

Lecture on God, Creation, Love, and Faith

1. The Nature of God and Theological Language

- **God as Ipsum Esse:** God is the source of all existence, the act of being itself, where essence and existence coincide.
- **Theological Obscurity:** Like incense in Catholic Mass that clouds vision, theological language is meant to obscure certain truths about God to prevent humans from reducing God to something comprehensible.
- **God's Independence from Creation:** God does not need the world, which is a fundamental point in Catholic tradition. This lack of need allows God to love the world purely and fully.

2. Creation and the Question of Why

- **Why Would God Create?:** Since God lacks nothing, creation must stem from something other than necessity.
- **God Creates Out of Love:** Love, in this context, is defined as willing the good of the other for their own sake. Because God does not need the world, creation is an act of love—God wills the good of the world without self-interest.
- **Creation Without Violence:** Unlike many ancient creation myths involving violent conflict, the biblical creation account is non-violent, achieved through God's word and love. This contrasts with the human assumption that order is restored through violence.

3. Genesis and the Structure of Creation

- **Liturgical Procession in Genesis:** The days of creation in Genesis resemble a liturgical procession, leading up to the creation of humans. Humans are to lead creation in the right praise of God.
- **Symbolism of Worship:** Everything in creation, though good, is not to be worshipped. Humans are meant to lead creation in worship rather than

dominate it.

4. Right Praise and Worship

- **Right Praise:** Worship is crucial to keeping life in harmony. The Bible repeatedly shows that Israel falls into chaos when it practices false worship.
- **Adoration and Right Alignment:** True adoration (*adoratio*) is being in right alignment with God, like being mouth-to-mouth with the divine. This leads to internal harmony, much like the rose window in a cathedral.
- **Worship vs. False Worship:** The right worship of God brings internal and external harmony, whereas false worship leads to disintegration.

5. The Fall and the Knowledge of Good and Evil

- **The Divine Permission and Prohibition:** God grants humanity the freedom to partake in the goodness of creation but prohibits eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This tree represents the prerogative of determining good and evil, which belongs solely to God.
- **Nietzsche and Modern Parallels:** Modern philosophy, particularly Nietzsche and existentialism, embodies this same rebellion—asserting human will over divine authority by claiming the right to define morality.

6. Noah's Ark and Sin's Return

- **The Flood as Tohu Wa-Bohu:** The chaos of sin, represented by the primordial waters, reasserts itself in the flood. Noah's Ark, symbolizing a microcosm of God's order, is God's rescue operation from the forces of sin.
- **The Church as Noah's Ark:** Churches, like Noah's Ark, preserve God's right order through worship. They serve as sanctuaries of right praise amidst the chaos of the world.

7. Human Cities and Violence

- **Cain and the Founding of Cities:** Cain, the first murderer, is also the founder of cities, symbolizing that human society often rests on violence. This is contrasted with the Kingdom of God, which is founded on peace and right praise.
- **Tower of Babel:** The story of Babel illustrates humanity's attempt to grasp at God rather than worship God. This misuse of unity for oppressive purposes leads to divine scattering, limiting sin's destructive capacity.

8. Abraham and the Call of Faith

- **Abraham as the Father of Faith:** Abraham responds to the voice of God, marking the beginning of a new rescue operation in which God forms a holy people. His willingness to follow the divine voice is the essence of faith.
- **Faith and Trust:** Faith is not credulity but trust in God's voice. It involves a willingness to leave behind comfort and security for the unknown journey with God.

9. The Law of the Gift

- **Receiving and Giving Grace:** The spiritual life is governed by the principle that when you receive grace and give it away, you receive more in return. Withholding grace leads to its loss, while sharing it multiplies it.

10. The Binding of Isaac (Akedah)

- **Abraham's Ultimate Test:** The sacrifice of Isaac is one of the most challenging and troubling passages in the Bible, asking whether Abraham loves God or simply the benefits God provides. This test reveals the depth of Abraham's faith.
- **Do We Love God or His Gifts?:** This narrative forces a distinction between loving God for who He is versus loving the benefits He provides. True worship is about loving God, not merely what He gives us.

11. Job and Other Tests of Faith

- **Job's Test:** Like Abraham, Job is tested to determine if he loves God or the benefits of God. Despite losing everything, Job remains faithful, providing a model of true worship.
- **The Prodigal Son and the Challenge of Faith:** Similar tests are found throughout scripture, with Jesus challenging his followers to prioritize their love for God over any earthly obligation, even when it seems harsh.

12. The Cross as the Fulfillment of Faith

- **Christ's Ultimate Sacrifice:** Jesus, stripped of all earthly benefits, remains faithful to God's will, demonstrating the ultimate expression of faith. His crucifixion embodies the question, "Do you love God or the benefits of God?"

13. Conclusion: The Right Ordering of Life

- **The Central Question:** The key to a harmonious life is the right worship of God. Bad praise leads to disintegration, while right praise brings harmony. The question of whether we love God or merely His benefits is the crux of the spiritual life.