Course Summary C.8-8 (Special Ontology: Theology)

General

This course offers an ontological and philosophical analysis of the phenomenon of religion, examining the sacred independently of specific religious dogmas or atheistic prejudices.

The course distinguishes three ancient types of theology - mythical, political and physical - and formulates the essential characteristics of the divine: life, life force (dynamism) and causation.

The text then addresses both non-Biblical, pagan religions (such as Santería, with its magical exchange offerings and syncretism) and Biblical religion, which is characterized by inspired and historical revelation, the Decalogue as a universal code of conduct, and the Eternal Covenant encompassing all peoples.

The problem of theodicy is also central: reconciling evil with a good and omnipotent God. The course demonstrates that God does not cause evil, but respects human freedom and autonomy within a law of sowing and reaping, and that God acts through a pedagogical forbearance intended to gradually bring human beings to repentance.

Summary

1: Nature, Typology and Method of Philosophical Theology

Philosophical theology is defined as the ontology of religion or religious belief. It is called 'philosophical' because it adopts a neutral position: outside any specific religion, but equally outside irreligious positions such as atheism or agnosticism. The ancient Greek tradition provides three fundamental types of theology:

- *Mythical theology*: addressing the sacred through myths and stories that serve to activate a higher life force within rituals.
- *Political theology*: addressing the deity insofar as public and official social life is concerned.
- *Physical or natural-philosophical theology:* interpreting the deity through nature (physis), as the Milesian natural philosophers (Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes) did by means of human reason.

The theological method always operates on two levels: phenomenologically (describing what directly appears, what is given) and logically (reasoning beyond what is known towards what is being sought). Because the sacred is essentially a mystery that transcends the human mind, theology employs the apophatic or negative method: it describes God and the sacred with

reservations, recognizing that human and everyday models cannot simply be applied to the exalted or transcendent deity.

According to Nathan Söderblom, the divine is defined by three characteristics: it is living (not dead), it possesses life force or power (dynamism), and it acts as a cause or originator (Urheber).

2: The Fundamental Structure of Non-Biblical Religions, Ontological Pillars and Neo-Sacralism

The term 'religio' originally means the reverent care of a life force that depends on higher beings, as opposed to negligere (to neglect). Secularized cultures neglect this fundamental structure and believe that they can solve all problems autonomously, without a higher life force.

To clarify the essence of a non-Biblical religion, the course analyzes Santería (or La Regla Lucumí). Within Santería, Olodumare (Olorun) is regarded as the mysterious Supreme Being and the source of all life force (ashé). He governs the universe through a council of intermediaries, the orishas. Human beings need ashé to survive and solve problems. The practice of Santería is based on magical exchange transactions (ebbos or offerings), founded on the principle "Do ut des" (I give so that you may give). Furthermore, Santería exhibits syncretism: an outward layer of Catholic saint veneration conceals African pagan spirits.

Every religious reality rests ontologically on three pillars:

- *Subtle matter* (hylic pluralism): the notion that, alongside dense matter, there is also ethereal substance (which perishes at biological death) and astral substance (which accompanies the immortal soul).
- *Energy* (aretalogy/dynamism): divine power manifested through a sign of power or a miraculous deed (aretē or dynamis).
- *Information* (apocalyptics): the disclosure or revelation (apokalypsis) of invisible facts by a gifted individual through visions or journeys of the soul (mantic practices).

Although Western secularization predicted the end of religion, our era is witnessing a revival of the sacred (neo-sacralism), divided between fundamentalisms and New Age movements. Thinkers such as Jacques Derrida interpret this phenomenon in terms of two sources of the sacred: integrity/power on the one hand, and consecration/trust on the other.

3: Theodicy, Human Freedom and Atheistic Existentialism

Theodicy (a term introduced by Leibniz) seeks to justify God in the face of the existence of physical and moral evil. A classic atheistic objection states that if God is good and omnipotent, He should prevent evil; since evil exists, God must not exist.

An ontological examination of this argument, however, exposes a faulty axiom: it ignores the autonomy of creation. God does not create unfree automatons or robots, but free and independent beings. Evil, therefore, is not attributable to God, but to deviations within autonomous creation.

In modern thought, two forms of atheism stand in opposition:
- *Complacent atheism:* the secular bourgeois morality that assumes God can be eliminated while traditional moral values can be retained a priori.
- *Tragic atheism* (Jean-Paul Sartre): existentialism recognizes that if God does not exist, there are no longer any a priori values or transcendent norms. According to Dostoevsky and Sartre: "Since God does not exist, in principle everything is permitted." Human beings are abandoned by God (délaissé), have no excuses, and are condemned to freedom.

4: Biblical Religion: Creation, the Decalogue and the Eternal Covenant

Biblical religion distinguishes itself by being both historical (based on witnessed events) and divinely inspired. God is the Creator of the universe, of humanity (created in His image and likeness), and of sexuality as a divine idea.

The core of Biblical revelation is the great theophany at Sinai, where God proclaims His code of conduct - the Decalogue or Ten Commandments. It consists of three theological commandments (directed towards God) and seven ethical commandments (directed towards one's fellow human beings). Jesus confirms these commandments as the enduring foundation of religious life.

The Decalogue forms part of the Eternal Covenant, which is imprinted immanently throughout all creation. This covenant is not limited to Israel, but encompasses all peoples, pagans and classes on earth. The fundamental structure of the Bible rests on the polarity between Flesh and Spirit (Gen. 6:3): when human beings live without conscience ('flesh'), God's Spirit (life force) withdraws and leaves them to their fate; when they live conscientiously, God's Spirit remains present, solving problems and bringing salvation.

5: God's Pedagogical Forbearance, the Law of Sowing and Reaping, and the Final Destiny

The Eternal Covenant links human freedom to an inescapable law of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7): whatever one sows, one will also reap. Those who sow in the 'flesh' reap corruption; those who sow in the 'spirit' reap eternal life. This leads to the Biblical doctrine of the twofold resurrection: a resurrection to life for those who live conscientiously and a resurrection to judgment/condemnation for those who live without conscience.

At the same time, the Bible presents a remarkable form of God's pedagogical forbearance or pedagogy (as developed in the Book of Wisdom). God governs with measure, number and weight, and acts gradually. He closes His eyes to human unscrupulousness to leave room for remorse and repentance. Through 'immanent sanction', God allows human beings to experience the bitter fruits of their own choices in order to bring them to understanding.

Finally, the course clarifies the difference between pagan deities and the Biblical God. Pagan deities operate within demonism or 'totality' (a symbiosis of good and evil, in which gods tempt people to sin and then accuse them). The Biblical God, by contrast, is wholly good, contains no dualism in His nature, and remains the first to be faithful to His own moral law.