

I believe in God the Creator-Father (nn. 198-354)

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[nn. 198-267](#) on the Trinity : see Lecture 13

As noted in Lectures 1-2, it is from our attempt to make sense of creation, including ourselves, that the very notion of 'God' arises. Everything that we experience is contingent: it exists in fact, but cannot on its own provide sufficient explanation for this fact. We have to look beyond it to account for its existing. Since everything to which we look for meaning is also contingent, there must exist, now, a Being that is self-sufficient and self-explanatory, in Aristotle's phrase, 'the uncaused cause', 'God'.

The world could not exist if there did not exist a non-contingent Being holding everything in existence: the Being we call 'God'(see Catechism n. 301).

It is in God that we and all creation 'live and move and have our being'(Acts 17:28; see Catechism n. 300).

‘God’ – Sanskrit **Ghu** (‘called’ ‘calling’) + **To** (‘The one’)

Religious
Experience is



Experience of
Communion with God

God ‘The Heart and the Beyond of Everything’ (Teilhard de Chardin)

The being of every creature is an expression of the Being that is God. We are held in existence in order that we may enjoy this divine intimacy.

In the Book of Proverbs, personified Wisdom exclaims: 'I was daily the delight of YHWH, always rejoicing in his presence, rejoicing in God's inhabited world and delighting in the human race'(Proverbs 8:30-31).

‘By means of all created things the divine assails us, penetrates us and moulds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, whereas we live steeped in its burning layers. “In him we live”. As Jacob said, awakening from his dream, the world, this palpable world which we were wont to treat with the boredom and disrespect with which we habitually regard places with no sacred association for us, is in truth a holy place and we did not know it’(Teilhard de Chardin *The Divine Milieu*, page 89).

Ways of imagining creation in Ancient Near East texts

- 1. Generation from the gods - not found in the writings of Israel.

- 2. Cosmic Struggle between God and the forces of chaos
 - ‘Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength,
O arm of YHWH;
 - awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old.
 - Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces,
 - who pierced that monster through?’ (Isaiah 51:9).
 - ‘It was you who split open the sea by your power.
 - You broke the heads of the monster in the waters.
 - It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan
 - and gave him as food to the creatures of the
desert’ (Psalm 74:13-14).

3. God works like a potter working clay

‘YHWH God shaped humanity [’adam] from the dust of the soil [’adamah] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the human being became a living being’(Genesis 2:7).

‘YHWH, you are our Maker.

We are the clay, you are the potter.

We are all the work of your hand.’(Isaiah 64:8)

3. God works like a potter working clay

‘Remember that you moulded me like clay. Will you turn be back to dust? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews? You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit’ (Job 10:9)

‘He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he
suspends the earth over nothing.

He wraps up the waters in his clouds, yet the clouds do not
burst under their weight.

He covers the face of the full moon,
spreading his clouds over it.

He marks out the horizon on the face of the waters
for a boundary between light and darkness.

The pillars of the heavens quake, aghast at his rebuke.

By his power he churned up the sea;
by his wisdom he cut Rahab to pieces.

By his breath the skies became fair;
his hand pierced the gliding serpent.

And these are but the outer fringe of his works; how faint
the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand the
thunder of his power?’ (Job 26:5-14).

4. In the inspired poem/hymn offered us in the opening chapter of the Book of Genesis, it is God's **power** that is highlighted: God creates simply by his word. In this way the author carefully preserves the transcendence of God who creates by the power of his will. God's word is enough. God speaks and it is done. The Genesis narrative focuses on the power of God, on the basic goodness, indeed sacredness, of creation, and on God's word that, as promise, is the driving force of history.

• God calls Moses to be his instrument in redeeming the Hebrew slaves from Egypt, and assures Moses: **‘I will be [’EHYEH] with you’** (Exodus 3:12).

• Moses wants to know God’s name:

‘I AM [’EHYEH] WHO I AM.

אֶתְיָה

אֲשֶׁר

אֵינִי

Exodus 3:14

You shall say to the Israelites, **‘I AM [’EHYEH] has sent me to you ... YHWH has sent me to you’** Exodus 3:15

יְהוָה

- n. 203 ‘To disclose one’s name is to make oneself known to others; in a way it is to hand oneself over by becoming accessible, capable of being known more intimately and addressed personally.’

- n. 210 The 'creed' of Israel : the central insight
- 'YHWH, a God tenderly compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in kindness'(Exodus 34:6)
- This is repeated in Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, Nehemiah 9:17, 2 Chronicles 30:9. Also Psalm 86:15, Psalm 103:8, Psalm 111:4, Psalm 145:8.

What does it mean to call the Creator ‘Almighty’(see Catechism n. 268)? This is a notion that needs careful handling. In Chapter 4 we suggested that one of the basic misunderstandings about God that is found throughout the Older Testament is that God is thought of as controlling creation, such that the happenings that are judged to be good are seen as expressions of God’s blessing, whereas the happenings that are judged to be bad are seen as expressions of God’s disapproval and punishment.

The basis for this misunderstanding is our understanding of 'power'. In our experience power is often abused. It is often expressed as control. When we call God 'Almighty', declaring our faith that there are no limits to God's power, it essential that we remember that God is love, that the power of God is the power of love. It is God's love-power that has no limits.

When, as adults, we experience someone attempting to control us, we do not experience this as love. While love is demanding, and is willing to challenge and correct, it never controls. Love respects others as sacred and respects their freedom. Love does not (cannot) protect us from suffering the consequences of our misuse or abuse of freedom, for love loves; it does not control.

The idea of God controlling is so embedded in our psyche that we have to be determined if we are to listen attentively to Jesus, and watch him reveal God as precisely not controlling. Jesus wept with disappointment over Jerusalem; he did not reorganise it. Jesus pleaded with Judas; he did not take over.

It is not that God is doing nothing. God loves. God is inspiring us all to love and offering us the grace to do so. God, the creator, enables us to co-create – that is to say, to love. This is the love of which Paul speaks:

‘Love has space enough to hold and to bear everything and everyone. Love believes all things, hopes all things, and endures whatever comes. Love does not come to an end’ (1Corinthians 13:7-8).

- Creation is essentially free, free to evolve according to the natural interaction of its energy. God does not intervene to cut across this. Rather God is constantly acting in creation. When creation opens itself to God's action, beautiful things happen. When creation closes itself off from God's loving action, God's design is to that extent thwarted.

- We human beings experience this. When we open ourselves to welcome God's providence, divine love bears fruit in our lives. Closing ourselves to God's gracious will is what we call sin. God respects our freedom even when our choices hurt us and others. But God continues to offer healing, forgiving, creating love.

n. 322

- 'Cast all your anxieties on God, for God cares about you'(1Peter 5:7).

n. 313

- 'We know that in everything God works for good for those who love him'(Romans 8:28).

Down the centuries, Christians – and not only in the past – have blunted and distorted Jesus' revelation. In a half-converted way, we have overlain Jesus' words and deeds with our own prejudices and projections. Some still want God to intervene when what we should be doing is opening ourselves to love, and helping others to do the same. If we were to do this, think of the 'miracles' that would happen in this world: miracles that only love can make possible. Jesus revealed God as love. God's love is all-powerful.

The only miracles that happen are miracles that happen when love is not thwarted. We can pray, like a child, for whatever it is we desire, so long as we open ourselves to love and allow love to work its purifying and energising effect in us and in our world.

Finally (see Catechism n. 272), we have every hope that beyond death and beyond suffering there is the promise of an eternity of love-communion that is for us, provided we do not obstinately reject it (Mark 12:24). God embraced Jesus from the cross into an eternal love-communion, and our hope is that God will embrace us also.

God as 'Father'

Psalm 103:13-14

As a father has compassion for his children,
so YHWH has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we are;
he remembers that we are dust.

Like a father YHWH exercises authority:

‘Let my son go that he may worship me’(Exodus 4:23).

Like a father YHWH educates:

‘Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so YHWH your God disciplines you’(Deuteronomy 8:5).

‘Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for YHWH has spoken: I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me’(Isaiah 1:2).

- Like a father YHWH accepts the king as his adopted son:
- ‘I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me’(2Samuel 7:14).
- ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you’(Psalm 2:7).
- Like a father YHWH cares for orphans as his own:
- ‘Father of orphans and protector of widows
- is God in his holy habitation’(Psalm 68:5).

YHWH's 'feelings' are those of a father:

'How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? ... My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender'(Hosea 11:8).

'I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. Return, O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness'(Jeremiah 3:19, 22).

'Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says YHWH'(Jer. 31:20).

It is Jesus' practice of addressing God as 'Abba!' (My dear Father) that accounts for this being a favourite address among Jesus' disciples. It accounts for the opening statement of the creed: 'I believe in God the Father'. Jesus addressed the one and only God as 'Father'. Jesus' disciples continue this practice, for the God of Jesus is our God, and the intimate relationship that Jesus had with God is the relationship that Jesus shares with us. The fourth Gospel has Jesus say to Mary Magdalene:

'Go to my brothers and say to them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God' (John 20:17).

God, our Mother

Of course in calling God 'Father' we are using an analogy. We are speaking in metaphors. We have come to realise that 'Mother', though less commonly used, is an equally appropriate metaphor for God. Because the ancients were ignorant of the process of conception (they thought that human life was wholly contained in the male seed, which the mother received and nourished), Jews followed by Christians, could not address God as 'Mother', since God is the source of life, not the receiver of it. With the change in our understanding of the process of conception, we can speak of God as 'Mother' as well as 'Father'.

‘God’s parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood’ (Catechism n. 239).

- We reflect upon an ancient tradition in the Christian community which speaks of God and of Christ as our Mother.
- Saint Augustine in his commentary on Psalm 101:7 (Hebrew Psalm 102:7) ‘I am made like to the pelican in the desert’ writes: ‘Christ exercises fatherly authority and maternal love just as Paul is also father and mother ... through his gospel preaching.’

- ‘We were gentle among you, like a **mother** tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God ... As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a **father** with his children’ (1 Thessalonians 2:7-11).

- Saint Anselm in his Prayer to Saint Paul writes: ‘You, too, good Jesus, are not you also a mother? Is not he a mother who like a hen gathers his chicks beneath his wings? Truly, Lord, you are a mother too.’
- He is referring to Jesus’ words in regard to Jerusalem: ‘How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!’ (Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34).

In the previous lecture we reflected on the fact that the notion that best points towards the mystery of God is the notion that God is infinite love-
communion, the love best seen in the communion between Jesus and God, and experienced in the community that enjoys communion in the Spirit of Jesus. Creation, then, is best understood as a finite sharing in and expression of this divine love. Creation is 'full of the radiant glory of God'(Isaiah 6:3; see Catechism n. 319), and is, therefore, essentially good (Catechism n. 299).

n. 328 ‘The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls “angels” is a truth of faith.’

- It is necessary to remember that our imagination and understanding are adequate only for what we directly experience with our senses.
- When the ancient texts of the Hebrew Scriptures speak of ‘the Angel of YHWH’, they are speaking of God as we experience God mediated through creatures. It is a way of acknowledging God’s transcendence.

- The naming of 'angels' in the Bible indicate aspects of God's presence and action. 'Gabriel' = God as powerful/ 'Raphael' = God as healer/ 'Michael' = God as having no equal/ etc
- In later Judaism, through Persian influence, the texts start to speak of immortal, non material, beings, imagined as in attendance at God's throne ready to carry out God's will. This imagery permeates New Testament times.

- While our faith includes acknowledgment of the existence of certain spiritual realities, we should be careful in speculating further as to their nature.
- ‘God wills the interdependence of creatures.
- The sun and the moon, ^{n. 340} the cedar and the tiny flower, the eagle and the sparrow:
- the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient.
- Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.’

Creation calls (video)

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