

## **FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH: II. CREATION**

### **“God created heaven and earth”**

We have begun a short series of sermons that will trace the major themes of the Christian faith, taking as our starting point the first emergence of these themes in the early chapters of the Book of Genesis. These foundational topics are: God, Creation, Man, Sin, and Redemption.

We noted last week in the first sermon that Holy Scripture opens with the statement, bold and bare, “In the beginning God.” There is no argument for God’s existence given there. He is simply the Great Presupposition. You start from God or you start from nowhere, Genesis seems to suggest. Scripture then moves on quickly to speak of creation. “In the beginning God created heaven and earth.” By that simple statement a line is drawn between God and everything else that is, visible and invisible, and this is not simply a line but rather a chasm. Søren Kierkegaard said that between God and his creation there is an “infinite qualitative difference.” God alone is the creator. All else is created. Hence biblical faith affirms from the outset that there is no ultimate dualism. There is no eternal struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan. God alone is eternal. He has no rival. He alone is God. He alone is creator. He alone is to be honored and worshipped by his creation. As the Psalmist urged, “Know ye that the Lord is God: it is he that made us and not we ourselves. . . . [Therefore,] Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise; be thankful and bless his name.”

“In the beginning God created heaven and earth.” By that simple statement matters of the greatest profundity and import are clearly established. Therein is set forth the existence of God before all things. Therein it is set forth that God is the creator of all things, visible and invisible, those that exist in this universe of time and space, and those that exist in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, including the angelic host. Therein it is set forth that God created all things out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. And therein it is set forth that God created all things by a free act of his own will and not out of any prior necessity.

## I.

Let us speak, first, of the fact that God's creation is out of nothing. God created heaven and earth, all that is, visible and invisible. There is thus, as we said, an absolute distinction between God and his creation. An absolute line is drawn between them. God alone is uncreated. God alone is self-existent and therefore dependent upon no other. He alone is above and beyond, before and after, creation. He is therefore the absolute and transcendent one.

Here is the foundation of our Judeo-Christian faith. This is why we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, why we owe him absolute obedience, and why we are to have no other gods before him. To worship any other is to worship a creature, an idol, an anti-God. He alone is worthy to be obeyed and loved absolutely, and that is our highest calling and our greatest joy.

It is this reality that underlies our biblical faith. This is how God revealed himself through the prophet Isaiah when he asked:

To whom will you compare me,  
and who is my equal? says the Holy One.  
Lift up your eyes on high and see Who created thee.  
He who brings out their hosts and numbers them,  
calling them all by name;  
because he is great in strength,  
mighty in power,  
not one is missing.

This One is our God, our strength, our aid. Do we lack confidence? Remember only that "Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth." God created all things out of nothing. All things, therefore, having their source in him, find their life and meaning and truth and peace in him.

We must never forget that line between the Creator and the created. Irenaeus said, "But the things established are distinct from him who established them, and what has been made, from him who made them." Wrote Athanasius, "God is self-existent, enclosing all things and enclosed by none; within all according to his goodness and power, yet without all in his proper nature."

"In the beginning God created heaven and earth." The most fundamental truth then about creation, ourselves included, is that all that exists exists at the hand of God.

All creation is absolutely dependent upon him. We and all things exist moment by moment by the will and pleasure of God. Were he to withdraw, we would immediately cease to be. So pray to him with each rising sun, and give him thanks at the end of each and every day.

## II.

The Christian faith teaches us that God created all things *out of nothing*. It also teaches that God created all things *for nothing*. Let me explain what I mean. Many of you are familiar with James Weldon Johnson's sermon/poem, "Creation," from his delightful little book *God's Trombones*. It begins,

And God stepped out on space,  
And he looked around and said,  
I'm lonely—  
I'll make me a world.

I love that poem and love to read it aloud, as you know. It speaks movingly of God's love for us and of our being made for God. But taken at face value, it contains this untruth. It suggests that God made creation because of some lack or need of his own: "I'm lonely; I'll make me a world"—as though God were incomplete without us. Frank Sheed, an eminent Roman Catholic layman put it as well as any, in his book, *Theology and Sanity*.

God is infinite, the utterly sufficient all. There is no need of His nature not satisfied by what He is. There is not the smallest chink through which anything can be added to His fullness of existence, to the limitless perfection of His happiness. Besides Himself He needs no other. How could beings with nothing in them that He has not given, provide Him with anything He lacks? Yet other beings exist, and exist because He brought them into existence. Why? Not only did creation provide nothing that His nature needed, it provided, so to speak, no luxury either; it brought Him no profit, or increase, for there was nothing in it that was not already in Himself in greater, because uncreated, perfection.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* balances things very precisely when it states:

We believe that God created the world according to his wisdom. It is not the product of any necessity whatever [including any necessity of God's nature], nor of blind fate or chance. We believe that it proceeds from God's free will; he wanted to make his creatures share in his being, wisdom, and goodness: "For you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." Therefore the Psalmist exclaims: "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all"; and

“The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.”

That then is the fine line of difference. God created us and all things not because of any inner necessity as though he lacked anything or as though we might contribute anything to him, but only because in the abundance of his compassion he wanted to share of himself, of his perfect glory, and of his perfect serenity.

### III.

We must therefore say thirdly that creation was not only *out of nothing* and *for nothing*, in the sense we have just explained, but, as contradictory as it may sound, that it was really created, after all, *for something*, that is for the displaying of God’s might and glory, for the sharing of his wisdom and love, for the manifestation of his great care and compassion. It was in this sense that John Calvin used to speak of creation as “the theater of God’s glory.” He was only re-echoing the theme of the psalmist of old: “The heavens are telling the glory of God; the firmament showeth his handiwork; day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” Wrote St. Paul to the Romans, “Ever since the creation of the world [God’s] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made” (1:20). With this in mind St. Basil said in a sermon,

“Let us glorify the Master Craftsman for all that has been done wisely and skillfully; and from the beauty of the visible things let us form an idea of Him who is more than beautiful; and from the greatness of these perceptible and circumscribed bodies let us conceive of Him who is infinite and immense and who surpasses all understanding in the plenitude of His power. “May God . . . grant to you an understanding of His truth in its entirety, in order that from visible objects you may comprehend the invisible Being, and from the greatness and beauty of creatures you may conceive the proper idea concerning our Creator . . . Therefore, in the earth, in the air, and in the heavens, in water, in night and in day, and in all things visible, clear reminders of the Benefactor grip us” (Sermon 3.10)

Let us then, you and me, never fail to acknowledge and enjoy the wonder of creation and the far greater wonder of our Creator, and ever praise him by whom and for whom we and all things are made.

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