilege in Egypt, his exile after killing an Egyptian, and his time in the desert.
 3. Importance of purification before encountering God.
 4. Moses encounters God in the form of the burning bush, which symbolizes God's presence that does not consume.
 5. **God's Name: "I Am Who I Am":**
 6. Moses asks for God's name, seeking control through naming.
 7. God's response: "I Am Who I Am" signifies that God is not a being among many, but Being itself.
 8. God's reality transcends ordinary categories and names.
 9. Theological implication: God is Ipsum Esse, being itself, as developed by Thomas Aquinas.
-

The Nature of God

1. **God as the Ground of All Being:**
2. Argument from contingency: All contingent things depend on something else, ultimately leading to a necessary being whose essence is existence itself—God.
3. **God's Simplicity:**
4. God has no distinction between essence and existence—His essence *is* existence.
5. Anti-grasping name: We cannot fully understand or grasp God's simplicity.
6. **God's Infinity:**
7. God is infinite, meaning there are no borders or limits to God's being.
8. Anti-grasping: God cannot be defined or limited by human categories.
9. **God's Unity:**
10. There cannot be two or more infinite, unconditioned beings.
11. "The Lord your God is Lord alone!" (Deuteronomy 6).
12. **God's Self-Sufficiency:**

13. God does not need the world to exist, but sustains it out of His own will.
-

God's Presence and Power

1. **Omnipresence:**
 2. God is everywhere because He sustains all existence.
 3. God is in all things "by essence, presence, and power," as Aquinas says.
 4. **Omnipotence:**
 5. God's power is not just strength but the sustaining power that holds all things in existence.
 6. **Omniscience:**
 7. God knows the world into existence. His knowledge does not depend on observing but on creating.
-

Creation and Our Relationship to God

1. **Creation from Nothing (Ex Nihilo):**
 2. The world is created not from violence or struggle but from God's free act of will.
 3. There is nothing standing between us and God; we are directly related to Him as creatures.
 4. **Interconnectedness of All Creation:**
 5. All beings are ontological siblings, created and sustained by the same divine source.
 6. **Contemplative Prayer:**
 7. Finding the place in ourselves where we are being created by God leads to peace and a right relationship with God.
-

Conclusion: Living in Right Relationship with God

- **Two Sides of the Spiritual Journey:**

- God is both intimately close and utterly beyond our grasp.
- We must live in the balance of not trying to control God while also not running from Him.

- **Psalm 139 Reflection:**

- “Where can I go from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.”
 - We cannot avoid God, nor can we control Him. Our task is to live in love with God, surrendering control.
-