

## CHAPTER 1: THEOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

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## I: THEOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

This chapter deals with topics that will be presupposed in treating the volume's specific subject matter. Everyone preparing for or engaging in evangelization and catechesis has thought about these topics, but they are important and difficult enough to warrant treatment here. While I hope readers will find the chapter helpful in other ways, it is intended specifically to be a foundation for the remainder of this volume.

### A: The Ultimate End of Created Persons: The Kingdom of God

*Ultimate end* here does not mean the final state of things. The point is not that everyone, whether a great saint or an unrepentant sinner, ends up in God's kingdom. The point, rather, is that God's kingdom is the overarching good for which created persons should hope—the good that should shape every human being's entire life.

Scripture and the Church's teaching make it clear that God's kingdom is both his purpose in creating and the ultimate end that created persons ought to seek. They also make it clear that the God's kingdom will be a community of created persons with God, that human participants will share in Jesus' resurrection life and enjoy one another's company, and that they also will see God face to face.

St. Thomas Aquinas best articulated and defended a view held by many Church Fathers and teachers in the Church before and since his time: that the only blessing essential to God's kingdom is the vision of God. That view is erroneous, and the error leads to many misunderstandings and difficulties. A sound account of God's kingdom as the true ultimate end clarifies the truth of faith and solves many problems.

#### 1) The Jews of Jesus' time hoped for the coming of God's kingdom.

The Jews of Jesus' time understood talk about the coming of the kingdom of God on the basis of the Scriptures they heard read in their synagogues and the psalms they prayed there.<sup>1</sup>

“Although the Old Testament never uses the expression kingdom of God (except in Wisdom 10:10), the conviction that God, the God of Israel, is king is basic to it from one end to the other.”<sup>2</sup> God is king of creation: “I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless

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1. As passages I will quote make clear, the idea, if not the expression, *kingdom of God* appears in many passages of the Old Testament; on this, see Dale Patrick, “The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament,” in Wendell Willis, *The Kingdom of God in 20th-Century Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1987), 67-79. For a far richer and better-argued treatment of Israel's hope than I can offer, see N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 147-338.

2. Benedict T. Viviano, O.P., *The Kingdom of God in History*, Good News Studies, 27 (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), 17.

thy name for ever and ever. . . . All thy works shall give thanks to thee, O Lord, and all thy saints shall bless thee! They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and tell of thy power” (Ps 145.1, 10-11; cf. Ps 93). God’s kingship is permanent and absolutely unshakeable: “Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endures throughout all generations” (Ps 145.13; cf. Ps 146.10). In a special way, God is king of Israel. When he has brought the Israelites out of Egypt and saved them from Pharaoh’s pursuing force, their praise of him ends: “The Lord will reign for ever and ever” (Ex 15.18). In giving the Israelites the Sinai covenant, God formally “became king in Jeshurun [Israel], when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together” (Dt 33.5). Very often, God’s universal kingship and his kingship of Israel—and domination of her enemies—are linked together: “The Lord, the Most High, is terrible, a great king over all the earth. He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet” (Ps 47.2-3; cf. Ps 97.1-9).

Confronted with ongoing evils in the world but believing in God’s goodness and kingship, Israel anticipated his coming to “judge” the earth—that is, to put the world aright: “Make a joyful noise to before the King, the Lord! . . . for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity” (Ps 98.6, 9). The prophets clearly articulated that expectation:

The earth is utterly broken, the earth is rent asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunken man, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again.

On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before his elders he will manifest his glory. (Is 24.19-23; cf. Jer 10.6-25)

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. (Is 25.6-8)

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: “We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps faith may enter in.” (Is 26.1-2)

Such prophecy not only aroused hope for the restoration of Israel but for the renewal of the broken world—for the punishment of the wicked, the abolition of death, and the elimination of sin.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 359, does not accept the opinion that the verse that includes “swallow up death forever” is a later addition; he refers to Ps 16 and Ps 73, and argues that “swallow up” suggests the elimination of death as the ultimate suffering people undergo—“as a force of disorder, negativity, and aridity, morally and physically, in connection with which the actual dying of the individual is episodic and incidental.” Also see Blenkinsopp’s comments (370-71) on Is 26.19. In any

On the day of the Lord, Israel will not be spared. She will be purged. Jerusalem will “be taken and the houses plundered and the women ravished” (Zec 14.2). But God will deal with the attacking nations and restore order in the world (see Zec 14.3-8). Although God reigns always and forever, in a world restored by his action, his kingship will be realized in a new way: “The Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one” (Zec 14.9).

Israel’s anticipation of God’s definitive reign also included the expectation of a prophetic announcement of the day of the Lord: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes” (Mal 4.5).

Recognizing God’s supremacy, Israel’s early leaders did not aspire to be kings. When Gideon defeated the Midianites who had afflicted the Israelites, they offered him kingship, which he refused: “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you” (Jgs 8.23). Later, when the people asked the prophet Samuel for a king like other nations had, he at first resisted (see 1 Sm 8.4-21). But when they persisted, the Lord told Samuel to anoint Saul as the Lord’s designated prince (see 1 Sm 9.15, 10.1). Since *messiah* means anointed and God authorized Samuel to anoint Saul, he was the “messiah of Yahweh” (see 1 Sm 24.6). Saul’s kingship was subjected to both divine law (see 1 Sm 12.14-15) and a written quasi-constitution (see 1 Sm 10.25; cf. Dt 17.14-20).<sup>4</sup> Thus, *messiah* came to connote providing kingly service as God’s representative, who acted on his behalf.

After David was anointed king, God promised: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. . . . And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever” (2 Sm 7.12, 16). When the realm David ruled over was greatly reduced and even more so after his dynasty ended, the expectation that God’s promise to David would nevertheless be fulfilled contributed to the hope that God would send a messiah to save his people.

In developing and articulating that hope, the prophets merged the anticipation of the day of the Lord—the beginning of God’s definitive reign—with the coming of his human representative, the messiah, a descendant of David’s father, Jesse:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.  
And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, . . .  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth,

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case, at least some Jews had clear and firm faith in personal, bodily resurrection *before* Jesus’ time, as is clear from 2 Mac 7 and Dn 12.2.

4. See P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, 8 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 178-79 (anoint as prince) and 193-94 (constitution).

and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.  
 Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist,  
 and faithfulness the girdle of his loins.  
 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
 and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
 and the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
 and a little child shall lead them. . . .  
 They shall not hurt or destroy  
 in all my holy mountain;  
 for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
 as the waters cover the sea.

In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious. (Is 11.1-2a, 3-6, 9-10)

Thus, hopes for a messianic age could include the anticipation of peace that would extend even to the natural world.

Still, hope for a messiah regularly focused on the restoration of Israel, not only as a peaceful and prosperous nation, but as a true people of God:

My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall dwell in the land where your fathers dwelt that I gave to my servant Jacob; they and their children and their children's children shall dwell there for ever; and David my servant shall be their prince for ever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore (Ez 37.24-28; cf. Jer 23.5-6, 33.14-22; Am 9.11-15).

With that hope for Israel's complete and permanent restoration in view, the anticipated messiah was sometimes but not always expected to be a warrior-king.

Psalms 2 projects a warrior-king. When the rulers of the nations plot against God and his messiah, God laughs and terrifies them with his anger: "I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill" (Ps 2.6). The messiah describes his commissioning:

I will tell of the decree of the Lord:  
 He said to me, "You are my son,  
 today I have begotten you.  
 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,  
 and the ends of the earth your possession.  
 You shall break them with a rod of iron,  
 and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (Ps 2.7-9)

Moreover, less than two centuries before Jesus' time, Jewish rebels had defeated a pagan oppressor and for a time reestablished a Jewish, though not Davidic, kingship (see 1 Mac), and that experience undoubtedly colored expectations with respect to the messiah and the kingdom he would inaugurate. Consequently, many people surely expected a messiah who would outdo David's military achievements.

Still, a prince of peace also was projected:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
 Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
 Lo, your king comes to you;  
 triumphant and victorious is he,  
 humble and riding on an ass,  
 on a colt the foal of an ass.  
 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
 and the war horse from Jerusalem;  
 and the battle bow shall be cut off,  
 and he shall command peace to the nations;  
 his dominion shall be from sea to sea,  
 and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zec 9.9-10)

In this prophetic vision, not the messiah but the Lord himself will exercise the force required to save his people (see Zec 9.11-17).

The same thing is true in the apocalyptic vision of Daniel. God himself (“one that was ancient of days”) judges, and fire emanating from his throne burns up the current oppressor (“the beast”). Other pagan rulers (“the rest of the beasts”) lose their power (see Dn 7.9-12). After that, the vision continues:

Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man,  
 and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.  
 And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom,  
 that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him;  
 his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,  
 and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Dn 7.13-14).

While the human figure God puts in place of the beast is not a Davidic king, this ruler is both God’s agent and the representative of the people, insofar as they are submissive to divine authority, for through that figure “the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, for ever and ever” (Dn 7.18; cf. 19-28).

In passages of the book of Isaiah subsequent to those quoted above, God comes with kingly power that he exercises as a gentle shepherd (see Is 40.9-11). The creator of all things comes to rescue Israel and renew the earth (see Is 40.12-41.20). He comes as a loving savior-king, who blots out sins going back to a “first father” (see Is 42.5-43.27). Israel’s salvation is permanent, and the gentiles worship her God (see Is 45.5-25).

In this context, another human figure who is not a Davidic king—indeed, not a king at all—seems, like the son of man, to be both an agent of God and a representative of the people.<sup>5</sup> This figure is introduced as God’s servant who will quietly and gently, but persistently and effectively, put the world aright (Is 42.1-7). The servant says that the Lord formed him from the womb for his mission, prepared him, as weapons are prepared, to be an effective instrument (see Is 49.1-2), and commissioned him: “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified” (Is 49.3).

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5. On this figure, see John L. McKenzie, “The Servant Songs,” in *Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible, 20 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), xxxviii-iv.

Though the servant's efforts to serve do not go well, he trusts in God (see Is 49.4-5). God again commissions him and promises that, despite initial rejection, his mission will succeed by divine power:

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to restore the preserved of Israel;  
I will give you as a light to the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”  
Thus says the Lord,  
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,  
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,  
the servant of rulers:  
“Kings shall see and arise;  
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves;  
because of the Lord, who is faithful,  
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.” (Is 49.6-7)

But although the servant tries to carry out his prophetic mission in complete obedience to the Lord, his message is rejected, and he suffers physical abuse; still, he persists unwaveringly and confidently expects divine vindication (see Is 50.4-9).

Finally, although the abuse increases and the servant dies (see Is 53.2-8), his suffering and death, almost incredibly, manifest God's reign: “Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (Is 53.1). Rather than dying a failure, the servant succeeds in fulfilling God's will by suffering and dying, and is himself fulfilled for his faithful service:

Behold, my servant shall prosper,  
he shall be exalted and lifted up,  
and shall be very high. (Is 52.13).

Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him;  
he has put him to grief;  
when he makes himself an offering for sin,  
he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days;  
the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand;  
he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,  
make many to be accounted righteous;  
and he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great,  
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;  
because he poured out his soul to death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors. (Is 53.10-12)

Thus, the hope for the coming of God's reign and the repair of the broken world could include the anticipation of human figure who would enjoy neither the divine sonship and power of a messiah nor the dominion and glory of a son of man but who would overcome

sin by undergoing suffering and death: “Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed” (Is 53.5).

In the context of the passages regarding the suffering servant, people were again and again told to expect someone who would proclaim the good news of the arrival of God’s reign: “A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. . . . And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Is 40.3, 5). And again: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (Is 52.7).

## **2) The New Testament directs us to the kingdom of God as our true ultimate end.**

The synoptic gospels tell us that Jesus began preaching by proclaiming the coming of God’s kingdom: “Now after John [the Baptist] was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel’ (Mk 1.14-15). Matthew instead has, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4.17), but *heaven* here is “nothing more than a circumlocution for the divine name.”<sup>6</sup> So, Matthew confirms Mark’s summary of Jesus’ preaching, and his expression should not be taken to mean that Jesus announced a purely spiritual, otherworldly kingdom.

Luke at first only mentions Jesus’ initial preaching without saying what he taught (see Lk 4.15). Luke next deals at length with Jesus’ preaching in Nazareth, his exorcisms and healings in Capernaum, and people’s favorable and unfavorable responses (see Lk 4:16-41). But Luke then tells us that, when people in Capernaum wished to prevent Jesus from leaving, “he said to them, ‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose’” (Lk 4.43). In this way, Luke not only confirms what Mark and Matthew tell us about Jesus’ initial message but makes it clear that preaching the good news of the kingdom was *the* purpose for which he was sent (also see Mk 1.38-39; Mt 4.23, 9.35; Lk 8.1, 9.11).

In fact, the gospel proclaimed is always about the kingdom. When Jesus sends out the Twelve, he tells them: “Preach as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Mt 10.7; cf. Lk 9.2, 10.9), and in a discourse about the end of the age he says: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come” (Mt 24.14; cf. Mk 13.10). According to the book of Acts, between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, he proved to the apostles that he was really alive and spoke to them “of the kingdom of God” (Acts 1.3), and when they asked him just before his ascension whether he would then “restore the kingdom to Israel” (1.6), he declined to answer (see 1.7), saying: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (1.8). And the book of Acts ends with

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6. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *God’s Rule and Kingdom* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 80.

Paul in Rome “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered” (28.31).

Some to whom Jesus proclaimed the kingdom’s coming had already heard a similar message from John, who baptized with water those who responded to his call for repentance; John nevertheless made it clear that he was only an advance-man for someone about to come, who would baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit (see Mt 3.1-12; Mk 1.4-8; Lk 3.2-17; Jn 1.15, 19-34)—which points either to the messiah or a figure similar in having and exercising divine power. Thus, especially people who had heard John’s message, but even those who had not, could hardly have missed the significance of Jesus’ stating that “the time is fulfilled,” namely, “that a major turning point in the unfolding of salvation history has been reached, a particular moment in time which inaugurates a new eon.”<sup>7</sup> In the context, “the kingdom of God is at hand” meant that the day of the Lord either had arrived or was imminent; and “repent, and believe in the gospel” called on people to make the preparation necessary if they were to experience God’s reign as a blessing rather than as a disaster.

Scholars point out that the Greek word *basileia*, which is often translated *kingdom*, primarily refers to kingship, kingly rule, reign, or sovereignty rather than to the realm ruled over or, as some put it, a territory. For instance, one scholar sums up many quotations from the prophets:

These texts show us that Israel experienced Yahweh’s kingship in the historical action of its God. This is no ‘kingdom’ and no ‘sphere of dominion’ but a kingly leadership and reign which develops from Yahweh’s absolute power and shows itself in the guidance of Israel. This original meaning, namely that Yahweh as king actively ‘rules’, must be kept in mind through the whole growth of the *basileia* theme.<sup>8</sup>

Some scholars have used that fact as a premise to argue that the so-called kingdom of God, rather than “a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Heb 11.16), to be hoped for, was already fully realized in Jesus’ teaching and actions.<sup>9</sup> On this view, Jesus’ preaching about the kingdom was only a way of calling attention to his own arrival on the scene and promoting his novel views about how to live and treat other people. Similarly, some Church Fathers identified the kingdom “either with some *present* spiritual good in the soul of the believer, like knowledge, contemplation, spiritual and intellectual illumination, or the practice of Christian virtue.”<sup>10</sup>

Such notions of the kingdom are diametrically opposed to the view most common among Christians: that *kingdom of God* refers to heaven, where the blessed will live with God forever, even after planet earth has passed away. However, sound scholarship supports a balanced view of what *basileia* refers to in both the Old Testament and Jesus’ preaching:

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7. Viviano, op. cit., 14.

8. Schnackenburg, op. cit., 13.

9. See C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet, 1935).

10. Viviano, op. cit., 31.

This kingdom was not a timeless truth, nor an abstract ethical ideal, nor the coming end of the space-time universe. Nor did the phrase itself *denote* a community, though it would *connote* the birth of a new covenant community. It would denote, rather, the action of the covenant god, within Israel's history, to restore her fortunes, to bring to an end the bitter period of exile, and to defeat, through her, the evil that ruled the whole world.<sup>11</sup>

In sum, *kingdom of God* primarily refers to God's saving action. The good news of its coming meant that the creator—who at first had found everything that he made “very good” (Gn 1.31) and who then had for a long time patiently tolerated sin and its consequences—was now beginning to take action to renew the broken world, and thus was *becoming* king in a new way.

On this interpretation of *kingdom of God*, all the New Testament texts in which the expression occurs make sense. In itself, God's kingship is everlasting, because his saving action, like his creative causality as a whole, is identical with God himself. But in its effect, which is the coming of God's kingship, his saving action is neither everlasting nor an instantaneous event but a process with a definite beginning and end.

Because God, with the incarnation of the Word, became present to the world in a new way, the process of the kingdom's coming began with Jesus' arrival on the scene. The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus was the hoped for messiah, perhaps most clearly in Luke's account of the Annunciation, when Gabriel tells Mary:

Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,  
and you shall call his name Jesus.  
He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High;  
and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,  
and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever;  
and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Lk 1.31-33)

When John baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit anointed him, the Father acknowledged him (see Mt 3.13-17, Mk 1.9-11, Lk 3.21-22), and Jesus was ready to baptize with the Holy Spirit (see Jn 1.31-34)—to act as God's agent in the world and gather people into his kingdom.

At first, the coming of God's reign was imperceptible, yet manifested by what Jesus said and did. Casting out demons, he explained: “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Mt 12.28; cf. Lk 11.20). Again, asked when the kingdom of God was coming, he rejected the assumption that it was going to arrive perceptibly at some future time and other place, and, apparently with veiled self-reference, explained that it was already present: “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Lk 17.20-21).<sup>12</sup>

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11. Wright, *op. cit.*, 307.

12. The words translated “in the midst of you” can be and often were translated “within you”; however, sound exegesis no longer supports that translation; see Schnackenburg, *op. cit.*, 134-37; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Gospel according to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible, 28 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 1157-63.

The whole kingdom is present in principle in Jesus himself, not only inasmuch as he divinely and humanly cooperates with the Father and the Spirit in his preaching and miracles but also inasmuch as, in everything, he humanly obeys the Father's wise and loving plan of salvation. A sinless man who will be the primary member, the head, of the new covenantal community in friendship with God, Jesus primarily refers to himself when he compares the kingdom to a mustard seed and to leaven (see Mt 13.31-33; Lk 13.18-21).<sup>13</sup> Jesus sometimes makes present God's reign by expressly talking about it and acting with divine power. But inasmuch as he always and perfectly *obeys* the Father, he also makes God's reign present by everything he says and does, by his celibacy and simplicity of life, and by freely accepting all the frustrations and sufferings that come his way.

By constantly bearing witness to the kingdom and manifesting God's faithful and saving love, Jesus arouses people's hopes, motivates them to repent, draws them to believe in him and his gospel, and gives those who receive him "power to become children of God" (Jn 1.12). However, people do not enter the kingdom by merely assenting to the truth of the gospel: "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7.21; cf. Lk 6.46-49). That is so because evil is overcome and God's reign realized only as sin and its consequences give way to the *obedience* of faith. Accordingly, New Testament catechesis often makes it clear that grave sins can prevent people from inheriting the kingdom (see 1 Cor 6.9-10, Gal 5.19-21, Eph 5.5). By contrast, those who consistently do the Father's will thereby become members of Jesus' family of faith: "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mt 12.50; cf. Mk 3.35, Lk 8.21). Thus, the kingdom present in Jesus as seed grows into the people of God over whom he will reign forever; the kingdom present in Jesus as leaven pervades humankind.

The obedience of faith and loving others as one is loved by Jesus comes more easily to some than to others. Welcoming the kingdom is not easy for those well-adjusted to the sinful world's culture, who have a great stake in its unjust social structures. "It will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19.23; cf. Mk 10.23, Lk 18.24).

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13. Divinely preserved from all sin in view of the kingdom's coming in Jesus and the role she would play in it, Mary both perfectly embodied Israel's faith and hope, and participated beforehand in Jesus' perfect obedience and love, so that temporally she was the first member of the kingdom, as was beautifully explained (without using the word *kingdom*) by Benedict XVI, "Before the Angelus," Sydney, Australia, 19 July 2008: "This scene [the Annunciation] is perhaps the pivotal moment in the history of God's relationship with his people. During the Old Testament, God revealed himself partially, gradually, as we all do in our personal relationships. It took time for the chosen people to develop their relationship with God. The covenant with Israel was like a period of courtship, a long engagement. Then came the definitive moment, the moment of marriage, the establishment of a new and everlasting covenant. As Mary stood before the Lord, she represented the whole of humanity. In the angel's message, it was as if God made a marriage proposal to the human race. And in our name, Mary said yes." However, while necessary, mother Mary's consent to the new covenant was not sufficient; not she, but Jesus, would represent humankind in forming it, which he did by his lifelong obedience, culminating in his free acceptance of death, and in consummating it, which he, with the Father and Spirit, did by the events that began with the Last Supper and ended with Jesus' resurrection.

The poor and those who, like the poor, are always conscious of their total dependence on God, can more easily repent and believe: “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?” (Jas 2.5; cf. Mt 5.3, Lk 6.20). “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18.3; cf. Mt 19.14, Mk 10.14, Lk 18.16).

Some of Israel’s elite, who regarded themselves as exemplary and were well respected, rejected Jesus and his gospel. Because loving obedience to God’s salvific plan, even when it takes unexpected turns, is necessary to overcome sin, Jesus taught: “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5.20; cf. Mt 23.13). Again, to some chief priests and elders who challenged him, Jesus said: “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you” (Mt 21.31). Known sinners who recognized their own sinfulness were more open to the gospel and the grace to repent (see Mt 21.29-32).

It is therefore clear that those who hear the gospel but do not inherit the kingdom are blameworthy, and that those who do inherit it are blessed for “producing the fruits of” the kingdom (see Mt 21.43) by doing the Father’s will and freely accepting suffering for doing it: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5.10; cf. Acts 14.22). The parable of the talents also makes it clear that, while awaiting the kingdom’s arrival, its servants must use what has been entrusted to them to promote it (see Lk 19.11-27; Mt 25.14-30).<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the parable of the wedding banquet makes it clear that those who enter the kingdom are like invited guests who have no claim on their host, and that the role of their cooperation is like that of guests who come to a wedding banquet properly attired (see Mt 22.1-14). And the parable of laborers in the vineyard makes it clear that those who receive the kingdom are rewarded for complying with the requirements for receiving what God has promised rather than for their actual performance (see Mt 20.1-16). Thus, nobody is entitled to the kingdom; it is a divine gift, as Jesus tells his disciples: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk 12.32).

That little flock, which receives the gift of the kingdom, is Jesus’ own community.<sup>15</sup> Those belonging to it who remain faithful to him until his Ascension or who, after infidelity, repent and rejoin it, comprise the Church that Jesus leaves behind, gathered in the upper room until Pentecost (see Acts 1.12-26). That Church, as Jesus promised, was

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14. See Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, 1227-40, esp. 1232-33, where he explains that in Luke’s version of the parable, it is clear that it concerns the last judgment and that Jesus himself is the nobleman who “returned, having received the kingly power” (Lk 19.15), required the servants to give an account, and rendered severe judgment: “But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me” (Lk 19.27).

15. Inasmuch as the little flock that receives Jesus as messiah is a remnant of Israel, he is the king of the Jews. Still, Jesus has no intention of being the warrior-king many people expected. So, he is not eager to be identified as the messiah and, when questioned by Pilate, “Are you the king of the Jews?” (Mt 27.11, Mk 15.2, Lk 23.3, Jn 18.33), Jesus answers noncommittally (also see Jn 18.37). In Jn 18.34-37, Jesus also explains that the kingship he does have is not political—which he proves by the fact that his followers did not fight against his arrest—but is a matter of bearing witness to the truth.

founded on Peter (see Mt 16.18-19, Jn 21.15-17, Acts 1.15-22). Consequently, during the present age the kingdom subsists in and grows with the Church.<sup>16</sup> That is why Jesus promised to give Peter the keys to the kingdom, and authorized him to bind and loose in ways effective both on earth and in heaven (see Mt 16.19)—that is, both with the human community of the Church and with God. Thus, writing to the church at Colossia, Paul says that the Father “has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1.13).

Nevertheless, the Church cannot be identified with the kingdom of God. Because the kingdom’s definitive establishment is still to be hoped for, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray to the Father, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6.10; cf. Lk 11.2). The Church will continue saying that prayer until Jesus comes again. Jesus also suggests that there is a distinction between the Son of Man’s kingdom and the definitive kingdom of the Father.<sup>17</sup> For Jesus distinguishes between the two in explaining the parable of the weeds in the wheat field:

The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Mt 13.41-43)<sup>18</sup>

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16. In commenting on Mt 21.33-46, John P. Meier, *Matthew* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1980), 244-45, explains: “In Mt’s schema of salvation history, Jesus’ death-resurrection is the apocalyptic turning point which ushers in the new age of the church. Fittingly, then, right after the text referring to the resurrection, Mt has Jesus announce that after the death-resurrection God will take the kingdom from Israel and give it to a ‘people’ (RSV: ‘nation’) which will produce the harvest of justice, the good works God wills. By introducing this ecclesiological motif, Mt has shifted the imagery and the thrust of the parable. The vineyard no longer symbolizes Israel (v. 33) or Jerusalem (v. 39), but the kingdom of God, already present and given to Israel in the OT, but now transferred to the new people made up of both Jews and Gentiles, the church.”

17. I think that the NT texts that follow—especially 1 Cor 15.28—support the theological view that, insofar as *kingdom* refers to reign, the Son of Man’s reign is to the Father’s reign as David’s reign was to God’s reign, and the human action that pertains to the former is distinct from the divine action that pertains to the latter; and insofar as *kingdom* refers to realm, the realm of the Son of Man during the present age is not yet the definitive kingdom of God for which Israel hoped and that God is bringing about through Christ’ human action.

18. Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist, 1984), 51-52: “Indeed, the church can be identified with the kingdom of God’s Son. There is much insistence in introductory NT courses that *he basileia tou theou* (the kingdom of God) is an active, not a static or localized concept, and would be translated better as ‘rule, reign,’ not ‘kingdom.’ A corollary often is drawn that the initiation of the rule of God by Jesus cannot simply be equated with the founding of the church. In such observations, true as they may be, one must not overlook the fact that in some of the later sections of the NT *basileia* has been reified and localized, so that ‘kingdom’ is the only appropriate translation. One enters it, and there are keys to it. Also the kingdom and the church have begun to be partially identified. Important in this regard is Matthew’s explanation of the parable about the weeds planted and allowed to grow among the wheat (13:36-43). The good seed are the sons of the kingdom; the weeds are the sons of the evil one; when the harvest comes ‘the Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather *out of his kingdom*, all the causes of sin and all evildoers. . . . Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.’ Thus there is a kingdom of the Son of Man on earth with good and bad—seemingly the church—but only after the judgment will the just enter the kingdom of their Father.”

Similarly, Jesus compares the present kingdom to a net that gathers both good and bad fish, which must be sorted out when the net is drawn ashore (see Mt 13.47-48). That is why, in his magnificent description of the last judgment, Jesus says that the Son of man will come *as King* to separate the sheep from the goats (see Mt 25.31-34) and “will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Mt 25.34).

During Jesus’ public life, he exercised kingship on behalf of the Father by beginning to overcome sin and its consequences. With his resurrection and sending of the Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus established the Church, and in and through her he continues carrying on his mission: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28.18-20). Those who repent, believe, and are baptized are “born of water and the Spirit” so that they become children of God and share in his kingdom (Jn 3.5).

That kingship of Jesus must continue, as St. Paul teaches, “until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15.25-26). Then Jesus “delivers the kingdom to God the Father” (1 Cor 15.24), for, with the overcoming of death, absolutely everything except God himself will be subjected to Jesus (see 1 Cor 15.27).<sup>19</sup> “Then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one” (1 Cor 15.28). In other words, when all evils have been overcome, the coming of God’s kingdom will be complete. With Jesus as head of renewed creation, his mission will have been fully carried out.

Still, Paul’s saying that Jesus’ human kingship must continue *until* he has overcome death does not mean it will then end, but that it will then make creation perfectly at one with God. So, the authors of other New Testament books can say that of Jesus’ “kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1.33); “But of the Son he says, ‘Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever’” (Heb 1.8), “There will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pt 1.11).

That kingdom will be a real community of the blessed with Jesus. When he is asked for preferred status in his kingdom for James and John, he accepts the assumption that they will be with him in the kingdom but explains that status in it is not his to give because it has been determined by the Father (see Mt 20.20-23, Mk 10.35-40). Still, he promises companionship to all the Twelve: “As my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on

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19. See Ps 8.6, Eph 1.22, Phil 3.21. Another passage of Paul’s contains the clearest teaching of any in the New Testament that the definitive kingdom will include a renewal of all creation: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8.18-23).

thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Lk 22.29-30; cf. Mt 19.28). When the good thief asks to be remembered when Jesus comes into his kingdom, he replies: “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23.43). And Paul “would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5.8).

According to the seer of Revelation, the blessed will sing a new song to Jesus, the Lamb, rejoicing that he has given them a share in his kingship and priesthood: “Thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth” (Rv 5.9-10). They shall reign on earth because God’s will has been done: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rv 11.15).<sup>20</sup> After the kings of the earth have been displaced, the dead raised and judgment rendered, the new world arrives:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.”

And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” . . .

There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever. (Rv 21.1-5a, 22.3-5)

Even if one sets aside the striking images, including that of the New Jerusalem coming *down* from heaven, this passage stands as a solid confirmation of the others I have cited to show that those who inherit the kingdom will constitute a true community: bodily human beings living within an entirely renewed universe and in communion with God. Members of that community will enjoy such great intimacy with God that they will not only worship him but see his face and reign with him forever and ever.<sup>21</sup>

With two brief, closely linked parables, Jesus makes the point that the kingdom is a great good: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again,

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20. Sometimes the definitive coming of the kingdom is thought of as the death and resurrection of the whole universe. For example, 2 Pt 3.7-12 projects destruction by fire of the heavens and the elements on “the coming of the day of God” (v. 12), then goes on: “But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (v. 13).

21. Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 191-200, shows well how Rv 21.1 - 22.5 sketch out the new heaven and new earth as the overcoming of sin and its consequences, and the fulfillment of Israel’s hope; he explains (200) that God’s servants’ having his name on their foreheads pertains to their priesthood, since only the high priest, who entered the Holy of Holies, had the name of Yahweh on the turban that covered his forehead.

the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Mt 13.44-46). The worker is so euphoric at the treasure he has stumbled on that he sells everything to obtain it, and the merchant is so eager to possess the precious pearl he has been seeking that he sells all to buy it. “Thus it is with the Kingdom of God. The effect of the joyful news is overpowering; it fills the heart with gladness; it makes life’s whole aim the consummation of the divine community and produces the most whole-hearted self-sacrifice.”<sup>22</sup>

The Gospel according to Luke, 12.1-34, presents Jesus’ teaching to his disciples about their commitment to him and to his gospel of God’s kingdom. He begins by warning them against hypocrisy (v. 1)—a limited commitment without the love that motivates going beyond self-interest to realize genuine community with God and neighbor—and the duplicity to which hypocrisy leads (vv. 2-3). He then explains why the commitment must be not only genuine but so complete that one is prepared to lay down one’s life: it is a commitment to God, who both has the power to cast into hell those who betray him and rightly values human life (vv. 4-7). The unstated implication is that God will never require people to lay down their lives unless doing so is in their own best interests.

Jesus next deals with cases in which one’s life actually is at stake. In the heavenly court, he will vindicate those faithful and abandon those unfaithful to him and to his gospel of God’s kingdom (vv. 8-9). Jesus next adds an opaque distinction between real infidelity (blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, who has made clear what one should say), which is unforgivable, and forgivable shortcomings in fidelity (saying a word against the Son of man), which perhaps refers to Peter’s threefold denial and similar behavior, which does not contradict the truth revealed in Jesus (vv. 8-12).

Luke then marks a transition to cases in which one’s life is not actually at stake. Someone in the crowd asks Jesus to mediate a dispute about inheritance, and he refuses (vv. 13-14), but goes on to tell the crowd the parable of the rich fool, who carefully looked after his wealth but ignored the real meaning of life and, not being rich with God, lost everything when he died (vv. 15-21). Jesus then distinguishes between things such as food and clothing, about which disciples should not be anxious inasmuch as God will provide, and one’s very life and body. The latter are greater than the former (vv. 22-29). (The point is that things such as food and clothing are only useful goods, whereas life and the body are intrinsic to persons; and the unstated implication is that disciples should be anxious about their lives and bodies, and so should seek what will truly protect and promote their welfare as persons.) Jesus concludes: “Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be of anxious mind” (v. 29) about what everybody in the world seeks and the Father knows you need (v. 30). “Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well” (v. 31).<sup>23</sup> In other words, even when disciples’ lives are not

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22. Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972), 201.

23. The only synoptic parallel to Lk 12.22-31 ends, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Mt 6.33), which Thomas Aquinas interprets as

actually at stake, they should intend the kingdom as their ultimate end; by trusting God and doing his will, they will save their lives and their bodies despite death,<sup>24</sup> and will be supplied with everything they really need.

Finally, Jesus instructs his disciples to proceed with respect to things in a way diametrically opposite to that of the rich fool:

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Lk 12-32-34)

Here Jesus makes three further points. Although the kingdom is to be sought as an end, it will be the Father's gift. Still, by using one's possessions to meet others' needs, one can, as it were, invest what one has with God for safekeeping in his kingdom. Moreover, having treasure in the kingdom is doubly prudent: it also will help keep one's heart—that is, one's will—firmly fixed on one's true ultimate end.

In sum, the good news of the arrival of God's kingdom was proclaimed by Jesus, and its coming was, is, and will be mediated by him: by the Word's becoming flesh and his public life; by his death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit; by his ongoing intercession in heaven and action as head of the Church on earth; and by his final gathering up of the entire, renewed creation. While the definitive kingdom is God's gift, Jesus teaches his disciples to seek it by complying with the requirements for receiving it—that is, by doing the Father's will, which includes using one's gifts to promote the kingdom, forgiving others, and serving them. Finally, Jesus teaches that the kingdom is so great a good that it is to be sought as one's sole ultimate end, so that one must be ready to lay down one's life for it and, in any case, should be more intent on inheriting it than on having the necessities of life.

### **3) Catholic teaching confirms that the kingdom is our true ultimate end.**

At the beginning of article eleven, "I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that the Creed "culminates in the proclamation of the resurrection of the dead on the last day and in life everlasting" (988). It then affirms: "We firmly believe, and hence we hope that, just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives forever, so after death the righteous will live forever with the risen Christ and he will raise them up on the last day" (989). Thus, in accord with the whole New

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meaning to seek the kingdom as one's ultimate end: see *De malo*, q. 7, a. 10, ad 9. Ben Witherington III, *Matthew* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth and Helwys, 2006), 153, comments: "The verb 'seek' is in the continual present tense, so it refers to the ultimate life quest, what one relentlessly focuses on. The term *protos* [first] could mean 'above all,' but the way the rest of the aphorism reads it suggests that disciples are to seek only one thing, because it is God, not disciples, who will add the rest."

24. Jesus elsewhere makes this point explicitly and in that place he also refers to the last judgment: "Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mk 8.35-38).

Testament and the Creed itself, the *Catechism* treats living forever as bodily persons with the risen Lord Jesus as an object of Christians' faith and hope distinct from other blessings pertaining to everlasting life.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to article twelve, "I Believe in Life Everlasting," the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* first treats the particular judgment (1021-22) and then begins treating heaven:

**1023** Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they "see him as he is," face to face.<sup>26</sup>

By virtue of our apostolic authority, we define the following: According to the general disposition of God, the souls of all the saints . . . and other faithful who died after receiving Christ's holy Baptism (provided they were not in need of purification when they died, . . . or, if they then did need or will need some purification, when they have been purified after death, . . .) already before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgment—and this since the Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into heaven—have been, are and will be in heaven, in the heavenly Kingdom and celestial paradise with Christ, joined to the company of the holy angels. Since the Passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, these souls have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature.<sup>27</sup>

**1024** This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity—this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed—is called "heaven." Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.

The opening sentences say two things about those who die in grace and are perfectly purified: (1) they live for ever with Jesus, and (2) they have the beatific vision. Then those two statements are explained and confirmed by a quotation from an apostolic constitution issued by Pope Benedict XII in 1336. He teaches about baptized people who have died and whose souls either needed no purification or have finished with purgatory, and he deals with the state of such souls before the resurrection and final judgment. Benedict solemnly defines: (1) since Jesus' ascension, such souls have been, are, and will be "in heaven, in the heavenly Kingdom and celestial paradise" with Christ and the holy angels; and (2) since Jesus' passion and death, such souls have had and do have the beatific vision.

Benedict XII taught (1) and (2) *ex cathedra* to end a controversy set off by his predecessor, John XXII. Some Church Fathers had understood the New Testament to mean that, until the resurrection and last judgment, even pure or purified souls do not enjoy the beatific vision. But that such souls already enjoy it was the common teaching in

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25. In answer to the question, "What is life everlasting?" the *Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 207, states: "Eternal life is that life which begins immediately after death. It will have no end. It will be preceded for each person by a particular judgment at the hands of Christ who is the Judge of the living and the dead. This particular judgment will be confirmed in the final judgment." So, even if those who die in Christ need to undergo purification, their everlasting life begins with particular judgment, and they will joyfully await all the blessings that pertain to everlasting life.

26. Fn. 598: 1 Jn 3.2; cf. 1 Cor 13.12; Rv 22.4.

27. Fn. 599: Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus* (1336): DS 1000; cf. LG 49.

the Church by John XXII's time. Although John had held the common teaching, late in life he took the other position. He never proposed it as a truth to be held definitively, and he recanted before he died. Moreover, even when John denied that properly disposed souls enjoy the beatific vision, he held that they are in heaven, with the protection and consolation of Jesus' glorified humanity.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Benedict defines two propositions: (1) which John had always affirmed, and (2) which he had for a while denied.

The first proposition affirms that properly disposed souls are in heaven, and explains that, as John had, in terms of being with Jesus and the holy angels. The second proposition affirms what John had denied: that, even before the resurrection and last judgment, those souls have the beatific vision. Thus, Benedict's definitions of (1) and (2) make it clear that being in heaven includes the beatific vision but is not reducible to it.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, in defining (1), Benedict uses *heavenly kingdom* and *celestial paradise* to elucidate the reference of *heaven*. Thus, by solemnly defining the two propositions, Benedict implicitly teaches that the heavenly kingdom includes the beatific vision but is not reducible to it.

Faithfully conforming to Benedict's solemn definition, the *Catechism* verbally defines "heaven" as perfect life *with* the Trinity—as communion of life and love *with* the Trinity, Mary, the angels, and the other saints. In the context of the quotation of Pope Benedict's definitive teaching, that verbal definition of "heaven" as a community of divine and created persons implies that it is the heavenly kingdom and celestial paradise, which includes the beatific vision but is not reducible to it.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, when the *Catechism* explicitly states, "Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness," it implicitly but firmly and clearly teaches that the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings is the heavenly kingdom and celestial paradise, which includes the beatific vision but is not reducible to it.

That implicit teaching is confirmed by subsequent statements in the *Catechism*. "To live in heaven is 'to be with Christ'" (1025). "The life of the blessed consists in the full

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28. See X. Le Bachelet, "Benoit XII, constitution *Benedictus Deus*, émise par lui le 29 janvier 1336," *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, 2:658-63.

29. Benedict also solemnly defines that "on the day of judgment all will appear with their bodies 'before the judgment seat of Christ' to give an account of their personal deeds 'so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body' [2 Cor 5.10]" (DS 1002). Inasmuch as being in heaven is explained in terms of being with Jesus, and the blessed will eventually enjoy bodily communion with Jesus, their being in heaven will include the resurrection life without which Benedict definitively teaches they can have the beatific vision. So, again, heaven will include the beatific vision but not be reducible to it.

30. The *Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church* also verbally defines heaven: "By 'heaven' is meant the state of supreme and definitive happiness. Those who die in the grace of God and have no need of further purification are gathered around Jesus and Mary, the angels and the saints. They thus form the Church of heaven, where they see God 'face to face' (1 Corinthians 13:12). They live in a communion of love with the Most Blessed Trinity and they intercede for us" (209). While this definition lacks the context of Benedict XII's definition and is worded somewhat loosely, it nevertheless clearly indicates that heaven is a community in which other goods, including the saints' intercession for us, are included along with the beatific vision.

and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. . . . Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ” (1026). “The Beatitudes teach us the final end to which God calls us: the Kingdom, the vision of God, participation in the divine nature, eternal life, filiation, rest in God” (1726). “Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness” (1817). “Christian petition is centered on the desire and *search for the Kingdom to come*, in keeping with the teaching of Christ (cf. Mt 6.10, 33; Lk 11.2, 13). There is a hierarchy in these petitions: we pray first for the Kingdom, then for what is necessary to welcome it and cooperate with its coming” (2632).

To understand and appreciate fully the significance of the *Catechism*’s implicit teaching that God’s kingdom is our true ultimate end, one must consider other passages dealing with the kingdom both in the *Catechism* itself and some other recent magisterial documents.

The *Catechism* briefly summarizes the New Testament’s indications about what God’s kingdom is:

In the New Testament, the word *basileia* can be translated by “kingship” (abstract noun), “kingdom” (concrete noun) or “reign” (action noun). The Kingdom of God lies ahead of us. It is brought near in the Word incarnate, it is proclaimed throughout the whole Gospel, and it has come in Christ’s death and Resurrection. The Kingdom of God has been coming since the Last Supper and, in the Eucharist, it is in our midst. The kingdom will come in glory when Christ hands it over to his Father. (CCC, 2816)

By saying that God’s kingdom “lies ahead of us,” although it also is already in our midst, this passage focuses on the definitive kingdom’s coming “in glory.” Thus: “In the Lord’s Prayer, ‘thy kingdom come’ refers primarily to the final coming of the reign of God through Christ’s return” (2818).

In an encyclical on the Church’s missionary mandate, John Paul II clarifies the relationship between the Kingdom of God, Jesus, and the Church. In introducing the kingdom, he outlines his treatment:

Salvation consists in believing and accepting the mystery of the Father and of his love, made manifest and freely given in Jesus through the Spirit. In this way the kingdom of God comes to be fulfilled: the kingdom prepared for in the Old Testament, brought about by Christ and in Christ, and proclaimed to all peoples by the Church, which works and prays for its perfect and definitive realization.<sup>31</sup>

John Paul points out that Israel’s election began to carry out God’s plan for saving humankind as a whole, and that Jesus fulfills that plan. “The proclamation and establishment of God’s kingdom are the purpose of his mission: ‘I was sent for this purpose’ (Lk 4.43). But that is not all. Jesus himself is the ‘Good News’ . . . ; he proclaims the ‘Good News’ not just by what he says or does, but by what he is.”<sup>32</sup>

As John Paul explains the kingdom, he makes several statements that neatly summarize important points. “The kingdom will grow insofar as every person learns to

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31. John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 12, AAS 83 (1991) 261, *OR*, 28 Jan. 1991, 7.

32. *Ibid.*, 13.

turn to God in the intimacy of prayer as to a Father (cf. Lk 11.2; Mt 23.9) and strives to do his will (cf. Mt 7.21).”<sup>33</sup> “The kingdom of God is meant for all mankind, and all people are called to become members of it.”<sup>34</sup> “The liberation and salvation brought by the kingdom of God come to the human person both in his physical and spiritual dimensions.”<sup>35</sup> “The kingdom aims at transforming human relationships; it grows gradually as people slowly learn to love, forgive and serve one another.”<sup>36</sup>

Working for the kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God’s activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God’s plan of salvation in all its fullness.<sup>37</sup>

John Paul rejects anthropocentric and secularized misunderstandings of the kingdom: “If the kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the kingdom of God which he revealed.”<sup>38</sup> He points out that the this-worldly and “temporal dimension of the kingdom remains incomplete unless it is related to the kingdom of Christ present in the Church and straining towards eschatological fullness.”<sup>39</sup>

In treating the mysteries of Jesus’ public life, the *Catechism* briefly treats his baptism by John and temptations in the desert (see 535-40), and then deals with Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom, his purpose of drawing people to himself, his calling of little ones and sinners as well as others into the kingdom, his use of parables about the kingdom and the disposition needed to understand them, his miracles and exorcisms as signs of the kingdom,<sup>40</sup> his sending of the Twelve to preach the kingdom, his giving of the keys to Peter, his transfiguration as a foretaste of the kingdom, and his entry into Jerusalem, which manifested the coming of the kingdom that he was about to accomplish (541-60).

John Paul II explains in terms of the kingdom the significance of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension:

By raising Jesus from the dead, God has conquered death, and in Jesus he has definitely inaugurated his kingdom. During his earthly life, Jesus was the Prophet of the kingdom; after his passion, resurrection and ascension into heaven he shares in God’s power and in his dominion over the world (cf. Mt 28.18; Acts 2.36; Eph 1.18-21).<sup>41</sup> The last point is further explained by the *Catechism*: “Being seated at the Father’s right hand signifies the inauguration of the Messiah’s kingdom, the fulfillment of the prophet Daniel’s vision concerning the Son of man” (CCC, 664).

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33. Ibid., 13, AAS 262.

34. Ibid., 14.

35. Ibid., 14, AAS 263.

36. Ibid., 15.

37. Ibid., 15.

38. Ibid., 18, AAS 265, *OR*, 8.

39. Ibid., 20, AAS 267, *OR*, 8.

40. CCC, 547: “Jesus accompanies his words with many ‘mighty works and wonders and signs’, which manifest that the kingdom is present in him and attest that he was the promised Messiah (Acts 2.22; cf. Lk 7.18-23).”

41. John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 16, AAS 83 (1991) 263-64, *OR*, 28 Jan. 1991, 7.

In treating, “He will come again in glory,” the *Catechism* first makes the point that Jesus already reigns through his Church (see 668-70). It then goes on: “Though already present in his Church, Christ’s reign is nevertheless yet to be fulfilled ‘with power and great glory’ by the king’s return to earth,”<sup>42</sup> and quotes Vatican II: “Until there be realized new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, the pilgrim Church, in her sacraments and institutions, which belong to this present age, carries the mark of this world which will pass” (CCC, 671; LG 48). The last point is then more fully explained: “According to the Lord, the present time is the time of the Spirit and of witness, but also a time still marked by ‘distress’ and the trial of evil that does not spare the Church” (CCC, 672). After treating the prospect of the gathering in of Israel and the Church’s ultimate trial (see 673-76), the *Catechism* affirms: “The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover . . . only by God’s victory over the final unleashing of evil, which will cause his Bride to come down from heaven” (677).

Emphasizing that the Church is by nature apostolic and that every member shares in her mission, the *Catechism*, quoting Vatican II, defines the apostolate as “every activity of the Mystical Body” that aims “to spread the Kingdom of Christ over all the earth” (CCC, 863; AA 2). In an earlier passage, the *Catechism* also quotes Vatican II when it explains the Church in terms of the kingdom: “To fulfill the Father’s will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church ‘is the Reign of Christ already present in mystery’” (763; LG 3). That reign has grown but remains to be unveiled:

The kingdom has come in the person of Christ and grows mysteriously in the hearts of those incorporated into him, until its full eschatological manifestation. Then all those he has redeemed and made “holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph 1.4), will be gathered together as the one People of God, the “Bride of the Lamb” (Rev 21.9), “the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God” (Rev 21.10-11). (CCC, 865)

That paragraph beautifully focuses on the communitarian reality of God’s definitive kingdom, but omits mention of the beatific vision.

In the *Catechism*’s article on everlasting life—after the particular judgment, heaven, purgatory, hell, and the last judgment—the final topic is: “The Hope of the New Heaven and the New Earth.” Only one paragraph is devoted to summarizing that treatment:

At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. Then the just will reign with Christ for ever, glorified in body and soul, and the material universe itself will be transformed. God will then be “all in all” (1 Cor 15.28), in eternal life. (CCC, 1060)

The new universe will be the definitive realization of God’s plan to unify everything in Christ (see 1043). “In this new universe, the heavenly Jerusalem, God will have his dwelling among men (cf. Rev 21.5)” (1044). This consummation will finally realize the perfect community of human beings of which the Church is a sacrament—the holy city of God, the Bride of the Lamb—whose members will share together in the vision of God

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42. CCC, 671; with fn. 557: Lk 21.27; cf. Mt 25.31.

(see 1045). This consummation also will finally realize the potentiality of the material universe to serve human beings and share in their glorification (see 1046-47).

The *Catechism* ends this section with three paragraphs (1048-50) quoting much of a remarkable passage in Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. Since that passage provides an important element of the explanation of how Christians can shape their lives toward God's kingdom as their ultimate end, the whole of it deserves to be quoted and commented upon. My initial comments will explain how the kingdom, insofar as it includes created realities, requires the cooperation of created persons, even though God and his divine act of reigning depend on nothing else.

God's initial creative work, his redemptive work in Jesus, and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are only parts of the coming to be of his kingdom, which is not yet finished. God's redemptive work in Jesus included the creation of his humanity and his human free choices, and thus required his human cooperation; and the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work in the redeemed includes the creation of their free choices to repent, believe, and walk in the good works for which they are "created in Christ Jesus" and "which God prepared beforehand" (Eph 2.10). Free choices, as acts of self-determination of the persons who make them, last (see **B-2**, below).

But it does not follow that only choices are important. Also important are fundamental human goods: friendship with God, peace among created persons, harmony within oneself, familial communion, knowledge of truth and esthetic experience, skilled performance in work and play, and bodily life and well-being. In loving people into being, God wills their whole reality, and the various human goods are different aspects of the full realization of human persons as individuals and of the entire human family. Authentic self-love and love of neighbor must likewise embrace every aspect of human reality and flourishing.

Therefore, the significance of our actions, considered in reference to the kingdom to come, includes all their significance for this passing world but far exceeds that significance. The persons and communions of persons we are to be forever are coming to be now. Those persons and communions of persons are to be unique, each like God in an unrepeatable way and all together like God in a way that no single one or smaller group could be.

The kingdom God is creating requires our cooperation. Although he does not depend on us, since anything we contribute to the kingdom is the fruit of his grace,<sup>43</sup> nevertheless we really can cooperate or not. If we do, our lives in this world will contribute to the kingdom, as Vatican II has explained:<sup>44</sup>

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43. God creates free choices (see **B-3**, below), and, as Trent teaches, his "goodness toward all men is such that he wills his gifts to be merits of theirs" (DS 1548/810); thus, Trent *condemned* the following proposition: "The good works of the justified person are gifts of God in such a way that they are not also good merits of the one justified" (DS 1582/842).

44. The first two pieces of the passage that I quote and comment on are the latter part of GS 38; the other three paragraphs are the whole of GS 39; but the passage is continuous in the Council's text.

Now, the gifts of the Spirit are diverse: he calls some to bear clear witness to the desire for a heavenly home and to keep that desire lively in the human family; he calls others to dedicate themselves to the earthly service of human persons, and by this ministry of theirs to prepare material for the heavenly kingdom. He frees all, however, so that—having set aside self-love and taken up and humanized all earthly forces—they can reach out toward that future when humanity itself will become an offering accepted by God.<sup>14</sup> (GS 38)

14. See Rom 15.16.

Those called to “bear clear witness to the desire for a heavenly home” are Christians who forgo marriage in order to concentrate as much as possible on “the affairs of the Lord” (1 Cor 7.32-34). They keep this desire “lively in the human family” by that witness itself and also by their clerical service and/or other appropriate apostolate. Those called to “dedicate themselves to the earthly service of human persons” must forgo, at times, focusing on the “affairs of the Lord.” Yet by their earthly service, the Council says, they “prepare material for the heavenly kingdom.” What that means becomes clear later in the passage, when the Council affirms that *all* who enter into the kingdom will have prepared material for it.

The Spirit frees all (by moving them to repentance and the obedience of faith) to reach out to that future (to hope confidently for the age to come) when humanity itself will become an offering accepted by God. As God accepted Jesus’ self-offering by raising him from the dead and glorifying him, so he will accept the self-offering of redeemed humanity by raising and glorifying all who die in Christ.

As an advance payment on this hope and as nourishment for the journey, the Lord left to his own that sacrament of faith in which natural elements worked on by human hands are turned into his glorified body and blood—a supper of familial communion and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. (GS 38)

The Council here links together several traditional doctrines about the Eucharist: that it is an anticipation of the wedding feast of the Lamb<sup>45</sup> in the age to come, that it is a help in living for the sake of the kingdom, that it gathers the family of God on earth and unites its worship with that of the angels and saints in heaven, and that humanly provided materials, bread and wine, are transformed into Jesus’ glorified body and blood. In context, this linkage suggests that the materials being prepared by the faithful for the heavenly kingdom will be transformed in an analogous way.

*The New Earth and New Heaven*

We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity,<sup>15</sup> nor do we know how the universe is to be transformed. As deformed by sin, the form of this world is passing away,<sup>16</sup> but we are taught that God is preparing a new home and a new earth where justice abides,<sup>17</sup> one whose happiness will fulfill to overflowing all the desires for peace which mount up in human hearts.<sup>18</sup> Then, with death conquered, the

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45. “Happy are those who are called to his supper”—the beatitude proclaimed by the priest just before distributing Communion—inadequately translates a more explicit Latin text: “Beati qui ad cenam Agni vocati sunt” (“Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb”).

children of God will be raised up in Christ, and what was sown in weakness and corruption will put on incorruptibility;<sup>19</sup> then too, charity and its works staying in place,<sup>20</sup> the whole of the creation<sup>21</sup> which God created for humankind's sake will be freed from slavery to vanity. (GS 39)

15. See Acts 1.7.      16. See 1 Cor 7.31; St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, 5.36.1, *PG*, 7:1222.

17. See 2 Cor 5.2; 2 Pt 3.13.

18. See 1 Cor 2.9; Rv 21.4-5.

19. See 1 Cor 15.42, 53.

20. See 1 Cor 13.8; 3.14.

21. See Rom 8.19-21.

We do not know when God will bring the present age to an end or how the universe will be transformed. But divine revelation makes it clear that creation as it now exists will be radically transformed. The Council refers to 2 Pt 3.13; the preceding verses say, “the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up” (2 Pt 3.10) and “the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire” (2 Pt 3.12). The Council focuses on the promise that the new earth and new heaven will be free of sin and death, and will include unimaginable blessings.

“Charity and its works” will survive through the transformation of the universe. In the book of Revelation, the survival of the works of charity is expressed by a striking image: the bride of the Lamb is “clothed with fine linen, bright and pure,” a wedding gown made of “the righteous deeds of the saints” (Rv 19.8).

In teaching here that the whole of creation, which has been damaged by human sin, will be transformed and perfected, the Council repeats what *Lumen gentium* teaches at the beginning of a chapter entitled, “Concerning the Eschatological Character of the Pilgrim Church and Her Union with the Heavenly Church.” Closely linking the Church’s consummation and the restoration of all things, the Council affirms that “the renovation of the world has been determined irrevocably and is anticipated in a certain real way in the present age, for already on earth the Church is distinguished by a true though imperfect holiness.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, as incipient kingdom, the Church includes the entire incipient new earth and new heaven.<sup>47</sup>

The raising of the dead, itself mysterious (see 1 Cor 15.35-57), offers a clue about the renewal of the material universe, the natural environment required for bodily personal and social existence. Presumably it will be changed into a suitable environment for bodily created persons, living in communion with the divine persons and one another, and an appropriate medium for their self-expression and communication.

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46. LG 48; there the Council also refers to other relevant Scripture texts: Acts 3.21, Eph 1.10, Col 1.20, 2 Pt 3.10-13. On the meaning of Eph 1.10, see Heinrich Schlier, “kephalê, anakephalaioomai,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:673-82.

47. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 8, AAS 95 (2003) 438, *OR*, 23 Apr. 2003, II, teaches that the Eucharist “embraces and permeates all creation. The Son of God became man in order to restore all creation, in one supreme act of praise, to the One who made it from nothing. He, the Eternal High Priest who by the blood of his Cross entered the eternal sanctuary, thus gives back to the Creator and Father all creation redeemed. He does so through the priestly ministry of the Church, to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Truly this is the *mysterium fidei* which is accomplished in the Eucharist: the world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator now returns to him redeemed by Christ.”

We are warned that it profits one nothing if one gain the whole world but lose one's very self.<sup>22</sup> Still, the expectation of a new earth ought not to dampen but rather to enkindle our concern for cultivating this earth, where the body of the new human family grows, that body which already provides a sort of foreshadowing of the new age. So, although earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom, still, insofar as earthly progress can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is very important to God's kingdom.<sup>23</sup> (GS 39)

22. See Lk 9.25.

23. See Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno*, AAS 23 (1931) 207.

In speaking of the “body of the new human family,” which grows and foreshadows “the new age,” the Council must be referring, at least in part, to the body of Christ, the Church. For nothing else in this world is the body of the new human family and sign of the coming kingdom. Still, God's revelation in Jesus and the Spirit's expansion of the fellowship of the new covenant have bettered the world in many ways not obviously part of the Church. Although these benefits are somehow related to the Church (just as is everyone whom the Holy Spirit has drawn into the fellowship of the new covenant), the Council uses a novel and more inclusive expression.

The distinction the Council makes between earthly progress and the growth of Christ's kingdom is important. Jesus' disciples are not building the kingdom by gradually improving this world, and, contrary to what Christians influenced by secularism sometimes imagine, the definitive kingdom of God will not come about by human efforts that gradually overcome evils. The struggle against evil “started at the world's beginning and will continue to the last day, as the Lord tells us” (GS 37), and only God's re-creative act, exemplified by raising the dead, will cause the kingdom's coming. Then the new earth and new heaven will replace the present world, which will have passed away (see Rv 21.1).

Nevertheless, progress that “contributes to the better ordering of society”—that promotes genuine human community—is very important to the kingdom. The Council explains why:

For after we have promoted on earth, in the Spirit of the Lord and in accord with his command, the goods of human dignity, familial communion, and liberty—that is to say, all the good fruits of our nature and effort—then we shall find them once more, but cleansed of all dirt, lit up, and transformed, when Christ gives back to the Father an eternal and universal kingdom: “a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace.”<sup>24</sup> On this earth the kingdom is present in mystery even now; with the Lord's coming, however, it will be consummated. (GS 39)

24. *Roman Missal*, Preface of the Feast of Christ the King.

No good fruit of human nature and effort will be lost. All such goods *can* survive, as the saints' works of charity will, or *can* be raised up in glory, as the bodies of the saints will be. And all the goods that survive or are raised up will be purified of any residue of sin, perfected, and incorporated into the fulfillment of all creation in Christ. But to find those goods in the kingdom, we must do God's will in this world, for they will be found only *after* we promote them in the Spirit of the Lord and in accord with his command—to follow Jesus in doing God's will.

Only three human goods are named: human dignity, familial communion, and liberty. But each of these implicitly embraces all human goods. Human dignity includes all the goods that contribute to the flourishing of human persons, for deliberately impeding, destroying, or damaging instances of any of them in a human individual or community violates that person's or community's dignity. The communion of the human family is realized insofar as people love one another, and genuine love motivates people to promote and protect their every good. Authentic liberty excludes slavery to sin and all its consequences, which mutilate every human good, and bears fruit in eternal life (see Rom 6.20-23).

The kingdom that is even now present but not yet fully manifest can only be the Church. As in speaking of "the body of the new human family," here too the Council thinks of the incipient kingdom as gathering in everything bettered by God's revelation in Jesus and by the Spirit's renewal of the earth. All created reality will be brought to fulfillment when the Lord comes again (see 1 Cor 15.20-28).

However, As God gives their daily bread to those who till the earth, by making the seeds they plant grow into the grain they harvest (see Gn 2.15, Mk 4.26-29), so he will give those who promote human goods in accord with his command the new earth and new heaven by transforming them, their good works and relationships, and all the other material they provide into constituent elements of his everlasting kingdom. And as the cultivation of the earth is neither a test nor a punishment imposed on us by God but part of the original divine plan for human fulfillment (see Gn 1.28), so the requirement that we walk in all the good works that God prepared beforehand for us (see **B-3**, below) is no arbitrary imposition, but a truth about how to become all God wishes us to be forever. What we lose if we disregard that truth—whether a share in the kingdom or the role in it we could have had—will not be a punishment imposed by God but the inevitable result of failing to cooperate in receiving his gifts. Even though God could provide bread miraculously to those who fail to till the earth, he cannot transform us into the saints he calls us to be if we refuse to live the lives he has prepared for us.

#### **4) For St. Thomas Aquinas, being in the kingdom is having the beatific vision.**

Thomas seldom mentions the kingdom of God and nowhere systematically treats the Scripture texts that show what it is.<sup>48</sup> But occasionally he deals at the same time with the kingdom and the ultimate end, and makes it clear that he understands Jesus' exhortation, "seek first his kingdom" (Mt 6.33), to mean: seek the kingdom as your ultimate end.<sup>49</sup> Thomas explains that since God's reigning is an act of his providence, and providence directs everything toward the ultimate end, people are fully under God's reign—in his kingdom—when they reach the ultimate end to which he directs them. So, Thomas notes, *kingdom* is sometimes used to refer to the group of people who are settled in their ultimate end, "and in this sense being in the kingdom of God is the same as being in beatitude. Nor does the kingdom of God, in this sense, differ from beatitude, except as

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48. See Viviano, op. cit., 61-67.

49. See *De malo*, q. 7, a. 10, ad 9.

the common good of a whole group differs from the individual good of each of its members.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, Thomas identifies the definitive kingdom with the beatitude—the real and perfect happiness—that he regards as the ultimate end.<sup>51</sup> He also holds that people will find beatitude only in the beatific vision, and that nothing else is necessary. He therefore concludes that people’s true ultimate end is God alone, attained by the beatific vision (see *S.t.*, 1-2, q. 3, a. 8). For Thomas, then, nothing but the beatific vision is essential to the kingdom, and being in the kingdom is reducible to having the beatific vision.

Thomas’s reduction of the kingdom to the beatific vision seems to me to be incompatible with Scripture and the Church’s teaching. Using those sources in the previous sections, I have concluded that the kingdom will be not only a group of souls enjoying the beatific vision but a real community of bodily human beings living within an entirely renewed universe—a community in which we hope to live with Jesus, Mary, the other saints, and the holy angels; a community in which created persons, living in familial intimacy with God, will see him as he is. Therefore, if Thomas were merely an eminent theologian who presented the best case for a view he shared with several other important theologians, I would dismiss his view and move on. However, Thomas is perhaps the greatest Doctor of the Church, and he presented the best case for a view that he shared with several Church Fathers, including St. Augustine, who put it in the aphorism: “You have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” Moreover, since Thomas’s time, not only Catholic theologians but popes and bishops have often taken for granted the view he held. So, I will summarize his case for that view in this section, criticize it in the next, and then in **6**, below, propose an alternative account of human desire, the true ultimate end, and beatitude.<sup>52</sup>

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50. *In Sent.*, 4, d. 49, q. 1, a. 2 qu’la 5, c. Again, Thomas interprets Jesus’ saying: “‘Seek first the kingdom of God,’ to seek it as an end, since the kingdom is beatitude. *Kingdom* is derived from reigning: for one is ruled when one’s will is subjected to the will of the one reigning; which will be the case in heaven; so ‘Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God’ (Lk 14.15)” (*Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, cap. VI, lect. v).

51. Thomas’s Latin word, *beatitudo*, can be translated *happiness* provided happiness is understood, not as a subjective mood—for instance, how I feel when it’s a beautiful day and “everything’s going my way”—but as an objective fulfillment that perfects or completes human beings by realizing their potential. So, if I only wished for what is really good for me and always got what I wished for, I would have the happiness that translates *beatitudo* (see *S.t.*, 1-2, q. 5, a. 8, ad 3). But in that sense of *happy*, I would be happy even if, among other things, I had wished to be Jesus’ faithful disciple, and found myself being defamed, rejected, and persecuted on his account (see Mt 5.11).

52. Some will object that a view so widely held by Catholic theologians and so often taken for granted in magisterial teachings deserves religious assent, so that Catholics should treat it as normative for interpreting Scripture and the Church’s teaching. But because Vatican II prescribed that moral theology “should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching” (OT 16), I studied many Scripture texts and consulted many recent works by Scripture scholars bearing on the ultimate end, and have become convinced that the theologically traditional view is falsified by Scripture, which leads God’s people to seek first his definitive kingdom, and that God’s kingdom includes but is not reducible to the beatific vision. Similarly, while the theologically traditional view often has been assumed in magisterial teachings, I have become convinced that it is falsified by the explicit Church teachings about the kingdom presented in **3**, above. Moreover, the criticisms of Thomas’s view and his case for it that I will present (in **5**, below) will show that it is inconsistent with some other Church teachings and with some other positions defended by

Thomas's fullest articulation of his case is at the beginning of the second part of his *Summa theologiae*. The first part dealt with God and creatures; the second deals with human actions, which are the subject of moral theology. The treatise is divided into sections called "questions" and those into subsections called "articles."

The first question sets out some points about ends and the ultimate end that will be presupposed in Thomas's treatment of beatitude; the second deals with *the entity* in which human beings will find beatitude; the third with *how* that entity gives them beatitude; the fourth with *what* that beatitude involves and does not involve; and the fifth with its *attainment*.

In question one, article one, Thomas explains that not everything human beings do is a human action in the relevant sense. The behavior of babies and toddlers, and some unthinking behavior of mature individuals, such as scratching an itch, do not count. So, *human actions* here refers only to actions resulting from thinking and free choice. Such actions depend on the will, whose object is a good and an end—that is, a purpose to be realized. So, human actions always have an end, in the sense that they carry out a choice made for a purpose—that is, to bring about some benefit for someone.

In article two, Thomas explains that, in general, anything that does something is realizing its own possibilities, so that its acting tends toward some definite outcome. That thesis can be understood by noticing that the functioning of animals and even of plants have a definite point: each of them contributes in a particular way to maintaining life, developing the individual, and/or reproducing. But whereas natural tendencies shape the actions of other kinds of things, human beings can understand what will fulfill them, make plans, and direct their actions toward purposes.

In article three, Thomas adds the point that the purpose for whose sake one does something can settle, from a moral point of view, what kind of action one is doing. Hoping to end a difficult case by killing a patient with intractable pain, a physician prescribes doses of opiates limited only by self-concern about possible professional or legal consequences; but the nurse, while fearing that the drugs might bring about death, administers them only in order to relieve the patient's pain. The physician commits homicide; the nurse cares for the patient and mitigates suffering.

In article four, Thomas deals with series of purposes that are ordered as such—series that he says "have order per se." For instance, one might drive to a store to buy some food, buy the food to make dinner, make dinner to share it with a guest, share dinner with the guest for some ulterior purpose, and so on. Again, a mother might be anxious to live long enough to raise her children, want to be healthy enough to survive, decide to lose weight for health's sake, go on a diet to lose weight, and refuse dessert to keep to her diet. In such series, a purpose farther from the action shapes the one next closer to it, and the realization of each purpose moves toward the realization of the ulterior one. So, any such series of purposes has to be limited: there must always be both an ultimate end and a

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Thomas himself, while the theological proposals I shall offer (in 6, below) will point to solutions of some longstanding problems resulting from the assumptions and implications of the view that human persons' true ultimate end is God alone, attained by the beatific vision.

first performance in realizing that end. Otherwise, there would be no point in acting and/or one could never begin acting.

In article five, Thomas argues for a thesis that will be an essential premise in his case for the view that human persons' true ultimate end is God alone attained by the beatific vision. The thesis is that a human individual cannot will more than one ultimate end at the same time. He offers three arguments, but sympathetic commentators have found problems with the second and third, and agree that the first suffices.<sup>53</sup> So, I deal only with the first. Its premises are: "Since everything tends to its own perfection, what human beings tend toward as their ultimate end must be something that they tend toward as a good that is perfect and utterly fulfills them . . . So, it is necessary that the ultimate end fulfill the human person's entire appetite in such a way that nothing more is left to be desired—which is impossible if something more is required for the person's perfection." The conclusion is: "Consequently it is not possible for one's appetite to tend to two things as though each were one's perfect good"—that is, one's ultimate end (*ST* 1-2, q. 1, a. 5, c).

To understand the point of this argument, one must notice three things. First, Thomas is not saying that people stick with the same ultimate end all their lives. His point is that people cannot at the same time pursue two different ultimate ends. He quotes St. Paul's saying that some pagans' "god is their belly" (Phil 3.19) and Jesus' saying: "No one can serve two masters" (Mt 6.24). So, Thomas is keenly aware that radical conversion is possible and often necessary, and he holds that sinners become saints and saints sinners by tending successively to different ultimate ends. Second, Augustine had pointed out that some people put their ultimate end in four things: pleasure, repose, the gifts of nature, and virtue. Thomas comments on that view by saying that, for those who hope to find complete fulfillment in a group of goods, that particular group of goods is the single thing toward which they tend as their ultimate end. Third, Thomas is not merely explaining that people must have some definite idea of the ultimate end—such as being happy or having a good life—but that they can will only one concrete ultimate end at a time. He makes that clear by distinguishing between the idea of the ultimate end ("one's perfect good") and the one concrete reality toward which one tends *as* one's perfect good—such as God, one's belly, the set of goods Augustine mentions, or whatever.<sup>54</sup>

In article six, Thomas repeats something he has already shown in article four, namely, that human beings cannot will anything without willing it for an ultimate end. His argument here is that whatever is desired is desired as a good; goods must either be the ultimate end or not; and if not, must be desired for the sake of an ultimate end. Thomas's point here is to deal with three cases that might seem to be exceptions. First, people often engage in playful actions "just for fun"; such actions do not seem to be done for any ultimate end. Thomas says one regards fun and relaxation as elements of one's over-all complete good, which is one's ultimate end. Second, some people are interested

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53. See Thomas Gilby, O.P., in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 16, *Purpose and Happiness*, trans. and ed. Thomas Gilby, O.P. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 20 (fn. c) and 21 (fn. h).

54. For a fuller treatment of this point, see Germain Grisez, "The True Ultimate End of Human Beings: The Kingdom, Not God Alone," *Theological Studies*, 69 (Mar. 2008): 40-44.

in purely theoretical studies, and Thomas deals with that as he dealt with playful actions. Third, though people cannot order anything to an end without thinking about that end, people often desire and act for some good without thinking about anything beyond it. Thomas replies that, once one has an ultimate end, one need not always be thinking about it; one's prior intention of it can shape one's desires even when one is not thinking about it, just as one's previous awareness of one's destination keeps one walking toward it while one thinks about other things.

In article seven, Thomas distinguishes between a way in which all human beings have the same ultimate end and a way in which they have different ultimate ends. He says that the expression *ultimate end* refers to both the idea of the ultimate end and to the reality in which that idea is found. He explains that, "as to the idea of the ultimate end, all agree in their desire of the ultimate end, since all desire their own perfection to be fulfilled—which is the idea of the ultimate end, as I have said. But as to that in which their perfection will be found, not all agree, for some desire riches as the consummate good, others pleasure, and still others something else." The relevance of this explanation is clear from Thomas's response to an objection that those familiar with Augustine might have made: The changeless good (God) is the ultimate end, but sinners turn away from that; so, there are two different ultimate ends. Thomas answers that sinners still want the consummate good but mistakenly seek it something other than in God.

In article eight, Thomas makes another important distinction between two senses of *end*: the reality in which the idea of good is found and the use or attainment of that reality; for instance, we say "an avaricious person's end is either money (as the reality) or having money (as the use)." Thomas holds that God is the ultimate end of all creatures in the sense that all of them are directed toward divine goodness, but not all in the same way. Only rational creatures, including human beings, can attain their ultimate end by knowing and loving God. Other things attain God's goodness by having some likeness of it—at least by existing and perhaps by living, or even by knowing as animals do.

Having said in the eighth and final article of question one that God is the reality in which rational creatures' consummate good is to be found, Thomas proceeds in question two to prove the point by systematically eliminating other possibilities.

In the first six articles, he argues that the good that will make a human being perfectly happy can be neither (1) riches, nor (2) honors, nor (3) celebrity and prestige, nor (4) power, nor (5) health and bodily well-being, nor (6) pleasure. Those arguments are interesting and helpful for moral theology, but not essential to the affirmative case Thomas makes for the view that the true ultimate end is God alone, attained by the beatific vision.

In question two, article seven, Thomas argues that neither one's soul itself nor any good of one's own belonging to one's soul can be the reality in which one's consummate good will be found. One's soul itself needs something more to be fulfilled; the ultimate good for whose sake one acts cannot be something one already has. Any good of one's own belonging to one's soul will be a participated, and so a particular, good, not the universal good, which is what the human will tends toward; so, no good belonging to one's soul can be the reality that will make one perfectly happy.

Still, Thomas points out, if one asks about human persons' *attainment* of their ultimate end, that will be something pertaining to the soul. He sums up: "Therefore, the entity itself desired as an end—the entity in which one will find beatitude—is *what* will make one perfectly happy; but the *attainment* of that entity is called 'beatitude.' So, we should say that beatitude will be something belonging to one's soul [the beatific vision], while that in which one will find beatitude is something other than one's soul [God himself]."

In the final, eighth article of question two, Thomas argues that the good that ultimately fulfills human beings—the good whose attainment he calls "beatitude"—cannot be any created good and must be God alone:

The beatitude of human beings cannot possibly be in any created good. For beatitude is the perfect good, which completely satisfies desire; it would not be the ultimate end if it left something more to be desired. But the object of the will, which is the human appetite, is the good universally; just as the object of the intellect is the true universally. Plainly, then, nothing can satisfy the human will except the good universally. And that is not found in anything created, but only in God, since every creature has participated goodness. So, only God can satisfy the human will . . . Therefore, the beatitude of human beings is found in God alone.

In dealing with this issue, Thomas considers the objection that, insofar as human beings are finite, their fulfillment, however great, must be finite, and so cannot be in God. His answer is that human beings can find their fulfillment in a reality distinct from them that is infinite, while the attainment of the reality, which is intrinsic to them, remains limited.

Question three concerns *what* beatitude is. In the first article, Thomas restates his distinction between two senses of *end*: the reality desired (money, in the case of an avaricious person) and the attainment of that reality (having money). Then he repeats the point: God is the good to be desired, but attaining and enjoying God, which is called "beatitude," is something of ours, and thus is a created good.

In article two, Thomas argues that beatitude in us must be some functioning. The premises are that beatitude is complete fulfillment; fulfillment realizes one's potentiality; and we realize ourselves, not by simply being, but by functioning. So, our beatitude must be some functioning.

In article three, Thomas says the functioning essential to beatitude cannot be sensory, because the senses cannot unite us with the uncreated good, which is the ultimate end. So, beatitude must be a specifically human functioning. He adds, though, that beatitude will somehow affect and enhance the sensory functioning of the blessed.

In article four, Thomas argues that the functioning essential to beatitude cannot be that of the will. The will bears on goods by desiring and pursuing them until they are attained, and then resting in and enjoying them. So, the very attainment of the ultimate end, which is beatitude, must be a functioning, not of the will, but of the intellect. Still, with the intellect's attainment of the ultimate end, the will, delighted, will rest in it.

In the fifth article, Thomas argues that the functioning that constitutes beatitude cannot be that of the intellect as practical but as speculative. First, because it must be one's best functioning, and that is of the best capacity bearing on its best object. The best

capacity is the intellect, and its best good is God, whom we can contemplate but in no way bring about or act upon. Second, because contemplation is for its own sake, while the functioning of the practical intellect is for an end beyond itself, which precludes its being the very attaining of the ultimate end. Third, because human beings share contemplation with higher realities (God and the angels) while lower animals share in some way in human concerns with practical matters.

In the sixth and seventh articles, Thomas argues that the intellectual functioning that constitutes beatitude can neither be the knowing involved in theoretical sciences nor in contemplating angels.

In the eighth and final article of the third question, Thomas argues that ultimate and perfect beatitude can only be in the vision of God's essence—that is, in the immediate understanding of what he is. One premise of that argument is, again, that “a human being cannot be happy as long as there is something more for him or her to desire and seek.” The other premise is that the human intellect, made aware by created realities that God exists, would remain unsatisfied if it did not understand what God is in himself.

Because that argument turns on human beings' natural tendency to wonder about ultimates, it hardly makes the beatific vision appealing to people who are not philosophically inclined. Thomas elsewhere provides a more attractive account of the vision of God. By intellectual knowledge, one can in a way take in what one knows and make it one's own, because the known and knower become one. “So, then,” Thomas says, “beatified by the vision of God, the mind in that understanding becomes one with him.” Moreover, “since God is the very essence of goodness, he is the good of every good. So, when he is seen, all good is seen.” And since those enjoying the beatific vision not only see God but become one with him and make him their own, “in seeing God, they will have a full supply of all goods.” Being with one's beloved is joyful; joy intensifies love, and being together becomes still more joyful. “In the vision of the divine essence the created mind tightly clings to God, and the vision itself completely enflames the will with divine love.” So, the joy of the blessed is complete, not only because in enjoying God's goodness they are enjoying all goods, but also because they are so perfectly one with God whom they love so much.<sup>55</sup>

Question four deals with some things that beatitude involves and does not involve.

In the first three articles, Thomas explains that beatitude includes delight (1), but vision is its chief component (2), and really being with God rather than seeking him is essential (3). In the fourth article, he explains that rectitude of will is required to dispose one to receive the beatific vision, and that the vision causes the will to love everything according to its relationship with God, and so to love it rightly.

In the fifth article, Thomas argues that the body is not essential to beatitude. He begins by showing that a soul can enjoy the beatific vision without the body; he then argues: “Since the perfect beatitude of human beings consists in the vision of the divine

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55. Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae*, lib. 2, cap. 9. Thomas's account in that chapter of the relationships among God's goodness, union with him, and their love and joy is likely to remind happily married readers of their better experiences of marital intercourse.

essence, their perfect beatitude does not depend on the body. So, the soul can be blessed without the body.” Still, he explains that the body is involved in beatitude:

One must consider that something can belong to an entity’s perfection in two ways. In one way, by constituting the thing’s essence, as the soul is required for the perfection of a human being. In another way, what is required for an entity’s perfection belongs to its well-being [*bene esse*], as bodily beauty and quickwittedness belong to a person’s perfection. Therefore, although the body does not belong to the perfection of human beatitude in the first way, it does belong to it in the second way. For since a thing’s operation depends on its nature, when the soul will be more perfect in its own nature, it will more perfectly have its proper operation, in which felicity consists. Thus, when Augustine asks “whether the highest happiness can be ascribed to the disembodied spirits of the dead,” he answers that “they cannot see the Immutable Substance as the holy angels see it; either due to some more hidden reason or because there is in them a certain natural desire for managing the body.”

By quoting with approval Augustine’s answer to his own question, Thomas surprisingly concedes that there can be happiness higher than that of the beatific vision as it is enjoyed by the disembodied spirits of the dead and that there may remain in such souls an unsatisfied desire bearing on the body.

In the sixth article, Thomas explains that, insofar as beatitude involves the body, the body will be perfected, both as a result of the beatific vision and so as not to impede it.

In the seventh article, Thomas considers an argument that some external goods are required for beatitude:

What is promised the saints as a reward pertains to beatitude. But external goods are promised the saints; for instance, food and drink, riches, and a kingdom. For it is written, “that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom” (Lk 22.30); “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Mt 6.20); and “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom” (Mt 25.34).

Thomas, however, maintains that beatitude requires no external good whatsoever, because the blessed will have spiritual bodies rather than animal bodies, and so will no longer need external goods. In response to the argument, he says that “all such promises contained in sacred Scripture are to be understood metaphorically, according as spiritual realities are regularly signified by bodily ones.” And he applies that exegetical norm not only to food and drink, and riches, but to the kingdom itself: “By food and drink, one understands the delight of beatitude; by riches, the completeness with which God suffices for the blessed; by the kingdom, the elevation of the human person to union with God.”

In the eight article, Thomas argues that “the fellowship of friends is not necessarily required for beatitude, since the human being has the whole fullness of his or her perfection in God. But, he adds, as he did with respect to the body, “the fellowship of friends makes for the well-being of beatitude.” To the objection that beatitude perfects charity, which includes love of neighbor, Thomas replies that “if there were only one soul enjoying God, it would be happy, lacking a neighbor it might love. But assuming a neighbor, love of that neighbor follows from perfect love of God. So friendship is to perfect beatitude as an accompaniment.”

Question five deals with beatitude's attainment.

In the first article, Thomas again makes the point that human beings can attain beatitude—the perfect good—though not in the present life.

In the second, he argues that, while the beatitude of all who attain God is the same in *what* they enjoy, their enjoyment of God differs in degree. In making this point, Thomas quotes Augustine, who interpreted the “many mansions” Jesus spoke of as “diverse intrinsic goods of merits in life eternal.” Then Thomas says: “Now, the intrinsic good of life eternal, which is given for merit, is beatitude itself. So there are different degrees of beatitude, and the beatitude of everyone is not equal.” His point is that differences in merit affect how well people are disposed to enjoy God.

In the third article, Thomas says that nobody can have perfect and true beatitude in this life, but people can imperfectly share in it by living in hope of it and in some way enjoying God's goodness. In the fourth article, he goes on to explain why, unlike the imperfect beatitude available in this life, the perfect beatitude hoped for after this life can never be lost. Enjoying the good of every good, no one could give it up or will any evil, and God, being just, would never withdraw himself from anyone who loves him faultlessly. Nor could anything else interfere. So, the beatific vision will be an unbreakable union of love.

In the fifth article, Thomas deals with the puzzle that human beings' native resources are inadequate for attaining the perfect beatitude that is their true ultimate end. Thomas explains that while human beings' natural capacities of intellect and will are incapable of achieving the beatific vision, which goes beyond every created power, their capacity of free choice enables them to be converted to God, who can beatify them. So, they are not in the absurd situation of having an end that they cannot attain; indeed, in being able with God's help to enjoy perfect goodness, they are better off than creatures whose native resources are adequate to achieve their own imperfect goods.

In the sixth article, Thomas explains that, while, as creatures, angels are superior to human persons, we can be beatified only by divine action, not by anything an angel can do for us, although angelic help might contribute to disposing us for attaining beatitude.

In the seventh article, Thomas argues that God enjoys beatitude without doing anything to attain it and that, while God could endow persons with beatitude when creating them, it is fitting that angels attain it after a single meritorious act and that human beings dispose themselves to receive it by many actions, called “merits.” Still, as the original creatures came to be with the ability to reproduce themselves, Christ, who is God and man, through whom happiness was to become available to other human beings, had beatitude from the first moment of his conception. But his case is unique, for, although baptized children who die before reaching the use of reason attain beatitude without merits of their own, they had become Christ's members and are saved by his merit.

In the eighth and final article of the fifth question, Thomas argues that, if beatitude is considered in general, everyone necessarily wills it, because the general idea of beatitude is perfect good. Since the will is concerned with goods, perfect good would totally satisfy it. So, wanting beatitude is nothing but wanting one's will to be satisfied, and everybody

wants that. But if beatitude is considered according to a particular idea of what will provide it, not everyone knows what that is, and so not everyone wills such beatitude. To the objection that people might get everything they want without having beatitude—after all, people can will badly, get what they want, and end up miserable—Thomas says that beatitude is in having what satisfies natural desire, for only perfect good can do that, rather than in satisfying desires generated by opinions, which can be mistaken.

### 5) Thomas’s view of the ultimate end and his case for it are unsound.

In his treatise on beatitude, Thomas maintains that the true end of all human actions must provide such complete fulfillment that anyone who attains it can desire nothing more. That thesis is an essential premise in the two central arguments meant to show that God alone, attained by the beatific vision, is the true ultimate end. Thomas also maintains that Jesus enjoyed the beatific vision from the “beginning of his conception” (see *S.t.*, 1-2, q. 5, a. 7, ad 2; 3, q. 9, a. 2; 34, 4).

However, in carrying out his mission, Jesus as man not only engaged in solitary contemplation but preached the gospel, as Thomas points out: “He said: ‘For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth’ (Jn 18.37)” (*S.t.*, 3, q. 40, a. 1, c.). Jesus desired to gather up the lost sheep of the house of Israel (see Mt 10.6), and that desire was frustrated: “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” (Mt 23.37). At the Last Supper, Jesus said: “I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer” (Lk 22.15). After rising from the dead, Jesus nurtured the faith of the Eleven and prepared them to receive the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1.3; *S.t.*, 3, q. 55, a. 5), because he desired them to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth (see Mt 28.19-20). Even now, Jesus desires and acts for our salvation: “He is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them” (Heb 7.25).

Someone might suppose that, since Jesus “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20.28), he acted only for others’ good, and in no way for his own human fulfillment. However, Thomas teaches that every human being desires and acts for his or her own complete fulfillment (see *S.t.*, 1-2, q. 1, a. 7), and Jesus, in humanly laying down his life, clearly sought true self-fulfillment: “For the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12.2).<sup>56</sup>

Selfless service to others and authentic self-fulfillment are not alternatives, as Vatican II teaches: Human beings, “the only creatures on earth that God willed for their own sakes, cannot fully find themselves except by sincere self-giving” (GS 24). To understand this truth, it helps to notice that even an animal sometimes acts for other animals’ benefit: many mature animals care for their young, and animals sometimes feed and/or defend others than their young. Humans also are naturally inclined to live together, and to find at least part of their self-fulfillment in loving and benefiting others.

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56. Citing St. Paul (Phil 2.8), Thomas teaches that Jesus by his passion and death merited his own exaltation (see *S.t.*, 3, q. 49, a. 6).

In having and raising their children, people often forgo many other things they could enjoy. In doing so, they find self-fulfillment as good parents. Thus, the good of parents as such and that of children as such are the same—the two goods are aspects of one common good insofar as promoting children’s fulfillment is fulfilling for parents, and parents’ fulfillment contributes to their children’s fulfillment. Similarly, genuine friends love each other for their own sakes and in doing so enjoy self-fulfillment in the common good of their friendship. So, Jesus humanly fulfilled himself by greatly loving his friends and laying down his life for them.

Like every other human being, Jesus always acted for, and is still acting for, not only an end but an ultimate end. The ultimate end for which he acts, even now, is not the beatific vision, which he certainly already enjoys. Rather, it is the common good for which he will come in glory to judge the living and the dead (see *CCC*, 668-82), the good that will be fully realized only when “he has put all his enemies under his feet”—the last of which “to be destroyed is death”—and “delivers the kingdom to God the Father” (1 Cor 15.24-26). Not surprisingly, what Jesus teaches his disciples to seek first is the same ultimate end to which he devoted his entire life and for which he is still acting: God’s definitive kingdom.

Someone might say: Jesus is an exception in being able to desire and act for the kingdom, insofar as it is still to be realized, despite already enjoying the beatific vision. However, in praying to Mary and other saints, we ask them to pray on our behalf. We want them to take an interest in us, desire for us what we need, and ask God for it. And they do intercede for us. Therefore, although Mary and the other saints already enjoy the beatific vision, they desire something more: the benefits they ask God to give us.<sup>57</sup> In seeking benefits for us, they enjoy a certain self-fulfillment distinct from their fulfillment in seeing God: Mary has the joy of being a good mother and the saints of being good brothers and sisters to those for whom they intercede. Thus, in interceding for us, Mary and the other saints are acting for the end and good that we and they have in common: the communion of saints (see *CCC*, 956). Insofar as the present communion of saints is not yet the ultimate end, Mary and the other saints intend it for the sake of the same ultimate end for which Jesus continues acting, namely, the definitive kingdom to which the entire plan of God’s providence is directed.

Thus, the beatific vision does not fulfill human beings so completely that they can desire nothing more. Rather, those enjoying the beatific vision continue to desire a common good, engage in human acts of interceding to promote it, and, in doing so, not only contribute to others’ fulfillment but obtain additional fulfillment for themselves.

Another line of argument confirms the conclusion that God alone, attained by the beatific vision, does not fulfill the blessed so perfectly that they can desire nothing more.

As I related (in **4**, above), Thomas maintains that the body is not essential to beatitude, because the soul can enjoy the beatific vision before the resurrection of the

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57. It is worth noting that, according to those who have experienced apparitions subsequently approved by the Church, Jesus and Mary often express sadness about how people are behaving, make clear a desire for them to repent and lead holy lives, and direct the visionaries to act for that end by spreading some particular message and/or by promoting some devotion.

body, and that the company of friends is not essential to beatitude because, he imagines, a single soul enjoying the beatific vision would be completely fulfilled. But while Thomas denies that the body and the company of friends belong to beatitude's perfection as essential features of it, he affirms that they belong to beatitude's "well-being [*bene esse*], as bodily beauty and quickwittedness belong to a person's perfection" (*S.t.*, 1-2, q. 4, a. 5; cf. a. 8).

In his solemn teaching, Benedict XII affirmed, among other things, that souls that see and enjoy God's essence "are truly blessed and have eternal life and rest" (DS 1000/530). Thomas is correct in holding that the body does not belong to that beatitude's essential perfection. But, as I showed (in **3**, above), Benedict also definitively teaches that being in the "heavenly kingdom" includes being with Christ and the holy angels, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* verbally defines "heaven" as perfect life *with* the Trinity—a communion of life and love with the Trinity, Mary, the angels, and the other saints. Thus, Thomas is mistaken in thinking that the company of friends is not essential to beatitude.

Still, Thomas surely is correct in holding that having one's own body pertains to the well-being of the perfection of the beatitude about which Pope Benedict later taught.

The significance of the distinction between what belongs to something's perfection as essential and as contributing to its well-being can be clarified by reflecting on additional examples. Essential to the perfection of human individuals as such are those goods common to all of them—to Adam, Eve, Jesus, Mary, frozen embryos, patients in a permanent vegetative state, Olympic medalists, the blessed, and the damned. Contributing to the well-being of human beings is any good belonging at least to one but not to all of them, including such characteristic functions as reasoning and making free choices. However, there is, again, a difference between what belongs to the perfection of such functions as essential and as contributing to their well-being. The goods that all instances of reasoning or of choosing freely have in common belong to their perfection as essential, while such goods as an instance of reasoning's soundness and a free choice's moral rectitude make for their well-being. Yet again, there is a difference between what is essential to instances of sound reasoning and of upright free choices and what makes for their well-being—for instance, being part of an inquiry that attains truth makes for the well-being of sound reasoning, and being part of a life that attains the true ultimate end makes for the well-being of an upright free choice.

Plainly, perfections that make for well-being are usually far more important than one might suppose if one considered only Thomas's examples of bodily beauty and quickwittedness that make for people's well-being. In every case, a good that makes for well-being really is an added perfection, and that added perfection is desirable.

Because resurrection life will contribute to the well-being of the beatitude of souls now enjoying the beatific vision, that beatitude cannot by itself provide perfect fulfillment. For, since whatever contributes to anything's well-being tends toward making its fulfillment perfect, if something contributed to the well-being of perfect fulfillment, it would further perfect fulfillment that already is perfect. But fulfillment that already is perfect cannot be further perfected.

Moreover, although not in his treatise on beatitude summarized above, in another work, Thomas himself argues: since “the human soul is naturally united to the body . . . it has a natural desire for union to the body. So, the will cannot rest completely unless the soul is rejoined to the body—unless the person is raised from the dead.”<sup>58</sup> Since resurrection life will satisfy a natural desire that cannot otherwise be satisfied, Thomas cannot consistently maintain that attaining God by the beatific vision is of itself the true ultimate end *that leaves nothing to be desired*.<sup>59</sup>

The *Catechism* points out: “From the beginning, Christian faith in the resurrection has met with incomprehension and opposition” (*CCC*, 996), and cites the negative reaction to Paul’s preaching in Athens about resurrection (see Acts 17.32) and Paul’s report of some Corinthians’ disbelief in bodily resurrection (see 1 Cor 15.12-13). Early heretics also “swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already” (2 Tm 2.18).<sup>60</sup> Because of that resistance, almost every book of the New Testament bears witness to bodily resurrection, and it is affirmed in a distinct article of faith: “We look for the resurrection of the dead,” where “look for” clearly means hope for. The liturgy often encourages the faithful to hope for bodily resurrection and sometimes indicates that it is part of the ultimate end:

All-powerful and ever-living God,  
you raised the sinless Virgin Mary, mother of your Son.  
body and soul to the glory of heaven.  
May we see heaven as our final goal  
and come to share her glory.<sup>61</sup>

Since we, unlike Mary, may enjoy the beatific vision before being raised from the dead, our hopes for the vision of God and bodily resurrection are distinct. Since we hope for both of them as goods in themselves and do not hope for either of them as a means to the other, neither of them can be sought as a means to anything else nor can either of them by

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58. *Compendium theologiae*, cap. 151.

59. *S.t.*, 1-2, q. 4, a. 5, obj. 3 is: “Beatitude is a human being’s perfection; but the soul without the body is not the human being; so, beatitude cannot be in the soul without the body.” Thomas replies: “A human being’s beatitude is in respect to intellect; and, therefore, given intellect, beatitude can be present in him or her; just as an Ethiopian’s teeth, in respect to which he or she is said to be white, can be white even after they are extracted” (*ibid.* ad 3). By assuming that the separated soul is a human being, that reply misses the objection’s point, as is clear from Thomas’s cogent argument elsewhere that, because the human person is a composite of soul and body, the ongoing, post-death existence of one’s soul without one’s body is not the survival of oneself, but only of, as it were, a spiritual remnant of oneself: see *Super primam epistolam ad Corinthios lectura*, xv, lect. 2, ad v. 19; cf. *Quodlibetum*, 7, q. 5, a. 1, ad 3; *S.t.*, 1, q. 75, a. 4, c.

60. As I explained (in 4, above), in excluding external goods—not only food and drink, and riches, but the kingdom itself—from the beatitude promised by Jesus, Thomas applied the exegetical norm: “All such promises contained in sacred Scripture are to be understood metaphorically, according as spiritual realities are regularly signified by bodily ones.” The early heretics who held that the resurrection was already past apparently applied a similar norm more stringently than Thomas later would: they seem to have interpreted the apostles’ preaching about bodily death and resurrection as a metaphorical way of talking about the spiritual rebirth brought about by baptism.

61. “Opening Prayer” of the Mass during the day for the solemnity of the Assumption, *Roman Missal: Sacramentary* (1974).

itself be our ultimate end. Instead, we hope for both as essential constituents of the ultimate end that Mary and Joseph already hoped for and that Jesus taught us to seek first: the kingdom of God. Also essential to the definitive kingdom are being with Jesus; enjoying the company of Mary, other saints, and the holy angels; and, as Vatican II teaches, “all the good fruits of our nature and effort” which we hope to find again in the kingdom, “but cleansed of all dirt, lit up, and transformed” (GS 39).

Another problem with Thomas’s theory of the ultimate end is that, if it were correct, people who are ignorant of God could not possibly live good lives, because they would inevitably seek complete fulfillment, leaving nothing to be desired, in something that could not give it. To show this, I begin with what Thomas says about children who make their first choice without having been baptized, namely, that all such children, on reaching the use of reason, must deliberate about themselves. If they turn toward God and direct their lives toward their true ultimate end, they receive pardon for original sin; if they fail to do that, they commit a mortal sin (see *S.t.*, 1-2, q. 89, a. 6).

Now, Thomas knows from Scripture that there are many false gods, and he hardly means that people should regard any of them as their ultimate end. He has in mind the true God, to whom the Scriptures bear witness. But a great many people have not known the true God. Many great philosophers and leaders of religious movements had views of the source and destiny of human beings very different from the beliefs of Jews and Christians. Plainly, the knowledge of the true God needed to direct one’s life to him as one’s ultimate end was not available to those philosophers and religious leaders. Yet some of them seem to have tried to find and live by the truth.

If what Thomas says about unbaptized children is true of those philosophers and religious leaders, and of their followers, all of them lived and died in mortal sin.<sup>62</sup> However, Vatican II teaches that people who lack express awareness of God through no fault of their own receive the help of the Holy Spirit so that they can be saved (see *LG*, 16; *GS*, 22). Thus, for children in that situation, it is salvific, not sinful, to start out by taking as their ultimate end a life shaped by what they sincerely believe to be the truth about what is good for human persons and communities.

Someone might say that, by resolving to follow their God-given consciences, such people implicitly believe in and take God as their ultimate end.<sup>63</sup> I grant that such a commitment is an implicit act of faith. But I deny that people who lack express

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62. Thomas knows that some philosophers held that perfect beatitude could not be attained until after death (see *In Sent.*, 4, d. 49, q. 1, a. 1, qu’la 4.). Moreover, in many places he speaks of an “imperfect beatitude” or “certain participation in beatitude” as if he regarded it as an end attainable by human beings’ natural capacities, and, in commenting on Aristotle, Thomas seems to accept his teaching about happiness as sound within its limitations (see *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, lib. 1, lect. 9-10; lib. 10, lect. 9-13). However, Thomas nowhere considers whether philosophers acted uprightly or sinned if they took such beatitude as their ultimate end.

63. Thomas himself speaks of “implicit faith” when he explains how the centurion Cornelius acted in ways pleasing to God (see Acts 10.5; *S.t.*, 2-2, q. 10, a. 4, reply to *sed contra*).

knowledge of God can implicitly take God as their ultimate end.<sup>64</sup> Because hunters must guide their aim by what they see or think they see, only what is or seems to be visible can be a target. Similarly, because one can intend only something one intellectually knows or thinks one knows to be an attainable good, any end intended by someone making a choice must be understood, thought to be good in some way, and intended on the basis of that judgment. Therefore, nothing can be taken as an ultimate end without first being explicitly known. When people lacking express knowledge of God through no fault of their own uprightly take something as their ultimate end, it cannot be God but must be a good or set of goods they understand—a good or set of goods in which they cannot correctly expect to find complete fulfillment leaving nothing more to be desired, yet must rightly expect to find some fulfillment, because otherwise they would be incapable of doing even naturally good actions, much less the meritorious actions required for salvation.

That people can intend a true ultimate end other than God, attained by the beatific vision, also follows necessarily from what Thomas says about unbaptized children who die without ever having personally sinned.<sup>65</sup> He holds that they have the knowledge appropriate to a separated soul according to its nature, including the knowledge that it was created for beatitude and that beatitude consists in the attainment of perfect good. But they lack supernatural knowledge: they do not know that beatitude consists in the beatific vision. Therefore, being without the beatific vision does not make them sad.<sup>66</sup> Rather, they rejoice because they participate greatly in divine goodness and natural perfections.<sup>67</sup>

Now, Thomas holds that those separated souls know that God exists. He also holds that anyone who knows that God exists naturally desires to know what God is.<sup>68</sup> However, not having the beatific vision, those souls have a desire to know what God is that remains unfulfilled. What, then, must they think about their own situation? They must think that they are attaining the true ultimate end available to them as human beings. Otherwise, they would be sad. But they know that they have a desire—to know what God is—that remains unfulfilled. So, they must not think that their true ultimate end as human beings is complete fulfillment, leaving nothing to be desired. Rather, they must think that, despite their unfulfilled desire, they should be satisfied with what they have: fulfillment in goods naturally available to them as human beings, including knowing the Creator as

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64. Virtually acting for something as one's ultimate end is not implicitly taking something as one's ultimate end. Virtually acting for anything as one's ultimate end presupposes an earlier choice in which one consciously intended that reality as one's ultimate end.

65. Of course, many now think that all those who die without baptism but before committing any sin reach heaven. But few deny the possibility of limbo, and its possibility is enough to prove that people can rightly intend as their ultimate end something that can be known by human beings lacking faith. Moreover, Thomas's teaching about limbo cannot be reconciled with his claim that the true ultimate end can only be God attained by the beatific vision.

66. See *De malo*, q. 5, a. 3, c. and ad 1.

67. See *In Sent.*, 2, d. 33, q. 2, a. 2, c. and ad 5.

68. See *S.t.*, 1-2, q. 3, a. 8, c.

they do and being at peace with him. But if Thomas were right about beatitude, they would necessarily desire complete fulfillment that would leave nothing more to be desired, and they would be sad. Moreover, since Thomas thinks they rightly settle for the beatitude available to them, he cannot consistently deny that human beings can rightly intend as their ultimate end something other than God, attained by the beatific vision.

Thomas Gilby, O.P., who prepared the volume of the treatise on beatitude in the Latin-English edition of the *Summa theologiae*, acknowledged and briefly discussed the apparent inconsistency between Thomas's thesis that the true ultimate end must be an absolutely fulfilling good leaving nothing to be desired and his various admissions inconsistent with that thesis. Referring to two groups of relevant texts—the first including the central passage in the treatise on beatitude in the *Summa* and the other including the passages in which Thomas treats limbo—Gilby says: “They are to be held together, and their coherence explored.”<sup>69</sup> He begins by summarizing the efforts of two early commentators, Cajetan and Dominic Soto, to solve the problem, but concludes: “However it can be fairly argued that St. Thomas himself meant more than their interpretations allow.”<sup>70</sup> So, he goes on to consider briefly an interpretation developed by a school that included Sylvester of Ferrara (1474-1528), Bañez (1528-1604), John of St. Thomas (1589-1644), and A. Gardeil (1859-1931), but frankly comments: “That this interpretation amounts to a complete solution would be too much to claim. . . . Perhaps it is the best we can do for an answer that goes no further than the terms of the question. Or perhaps the matter is better left with Cajetan or Soto.”<sup>71</sup> However, when the two sets of texts are considered in the light of the independent reasons for holding that the kingdom cannot be reduced to the beatific vision and that desires for other fulfillments are compatible with enjoying the beatific vision, it is more reasonable to conclude that the two sets of texts cannot be held together and that their incoherence must be admitted.

The previous considerations have shown the falsity of Thomas's basic assumption: “Since everything tends to its own perfection, what human beings tend toward as their ultimate end must be something that they tend toward as a good that is perfect and utterly fulfills them.” That assumption also grounds his only clear argument that one can have, at any given time, only a single ultimate end, and that position, I shall argue, leads to other false conclusions. The falsity of these implications of Thomas's basic assumption will be further evidence of its falsity. Moreover, understanding why most people have two or more ultimate ends at the same time will be useful for exploring the real relationship

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69. Gilby, op. cit., “Appendix 5,” 154.

70. Ibid., 155.

71. Ibid. Thomas's inconsistencies, which his commentators tried unsuccessfully to treat as soluble paradoxes, generated a twentieth-century debate between theologians intent on safeguarding the gratuity of the beatific vision (e.g., Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.) and those convinced that only the beatific vision can satisfy the naturally restless human heart (e.g., Henri de Lubac, S.J.). Peter F. Ryan, S.J., “How Can the Beatific Vision both Fulfill Human Nature and Be Utterly Gratuitous?” *Gregorianum*, 83 (2002): 717-54, shows that each side effectively criticized the other's errors, but neither satisfactorily defended itself; and that Karl Rahner, S.J., who is often assumed to have solved the problem, actually failed to do so.

between human beings' natural inclinations to their fulfillment and the elements of the kingdom for which divine revelation leads God's people to hope.

Thomas holds that those joined to God by charity—living in his love—have him as their sole ultimate end; but since mortal sin is incompatible with charity, when people who have been living in God's love commit a mortal sin, they must thereby intend something other than God as their single ultimate end (see *S.t.*, 1-2, q. 72, a. 5; q. 87, a. 3). That position, I will argue, is mistaken. First, I will show that people living in mortal sin sometimes also act for a good ultimate end. Second, I will show that someone previously living in God's love who commits a mortal sin can nevertheless be acting for both the end of faith and a this-worldly (and partly illusory) good as ultimate ends. Third, I will show that those living in God's love who commit venial sins also necessarily have at least two ultimate ends at the same time.

First, then, Thomas argues that not every act of an infidel need be a sin. By *infidels* he means those who sinfully refuse to accept divine revelation, and so live in mortal sin, lack sanctifying grace, and are incapable of doing anything meritorious. Still, he explains, “there remains in them something of the good of nature” and

they can to some extent do the good works for which the good of nature suffices. So, it is not necessary that they sin in everything they do, but whenever they do something out of infidelity, then they sin. For just as someone with faith can commit an actual sin, which he or she does not refer to the end of faith—sinning venially or even mortally—so an infidel can do some good act in that which he or she does not refer to the end of infidelity. (*S.t.*, 2-2, q. 10, a. 4, c.)

Thomas also responds to the counterargument that only faith directs the intention to the true ultimate end, and that no good act can be done without the right intention: “Faith directs the intention in respect to the supernatural ultimate end, but the light of natural reason also can direct the intention in respect to some connatural good (*ibid.*, ad 2).

I will deal later (in **6**, below), with the relationship between the supernatural ultimate end and natural goods. The relevant point now is that Thomas here explicitly or implicitly admits three things. First, human acts can be morally good without being directed to the true ultimate end of human persons. Second, since the mortal sin of infidelity cannot be done for a good ultimate end, and infidels can do good human acts (which they do not refer to the end of infidelity), the connatural goods intended by infidels in doing morally good acts must either themselves be an ultimate end other than the end of infidelity or must be ordered to some ulterior, good ultimate end. Third, since both a mortal sin and the act of faith must have ultimate ends, Thomas's admission that someone with faith can commit a mortal sin that he or she does not refer to the end of faith implies that people with faith who commit mortal sins simultaneously have at least two ultimate ends.

Second, someone who has been living in God's love can make a mortally sinful commitment for the sake of some this-worldly good while also continuing to act appropriately—although not meritoriously—for the true ultimate end. To show this, I propose a case I made up, using elements of several real ones.

Blanche and Tom, college classmates and devout Catholics, enjoyed a chaste friendship, fell in love, and married the day after graduation. The couple soon had a baby

and were expecting another when Tom was sent off to war. Before the couple's second son was born, Tom was killed. To support herself while caring for her little boys, Blanche decided to provide day care. The first children she got were four sisters, the eldest eight years old, whose father, Harry, needed help because his wife, Jane, was in a nursing home, permanently paralyzed from the neck down. She had fallen while retrieving a toy from their home's roof. Harry and Jane, evangelical Episcopalians serious about their faith, had married with the commitment to be faithful until death, for they truly loved each other and believed that divorce, while possible, is wrong. But after Jane's accident, they divorced so that governmental programs would pay for her care and Harry could use all his income to meet present and future needs of their children and himself.

Soon, the girls loved Blanche, and she loved them as much as her own boys. She often took all the children to visit Jane, and the two became friends. Blanche's house was hardly large enough to care for the six children; Harry's was much larger. He had his daylight basement finished as an apartment for Blanche and her boys. After moving in, she began cooking dinner almost every day. Helping Blanche care for her boys, Harry became like a father to them. The couple regularly prayed together and went to Mass on Sundays, taking all six children. Being non-Catholic, Harry did not receive Communion.

Gradually, Blanche and Harry grew closer. After more than a year, on the first evening of a long weekend, they became intimate, and had intercourse many times the next few nights. Blanche, who had never before committed a mortal sin, repented, confessed, and soon realized she was pregnant. Neither she nor Harry considered abortion. Harry repented his infidelity and told Jane what had happened. Consoled by her faith and resigned to her disability, Jane was not angry. She forgave Harry, and, thinking that Blanche would be a fine mother for all the children, urged the couple to marry. Feeling forgiven by God as well as by Jane, Harry proposed.

Blanche's confessor was also an experienced canon lawyer. He met with Harry and Jane at the nursing home, then talked with Blanche. She listened, prayed, and became convinced that civilly marrying Harry would mean living in the mortal sin of adultery. So, she told him that she had to end their relationship and move out. While not agreeing with her conscientious judgment, Harry respected it, did not press her to stay, offered to help her move on, and promised to support their child. Anguished, Blanche looked for a place to live and found nothing appealing. Meanwhile, she thought anxiously both about missing Harry and his girls and about caring for her three children without anyone's help. When tired and discouraged, she unwillingly remembered the weekend of lovemaking and could not help imagining living as Harry's wife and caring together for their children.

A pastoral counselor, Lucy, tried to help Blanche move on. But when she asked whether she would be excommunicated if she civilly married Harry, Lucy said no and gave her a copy of John Paul II's guidance for pastors about Catholics living in invalid marriages:

They should be encouraged to listen to the word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts in favor of justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace. Let the Church pray

for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother, and thus sustain them in faith and hope.

However, the Church reaffirms her practice, which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried. They are unable to be admitted thereto from the fact that their state and condition of life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and the Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist.<sup>72</sup>

Blanche said: “Harry and I could marry civilly, go to Mass and pray together, bring up the children as Catholics, and do the other things the Pope says, including not going to Communion. I would be living in mortal sin and could end up in hell. But if we pray and do our best, God will help us be good parents and, I hope, get me straightened out before I die.” Lucy gently pointed out that Blanche would be forgoing intimacy with Jesus, perhaps forever, to have intimacy with Harry for only a while, and suggested that, instead of marrying him or moving out, she could continue living in her apartment in his home and caring for their children but limiting their relationship enough to avoid sexual intimacy. But when Blanche talked with Harry that evening, neither felt able to return to their earlier, chaste relationship while living in the same house and caring together for the children. Harry said he would gladly cooperate in living according to John Paul II’s advice, and Blanche agreed to marry him civilly.

In that single choice, Blanche undertook two things: (1) to live in mortally sinful intimacy with Harry for the sake of their relationship with each other, their cooperation in parenting, and other goods they would share together; and (2) to continue practicing her faith as fully as possible under the circumstances, including bringing up all the children as Catholics, for the sake of her own and the children’s salvation. The ends of the two things are plainly different. The stated ends of (2), being intended for their own sake, are ultimate; and if the stated ends of (1) are not ultimate, they are intended only for some ultimate, this-worldly end, not for the other-worldly ends of (2). So, in her single choice, Blanche intends simultaneously at least two ultimate ends; and in carrying out her undertaking, Blanche sometimes will be acting at once for both ultimate ends—for instance, when the couple pray together and take the children to Mass on Sundays.

Someone might say that Blanche is taking as her single ultimate end a set of goods including the stated ends of both (1) and (2), mistakenly thinking that set of goods will give her perfect fulfillment leaving nothing to be desired. But that is absurd.<sup>73</sup> Blanche expects neither to enjoy the stated ends of (1) and of (2) at the same time nor to be completely fulfilled in this world. Moreover, when she repented her first sins and intended to forgo intimacy with Harry, she did not expect the tempting desire to enjoy it *now* to be satisfied in heaven. Thus, she was—and she remains—

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72. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 84, AAS 74 (1982) 185, *OR*, 21-28 Dec. 1981, 17.

73. In Grisez, “The True Ultimate End,” 44, I overlooked the points I am about to make and conceded that a woman such as Blanche could mistakenly take as her ultimate end a set of goods including both God and the intimate relationship.

convinced that neither heaven nor anything else can fulfill her so completely that she would have nothing more to desire.<sup>74</sup>

Now, to the third point. Thomas's position also raises a question about how people living in God's love can commit venial sins, since, even when sinning venially, people are not acting for God's glory and seem to be seeking at least some fulfillment in something else. This discussion will be concerned only with deliberate sins that are venial due to light matter.

In his first systematic theological work, Thomas held that, to order their actions rightly, people need to intend, actually or virtually, God or charity as the ultimate end for whose sake they make their choices. Examples clarify the *actually/virtually* distinction: A mother who looks after her own health because she wants to live long enough to raise her children, in the hope that they will eventually be with her in heaven enjoying God, *actually* intends God as her ultimate end. Then, when for her health's sake she follows a diet-plan in choosing foods, without simultaneously thinking about God, she *virtually* intends God as her ultimate end.<sup>75</sup>

Later, Thomas tries to solve the question about venial sin by saying that it is not necessary that people living in God's love always actually intend him as their end, but "it suffices that they habitually refer themselves and everything of theirs to God" (*S.t.*, 1-2, q. 88, a. 1, ad 2); and that those who commit venial sins do not take the temporal good as their end but only make use of it, while referring it to God habitually, though not actually (see *ibid.*, ad 3). He sometimes puts the point concisely: "What is loved in a venial sin, is loved on account of God in habit, even if not in act" (*S.t.*, 2-2, q. 24, a. 10, ad 2); and: "Someone who sins venially, loves along with God something else, which he or she loves in habit, although not in act, on account of God."<sup>76</sup>

What does it mean to say that people "habitually refer themselves and everything of theirs to God?" Thomas maintains that charity (loving God) is the chief principle of merit (of deserving to attain God) and that all the good acts of those who love God are meritorious (see *S.t.*, 1-2, q. 114, a. 4). So, he must explain how all the good works of people who love God become directed toward him as their ultimate end. In an early

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74. Peter F. Ryan, S.J., "Must Acting Persons Have a Single Ultimate End?" *Gregorianum*, 82 (2001): 339-48, cogently answers the subtle proposal of the Carmelites of Salamanca (Salmanticenses) that a mortal sinner's single ultimate end is a set of goods regarded as the prospective fulfillment of his or her proper nature, including both its naturally good inclinations and its sinfulness. That proposal founders on the rock of an ultimate end's priority to the first self-determining free choice made for its sake: people, such as Blanche, who are not already living in mortal sin must conceive the ultimate end for whose sake they are tempted to sin *before* they give in to that temptation, and, until they sin, their proper nature does *not yet* include specification to the fulfillment to be had by that sin.

75. See *In Sent.*, 2, d. 38, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4, where Thomas also says that, for God or charity to be the ultimate end, it "is not enough that one only in habit have God or charity—since in that way one would even order the act of venial sin to God, which is false." But Thomas does not seem to repeat that sound teaching elsewhere.

76. *De malo*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 1. One must keep in mind that Thomas is referring here to people who are living in God's love.

attempt to provide that explanation, he talks of directing oneself as a whole to God. In order to merit, he says

. . . an entirely habitual ordination of an act to God is not enough, because from something being habitual, nothing is merited, but only from the fact that it is actually done. But neither is it necessary that there always be an actual intention ordering to the ultimate end linked with every action that is directed to some proximate end; but it suffices that all those ends are sometimes referred to the ultimate end; as happens when someone takes thought to direct himself or herself as a whole to the love of God: for then, whatever that person orders to himself or herself will be ordered to God.<sup>77</sup>

Of course, venial sins are not acts of charity, and so are not meritorious.<sup>78</sup> In the texts about venial sin quoted above, however, Thomas says that *the goods* that those living in God's love intend when venially sinning remain ordered to God. So, his argument must be this: (1) such people seek for *themselves* the goods they love in venially sinning, (2) their *selves* are ordered to God by charity; (3) since venial sins are compatible with charity, their *selves* as wholes remain ordered to God even when they are sinning venially. Therefore, when people living in God's love commit venial sins, *the goods* they love in venially sinning are loved on account of God in habit, even if not in act.

While that argument is plausible, it is not sound. As in doing anything else, someone committing a deliberate venial sin acts for an end and must act for some ultimate end. Even if someone is living in God's love, the ultimate end for which he or she is committing a venial sin cannot be God, for, if it were God, the action would be good and meritorious. Therefore, in committing a deliberate venial sin, someone living in God's love is acting for an ultimate end other than God.

At the same time, such a sinner intends some true ultimate end in making good choices, especially those carrying out sound commitments. Of course, venial sinners do not expect to find complete fulfillment, leaving nothing to be desired, in anything for the sake of which they commit venial sins. But neither do they expect to find such complete fulfillment, now, in the true ultimate end. And, for agents living in time, no fulfillment later on can deliver everything desirable about what they want now.

To see how Thomas's argument went wrong, one must recall his own account of human action. According to that sound account, one cannot direct *oneself* to any good and end except insofar as one's self is still to be realized and is in one's power. But in that respect, one's self is precisely what will be realized by one's self-determining free choices. Moreover, one cannot direct any good to oneself except by obtaining fulfillment in that good. But in that respect, one directs a good to one's self by choosing to do something that will be conducive—directly or, perhaps, indirectly, by getting others' help—to one's being fulfilled by that good. Therefore, Thomas only generated confusion by supplementing his usual, careful talk about ordering actions to ends by intending the ends in making choices with loose talk about ordering oneself to God and ordering goods to oneself. Moreover, as Thomas shows, a per se series of ends and performances relates

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77. *In Sent.*, 2, d. 40, q. 1, a. 5, ad 6.

78. See *De malo*, q. 2, a. 5, ad 7.

any initial performance carrying out a choice to the ultimate end for the sake of which the choice is made. So, when one is deliberately acting wrongly for some fulfillment, the action must be carrying out a choice that cannot have been made for one's true ultimate end, but must have been made for some other end.

That truth can be illustrated by a clear example of someone living in God's love who has a delicate conscience but nevertheless chooses to commit a venial sin.

While preparing for confirmation at age seventeen, Miriam had a conversion experience and decided to live for God's kingdom by striving always to discern and do the Father's will. Eventually she discerned the call to marry and have children. Most of her time and energy are devoted to fulfilling the responsibilities pertaining to her state of life. So, usually she is not thinking about God and the kingdom. The ends she intends in making most of her choices are to meet various needs of her husband, her children, and herself. So, when she sets out for the grocery store, she actually intends to get the groceries she needs, in order to make some modest but healthful meals, in order to nourish the family and build up familial communion. But she intends that series of ends because they pertain to her role as wife and mother, and she chose to be a wife and mother for the sake of God's kingdom. So, when she consciously heads for the grocery store, she virtually intends to reach the kingdom.

Suppose that Miriam's twin sister, Aarona, single but inconveniently pregnant, has a botched abortion and emergency hysterectomy, repents and confesses to the hospital chaplain, and confides the truth to Miriam but tells their mother the surgery was necessitated by unaccountable hemorrhaging. Their mother—suspicious and confident that Miriam will know the truth—asks her by e-mail. Not having committed a deliberate sin in years, Miriam does not want to lie. She delays but her mother presses, and Miriam reluctantly replies: "I'm worried about Aarona, too, but I don't know what's going on with her these days. She hasn't been talking with me as she used to."

Miriam's reply is almost true, but she sends it after thinking: "Mother will be upset if I tell her the truth; she'll talk with Aarona, and she'll be really angry with me for snitching on her. God won't be pleased with my lying, but it's only a venial sin." Many people would tell Miriam that her lying is not a sin. But it certainly is a sin to do something, as she does, that one thinks is a sin.

What ultimate end does Miriam intend in choosing to lie? She intends to prevent her mother from being upset, in order to prevent her from talking with Aarona, in order to prevent Aarona's being upset, in order to protect their relationship as sisters. That relationship is good in itself, but, in lying, Miriam intends solidarity with Aarona as good not only in itself but by itself—as a good to be promoted by a choice that she believes will not please God. Thus, in choosing to lie, Miriam, rather than intending her relationship with Aarona for the kingdom's sake, intends it as a distinct ultimate end.<sup>79</sup>

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79. A critic might argue: "But there's really no separate good for Miriam to intend, for her relationship with Aarona can neither exist nor have any real value apart from God and his will for them. Of course, Miriam isn't perfect. Yet she still has only one ultimate end." The premises are true, but rather than leading to the conclusion, they explain how Miriam, while genuinely committed to seeking the kingdom by discerning and doing God's will, at the same time intends a second, partly illusory ultimate end.

In fact, rather than acting for something that they expect will fulfill them so perfectly that there will be nothing more to desire, most people are rightly convinced that nothing can possibly deliver such complete satisfaction.

Seven-year-old Melissa's family is about to leave for a long-planned, all-day boat ride, provided by her dad's employer. The phone rings. It's Melissa's friend, Angela. Her dad learned last night that the family, which is moving to Australia and was scheduled to depart next week, must instead set out tomorrow. Angela wants Melissa to spend this last day with her at her aunt's house. Melissa's dad says: "It's up to you. Spend the day with Angela if you like or tell her goodbye right now and come along with us." Melissa wishes she could be in two places at once but she must choose, not between means to an end, but between two things she greatly desires and sees as good in themselves. Neither today nor ever will she obtain fulfillment in the unchosen possibility. The possibilities for her are to spend today with Angela and to spend today with her family; and today's unchosen possibility will be gone forever tomorrow.

Someone might object: Unsatisfied desires in this life cannot falsify Thomas's account of beatitude, which concerns the ultimate end to be attained in heaven. However, only if people believe that all their desires *can* be satisfied can they intend something as their ultimate end in the expectation that it will provide fulfillment that leaves nothing to be desired. People's need to make choices and the fact that many desirable options are ephemeral convince most people that nothing and no collection of things can satisfy them so fully that there will be nothing more to be desired.<sup>80</sup> Now, one can wish for something one thinks is impossible, but one cannot intend it as an end and choose to act to bring it about. So, what Thomas argues everyone must do, most people simply cannot do, namely, tend toward something as their ultimate end expecting its attainment to leave nothing to be desired.

Even assuming Thomas's requirement that beatitude is in having what satisfies natural desire rather than in satisfying desires that presuppose opinions, experience quickly convinces most people that not all natural desires can be satisfied. Children naturally desire both to find answers to their questions and to get along well with their parents and teachers, and they soon learn that the two desires cannot be completely satisfied at the same time—that they must at times suppress their curiosity or risk provoking the adults whose help they need to satisfy it. Very bright children naturally desire to do their school work skillfully and to get along well with their classmates, and may find that the two conflict. Poor children naturally desire to satisfy their hunger and to get along well with their siblings, but must put up with some frustration of both desires if they are to enjoy some satisfaction of both.

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80. This argument cannot be rebutted by saying: "Thomas is doing metaphysics here, not psychology." He is doing metaphysics but also is drawing a conclusion about a matter of fact that pertains to psychology. Against truths of faith—e.g., the substantial presence of Jesus in the Eucharist—experience cannot count. But when someone argues from a metaphysical assumption to a thesis about what people must do and one finds that one need not do it, or about what one cannot do and one finds that one can do it, one's experience falsifies both the thesis and the metaphysical assumption.

Because people are convinced that nothing will provide complete satisfaction leaving nothing to be desired, and because they can and do simultaneously act for multiple ultimate ends, shaping life well is more complicated and difficult than Thomas supposed. As I shall show, recognizing the kingdom as the true ultimate end facilitates discerning and accepting one's personal vocation, which alone fully integrates one's life with charity and orders all one's good actions to the true ultimate end.

Why did Thomas fail to see that the kingdom is the true ultimate end? I shall not try to give a complete explanation. But one primary reason why not only Thomas but Bonaventure and Albert failed to understand the kingdom was "widespread ignorance of the apocalyptic Jewish background of this expectation, together with an acute Platonizing longing for the eternal, a place outside time and history."<sup>81</sup>

The early Church Fathers had closely followed scriptural teachings regarding the kingdom, and St. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, who was martyred around 200 A.D., strongly defended the realism of the kingdom and everything in Christianity that involved the human body against attempts to reduce the faith to a disembodied spirituality.<sup>82</sup> However, a pagan philosophy, which was later called "Neoplatonism," emerged in the third century, and many Christian thinkers used it in efforts to develop systematic theology—that is, a systematic understanding of many central truths of faith.

The Neoplatonists strove to develop a single, all-inclusive worldview and way of life. They held that reality has four levels: the highest level is the source of everything, the One, which is beyond understanding, and as undifferentiated perfection is The Good; next is pure Mind, which contemplates in a single vision the One, itself, and the ideas of all possible things; then pure Soul, which, working from the ideas Mind contemplates, generates a system of existing things, in the process giving rise to individual souls; and the lowest level, the multitude of sensible things, the material world. The limit of material reality is matter in itself (as distinct from any form it takes), which, insofar as it entirely lacks perfection, is the opposite of the One, and the principle of evil. While all four levels of reality are eternal, The Good by its very nature is diffusive of itself, so that the three lower levels come from the One by timeless emanation, somewhat as light, heat, and life proceed from the sun—although, unlike the sun, the One does not do anything or give up anything in emanating.

According to Neoplatonism, human souls share in mind and are capable of understanding and action, but humans as embodied are real in the lowest way. Tending to forget their origin, they become dispersed outside themselves and enmeshed in the sensible world. But because the lower levels proceed from the One, they can also "convert"—that is, turn back to the One. To begin their return, humans must first draw back from the exterior world of sense and begin to exercise moral self-discipline so as to focus on the higher level of rational reflection. Then they must go beyond that level's multiplicity to the intuition—a pure but still self-conscious understanding. Finally, they

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81. Viviano, *op. cit.*, 57.

82. *Ibid.*, 32-38. See Irénée de Lyon, *Contre les Hérésies* (V:31-36), ed. Adelin Rousseau (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1969), 389-467.

may reach union with the One, without even the otherness of thinking *about* or accompanying self-consciousness.<sup>83</sup>

It may seem from this brief summary that the Neoplatonist worldview and way of life offer little for Christian use. But Neoplatonism was developed by able philosophers, who gathered up many insights from Plato, Aristotle, and others. In working out a coherent system, they developed insights, arguments, and a vocabulary far more serviceable than those of other contemporary pagan thinkers, whose views were more like those of many post-Christian thinkers of our own time. Consequently, though Christian thinkers rejected everything in Neoplatonism that they recognized as incompatible with divine revelation, they also found in that philosophy much that seemed helpful. Among those who made use of Neoplatonism were Origen, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory of Nyssa in the East; and, in the West, Boethius, Ambrose, and Augustine. Moreover, some Greek treatises imbued with Neoplatonism were written, probably around 500 A.D., by a Christian writer who identified himself as the Dionysius who was a disciple of St. Paul (see Acts 17.34). Translated into Latin, those treatises were used by medieval theologians, including Thomas, as highly authoritative sources.<sup>84</sup>

Neoplatonism obviously differs in important ways from Christian faith. The One, which is beyond personhood, does not create, does not exercise providential care, does not reveal, and cannot offer human beings a share in its nature and life with a view to interpersonal communion. The Neoplatonist cosmos will never be transformed into a new heavens and a new earth, but will continue forever much as it is. Originating from the One by emanation through intermediate levels, bodily human persons are separated from the One not by sin but by their diminished reality and their involvement in the sensible world. Human souls do not differ from the One as creatures from their creator, but as a lower mode of spirit whose supreme mode is the One. Thus, the human soul is naturally akin to the One, naturally needs to return to the One for fulfillment, and naturally tends toward that fulfillment.

Plainly, Neoplatonism and elements of Aristotle's philosophy that seemed compatible with it are the chief sources of Thomas's theses that the object of the will is the good universally, that the true ultimate end of human persons must be a good so fulfilling that it leaves nothing to be desired, that such fulfillment is naturally desired, that it can be found in the beatific vision of the divine essence, and that nothing but that vision is essential to perfect beatitude.

That view of the ultimate end is erroneous. Yet I expect that many faithful Catholics will ask: Why must we give it up?

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83. For a more adequate but brief and understandable sketch of Neoplatonism together with a bibliography, see Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R., *A History of Ancient Western Philosophy* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), 395-416; an even briefer sketch, which makes clearer some very influential elements of Neoplatonism: Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 2002), 157-71.

84. On Pseudo-Dionysius and his Christian transformation of Neoplatonism, see Louis Bouyer, Cong. Orat., *History of Christian Spirituality*, vol. 1, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (New York: Seabury, 1963), 395-421.

As has been shown (in 1-3,- above), Scripture and the Church's teaching make it clear that the true ultimate end of human persons is God's kingdom, which includes but is not reducible to the beatific vision. As has also been shown, Thomas's own works include sound teachings inconsistent with his untenable view of the ultimate end, and so do many works of the Church Fathers and other Doctors, and various documents of the magisterium. The items I have mined from those sources are only part of their rich lode.

The faith of the Church is one thing; theological views are another. Each truth of faith is essential to the communion of the new covenant, which is God's gift in Jesus to humankind. Theologies are products of human thought and work. The faith of the Church develops as she holds and contemplates, protects against misunderstandings and attacks, and hands on to generation after generation all that she herself is and all that she believes (see DV, 8). And this tradition of faith is carried on in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, who ensures that what God has given for the salvation of all will remain available to the ends of the earth and to the end of time. Theologies develop as believers, striving to appropriate and communicate what the Church hands on, contribute to an ongoing dialogue with one another. In that human work, as in all other intellectual disciplines, errors are inevitable, and progress is made only by detecting errors and proposing alternatives—which, of course, will have their own defects. Therefore, while it is irresponsible for any believer to call into question even the least central truth of faith, treating perennial theological doctrines as if they were truths of faith is no less irresponsible and is likely to gravely harm the Church's life and impede her mission.

#### **6) The common good of God and created persons is being realized in the coming of God's kingdom.**

To understand how the kingdom of God will fulfill human persons who inherit it, one must understand human persons' natural ultimate end. That ultimate end ought to be sought by people who have never heard anything of what God revealed when he spoke through the prophets and when he spoke and speaks still by his "Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb 1.2). To understand human persons' natural ultimate end, one must begin by accurately identifying the object of the human will.

Different sorts of organisms tend in different ways toward what will help them survive and flourish. Plants are affected by varying environmental conditions, such as sunlight and water, and respond to them. Animals' senses enable them to become aware of potentially helpful and harmful things, and animals' emotions, such as desires to eat what they perceive as edible and fears of being eaten, move them to behave appropriately—for instance, to pursue prey and flee from or fight off predators. Like plants, people also spontaneously respond to many environmental conditions; and, like animals, they engage in behaviors motivated by emotions that result from perceptions and images. But unlike other organisms, people can understand what would fulfill them and intend it in choosing to act to bring about their fulfillment. So, St. Thomas says: "the understood good is the object of the will, and that good moves the will as an end" (*S.t.*, 1, q. 82, a. 4, c.; cf. 1-2, q. 19, a. 3, c.).

Thomas also distinguishes between things that, lacking awareness, are directed to their good by another; animals that have sentient awareness and are directed by it only toward particular goods; and persons, who understand what goodness is and are inclined by their understanding to the “good universally” (*S.t.*, 1, q. 59, a. 1). In that context, *good universally* means whatever will give human beings some sort of fulfillment. However, in trying to show (in *S.t.*, 1-2, q. 2, a. 8) that God alone must be the ultimate end of human beings, Thomas contrasts *good universally* with participated goodness, and argues that only God can satisfy the human will. But as I have shown (in **5**, above), Thomas could not consistently maintain that position, because the object of the human will is good universally, not in the sense that human beings naturally desire perfect goodness that will leave nothing to be desired, but only in the sense that human beings understand what goodness is, think various things to be good, and can will whatever they think to be good. Thus, the object of our will is any and every intelligible good, including the good that is God, as we understand that good.

Thinking that grass is green or that a baby is small is not simply understanding the grass and the baby but knowing something to be true about them. Similarly, thinking entities to be good is knowing, or thinking one knows, a truth about them—namely, that goodness belongs, or could belong, to them. Unlike most other attributes, an entity’s goodness varies with the sort of entity it is: the goodness of a good dinner and that of a good dog are very different. That is so because the goodness of anything is whatever realizes the possibilities that complete it, and what realizes something’s possibilities depends on what kind of reality is and what its possibilities are. Thus, anything is completely good only if, considering what it is, its possibilities are fully realized, so that it is all that it can be.

If we know what is true about God, we know him to have no unrealized possibilities, and so know him to be perfectly good. But the goodness that belongs to God is his alone, and we do not know what God and his goodness are in themselves.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, we do know that, inasmuch as other realities are not God, his goodness is not the goodness of anything else. So, even though God’s goodness is greater than the goodness of anything else, inasmuch as God is greater than anything else, God’s goodness is, for us, only one good among others.

Human beings and their wills are not related in the same way to those aspects of their own goodness that depend upon their choices and actions, and the goodness of anything else. Aspects of human beings’ own goodness that depend upon their choices and actions are understood, thought of as possibilities to be realized or realities to be protected, and may or may not be intended as the ends of freely chosen actions. The goodness of everything else cannot be intended as the end of any chosen action.

Since the goodness of God, considered in itself, is entirely independent of our choices and actions, and since the end we intend in making a choice to do anything must be a good that we think can be realized or protected in or through that choice and action,

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85. As St. Thomas teaches: “With regard to God, we cannot grasp what he is, but what he is not, and how other things are related to him” (*S.c.g.*, lib. 1, cap. 30).

God's goodness, insofar as it is proper to him, cannot be the end we intend in making any choice whatsoever.

Still, the goodness of God and of everything else that does not depend on our choices and actions can be understood, acknowledged, appreciated, and volitionally enjoyed. Such joy in the goodness of entities is part of one's experience of the intelligible beauty of God (considered insofar as his goodness can be understood), and also of natural things and processes, of theories and works of fiction, of machines and their working, of the lives and achievements of people in the past,<sup>86</sup> and of our own and other peoples' fulfillment insofar as it is already realized and considered only as realized. For instance, seeing a beautiful baby or reflecting on our own normal functioning, we can experience awe and joy.

Since goods must be understood as *humanly* fulfilling to be intended as ends by people making choices, human beings can and often do consider, as possibilities to be realized or realities to be protected, aspects not only of their own good but of other people's good.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, insofar as we see our good and the good of other people as joined together, so that neither (or none) of us can be fulfilled unless we are fulfilled together in some common good, we can love others for their own sakes, as I have explained (near the beginning of 5, above).

We can even consider as possibilities to be realized or realities to be protected the goods of things that are not persons. But since our actions always fulfill us, we cannot be interested in the good of any entity other than a person or community of which we are a member except insofar as that good is a condition, element, or result of our personal good or the common good of a human community to which we belong. Since subhuman things are absolutely incapable of joining with us in actions that are cooperative and mutually fulfilling, we can love subhuman realities only inasmuch as they somehow contribute to our own fulfillment or that of someone or some group of people whom we love.<sup>88</sup> So,

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86. If those past people are considered as still participating in ongoing actions with which one might cooperate, one can intend their fulfillment in intending the common good to which one shares a commitment with them.

87. While emotions naturally motivate individuals to act for the good of some other people, they also naturally incline people to treat others according to sensibly perceived differences that need not, and often do not, correspond to intelligible factors relevant to fundamental human goods. Consequently, the rational guidance those goods give all human beings toward an inclusive human community, harmonious in itself and at peace with God, not only can lead even fallen human beings to act for that ultimate end but very often only leads them to rationalize their failure to act for it—to make excuses for unjust discrimination of various sorts.

88. Even a person who does not love anyone else for his or her own sake can be motivated by various self-interests to be deeply concerned about some aspects of the genuine good of other individuals or substantial groups. For example, an entirely self-centered physician may be strongly committed to promoting patients' genuine health so as to forestall malpractice suits and maintain a reputation for excellence that enables her to maximize earnings, and an entirely self-centered public official may be strongly committed to promoting his nation's authentic common good so as to go down in history as a great man. Moreover, people of all sorts can be deeply concerned about some aspects of the genuine good of many subhuman realities—e.g., the environment, endangered species, great works of art, historically significant sites, collections of various things, and so on. Insofar as someone selflessly loves others, he or she will be concerned about the good of subpersonal entities only insofar as it is somehow conducive to the

while we can intend as ends subhuman entities that are means to ulterior ends, we cannot intend subhuman realities for their own sakes—that is, as ultimate ends.

Which goods can we intend as ultimate ends? Because human beings are complex, human fulfillment has diverse aspects, each of which is good in its own way. Thomas referred to these goods when he said that even those in mortal sin can do good actions for the sake of connatural goods.<sup>89</sup>

As animate beings, human persons are organic substances. Life itself—its maintenance and transmission—health, and safety are one category of fundamental good.

As rational beings, human persons can know reality and appreciate beauty and whatever intensely engages their capacities to know and to feel. Theoretical knowledge and esthetic experience are another category of fundamental good.

As simultaneously rational and bodily, human persons can try by their behavior to bring about a certain state of affairs. Behaving skillfully to bring about what one wishes to bring about is another category of fundamental good. Although often sought only as a means to some further end, such effective performance of itself fulfills a person and so can be intended for its own sake, as it sometimes is by those who enjoy doing good work or engaging in games requiring skill.

As rational animals who are able to form a one-flesh bodily union, human couples can marry and have children. So, familial communion, including conjugal love and parenthood, is another fundamental good.

As members of groups whose freely chosen actions can contribute to one another's fulfillment, human persons need to get along with one another. So, another category of fundamental good is interpersonal harmony. That good is realized in more and less sound and adequate ways. Ideally, people try to realize it as a common good, such as social solidarity or friendship.

Within oneself, feelings can be conflicting and also can be at odds with one's judgments and choices. One's choices can conflict with one's judgments and one's behavior can fail to carry out what one intends or to express one's inner self. So, another category of fundamental good is harmony among one's judgments, choices, feelings, and performances. That good also is realized in various ways. Ideally, people realize it by making sound judgments, choosing in accord with them, carrying out those choices with appropriate behavior, and, in consistently doing all that, integrating their feelings with their sound judgments and good actions.

People and human communities also experience tension with what they recognize as a more-than-human source of meaning and value. So, another category of fundamental good is harmony with that more-than-human reality. Again, that good is realized in

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good of some persons or communities of persons. But those who do not love anyone else for his or her own sake will be concerned in the same way about the genuine goods of subhuman entities and those of other people, and may well be more concerned about the former than the latter—e.g., more concerned about the animals' suffering than about aborted babies' deaths.

89. See *S.t.*, 2-2, q. 10, a. 4, c.; cf. 1-2, q. 94, a. 2; Germain Grisez, "The First Principle of Practical Reason: A Commentary on the *Summa theologiae*, 1-2, Question 94, Article 2," *Natural Law Forum*, 1965 (10): 168-201.

various ways. Ideally, people more or less know the truth about God and try to realize harmony with him, somewhat as they try to realize harmony with one another, as a common good.

Since there is an interplay among the various aspects of human fulfillment, goods of each category are sometimes intended as means to one or more of the other aspects of fulfillment. Still, the connatural goods are fundamental in the sense that the fulfillment each of them offers can be intended as an ultimate end, and none of them can supply the fulfillment each of the others does.

Considering each category of fundamental human good by itself, one does not find anything that can be the true ultimate end of human persons and communities, to which the others should be regarded as mere means. Since each makes an irreducible contribution to the well-being and flourishing of the person, each has moral significance in virtue of the dignity of human persons—that is, their intrinsic worth. Thus, in explaining the exceptionless moral norm forbidding killing, John Paul II says that “the origin and the foundation of the duty of absolute respect for human life are to be found in the dignity proper to the person and not simply in the natural inclination to preserve one’s own physical life. Human life, even though it is a fundamental good [bonum praecipuum] of man, thus acquires a moral significance in reference to the good of the person, who must always be affirmed for his own sake.”<sup>90</sup>

Still, even without awareness of divine revelation, people can know the true God: “Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made” (Rom 1.20; cf. DS 3004/1785). Not all creatures manifest God’s providence and benevolence, but even those divine attributes can be detected by people who not only recognize that their very being is the creator’s gift but reflect on the fact that he has also equipped them with practical insights into fundamental human goods. For those insights guide them, like a law “written on their hearts” (Rom 2.15), to act individually for their personal good and, with others, for common goods. As the things God has made indicate his eternal power and majesty, the guidance toward intelligible goods of the law written on human hearts indicates his intelligence. And people can deduce that a guiding intelligence is provident—is acting on a plan—and that an intelligence guiding human beings and communities toward their good is benevolent.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, people who recognize that God has equipped them with practical insights into fundamental goods that guide them toward their fulfillment also can recognize him as the source of their unique sets of gifts—that is, of all abilities and resources they have and can use to protect and promote goods—and of all their opportunities to use those gifts.

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90. *Veritatis splendor*, 50, AAS 85 (1993) 1173, OR, 6 Oct. 1993, VIII.

91. Thomas explains (*S.t.*, 1-2, q. 91, a. 2) that all creatures are subject to God’s providence, but rational creatures are subject to it in a special way: by sharing in it in providing for themselves and others. He concludes: “Thus rational creatures share in the very eternal plan by which they have a natural inclination to their appropriate action and end, and that participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called ‘natural law.’”

Reflecting on those truths about God, people should acknowledge, praise, and thank him for creating them, guiding them, and giving them everything they accomplish. Having recognized that God's goodness grounds their good, they also should intend to follow his guidance both because doing so will be in their own interest and because cooperating with God by following his guidance is the only way they can give him what he intended to bring about in providing that guidance. Thus, even without revelation, people can intend to promote harmony with God as their ultimate end, by following his guidance—and thus cooperating with him—in making all their choices and carrying them out. But since God's guidance includes direction to get along with others and cooperate with them for common goods, intending as one's ultimate end to cooperate with God entails intending to live, insofar as possible, as a member of an inclusive human community in friendship with him.

Of course, each of the fundamental human goods is only one element of human well-being and flourishing, and each realization of any of those elements in or by a freely chosen human action is only one part of an individual's or community's overall fulfillment. Since a whole is greater than its parts, the persons and communities for whom we act are always greater than any good for which we act in trying to benefit them. We love both. But we love persons and communities for themselves, while we love only as contributions to their good the benefits we seek. So, our ultimate end should include all the benefits we can realize by protecting and promoting all the fundamental goods of persons in every way compatible with loving all those persons and all aspects of their well-being and flourishing. Consequently, as the ultimate, communal end of all the choices and actions of all human beings, harmony with God would ideally include the realization insofar as possible of every human being in respect to every fundamental human good.

Obviously, no possible course of action that any human person or human group can choose and carry out will promote and protect in every possible way all the fundamental goods in every person. How, then, can human beings include in their ultimate end all the persons with whom they can cooperate and/or whom their actions can benefit or harm, and every benefit they might realize in protecting and promoting any of the fundamental goods?

Under harsh conditions, when family members heavily depend on one another for their very survival, the reality of a common good such as the ongoing survival of the whole family can be rightly intended by family members as an ulterior, although not ultimate, end whenever they choose to do something to protect or promote their own and one another's health, safety, or bodily integrity. Still, family members cannot expect their particular acts to bring about and protect that common good as a whole but only to contribute to it in more or less limited ways.

Similarly, people can intend a very inclusive common good as an ultimate end. For instance, although idealistic young people with diverse gifts cannot undertake a career that will promote and protect all the fundamental goods in every human being, they can intend that inclusive ultimate end by committing themselves to some sort of service in

order to make a difference in the world for the better.<sup>92</sup> Again, some people promote altruism, for example, by saying: “I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”<sup>93</sup> Just as those who promote the eradication of an infectious disease can intend to contribute to the health of everyone in the world, those who sincerely promote altruism can intend as an end all of altruism’s good fruits—any and every fundamental good in any and every person who can be affected by others’ actions—and can intend either that end or something ulterior to it as their ultimate end.

Of course, in this fallen world, very few if any of those who entirely lack divine revelation come to know all that human beings can naturally know about God and how they should cooperate with him. Still, people can grasp the various sorts of fundamental goods, including the good of harmony with the more-than-human source of meaning and value, and, intending those goods as ultimate ends, they can choose to do what they sincerely, even if sometimes mistakenly, think will promote them. In doing that, people can recognize that their own fulfillment generally can be achieved only by cooperating, not only with other people, but also with the more-than-human source of meaning and value—provided they think it possible to cooperate with that entity. Moreover, most people realize that genuine cooperation involves using, as their standard for treating others, how they wish others to treat them and their loved ones. So, with the Holy Spirit’s help, people who, through no fault of their own, lack express awareness of God can intend various ultimate ends toward which God directs them by the law written on their hearts, can deal justly with other people and with him, and so can be saved. Yet such people may not have been able to identify the true ultimate end toward which human beings should direct their lives: harmony with God, including the realization, insofar as possible, of all human beings in respect to every fundamental human good.

People lacking divine revelation who have partially attained the truth about God that they could attain about him have come more or less close to grasping the true ultimate end toward which human beings should direct their lives. However, the many evils that people in the fallen world do and undergo lead most people to develop distorted notions about God and occasion widespread despair and cynicism. Moreover, divisions and conflicts among various groups of people prevent many who understand the common good of human beings as such from committing themselves to its service, and, very often, groups of people settle for pursuing together some range of fundamental goods for themselves. Even so, whatever truth people reach about God and about the ultimate end

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92. Because we can have more than one ultimate end at the same time, we can intend in some of our choices less noble ultimate ends while idealistically undertaking a career for the sake of an ultimate end that includes all the fundamental goods of everyone with whom we could cooperate or whom we might benefit in any way whatsoever.

93. This statement is attributed to Stephen Grellet (1773-1855), born Étienne de Grellet du Mabilier, who was a Quaker missionary. See Elizabeth Knowles, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (New York: Oxford University, 2004) s.v. Grellet.

for which they should act helps them understand divine revelation if they hear it and disposes them to welcome it if it is commended by cogent signs of its authenticity.

Consequently, when God revealed himself as creator and provident Lord, and offered a covenantal relationship in which his people could cooperate with him for the sake of his kingdom, they readily understood his proposal and intended the kingdom of God as their ultimate end in committing themselves to the covenant and undertaking to love God—that is, to cooperate faithfully with him in fulfilling their covenantal responsibilities, not only out of self-interest but to give him his due and show him their gratitude. As God unfolded his plan to open his covenantal community to the whole of humankind, the promised kingdom came to include everything that could be hoped for by human beings who accurately understood all that can be naturally known about both God and human fulfillment. When God promised to fix the broken world and raise the dead, the promised kingdom included more than human beings could naturally regard as possible, though not yet more than they could recognize as naturally fulfilling once they believed it to be possible.

To understand how God’s kingdom is the common good of God and his people, one must understand how God’s glory and human fulfillment are one good for which both God and his people cooperate—insofar as his people are faithful.

Vatican I teaches definitively that the world is created for the glory of God (see DS 3025/1805). The glory of God primarily is his perfect reality itself. But just as people express themselves in their good work, God outwardly manifests his intrinsic glory, his being all-good, in creation. That goodness is recognized by—and God’s glory is thus realized in—the minds of intelligent creatures, who appreciate and praise God for who he is and what he is doing (see Eph 1.11-14).<sup>94</sup>

Someone might suppose: Since the world is created for God’s glory, he creates to acquire praise and honor for himself. However, to suppose that God gains anything at all by creating us would be to suppose God needs us, in which case he would not be God. So, Vatican I excludes the thought that God is trying to acquire something for himself by teaching that he creates “to manifest his perfection through the goods that he makes creatures share in, not to increase his happiness nor to acquire anything.”<sup>95</sup>

God depends on nothing else, and his actions must be understood as motivated ultimately by his love of his own, fully actual goodness. However, God also knows that his goodness can be manifested, expressed, communicated, and shared with creatures. His free choice to create the universe, including ourselves, is thus an act of pure generosity.

Plainly, the whole universe is the greatest created good, because it is the fullest created expression of God’s goodness. Human fulfillment is only part of this whole and,

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94. On the concept of glory in Scripture and its place in the divine plan for creation, see S. Aalen, “doxa,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2:44-48.

95. DS 3002/1783; translation supplied. Two articles by the same author clarify the points considered here and in the following three paragraphs: Philip J. Donnelly, S.J., “St. Thomas and the Ultimate Purpose of Creation,” *Theological Studies*, 2 (1941), 53-83; “The Doctrine of the Vatican Council on the End of Creation,” *Theological Studies*, 4 (1943), 3-33.

as such, not ultimate. But it does not follow that God uses us for an ulterior purpose; rather, we and our fulfillment are important parts of the self-expression God intends in creating (see *S.t.*, 1, q. 44, a. 4; q. 47, a. 1; q. 65, a. 2; *S.c.g.*, 3, 20-22).

As I explained (in 2, above), the whole of creation will be included in God's definitive kingdom, which is the ultimate end that Jesus taught us to seek. Thus, insofar as the whole of creation, considered as God's glory, is his end in creating, the kingdom of God is the common good for the sake of which God and his people, united by a covenant, cooperate. Insofar as cooperating for God's kingdom fulfills his people's human potentiality to be in harmony with him, it is their connatural good; but insofar as the kingdom includes more than human beings could even naturally think of as possible, much less hope to share in, their ultimate end is also supernatural.

In Jesus, God does not abolish the law and the prophets (see Mt 5.17). Jesus begins to fulfill God's promises, though in an unexpected way. The new covenant is better, "since it is enacted on better promises" (Heb 8.6). But the new covenant had been foretold (see Heb 8.10-12, Jer 31.31-34), and it will bring those who persevere in faithfulness to all the human fulfillment that had been promised (see 2,- above).

Through Jesus, God also promises something more than human fulfillment: the beatific vision. Jesus proclaims: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5.8). Benedict XII teaches definitively that by this vision of God souls "see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature" (DS 1000/530), and St. Paul explains that those who see God will enjoy such profound intimacy with him that they will know him as he knows them: "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood" (1 Cor 13.12).

To understand insofar as possible this intimacy of the blessed with God, one can begin by considering that human love is not an action but a disposition toward what fulfills. The mutual love of two or more human persons disposes them toward fulfillment in communion. Insofar as they are not yet united as fully as possible, their love draws them to become more perfectly one; insofar as they are united; their communion fulfills each of them and they rejoice in it together.

Jesus reveals how close he and the Father are: "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me" (Jn 14.11; cf. 10.38), and the Church teaches that this intimacy is mutually true of all three persons (see DS 1311/704). The divine essence—all that God is—is a single reality, and each of the three persons is that reality in all its fullness; the three persons are distinguished from one another by their very relationships with one another (see *S.t.*, 1, q. 40, a. 2). Therefore, the blessed Trinity is a perfect communion of persons who not only love one another but are, together, love, so that "God is love" (1 Jn 4.8).

Jesus tells his disciples how he loves them, and exhorts them to cherish that communion: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love" (Jn 15.9). He also prays that his disciples will share in the divine communion itself—

that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which

thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. (Jn 17.21-23)<sup>96</sup>

Thus, the intimacy experienced by souls enjoying the beatific vision must not be reduced to curiosity's satisfaction by an act of the intellect, but must be thought of as their living in most intimate communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—a sharing in their unique love and joy.

St. John tells us that those who enjoy the beatific vision will be like God in a way that is not yet apparent: “Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3.2). To those who believed in him, Jesus “gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1.12), and that coming to be does not result from natural human functioning, for they “were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn 1.13). Thus, those who believe in Jesus are begotten by God (see Jn 1.12-17), and this begetting is very real: the word of God, which gives rebirth, is divine semen (see 1 Pt 1.23); and “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn 3.6), not flesh. St. Paul likewise makes it clear that the Spirit is the principle of adoption by which we call out to God: “Abba! Father!” (see Rom 8.15). “It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8.16). God lovingly chooses those whom the Spirit will adopt in order that the Son might be the *firstborn* of many (see Rom 8.29). Those adopted really are additional members of the Father’s family.

Paul also makes clear how mysterious the beatific vision is; it is “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived” (1 Cor 2.9). The human heart has not conceived the beatific vision, and therefore has never been restless for it, because human nature has no capacity to be fulfilled by such divine intimacy.<sup>97</sup> Only by becoming children of God and thus sharing in the divine nature do human persons acquire the capacity to be fulfilled by sharing in the love that God is. So, just before explaining that those who enjoy the beatific vision will be like God, John exclaims: “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 Jn 3.1). By enabling us to become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pt 1.4), Jesus has enabled us to be fulfilled by the beatific vision.

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96. See Ceslaus Spicq, O.P., *Agape in the New Testament*, vol. 3, *Agape in the Gospel, Epistles and Apocalypse of St. John* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1966), 35; also see Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Epistles of John*, Anchor Bible, 30 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 520-26 and 553-60, and on mutual indwelling (or “abiding/remaining in”) 259-61 and 283-84.

97. Having received God’s revelation, people in the Old Testament naturally wanted to see him in the sense that they wanted access to him and/or wanted some sort of experience that would reassure them about his presence, availability, continuing interest in them, and so on (see Rudolf Schnackenburg, “Vision of God,” in Johannes B. Bauer, ed., *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*- (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 947-49. Such a natural desire to see God persisted among Jesus’ disciples. Seeking reassurance, Philip says: “Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied” (Jn 14.8). Jesus responds: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?” (Jn 14.9). The response makes it clear that Philip has already received what he wants but failed to recognize it. Clearly, then, he did not desire the beatific vision.

But how can we humanly desire the beatific vision if it can fulfill us only insofar as we have become children of God who, as such, truly share in the divine nature? In other words, how can enjoyment of intimacy with the divine persons pertain to the ultimate end—namely, the kingdom—that most perfectly fulfills our natural capacities *as human*?

Someone might say that having the common good of God's kingdom as our ultimate end and being able, on that basis, to love him for his own sake, we can desire intimacy with him, and so can desire the beatific vision. But that seems to be fallacious. Since the question is how the kingdom can include the beatific vision, if the unique fulfillment it gives is included in the common good that enables us to love God for his own sake, the question is begged rather than solved. But if the kingdom is considered without the unique fulfillment the beatific vision gives, those loving God for his own sake in seeking the kingdom as a common good can intend for God only his glory—that is, his good manifested in creation. But the intimate life of the divine persons is their goodness itself, not its manifestation.

But since Jesus is both a divine person and truly human, human friendship and cooperation with him in seeking the kingdom of God leads his disciples to desire the beatific vision. Insofar as the kingdom is the common good of Jesus and his disciples, they can love him for his own sake both as God (inasmuch as his glory is their human fulfillment) and as man (inasmuch as he draws them into intimate human friendship by sacrificing himself for them and uniting them bodily with himself). Intimate human friends take an interest in every aspect of each other's lives and are disposed by their mutual love to deepen their intimacy as much as they can, unless they have some reason to limit it. But just as in loving one's mother or father, one loves that person, not his or her human nature, so in loving Jesus, one loves this person, not his human or divine nature. Therefore, loving Jesus as their intimate human friend, Jesus' disciples can understand and desire as humanly fulfilling intimate knowledge of his divine self. Disciples who can regard their real life even now as "hid with Christ in God" (Col 3.3) and desire "to depart and be with Christ" (Phil 1.23) can also desire to know him personally as fully as he knows them, and to be, like him, a mature child of God who can enjoy the intimacy with all three divine persons that Jesus has always had with the Father and the Spirit.

I showed (in 5, above) the untenability of Thomas's notion of beatitude as perfection that leaves nothing more to be desired. Beatitude is better understood as participation in God's kingdom, and, as the kingdom comes, participants' beatitude increases.

Even living in the fallen world without Christian revelation, people can accept the Holy Spirit's grace and live uprightly. Those who do so attain harmony with God and within themselves, as much harmony with others as others will cooperate in realizing, and whatever other goods God gives them. While such people suffer greatly in diverse ways and do not understand the meaning of their sufferings, they are, in reality, far happier than less upright people. Still, inasmuch as the kingdom's coming is not manifest in their experience and their lives, their happiness is not regarded as beatitude.

People who receive and accept God's revelation understand more, begin to understand the meaning of their sufferings, and achieve more. So, they begin to have

beatitude: “Happy are the people for whom things are thus; happy the people whose God is the Lord” (Ps 144:15).

Jesus teaches those who believe in him to follow him in selfless service, and says: “If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it” (Jn 3:17). Although grounded in what is to come, that true beatitude is available here and now: “Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven” (Mt 5:11-12).

Yet at present, salvation must be worked out “with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). Even if they must still undergo some purification, then “blessed are the dead who die in the Lord....Let them find rest from their labors, for their works accompany them” (Rev 14:13).

Still more blessed are they when, purified, they see God: even before resurrection, they “are truly blessed and have everlasting life and rest.”<sup>98</sup> Someone might argue that no greater beatitude is possible, and that it is wrong to believe that those who already enjoy the beatific vision can still desire and hope for the definitive kingdom. For Benedict XII, in his solemn teaching about blessed souls still awaiting the resurrection, states that “the vision of the divine essence and its enjoyment evacuate the acts of faith and hope from them insofar as faith and hope are properly theological virtues” (DS 1001/530). However, while we now hope for the kingdom as a whole and for each of the many blessings it will include, if we die in Christ and are sufficiently purified, not only will faith give way to sight, but hope will give way to confident expectation of receiving—*no matter what we might do*—all the blessings then still to come. So, the unfulfilled desires of those already enjoying the beatific vision for their own bodies and other goods of the definitive kingdom will generate in them an attitude very different from the properly theological virtue of hope—an attitude that would be presumptuous during our present life.

Since the definitive kingdom will fulfill human desires not fulfilled by the beatific vision, human beings whose souls are already enjoying the beatific vision will be still more blessed when they are again complete persons in the new earth and new heaven. Along with their glorified bodies, they also will find again, as Vatican II teaches, all the good fruits of their nature and effort that they promoted on earth (see **3**, above).

What about after Jesus has handed over his kingdom to the Father? I do not think it will be true, even then, that the blessed will have nothing more to desire. Since the unsatisfied desires the blessed now have, which are compatible with the beatific vision, include desires that motivate them to intercede for us, they manifestly love their neighbors and are able and willing to act on that love. Moreover, when the Church’s teaching verbally defines heaven as “communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed” (CCC, 1024), it implies ongoing interpersonal relationships among all the created persons in the kingdom. If the blessed can and wish to engage in interpersonal relationships, doing so will further fulfill them. Consequently, they will become still more blessed.

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98. Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus*, DS 1000.

Compared to the effect on blessedness not only of the beatific vision but even of dying in the Lord or the coming of the definitive kingdom, ongoing interpersonal relationships among blessed created persons may be less significant. However, genuine friendships are a great good, and people who have been parties to them cherish memories of the times in which they experienced intimate communion. In the kingdom, no residual defects, misunderstandings, or other imperfections will limit affection; everyone will be entirely lovable, and everyone's affection will be uninhibited. Shortness of time will not limit communication; suffering, death, and fear of them will not cloud joy. Everyone will be open to intimate friendship with everyone else; everyone will delight in bringing other friends together; and there will be very many created persons to get to know better and better. Moreover, while human persons who live in the definitive kingdom will neither marry nor be given in marriage (see Lk 20.35), those who even now "are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom 12.5) will surely be aware in heaven—"the blessed community of all who are fully incorporated into Christ" (*CCC*, 1027)—of their union with Jesus and one another. So, their constant experiences of ever-growing intimacy will be not only spiritually joyful and emotionally delightful but sensibly pleasurable.

Whether and how human persons will continue realizing themselves in respect to knowledge of creation, fine artistry, and so on is less clear, and whether the unending heavenly wedding feast will involve good food and fine wine is even more questionable. However, such matters deserve consideration without a Neoplatonist assumption that the promises in Scripture regarding material realities are to be reduced to metaphorical expressions of aspects of the beatific vision.



## **B: Free Choice, Divine Creativity, Evil, and Suffering**

### **1) People do make free choices.**

It is a common experience for us to face incompatible options, at least those of either acting or refraining from action. Different considerations make each alternative interesting or make both (or all) repugnant. The conflict leads to hesitation: one stops and thinks. People usually look for something already settled to discard all but one of the options, but if two or more alternatives remain, they need to make a choice.

Moral conflicts are not the only cases requiring choices, and often it is necessary to make a choice in a situation where there is no moral conflict—for example, a job applicant choosing between morally acceptable positions.

Having to make a choice is not like anticipating something that cannot be controlled, such as becoming tired or hungry, sneezing or bursting out laughing. In supposing we can act or not, or do this or that, we feel that the choice is really up to us. In choosing, moreover, we do not experience something happening to us that can be identified as the choice itself; rather, we are aware of *doing* something ourselves, of *making* a choice. Thus, we have an experience of choosing freely.

Certainly, many causal conditions, including ones of which we are not aware, limit the alternatives that come to mind; often those alternatives arise from factors entirely outside our control. Thus, the freedom we experience is limited. It is possible to choose only between or among unsettled possibilities that we recognize and think we have the power to realize, and some people have fewer and poorer options than others. But despite all the relevant antecedent causes, and within the framework they set, we sometimes do face open alternatives; we stop and think, and we make a free choice. When one makes a free choice to do *A* rather than *B*, nothing given before one makes the choice brings it about that one chooses *A* rather than *B*. All the causal conditions for the choice one makes are exactly the same as the causal conditions for the (or any) alternative choice that could have been made—except insofar as the causal conditions of the choice made include the choosing itself.

Having made a choice, of course, one explains it by the motives and reasons that made the chosen possibility appealing. But until the choice was made, the motives and reasons that made the unchosen alternative or alternatives appealing also were present and operative. Insofar as motives and reasons are causal conditions of the alternatives available for choice (or involve or presuppose causal conditions), they become differentiated only in and by the actual making of the choice.

Although determinists regard the experience of freedom as misleading or illusory, the Bible takes for granted the human ability to make free choices. God does not impose his covenant but proposes it. How people respond determines their lives in this world and the next (see Jn 3.14-21; cf. Sir 15.11-20). The Council of Trent solemnly defines the

truth that human beings, even after Adam's sin, can make free choices (see DS 1555/815). Our good free choices are truly our own though they also are God's gift.<sup>99</sup>

Since we have an experience of making choices that at least seem to be free, it is up to determinists to show that we should agree with them. In trying to show that, however, they must do more than call our attention to facts and present us with purely logical analyses, since no set of facts can exclude the possibility of additional facts and no logical analysis can rule out the realization of an understandable possibility. Determinists therefore regularly try to show that their view offers the most reasonable account of all the relevant facts and therefore should be accepted. That *should* appeals to our reasonableness and challenges us to pursue truth disinterestedly. So, it presupposes that we can rise to the challenge or not, and that what we should do is one of two alternatives really open to us. But the alternatives are open to us only because we understand the good of knowing truth and can choose for its sake or fail to do so. Inevitably, therefore, attempts by determinists to show that we should accept their view are self-defeating since they implicitly call upon us to make a free choice.<sup>100</sup>

Because causal factors provide and limit the options available for free choice, anyone who affirms free choice can and should recognize that every individual's freedom is always limited by many psychological and social conditions. But psychologies that include the denial of free choice must provide a fallacious account of sin, repentance, and commitments, including the act of faith; and they must promote methods of formation and of solving personal and social problems that are out of touch with those realities. Mingling such faulty psychologies with Christian formation and spirituality inevitably creates confusion and damages the lives of many Christians, not least of those subjected to unsound counseling and formation.

## 2) As self-determinations, free choices last.

The ability to make free choices—not being completely determined by other realities—is one important way we are somewhat like God, who is not determined by anything other than himself. In choosing freely, we too are not determined by anything other than ourselves, although as creatures we remain dependent upon God even for our free choices. Moreover, in affecting reality by carrying out free choices, human persons also are somewhat like God, who creates by his free choice (see DS 3002/1783, 3025/1805). We, however, are our own self-makers under God.<sup>101</sup>

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99. See DS 1525/797; cf. GS 17. Most nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophers, psychologists, and other thinkers who do not believe in divine revelation and who have written about the issue have denied the freedom of self-determining choice that most faithful Jews and Christians have maintained and that Trent definitively teaches. This widespread rejection of free choice is obscured by determinists' affirmations, often passionate, of various other sorts of freedom and/or of compatibilism—that is, the view that choices, though determined, are free in some sense other than the traditional one; on this, see Joseph M. Boyle, Jr., Germain Grisez, and Olaf Tollefsen, *Free Choice: A Self-Referential Argument* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 8-10 and 104-21.

100. For a full articulation of this line of argument against determinism, including answers to objections likely to be provoked by my summary, see *ibid.*, 122-85.

101. John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, 71, AAS 85 (1993) 1190, *OR*, 6 Oct. 1993, XI, quotes St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Moysis*, II, 2-3: *PG* 44, 327-28: "All things subject to change and to

That is so because one makes a choice by adopting and going with the reasons for one alternative rather than the (or any) other. Thus, choices not only select the actions that carry them out but orient the self, both in respect to the persons (including oneself) expected to benefit from or be harmed by the action and in respect to the goods that will constitute any benefit or be at stake in any harm. Outward performances come and go, but preferences between or among persons and goods last and shape one's heart unless and until one makes another, incompatible choice. Thus, choosing to commit a sin is said to put one in a "state of sin." This state is nothing other than the sinful choice itself, considered not as an efficient cause of the behavior that carries it out but as the formal cause—that is, the intrinsic, constituting principle—of the self-determination involved in making it, inasmuch as one disposes oneself wrongly toward the goods at stake and the people affected. This self-determination persists; it is one's "state," unless and until one repents. Good choices likewise last. While the character of good people, their genuine friendships, and other good interpersonal relationships and social structures involve more than good choices, enduring good choices are central to those realities.<sup>102</sup>

I do not think that Thomas Aquinas ever fully articulated the proposition that choices last, but he surely glimpsed the point. In discussing the stain of sin, he notes that, besides what the sinner loses in sinning, a sinful act leaves in the soul a positive disposition or habit (see *S.t.*, 1-2, q. 86, a. 2). Some understanding of the "habit" that choice leaves in the self can be gained by analogy with intellectual learning and knowing (see *S.t.*, 1, q. 79, a. 6).<sup>103</sup> Learned people have actively in mind at any moment only a small fragment of what they know. Yet the knowing of something lasts and is more than just a power to recall what one previously thought, for one's store of knowledge is the systematic context of further inquiry and judgment that continually expand one's view of reality. Likewise, choices as self-determinations last, not simply as dispositions to choose similarly in similar situations, but as developments of the moral self. Still, unlike genuine intellectual knowledge, which cannot be reversed, both bad and good choices can be reversed by a change of heart.

The fact that free choices last insofar as they are self-determining is the key to understanding many of the matters treated in the remainder of this volume. For instance, the intrinsic relationship between our present lives and life in the kingdom is intelligible

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becoming never remain constant, but continually pass from one state to another, for better or worse . . . Now, human life is always subject to change; it needs to be born ever anew . . . But here birth does not come about by a foreign intervention, as is the case with bodily beings . . . ; it is the result of a free choice. Thus *we are* in a certain way our own parents, creating ourselves as we will, by our decisions."

102. On the lastingness of choices, see Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Boston: D. Reidel, 1979), 149-52; John Finnis, *Fundamentals of Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1983), 139-44.

103. Of course, Thomas provides a very developed general theory of virtues and vices (in *S.t.*, 1-2, qq. 49-58), and rightly points out: "The act of [a moral] virtue is nothing else than the good use of one's capacity to make free choices" (*S.t.*, 1-2, q. 55, a. 1, ad 2). However, I have not found any place where he explains that the lasting self-determination involved in any free choice is the heart of moral virtue, the rest of it being the psychological integration of other aspects of the personality, including feelings and performative capacities, that results from carrying out free choices.

only if we grasp the connection between what we make of ourselves now by our choices and what we will be forever by the ongoing reality of these same spiritual acts.

### 3) God creates human free choices.

The actions of individuals cooperating with one another are distinct and separate, even if very similar. For instance, if people sing a song together, each sings with his or her own voice; if they play catch, each catches the ball when another tosses it, and then tosses it back. And, although we may in various senses help one another to do things, none of us ever depends on another human being's help for all that we put into any action.

We tend to suppose that cooperation with God is rather like cooperation with other people. Joined to the true belief that we make free choices and shape ourselves by them, that supposition leads to the erroneous belief that we do not depend on God for all we put into our own free actions. It is true that God gives us the power to make free choices and helps us make good ones. Yet we suppose that, since our choices are free, we do not depend on God in actually making them, but proceed to do so entirely on our own. We then also may think that, though we must thank God for all his help, we need not be grateful to him for our good choices themselves.

With that mentality, we are likely to miss the point of important Scripture texts bearing on the plan God has for each of our lives. For example, in the Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul writes:

God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph 2.4-10)<sup>104</sup>

Here Paul first tells us that our salvation is, through and through, the fruit of God's mercy and that the faith that saves is wholly unmerited grace. Then he explains the significance of the Christian lives we are called to live. Good works are far from unnecessary. Indeed, God has recreated us in Christ precisely for good works. But these, too, are God's gift; he has prepared them in advance. At the same time, nevertheless, they truly are our own actions. We should walk in them.<sup>105</sup> And we will do that only if we discern God's plan and freely choose to follow it (see Rom 12.1-2).

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104. Some scholars deny or doubt that Paul wrote Ephesians. But see Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, Anchor Bible, 34 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), 36-50; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 4-47. Of course, regardless of who wrote it, Ephesians is canonical Scripture.

105. Commenting on the passage, Thomas, *Ad Ephesios*, lib. ii, lect. 3, refers to Romans 8.30 and explains that good works pertain to the calling of those predestined by grace: "Predestination is nothing other than preparation of God's benefits, among which are counted our good works themselves. Now God

People who preach and teach tend to avoid certain familiar but opaque passages of Scripture, so that these passages seldom shape anyone's thinking and practice. For the sake of the intelligibility and fruitfulness of much to be presented later, I wish to correct the mistaken suppositions mentioned above, so that this passage from Ephesians and similar passages will be understood clearly and applied.

Cooperating with God is very different from cooperating with human beings. Except insofar as we make our actions sinful by introducing evil into them, we depend entirely on God for everything we put into our actions, even for making our own free choices, since every created reality depends entirely on God for its very existence. Moreover, insofar as God's creativity overcomes the fallen human condition and our personal sins, it is saving grace. Thus, those who walk in the good works God prepared for them make free choices whose very existence depends on grace, and they ought to thank God for their own actions: "It is you who have accomplished all we have done" (Is 26.12 NAB).<sup>106</sup> Grace accounts for everything good in human actions that contribute in any way to the fulfillment of God's salvific plan.

Yet saying God creates free choices is likely to *seem* absurd. God's creative will, being all powerful, cannot be frustrated; so how can our created choices be free? Moreover, evil certainly is real, but it is not created by God. So how is it related to God's creativity?

#### 4) "God creates free choices" is not absurd.

To say, *Our free choices depend on God for their reality*, is not to say, *God settles which option we take when we seem to ourselves to be making a free choice*. True, it is necessary that, if God knows and wills something, then it is in reality as he knows and wills it to be; but it does not follow that choices one thinks one is making freely are in fact necessary. That would be the case if God knew that one's choice of *A* rather than *B* would result from a causal condition, *C-of-A*, and God willed *C-of-A*. But when one freely chooses *A* rather *B*, there is no causal condition, *C-of-A* for God to know and will. God's creative causality itself does not cause one to choose option *A* (which would mean one cannot choose option *B*). Rather, God creates one or another whole: (1) one's being able to choose option *A* or option *B*, and freely choosing *A*; or (2) one's being able to choose option *A* or option *B*, and freely choosing *B*.

So, if God infallibly knows and omnipotently wills that one has the options of doing *A* and of doing *B*, and that one freely chooses to do *A* or freely chooses to do *B*, then one's options and one's free choice are in reality just as God knows them to be. But

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is said to prepare something for us inasmuch as he disposes himself to give it to us. . . . But lest anyone misunderstand that the good works are prepared for us in such a way that we in no way cooperate in them by free choice, he adds *that we should walk in them*, in other words: he prepared them for us in such a way that we ourselves by free choice carry them out. 'For we are God's fellow workers,' as 1 Cor 3.9 says."

106. See Thomas, *S.t.*, 1, q. 104, a. 1; q. 105, a. 5; 1-2, q. 109, a. 9; T. C. O'Brien, O.P., "Appendix 1: *Esse*, the Proper Effect of God Alone," in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 14, gen. ed. Thomas Gilby, O.P. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975), 169-75.

nothing is necessary in that created state of affairs except that one does have those options and that one freely chooses whichever option one chooses.

If one supposes that a good free choice is brought about by an entity that God creates to move the will to choose, one posits a *C-of-A*. However, one need not posit any created entity to account for a good free choice; it is fully accounted for by God's transcendent causality, the causal conditions that generate the options for choice, and the person's freely making the choice he or she makes. Of course, no choice conducive to salvation can be made without God's grace. But sometimes *grace* can be understood as referring to God's transcendent causality itself, and insofar as *grace* refers to a created entity, that entity need not be really distinct from the free choice itself. The grace required to make the choice can be identified with the choice, for, while it is a good work of the person making it, the choice is also, and fundamentally, God's gift to that person. For that reason, the Council of Trent teaches that, after human beings have been justified by God's wholly unmerited grace and recreated in Christ Jesus for good works (see DS 1528-34/799-802; Eph 2.8-9), they are able to do actions that are meritorious—that is, actions for which they deserve to inherit the kingdom—because God's "goodness towards all human beings is so great that he desires his own gifts to be their merits" (DS 1548/810; cf. 1542/841).

How God can cause free choices is only part of a more basic question: How can he create? His act of creating does not presuppose any reality but himself, and that act really brings about things that are other than God. How can God do that? How can he think of possibilities, which apart from him are nothing, and realize them in a universe other than himself? And how can a created universe that is not part of God's reality remain entirely dependent on him? Yet God can and does create; creatures are not part of divine reality; and creatures depend entirely on God. And so God also can and does create free choices, which depend on him but are not determined by his choices.<sup>107</sup>

While the preceding explanation shows it is not absurd to say that God creates free choices, it is hardly satisfying. Even many faithful Christians remain perplexed. As a result, some have more or less frankly abandoned the belief either that choices are free or that they depend on God for all their positive reality—that is, for everything but any evil that may be in them. Most focus on one element, freedom or dependence, while ignoring or downplaying the other, and divide into camps, with some emphasizing human freedom, others divine causality.

Focusing on free choice and downplaying divine causality distorts scriptural teaching and perpetuates the mistaken assumption underlying "Pray *as if* everything depended on God"—a false maxim inasmuch as it suggests that free choices and actions have some

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107. The preceding explanation summarizes the account of the matter articulated by Thomas; for a fuller summary with references to relevant places in his writings, see Brian J. Shanley, O.P., "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 72 (1998): 99-122; for a still fuller treatment, see Harm J. M. J. Goris, *Free Creatures and an Eternal God: Thomas Aquinas on God's Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will* (Nijmegen, Netherlands: Thomas Instituut Utrecht, 1996), most of whose interpretations of Thomas and analytic arguments seem to me sound, and whose central conclusions (summarized 305-6) seem to me correct.

positive reality that does not depend on God.<sup>108</sup> Making that false assumption has bad consequences. It implies that God sometimes *needs* our cooperation and that we sometimes do not need his, which undermines humility and gratitude, whereas the right attitude is: Without him I cannot think of, choose, or do anything good at all; and “He who is mighty has done great things for me” (Lk 1.49). Again, the false assumption makes it difficult for us to accept frustration and continue faithfully doing what we should, because feeling that we have done our part by making a good choice, we expect God to do his part by making our effort fruitful. Then too, taking more responsibility than is warranted for the fruits of our efforts, we are tempted to make moral compromises to achieve good ends or limit the ends we pursue to those we feel sure of achieving.

Focusing on divine causality has led some—though not so many today as in former times—to the view that God causes everything about both good and bad choices, and so predestines some to hell just as he predestines others to heaven. Today, however, since hardly anyone is prepared to defend double predestination, the tendency is to exaggerate the efficacy of God’s salvific will and think that he will save everyone by eventually overriding every unrepentant sinner’s obduracy (see *CMP*, 445-51).

The two opposing camps were simultaneously visible among Catholics in an argument about grace and free choice between Dominican and Jesuit theologians after the Council of Trent. Both sides took for granted the compatibility of divine causality and free choice but disagreed about their interrelationship, and some on each side accused their opponents of heresy. The controversy went on for twenty-five years, until, after very thorough discussions involving the best Catholic minds of the time, Pope Paul V ended it in 1607. He held that the Dominican position, focusing more on grace, was not Calvinist, and the Jesuit position, focusing more on free choice, was not Pelagian; that both sides could teach their own views, but neither could condemn the other’s; and that everyone should prepare to accept a final judgment by the Holy See.<sup>109</sup> But that final judgment never came.

In my view, both sides were correct in their criticisms of their opponents and mistaken in what they themselves held.<sup>110</sup> To avoid such mistakes, it seems to me, one must understand why faithful Christians are perplexed by the idea that God can and does create our free choices; and the perplexity can hardly be understood and overcome except by clarifying what we mean by *create*, what we can know about God, and how we can meaningfully talk about him.

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108. An extreme case of focusing on free choice and denying divine causality was the fifth-century heresy, Pelagianism, which denied original sin; see Joseph Pohle, “Pelagius and Pelagianism,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604a.htm>, accessed 1 Sept. 2008.

109. On this controversy and the Holy See’s handling of it, see Thomas M. Ryan, “Congregatio de Auxiliis,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 4:168-71; E. Vansteenbergh, “Molinisme, Congrégations de auxiliis,” in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, 10.2:2154-66.

110. For a brief summary and criticism of the two opposed views by a Protestant theologian who shares my view of the controversy, see Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (New York: Basil Blackwell,) 1988), 141-52.

### 5) In the created universe are negative realities, which God does not create.

Understanding what follows requires a distinction between two very different sorts of evil: sensible evil and intelligible evil. Anything perceived by the senses that naturally leads to negative feelings is sensibly evil; so, pain and anything perceived to be causing pain is sensibly evil. Intelligible evils are not perceived as such by the senses, but only by understanding and judgment. What follows is concerned with intelligible evils, and, as will be shown, pain as such is not among them.

To understand intelligible evil, one must begin by understanding negative realities. Consider light and darkness. Light is a positive reality. To be real, it needed to be created, and it must be constantly sustained in existence by God. Darkness also is real in the sense that it is not illusory or merely possible. But it is a negative reality, the lack of light where light sometimes is or might be. As a negative reality, it is not an existing thing. It can be neither created nor sustained by God.

Negative realities are sometimes directly perceived, as one notices darkness on entering a cave. They are sometimes valuable, as quiet is for prayer, study, or sleep. But some negative realities are bad—for example, heart arrest is the prolonged lack of the heart's pumping.

At the center of anything bad is some negative reality bad in itself: not just a lack but a privation—that is, the lack of a good that should be there. Still, privations are exactly like other negative realities in one vital respect: Since they have no being, they cannot be created. And since all evils are reducible to privations, no evil is created by God, “For everything created by God is good” (1 Tm 4.4; cf. Wis 11.24-25).

Things that are bad are not bad through and through. My bad left knee is good insofar as it still functions. Nevertheless, due to the privation at the root of the trouble, that knee's positive reality is not that of a healthy knee and it cannot serve me as a healthy knee would. The privation that makes my knee bad is not created, but the knee's positive reality depends entirely on God, and I still need to thank God for it—though not, of course, for the privation that makes it bad.

Although health and physical impairment are very different from moral good and bad, what is true of bad things in general is true of sinful actions: they are not bad through and through. If I choose to tell a lie, my free choice involves a privation. I deprive myself of harmony between what I do and what I judge I ought to do, between my free choice and my conscience. In carrying out the choice to lie, I deprive myself of integrity by accepting discrepancy between my inner self and outer behavior. Those privations and any others consequent upon them cannot be creatures of God; those evils depend on God only by depending on the positive realities that remain in my choice and action.

At the same time, all the positive reality of the choice and its execution, though involved in my sin, is good as far as it goes.<sup>111</sup> Many people will deny that: “Surely,”

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111. Thomas Aquinas holds: “The act of sin is both a being and an act; and from both it follows that it is from God.” But the privation due to which a sin is a sin “does not depend on God as its cause but on the sinner's free choice” (*S.t.*, 1-2, q. 79, a. 2, c.).

they will say, “the actions of those who tried to eliminate Europe’s Jews were evil through and through.” And in the sense in which they will say that, it certainly is true: what the Nazis did to the Jews was altogether at odds with the dignity and well-being not only of the victims but of the wrongdoers themselves and of every human being. However, though not morally good, even the Nazis’ choices and performances were good insofar as they were exercises of human natural capacities. That sort of good is recognized and fostered by emergency room physicians who strive to prevent stroke victims from becoming permanently comatose; such physicians generally would provide the same care to the kindest and cruelest person on earth, for they ask no questions and make no judgments about a patient’s moral character. Moreover, some morally positive elements can remain even within a sinful choice and action. Suppose, for example, I lie to spare a friend’s feelings: the intention is morally positive although it does not make my lying morally right.

#### **6) God’s creating is not like any creature’s causing.**

God’s creating is unique. To appreciate that truth, however, one must consider how we come to know God and how incomprehensible he remains to us.

In the case of any and every positive reality that one could experience, one can understand what it is without thereby knowing whether it actually exists. Nothing in our understanding of what any experienced thing is accounts for the fact that it is. Common sense reflection and scientific inquiry account for the existence of some positive realities only by considering them in the wider context of the action of other positive realities, whose being is taken for granted. Such inquiry is very worthwhile, but it does not even begin to account for the reality of the physical universe as a whole.

Nonbelievers sometimes suppose that the material universe simply exists and nothing accounts for it. Believers are likely to argue against that view by invoking the supposedly self-evident principle that it must be *possible* to account for every fact. Yet there are exceptions: Every time anyone freely chooses *A* rather than *B*, it is impossible in principle to account for that fact.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, the view that nothing accounts for the existence of the physical universe as a whole is *logically* possible and not, strictly speaking, absurd.

Indeed, that view would be generally accepted if there were no tenable alternative to it. But there is: The reality of the universe as a whole depends on a reality beyond it that, unlike the universe and everything in it, does not depend on anything else. That transcendent reality is not directly experienced, but anyone reasoning soundly will infer it, just as he or she will infer something to account for other facts except those for which, like free choices, it is inherently impossible to give an account. Now, if the reality on which the universe as a whole depends does not depend on anything else, that reality is real of itself—that is, it is real simply by being what it is—and cannot fail to be real: it necessarily exists.

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112. To say, “The free choice is accounted for by the person’s freely making it,” simply repeats the fact rather than accounting for it; to say, “Something else must account for the free choice,” implies that it was not free after all.

By such reasoning, one arrives at God, the creator of all things. But let us set aside for a little while everything we think we know about God, including what we hold by faith, and consider how the preceding argument both empowers and limits our thinking about God. I will begin by dealing with the one God, prescinding from Jesus, about whom, according to his humanity, we know many things—for example, that he had a mother named “Mary”—that otherwise would not be true of God.

Since God necessarily is, he need only be *what* he is in order for him to be. By contrast, whatever any creature is, its existence neither is included in nor flows from what it is or any characteristic it has. So, whatever God is in himself cannot be anything that any creature is.<sup>113</sup> And whatever any creature is, God is not. When we talk about God, therefore, and use words *in exactly the same sense* we use them to express something we understand about any creature, whatever we affirm about the creature must be denied of God.

It follows that God is not a body, matter, or energy; he does not evolve or change in any way; he is not spatial or temporal, has no size or shape, is neither a whole nor a part. God has no sensible properties, no dispositions or capacities like those found in natural things. In the sense in which experienced things can be self-identical or polymorphous, above or below, inside or outside, God is none of these.

But if God does not change, it does not follow that he is standing still, fixed, inert, or rigid, for those also are intelligible features of created things. If God is not moved by our pain, it does not follow that he is callous. If he is not above or outside, it does not follow that he is underneath or that he pervades the universe as its Force or Life.

If God is not a body, neither is he a mind or conscious subject—using *mind* and *conscious subject* in the same sense we use them about ourselves. As God does not hate others and take revenge in the sense that we do, so neither does he love others and have mercy in the sense that we do. Similarly, by experiencing ourselves and one another, we know what it is to be morally good, to know, to choose, to be a person. But what is true about us is never true of God. Suppose we say of a friend, “Evelyn understands, makes choices, and is a good person”; if we use the words in *exactly* the same sense, we must say: “God does not understand, does not make choices, and is not a good person.”

Can we even say God causes? Not in any of the senses in which we say a creature causes. However, our analysis began from the experienced universe, whose existence needed to be accounted for. The problem was unlike any other: Why is there a universe rather than nothing at all? That unique *why* led to a unique *because*—to an ultimate source of actual being.

Various sorts of things within our experience are called “causes” in diverse senses. For instance, in one sense, the words a reader sees on the page when reading this sentence were caused to be here by a computer and a printer; in another sense, by my use of them to express what I have in mind; and in a third sense, by my interest in providing an example to help readers see that *cause* has many meanings. Though those three causes

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113. Another formulation of the same argument: No essence we can understand is self-existent; but God’s essence is self-existent; so, no essence we can understand is God’s essence.

cause in very different ways, they are called “causes,” though in diverse senses, because they answer *why* questions—they account for things. So, when we ask the *why* question about the universe—Why is there a universe rather than no universe?—it is appropriate to say that what answers the question and accounts for the actual existence of the universe is its cause, using *cause* in a unique sense.

Where did that unique sense of *cause* come from? It developed in the argument and emerged from it, along with a unique sense of *is*, when we concluded that there is a cause of the universe. Except insofar as the question and its answer are unique, that generating of fresh meaning is similar to what happens when we ask other *why* questions and answer them by reasoning to something we had not previously known or even thought about. For reasoning is not merely a way of organizing what we already know; it is also, and far more importantly, a way of coming to know what was previously unknown.

In sum, though we do not understand what God is in himself, our knowledge about the relationship of created things to the creator enables us to say, with a clear and definite but unique sense, that God causes. But unlike our knowledge about how many of the causes within the universe bring about their effects, we do not know and cannot imagine how God creates the universe—or anything in it. Without understanding what God is in himself, we know that he has what it takes to account for the actual being of the universe. Thus, we really do know God from the things he has made, yet he remains hidden and utterly mysterious. As Thomas Aquinas said: “We cannot grasp what God is but what he is not, and how other things are related to him.”<sup>114</sup>

It follows that, in saying “God causes,” we must take care to avoid supposing that he accounts for things somewhat as causes of other sorts do. We must limit what we mean to what is required to account for the actual existence of creatures, including the positive reality of our free choices. We will always go wrong if we think God’s involvement with the realities he creates more or less resembles the involvement of other causes with what they account for. Then we will tend to suppose that at least some created realities, including free choices, cannot both be what they are and be created.

All this is not easy to keep in mind. Confronted with the mysterious, we naturally draw upon our existing store of knowledge for help in clarifying our thinking and expressing our meaning. In speaking of God’s causality, elements of what the word *cause* means in other contexts are likely to confuse us. We may be tempted to think God causes free choices by spiritual pushes and tugs, or by creating real lives somewhat as a playwright creates fictional lives—that is, by understanding his characters so completely that he can project what free choices they would make, and include just those free choices in their lives. We have to keep reminding ourselves that, though God creates everything, in every other sense of *cause*, he causes absolutely nothing. Grasping this point, one will begin to feel less perplexity in holding that human choices are both free and entirely dependent upon God for all their positive reality.

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114. *Summa contra gentiles*, lib. 1, cap. 30. My argument in this and the next sections—which in general follows but in some respects departs from Thomas’s work—is developed at length in Germain Grisez, *Beyond the New Theism: A Philosophy of Religion* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 36-91, 230-72.

### 7) God's knowing and willing are very different from our thinking and choosing.

More perplexity can be overcome by considering what it can mean to say God knows and wills. A classic account goes back at least to Anselm, the eleventh-century founder of scholastic theology and philosophy.<sup>115</sup>

It begins from the premises that creatures receive their whole reality from their creator, that their whole reality includes all their perfections, and that nothing can give what it does not possess. It seems to follow that God must somehow possess in himself every perfection found in creatures, and that all creatures, by virtue of their perfections, more or less resemble God.

Most of the perfections in creatures, however, are called “mixed,” because they are inextricably involved with bodiliness, interdependence, and other sorts of limitation that plainly cannot be ascribed to God. God then is said to have such mixed perfections only “in a more eminent way.” But what is that eminent way? No intelligible essence of a rose’s blooming, a batter’s hitting a home run, or a chaste newlywed couple’s consummation of their marriage can be distilled and attributed to God. To say that he has mixed perfections in an eminent way can only mean that they cannot be attributed to him but that he has what it takes to create them.

Given this framework, the classic account of God’s knowing and willing can be understood. By contrast with mixed perfections, such spiritual perfections are said to be “absolutely simple.” Human knowing and willing always involve obvious imperfections, but those limitations, it is claimed, can be mentally set aside, so that the distilled essence of the perfection found in us can be attributed to God as belonging to him perfectly and infinitely. At this point, some suppose knowing and willing can be attributed to God without further argument; others argue from other perfections. Thomas, for example, argues to God’s knowing and willing from his immateriality and unalloyed actuality.<sup>116</sup> But in either case, according to the classic account, our and God knowing and willing have both some common intelligibility and some differentiating elements, so that these and other absolutely simple perfections are predicated according to a four-term analogy: God’s willing is to God as our willing is to us.

This venerable account seems to me only partially sound. It does include two truths: First, because creatures really are related to the creator, the creator really must have what it takes to be the other end of that relationship; second, whatever can be affirmed about God must be predicated by analogy.

But the perfections of human knowing and willing appear to be inextricably joined to complexity and limitation. If one perseveres to the end in removing all complexity and limitation from human knowing and willing, one will end with nothing, like a child who tries to peel an onion completely. Moreover—and this is the decisive point—the plausibility of the underlying assumptions, that creatures must resemble their creator and that God must have the perfections found in creatures, comes from our knowledge of

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115. See his *Monologion*, esp. chap. 15, to which St. Thomas explicitly refers in his early treatment of the problem: *In Sent.*, 1, d. 22, q. 1, a. 2; his treatment in *S.t.*, 1, q. 13, a. 2, presupposes the same view.

116. See *S.t.*, 1, q. 14, a. 1; q. 19, a. 1.

other sorts of cause-effect relationships.<sup>117</sup> All the causes with which we are familiar can give only what they somehow possess, but the creator does not give something he possesses to another. The creator-creature relationship is unique, and trying to understand it on the model of other relationships is a mistake. Therefore, knowing and willing cannot reasonably be considered absolutely simple perfections and attributed to God on the ground that creatures must resemble their creator as effects (within creation) resemble their (created) causes.

However, *on a different ground*, namely, the real relationships of creatures to their creator, something like human knowing, willing, and personhood can be attributed analogously to God. Of course, such predications are reasonable only if the relationships authorize them, and if what they are taken as saying about God is limited to what those relationships authorize.

The creature-creator relationship—of things that need not exist, to the source of their reality—indicates that the creator need not have created them and thus makes it reasonable to suppose that he did so freely. But if we suppose that the creator is free, we will suppose him to be intelligent, and if free and intelligent, a person.<sup>118</sup>

### **8) Religious relationships with God manifest his personhood.**

Our religious relationships with God provide a richer basis for thinking of God as a living and acting person. This is so even of the natural relationship of human beings with God, while believers' relationship with the God of revelation provides an additional ground for speaking of his plan and will.

The principles of practical reason provide the basis for the natural religious relationship of human beings with God. Just as everything we learn from others about the world presupposes our own experience and basic understanding of it, so the moral formation we receive from others presupposes our own insight into fundamental human goods. We could never be taught about right and wrong unless we knew beforehand that good is to be done and pursued and evil to be avoided; and that life and health, truth and skills, harmony with others, and so on are goods to be safeguarded, sought, and promoted, while their opposites are evils to be avoided and resisted. These basic principles are natural—they come with our being; they are the law written by our creator on our hearts to shape deliberation and guide free choices and actions (see Rom 2.14-15; cf. *CMP*, 173-89).

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117. Thus, Thomas appeals to an axiom that is true about efficient causes—*Omne agens agit sibi simile*—in arguing that words such as *good*, *wise*, and *just* used in predications about God signify the divine substance; see, for example, *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 5. Thomas's use of the axiom is treated carefully by John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Our Knowledge of God and the Axiom that Every Agent Produces Something Like Itself," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 74 (2000): 81-101.

118. Still, while we can truly say that human life and action are *far greater* than bacterial life and action, if we wish to *compare* God's personhood and creativity with human personhood and action, we must say that divine reality *incomparably transcends* human reality rather than that divine reality is *far greater* than human reality.

Even if only dimly aware of all this, almost all human beings recognize that we are subordinate to, though not puppets of, a greater-than-human reality, with whom we ought to cooperate for our own good. That recognition leads to prayer and sacrifice. But the relationship to God that grounds natural religion also occasions erroneous thinking and idolatry. Not realizing that we cannot grasp what God is, most people quickly begin ascribing all sorts of human qualities to him. Many also are more eager to have God cooperate with them than to cooperate with him, so they try to refashion God rather than shape their lives according to his guidance.

Nevertheless, the awareness of divine guidance toward our own good, from which natural religion springs, implies that God is intelligent and benevolently interested in our welfare.<sup>119</sup> He directs our actions by providing reasons for choosing, yet allows us to choose freely, even when our choices are at odds with his guidance. God seems like a good father who gives sound advice to an adult child without resorting to pressure or coercion.

But knowing, willing, and goodness as we experience them cannot be in God. Hence, while the relationship based on the first principles of practical reason necessarily involves thinking of God as understanding and willing our good, knowledge and will are attributed to him only by analogy. Since the analogy is grounded in the relationship to God, who directs our deliberation and free choices toward our good, we have no warrant for supposing that God's and our knowing and willing are more alike than that relationship requires. Consequently, there can be no inconsistency between anything that relationship authorizes us to say about God and any truth about the created world—for example, that human beings make free choices.

The preceding analysis also applies to believers' relationship to God considered insofar as he reveals himself to them. He does so by means of a set of created entities: human words and observable events in the world, culminating in the human nature and life of Jesus of Nazareth. By all these together, the creator makes it clear that he invites all human beings not only to purify the relationship involved in natural religion but to commit themselves freely to the more intimate relationship he offers, and shape their entire lives by that relationship's requirements. People who do not arbitrarily reject this invitation experience its appeal and become convinced of revelation's authenticity, and revelation itself describes that response, which it calls "faith." Thus, the relationship God establishes by revealing himself requires listening and responding to him, and so, again, involves regarding him as personal, intelligent, and free. Moreover, the fullness of God's revelation, in and through Jesus, makes it clear that God must be thought of on the model of a family.

Apart from our relationship with God, however, we do not know what he is, but only what he is not. As the Fourth Lateran Council teaches, what God is remains incomprehensible to us and ineffable (see DS 800/428): "Between creator and creature no

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119. When people who think of God as benevolently interested are aware that they are making and carrying out unreasonable choices, they try, if repentant, to obtain his pardon; if unrepentant, they are likely to try to hide from him, bribe him, and so on.

similarity can be indicated without indicating greater dissimilarity” (DS 806/432). Of course, Jesus makes God known; in seeing him one sees the Father (see Jn 14.9), and Jesus is unique: no one else ever has seen the Father (see Jn 6.46). Moreover, even in most fully revealing himself, God remains invisible—until faith gives way to sight.<sup>120</sup>

God’s revelation shapes us for intimate communion with him, and this function of revelation both gives it meaning and limits its meaning. The relationship is not summed up in any one statement, but by the whole of Scripture, read in the context of the tradition and life of the Church. For instance, when we are told to call God “Father,” we are given one element of the whole formation needed to relate to him. Addressing God as Father does not imply that he more perfectly possesses the nature of paternity, an instance of which we experience in our natural family life; it implies that God has what it takes to be the other end of the relationship with him in which and for which this way of thinking and speaking are forming us.

The previous paragraph should not be misunderstood as saying: “God is not really our Father; we are only being asked to treat him as if he were.” On the contrary, although we do not comprehend what God is in himself, it is right to relate to him as we are led to do by his entire revelation, including Jesus’ instruction to say: “Our Father.” While the meaning of *Father* said of God is specified by our relationship in faith to him, to say that he is our Father in that sense is literally true. If we eventually see God as he is, we will not be disappointed; everything revelation tells us about him will be verified.

Meanwhile, realizing that God is the creator of all things, we will not fear that he might be unable to meet our needs; and realizing that we do not comprehend God, we will not be deterred from praying by the thought that our prayers cannot make any difference to him. Those who suppose that their knowledge of God justifies their thought that he cannot hear and answer our prayers know nothing about him at all.

### **9) In choosing to create the universe, God permits evils.**

As I explained (in 5, above), everything created by God is good. Evils are privations, negative realities that cannot be created. Strictly speaking, God does not cause any evil, but only permits evils as side effects of the goods he creates. However, one can say that God *indirectly* brings about the evils in the natural world—genetic defects, diseases, injuries, death—inasmuch as they belong to the natural order of things, which he creates.<sup>121</sup> But moral evils in no way belong to the order of nature. God provides intelligent creatures with the guidance of natural law, guidance they follow in choosing reasonably. Their unreasonable free choices introduce moral evils, which corrupt those choices, the acts that carry them out, and the social structures those acts build up. Created persons sometimes directly or indirectly cause one another’s sins: directly, by inducing or encouraging others to sin; indirectly, by failing to guide them and to help them avoid

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120. Of course, God gave people such as Moses and the prophets the experiences that were involved in their receiving divine revelation, and he still gives people experiences that convince them he is communicating with them. Still, such experiences do not convey what God is in himself.

121. For a sense in which human death, although it is the punishment for original sin, is natural, see *CMP*, 346-48.

sinning. But “God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil. He permits it, however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it.”<sup>122</sup>

In making anything, we make it out of something; in pursuing any end, we use means. Even in rightly making things and rightly pursuing ends, we bring about bad side effects and thus indirectly cause nonmoral evils, which we freely accept insofar as we foresee them and proceed despite them. This can be reasonable, but when accepting bad side effects is unreasonable, it is wrong. We unreasonably accept bad side effects in different ways. Sometimes we are foolishly inefficient and wasteful. The bad side effects could have been avoided and the good purpose achieved by using more suitable materials and means. Sometimes we are unfair, selfishly accepting bad side effects that will harm others in ways we would not accept if we or our loved ones were similarly harmed.

God, however, creates out of nothing and through his word alone. He uses no materials or means. Thus, he cannot be inefficient or wasteful in creating. Moreover, he does not stand to gain anything by creating, and he loves all things that exist (see Wis 11.24). Thus, God cannot be selfish in permitting evil. It follows that he cannot unreasonably accept bad side effects. In creating the universe he chooses, God permits only evils that are side effects he must accept in bringing about the goods with which he endows the creatures that his love brings into being, sustains, and perfects.

People are likely to suppose God could have prevented the evils that cause them to suffer and may resent his not doing so.<sup>123</sup> But though God perhaps could have created a universe entirely free of evil, he could not have created *this* universe and prevented the evils it involves. Doing so would have meant forgoing certain goods; moreover, “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him” (Rom 8.28). Therefore, provided we remain faithful in loving God, we can be confident that we will benefit from his having permitted the evils that cause us to suffer, and we ought to thank him for not having prevented them.

The worst evil in our universe was the rejection and murder of Jesus. God permitted that evil in creating his masterpiece: our redemption and Jesus’ glorification (see CCC, 312). But might not God have redeemed us in some less horrible way? Perhaps. But that redemption would not be the same as the one he chose. This giving for us of the Father’s only-begotten Son together with the human heroism of Jesus is unique. Its incomparable goodness could not be realized in any other way.

### **10) Suffering is part of the solution rather than part of the problem.**

Pain is a sensible evil, and the preceding analysis has focused on intelligible evils. I shall now explain why pain and suffering in general are not intelligible evils.

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122. CCC, 311. To the first sentence quoted is attached a note referring to Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, 1, 1, 2: PL 32:1223; Thomas, *S.t.*, 1-2, q. 79, a. 1.

123. Of course, in answer to prayer, God prevents some possible evils from happening or actual ones from continuing; but that truth is consistent with the point I am making: those evils’ happening or continuing are not side effects inseparable from goods God has chosen to create, and he creates the goods without them.

What is intelligibly bad in itself is a privation—the absence of something that should be present—and privations are the deficiencies in positive realities that are not all they should be. Thus, evil always affects—wounds, mutilates, spoils—something that remains good insofar as it is. Yet even though the thing remains good, it is bad considered precisely insofar as it is affected by the privation—for example, a functioning but injured knee, a lie to spare a friend’s feelings.

Intelligible evils, being negative realities, cannot be created, but come about as side effects of God’s creating and sustaining of good, positive realities.<sup>124</sup> If there were no evil, there would be no suffering. Hating and fearing both intelligible and sensible evils without distinguishing between the two, we fear and hate suffering. Indeed, most people think all suffering is intelligibly evil, and many are convinced it is the only real evil. Yet sin and death are intelligibly evil, and, while both of them lead to suffering, neither of them is suffering. Moreover, rather than being an additional evil, suffering *in itself* is not a privation but intelligibly good.<sup>125</sup>

True, there will be no suffering in the kingdom, but suffering is not the evil, or even part of it, from which humankind needs to be redeemed. Like most good things, of course, instances of suffering can be and often are affected by privations, with the result that they become bad. Suffering itself, nevertheless, is a positive reality, something good; and it is important to understand and appreciate the goodness of suffering in order to understand God’s redemptive work in Jesus and, more generally, to live a Christian life and help others to do so.

Start with pain. Although different in important ways from other sorts of human suffering, pain helps us understand human suffering in general.

Pain is not a privation. It is a sensation, one part of the very complex sense of touch. Just as we sense a thing’s hardness or smoothness or warmth or heaviness, we sense another, extremely important characteristic of many things: their harmfulness. The nerve endings that convey pain are called *nociceptors*—harm receptors. Most of the sensations they deliver are so mild that we do not even think of them as pain. Still, bodily discomforts, itching, twinges, smarting, pangs, aches, pain, and excruciating pain are all of them varieties of the same general kind of sensation. I use the word *pain* to refer to them all.

Touch a hot grill and feel pain; feeling the pain *is* sensing the hot grill’s imminent or incipient harmfulness to the skin and flesh. The sensation triggers an impulse to pull

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124. In making choices, we can intend evils as means to ulterior ends—e.g., we can intend to kill people, although we ought not, in order to avoid the burdens of caring for them, and intend to avoid those burdens in order to be free to pursue various goods. Not using *any* means to attain *any* end, God cannot use any bad means.

125. This statement is, of course, paradoxical, and readers may feel it is absurd. But John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, 24, AAS 76 (1984) 234; *OR*, 20 Feb. 1984, 6, dealing not only with Jesus’ suffering but with ours, writes: “It is something good, before which the Church bows down in reverence with all the depth of her faith in the redemption.” While John Paul teaches clearly about the salvific meaning of Jesus’ suffering and ours, he does not mean that suffering is an evil that has a beneficial effect. Rather, as I shall explain, he means that suffering is in itself the appropriate human response to evil that motivates people to deal with it.

away from the grill, and injury is prevented or minimized. But very often, pain is much less dramatic. Sit still for a long time and feel uncomfortable; feeling that pain is sensing prolonged immobility's imminent harmfulness to joints and muscles. One shifts position, and the harm is prevented.

Sometimes—fortunately, very rarely—a child is born without functioning nociceptors or loses their function due to disease. Such children often are badly burned when they touch hot things, develop serious arthritis from regular periods of prolonged immobility, and so on. Their life expectancy is lower than average; they often become deformed. Discussing such people, a neurosurgeon observes:

Ricardo's bent ankles, like little Jimmy's stumplike fingers, serve as reminders of those good things that pain does for us. The next time a shoulder groans or a knee aches, remember what would happen if we felt no pain at all. We would very quickly have no shoulders or knees at all. Old and painful joints are preferable to joints worn to uselessness in our youths by unperceived traumas.<sup>126</sup>

Pain is intelligibly good when it is all it should be: a warning of imminent, incipient, or ongoing harm that leads to appropriate and effective behavior to prevent or limit the harm. Hating and fearing pain is like hating and fearing fire alarms, and eliminating pain while ignoring the harm it signals is like turning off a fire alarm without putting out the fire. This is, for example, what people do who quit taking antibiotics for an infection as soon as they begin to feel better, instead of taking all the doses prescribed in order to get rid of the infection. They mistakenly regard the pain as evil and ignore the real evil the pain is signaling.

Like almost everything good in itself, however, pain can be affected by a privation—something can be missing so that the pain is not all it should be, and so the pain is bad. Many of the sensations we have in mind when we use the word *pain* are instances of bad pain.<sup>127</sup>

Just as one can hear ringing in one's ear when there is no sound to hear, so one can feel pain when there is nothing harmful to perceive. In both cases, the nerves are not functioning as they should, and so the sensations are bad.<sup>128</sup> Again, one's body can be undergoing harm to which there simply is no appropriate response. When severe and intractable pain results, the message is correct but unhelpful, and the pain is bad. Moreover, nonfunctional pain generally detracts from other, still-healthy functioning by preventing one from paying attention to anything else, inhibiting appropriate exercise, and so on. Thus, bad pain often is part of the problem that requires attention.

Though bad pain contributes to specifically human suffering, such suffering is not a sensation, as pain is, for it always involves intellectual knowledge, the thought that something is bad. But one can think something is bad without suffering. One suffers only

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126. Frank T. Vertosick, Jr., *Why We Hurt: The Natural History of Pain* (New York: Harcourt, 2000), 191-92.

127. Also, pain receptors often bring about sensations that do their job so well that one barely notices and does not attend to the slight "discomfort" that motivates one to avoid some incipient damage.

128. For an explanation, see *ibid.*, 44-48.

if, besides thinking something bad, one experiences it as repugnant. That experience is either or both of two things: (1) a negative emotion toward the bad thing (such as fear, anger, hatred), and (2) a will contrary to the evil affecting or threatening some good one loves. Indeed, we usually do not use the word *suffering* unless the experience includes both feelings of sadness or anger and the wish that what is making us sad or angry were not so, or feelings of fear and the wish that what we fear will not happen.

Thus, suffering in general, including both pain and specifically human suffering, can be described as *an experience of evil*.<sup>129</sup> Specifically human suffering is as varied as the evils that can be understood and the degrees and forms of repugnance one can have toward them. Small children suffer when they see injured baby animals; meticulous linguists suffer when they read a faulty translation; caring nurses suffer when their patients do poorly; people trying to do anything suffer when they fail. Everyone suffers at the thought that he or she or loved ones have been or will be wronged, and those who are good suffer when they think anyone is being wronged. We suffer when we realize we will die and when we confront the death of a loved one.

Like the sensation of pain, specifically human suffering is in itself good. If something really is evil, knowing that it is evil is being in touch with its reality. Feeling sad about it and wishing it were not so are entirely appropriate; repugnance is the right attitude. Unless evils are recognized and regarded with repugnance, it is impossible even to begin considering how to deal with them. Pangs of conscience are a blessing for one who has sinned: the suffering encourages repentance. To be entirely free of such suffering is the moral counterpart of being born without functioning pain receptors. Again, if one confronts the real prospect of one's own death or the actual death of a loved one, grief is a blessing: it helps one to accept the reality of death, take it into account, and live as best one can despite it.

Not only the evils that make others suffer but the suffering itself moves good people to compassion—to suffer with and for others, and to do what can be done to deal with the evil afflicting them. In general, suffering usually motivates people to act to avoid or overcome the evil that is causing it. With few exceptions, human goods cannot be safeguarded or realized except by confronting and dealing with evils. Gifted people develop their gifts only by trying and failing, suffering and overcoming. Heroes are not people with nothing to fear, but those who, having much to fear and rightly fearing it, overcome their fears.

Just as there is bad pain, however, there is bad suffering. Mistakes and confusions can lead people to think that something good is bad, or that something bad is far worse than it really is. A child who innocently brings about a loved one's accidental death can suffer terribly; and since the child is not really guilty, the suffering is bad. People who rightly judge something evil often hate the entire thing rather than the evil alone—for example, hating the sinner rather than just the sin. Such misdirected repugnance makes

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129. John Paul II, op. cit., 26, AAS, 239; OR, 7: "Suffering is, in itself, an experience of evil." Suffering is an experience of evil in the sense in which an experience is of something other than itself, as pain is the experience of actual or imminent damage. Suffering is not an experience of evil in the sense in which pleasure simply is an experience of feeling good.

suffering bad. Regarding an evil that afflicts them with appropriate repugnance, people may lack knowledge or power to overcome it, while others may fail to come to their aid; such people's fruitless suffering is bad. In our fallen world much suffering, perhaps most, falls short of being all that suffering ought to be—and so is more of less bad.

Moreover, emotion responds to concrete situations as wholes, so that the emotional element of repugnance that is part of specifically human suffering focuses not just on what is understood as evil but on what the evil affects—not only on harm but on the pain it causes. Consequently, even if suffering is all it ought to be, it usually will seem bad unless one understands suffering, reflects, sorts out one's feelings, and make the necessary distinctions.

### **11) This life's relationship to the kingdom gives suffering an acceptable meaning.**

By sending his Son, God set about freeing those who believe in Jesus from real privations of fundamental human goods—from sin, death, and some of their consequences, not least from the ignorance that blocks most human efforts to deal with the fallen condition. Up to now, however, Jesus, by his redemptive suffering, freed humankind only from evil, not from suffering. Yet by freeing his people from slavery to evil and enabling them both to overcome sin and help others overcome it, Jesus also prepares for the new earth and new heaven, where there will no longer be suffering because there will no longer be evil (see Rv 21.3-4).

Jesus already exists as the Lord in glory, as the first fruits of God's plan for the kingdom (see 1 Cor 15.20). All the other constituents of the kingdom will be gathered up by Jesus (see 1 Cor 15.24-27; Col 1.15-20). But Jesus became what he now is—and will be forever—only by living the life he lived, suffering the evils he suffered, and dying the death he died.

The sufferings of Jesus' disciples can contribute in a similar way to their becoming and being forever the members of the kingdom God is calling them to be. Consider Mary. Redeemed at the moment of her conception, she was at once a perfect human person and beloved daughter of God, who had prepared for her the good and holy life she was to live. Along each step of her path of life, she discerned what God was calling her to do, and gladly did what he wanted. She also constantly listened for God's word about what he wished her to accept, and *always* responded: "I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1.38). So, almighty God did great things for Mary, and when the course of her earthly life ended, she was greater than she had been at the moment of her conception. At the moment of her assumption into heaven, Mary was ready to take the place prepared for her, as the noblest companion of her Son and the queen-mother in his everlasting kingdom. When Jesus welcomed her, Mary found again all the good fruits of her human nature and effort, "but cleansed of all dirt, lit up, and transformed" (GS 39). She no doubt at last understood why God had permitted the evils that had caused all that she suffered during her life.

Similarly, apart from those who never develop sufficiently to make a free choice, anyone who has been saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus and recreated in him can become all that God wishes him or her to be forever in the heavenly kingdom only if

he or she lives out the life prepared by God in advance. Such a life of fidelity to God in a fallen world is sure to involve sufferings; undertaking it is taking up one's cross. But the blessed will find again in the kingdom, completed and perfected, every human good they tried to serve on earth, and they will realize that God could not have made them all that they will be forever had he prevented their sufferings by not allowing the evils that caused them to suffer.

Moreover, in the kingdom the blessed will see how God could have brought about in other ways all the benefits they brought about by using their God-given gifts in service to others. But without that service, along with all the sufferings providing it required, the blessed will see that they could not have become what they will be forever. So, the blessed will fully appreciate the lives God gave them to live and be grateful to him for all the sufferings those lives involved.

Even if we understand the significance of suffering in our lives and are confident God loves us, however, we will continue to trust him fully only if we bear in mind his incomprehensibility and the inevitability of the evils he permits in creating the goods he creates. The book of Job teaches the lesson about God's incomprehensibility, and Paul neatly encapsulates it: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' For from him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom 11.33-36).<sup>130</sup>

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130. Of course, even if we take that lesson to heart, we may misunderstand God's omnipotence and forget that what is logically impossible cannot be created. On misunderstandings of omnipotence, see Peter T. Geach, "Omnipotence," *Philosophy*, 48 (1973): 7-20.



### **C: The Deposit of Faith, Infallibility, and Inerrancy**

Some seminarians, priests, novices, and professed religious strive to hold fast to everything they—or their spiritual mentors—received, and strive to hand on all of it unchanged. They resist the authentic development that occurred in Church teachings during and since Vatican II, cling to venerable but questionable theological positions as if they were truths of faith, and believe that firmer discipline would remedy most of what they regard as wrong in the Church as a whole and, especially, in the priesthood and religious life.

Others use the legitimacy of the development of doctrine and the difference between the formulas that express faith and the realities attained by it to justify various proposals to bring into harmony with current “Christian experience” both formulations of faith and received practices—including formulations concerning ordained priesthood and religious life, and practices pertaining to them.

To proceed safely between those extremes, one needs a clear understanding of revelation, faith, infallibility, development of doctrine, and the inerrancy of Scripture.

Some people who think they have Christian faith deny that anyone has a special relationship with God which includes a definite set of truths and other things that he long ago entrusted to certain people not only for themselves but to hand on to others until the end of time. Such people also deny Jesus’ bodily resurrection and other miracles that made it clear that God was communicating, and reject the inerrancy of Scripture. If they nevertheless say that God reveals, they mean that some individuals and groups of people have religious experiences they find convincing. Only their personal experience and reflection determine what such people believe. For them, doctrine is nothing but sharing convictions with others to evaluate in the light of their own experience. This conception of revelation is obviously incompatible with Catholic faith.

While very few Catholic clerics and religious share that position, elements of it may at times slip into their thinking about particular matters. It needs to be considered explicitly and firmly rejected.

#### **1) God’s revelation in Jesus is definitive and for all human beings.**

God manifests himself in creation and by the law he writes on human hearts (see Rom 1.19-20, 2.14-15). But these are not messages addressed to a particular person or group. And only such a message manifests the intention to communicate and begins to develop an interpersonal relationship. Revelation is such communication by God (see DS 3004/1785, DV 2-3).

Revelation always involved both words and deeds: “the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them” (DV 2). Not all words and deeds were suited to constitute divine revelation, but only those that could be recognized as a personal communication from God and that

reasonable recipients would accept as such. So, at least some of the deeds had to be *mighty* and *wondrous*—miraculous events that, because causes within the universe could not account for them, were recognizable as divine signs, signals from the creator, God’s signature on the message. At the same time, the words had to be suitable to convey a message relevant to the religious relationship human beings already had with the provident, benevolent God who directs them to their own good by the law written on their hearts. Taken as a whole, the message had to offer a good relationship with God and hold out hope for the well being of those addressed.

God’s revelations to Abraham and to his chosen people through Moses illustrate how miracles and a message of hope constituted divine revelation and developed the natural human relationship with God by establishing an explicit, covenantal relationship. But they were only preparatory: “The old covenant dispensation was directed above all to preparing the coming of Christ, redeemer of all, and of the messianic kingdom, to announcing this coming by prophecy (see Lk 24.44, Jn 5.39, 1 Pt 1.10), and to signifying its meaning through various types (see 1 Cor 10.11)” (DV 15; cf. DV 3, 14). By contrast, Christian revelation was addressed to all human beings and is definitive.

The beginning of the Letter to the Hebrews articulates the basic reason why God’s revelation in and through Jesus is definitive:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. (Heb 1.1-3)

Jesus—the very Word of God, through whom all things were made—becomes present in the world as a fellow human being (see Jn 1.1-4, 14). The incomprehensible eternal Word translates himself into language we can understand. In him, the medium truly is the message: Jesus is at once God revealed, and God and man revealing; he *is* the revelation that manifests God in person. In words and deeds accessible to us, the Son makes the Father appear,<sup>131</sup> articulates his plan for human salvation and happiness, and shows us how to respond with perfect obedience. And by his death and resurrection, Jesus not only manifests the Father’s love and his own love but demonstrates the practicability of the Father’s plan. Thus, in Jesus the message of revelation is self-authenticating: he provides sufficient reason for making the commitment of faith.<sup>132</sup> In sum, in him God “has said everything; there will be no other word than this one” (CCC, 65).

Christian revelation also is definitive in that it fully manifests God’s plan for humankind and for creation as a whole. Jesus tells the Twelve: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15.15). Jesus proclaims the definitive kingdom, which will include eternal life in the Father’s house—the fellowship of divine and created persons in perfect love and joy. “This

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131. See Irénée de Lyon, *Contre les Hérésies* (IV:6,6), ed. Adelin Rousseau (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1965), 448-51.

132. See René Latourelle, S.J., *Theology of Revelation* (Cork: Mercier, 1968), 359-69.

mystery was not manifested to other generations as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Holy Spirit (see Eph 3.4-6, Greek text)” (DV 17). The new and eternal covenant is not only a solemnly confirmed bond, as the old covenant already was, nor the interiorizing of such a bond, as Jeremiah foresaw it would be (see Jer 31.31-34). It is an intimate communion of divine and human persons.<sup>133</sup> We are promised that in the fullness of that intimate communion, we who are now God’s children “shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3.2). Moreover, in Jesus, God’s plan for creation as a whole is revealed: “For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1.9-10). “The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away, and no further new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Tm 6.14, Tit 2.13)” (DV 4).

Jesus not only announced the new covenant, but brought it into being and provided for its ongoing life. Thus, though Christian revelation does include truths, it also includes practices (among which the Eucharist is the most important) and the structure Jesus gave to his Church. Explaining the apostles’ reception of revelation, Vatican II speaks not only of “what they had received from the lips of Christ,” but also of what they received “from living with him, and from what he did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit” (DV 7). The Council points out that what the apostles received was handed on not only by their oral preaching—supplemented by their own and their associates’ writings—but by the precedents they set and the arrangements they made for the Church.<sup>134</sup> Describing the content of sacred Tradition, the Council teaches that it is not limited to truths of faith: “Now what was handed on by the apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the people of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes” (DV 8).

## **2) Christian revelation is a deposit safeguarded by the Holy Spirit.**

In handing on all that Jesus revealed to the people of every time and place, the Church fulfills the mission he gave her:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. (Mt 28.18-20)

Vatican II explains that Jesus, “in whom the whole revelation of God most high is consummated,” gave these instructions in accord with the Father’s will that what he had

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133. Ceslas Spicq, O.P., *Agape in the New Testament*, vol. 3, *Agape in the Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse of St. John* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1966), 35, points out that in instructing his disciples, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love” (Jn 15.9), Jesus implies that “the charity of the Father, the Son, and the disciples is on one and the same level.” See also Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Epistles of John*, Anchor Bible, 30 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 520-26 and 553-60.

134. DV 7: “qui in praedicatione orali, exemplis et institutionibus ea tradiderunt.”

revealed for the salvation of all nations “should remain permanently in its integrity and be transmitted to all generations” (DV 7).

Consequently, Jesus entrusted to the apostles—and to those whom they chose to help with their work and to carry it on after they died—everything revealed in and through him. Like messengers conveying a precious gift and the message that accompanies it, they are to safeguard what Jesus has given them so that it will be available, whole and intact, to everyone until the end of time.

Both the apostles and their associates were aware of this responsibility. Luke, in the prologue to his Gospel, proposes “to write an orderly account” of “the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” (Lk 1.1-3). The author of the letters to Timothy exhorts him: “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you” (1 Tm 6.20); “Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us” (2 Tm 1.14). Here, “the truth that has been entrusted to you” translates a Greek expression that literally means “the deposit,” so that the second injunction might be more precisely translated: “By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the precious deposit.”

Our English word *deposit* often refers, not to something handed over, but to the result of a natural process—for example, a concentration of iron ore or oil. When Jesus ascended to heaven he did leave all that God had revealed in and through him. But, unlike a natural process, he did so purposefully, entrusting the deposit to those he commissioned to make it available to everyone else. He acted somewhat as a man does who provides for his family by depositing his wealth in a trust fund. The trustees’ responsibility is to safeguard the deposit, invest it carefully, and see that the family’s needs are met. In Greek usage at the time of the letters to Timothy, however, while a deposit was something handed over, it need not have been left behind, and could even have been confided secrets or a person. “According to Philo,” in fact, “the divine gifts entrusted to humans are like deposits that must be guarded carefully.”<sup>135</sup>

Jesus entrusted the deposit of faith not only to the apostles but to the entire Church. Vatican II teaches:

Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture form a single sacred deposit of the word of God. It is entrusted to the Church, and holding fast to it the entire holy people united with their pastors continue steadfastly in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and the prayers (see Acts 2.42, Greek text), so that in the faith handed on to be held, practiced, and professed there may be a unique single-mindedness of bishops and faithful. (DV 10).<sup>136</sup>

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135. Ceslas Spicq, O.P., *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. James D. Ernest (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 3:25.

136. The final phrase in Latin is: “singularis fiat Antistitum et fidelium conspiratio.” To it is attached the Council’s fn. 7, which first refers to Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (1 Nov. 1950), AAS 42 (1950) 756, where the phrase “singularis catholicorum Antistitum et fidelium conspiratio” is used to refer to the virtually unanimous agreement of the bishops and faithful as a ground for solemnly defining the doctrine of

Thus, the deposit of faith includes all the divine gifts that Jesus entrusted to his Church when he commissioned the apostles. The whole people of God is to hold fast to that deposit, live it out, and bear witness to it.

Yet the apostles and their successors were given a special responsibility, as Luke's prologue and the injunctions in the letters to Timothy make clear. Vatican II teaches that "in order to keep the gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the apostles left bishops as their successors, 'handing over' to them 'the authority to teach in their own place.'"<sup>137</sup> The Council also teaches that the role of authoritatively interpreting God's word is entrusted exclusively to the college of bishops, who continue to exercise that teaching authority (see DV 10).

But how can the bishops keep the deposit of faith whole and intact? People given a message to pass along usually mutilate and corrupt it—either lose parts of it, add foreign matter to it, or both. The New Testament provides ample evidence that even the Twelve often misunderstood Jesus' teachings, and history shows that individual bishops, including popes, sometimes make mistakes in teaching and preaching. Given the limitations and defects of any group of human beings, it seems sure that God's gifts in Jesus would not be handed on intact—that some things would be lost and others added, so that what God had given in Jesus would gradually become corrupted and unavailable.

Jesus anticipated the problem and solved it by sending "another Counselor," the Spirit of truth, to remain with the apostles permanently, and to dwell in them (see Jn 14.16-17). This Counselor teaches the apostles all they need to know, reminds them of Jesus' teachings (see Jn 14.26), joins with them in bearing witness to Jesus (see Jn 15.26-27), and guides them into the whole truth, the whole of the Father's revelation in Jesus (see Jn 16.12-15). Although handing on the deposit of faith whole and intact is a superhuman task, the Holy Spirit enables the apostles and their successors to do it and ensures that people of all later times and other places will have access to everything that Jesus entrusted to the apostles.

### **3) The Church infallibly holds and hands on the deposit of faith.**

Money is deposited in banks. A Medevac helicopter deposits a gravely injured driver in a hospital's trauma unit. Where is divine revelation deposited?

God's revelation in Jesus is communicated by human words and deeds. There would have been no such revelation if nobody had believed in Jesus; that attempt to reveal would have failed. In revealing, therefore, the Father had also to bring about faith in the minds and hearts of those who thereby received what he communicated. Divine revelation is deposited in the minds and hearts of believers. Initially, the revelation in Jesus was handed over to the apostles and held in their faith. But the apostles received the deposit of faith not only on their own and their successors' behalf but on behalf of the whole Church.

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Mary's Assumption; Pius XII adopted the phrase from Pius IX, who used the same language and ground in defining the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

137. DV 7; the internal quotation is from Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, iii, 3, 1.

Individual believers, including popes and other bishops *as individual believers*, can fail to identify and accurately represent elements of the faith. But the deposit of faith is whole and intact in the faith of the Church. Jesus and the Holy Spirit remain with the Church forever (see Mt 28.20, Jn 14.16); and God’s family as a whole—“the household of God, which is the church of the living God”—is “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tm 3.15).<sup>138</sup> When the Church as such identifies and articulates elements of her faith, Jesus himself acts in her, and she cooperates with the Holy Spirit. In holding and handing on elements of the deposit of faith, the Church as such cannot make mistakes but enjoys the infallibility Jesus wished her to have. She does so not by having members or leaders who are sometimes infallible, but by having the Holy Spirit, who is always infallible and who ensures, under specified conditions, that certain members of the Church do not err.

In considering the Church as the people of God, Vatican II teaches that the Church as a whole shares in Jesus’ prophetic office. Every member is to bear living witness to what God has revealed in Jesus. The Council then explains how the Church as a whole is able to fulfill this central part of her mission:

The whole body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One (see Jn 2.20, 27), cannot err about what is to be believed, and, thanks to the whole people’s supernatural sense of the faith, manifests this, its characteristic inerrancy, when, “from the bishops down to the last member of the laity” [note to Augustine omitted], it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals.

For, by this sense of faith which is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, God’s people accepts not the word of human beings but the very word of God (see 1 Thes 2.13). It clings without fail to the faith once delivered to the saints (see Jude 3), penetrates it more deeply by accurate insights, and applies it more thoroughly to life. All this it does under the lead of a sacred teaching authority to which it faithfully defers. (LG 12)

The paradigmatic manifestation of the infallibility of the Church as such is in the people’s universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. Those who join in holding and professing her common faith are what Paul calls “spiritual” men and women (see 1 Cor 2.10-15). Anointed by the Spirit, they can join in saying: “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2.16)—something even Paul could say only because he was articulating the Church’s faith and writing on her behalf.

What about matters on which the agreement or the whole body of the faithful is lacking? Like any human society, the Church acts not only when her members agree unanimously but also when they do not—by her leaders’ actions that meet appropriate conditions. In dealing with the teaching office of bishops, the Council teaches:

Although the bishops individually do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they nevertheless proclaim the teaching of Christ infallibly, even when they are dispersed

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138. The household is the family; members of the household are members of the family. Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 54, explains: “This metaphor for ‘family’ . . . flows naturally from the recognition of God as Father, believers as brothers and sisters, and apostles as ‘stewards’ (household managers).” Thus, God’s household—his whole family—includes both the divine persons and the created persons who have become God’s children by being born again or by adoption.

throughout the world, provided that they remain in communion with each other and with the successor of Peter and that in authoritatively teaching on a matter of faith and morals they agree in one judgment as that to be held definitively. (LG 25)

Inasmuch as the bishops exercise the role of apostolic leadership and are the Church's legitimate spokesmen, the Church as such plainly teaches what they teach, when the stated conditions are met. Therefore, under those conditions, the bishops teach infallibly.<sup>139</sup>

The preceding teachings of Vatican II make it clear that all elements of Catholic belief and practice that have ever been held universally and/or handed on by the body of bishops as essential have been believed and taught infallibly.

Still, as Vatican II says, it is still clearer that the bishops teach with the infallibility "with which the divine redeemer wanted his Church to be equipped" when they gather in a worldwide council and solemnly define matters of belief or practice (LG 25). Usually, that has happened because the ordinary mode of handing on the deposit of faith was impeded by disagreement involving the bishops themselves over matters at least some of them considered essential.

Since the pope, as successor of Peter, is head of the body of bishops, the body cannot teach independently of him (see LG 22); but he, "by virtue of his office as head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all Christ's faithful, who confirms his brothers in faith (see Lk 22.32), he proclaims a doctrine of faith or morals with a definitive act" (LG 25). Here Vatican II is reaffirming what Vatican I solemnly defined. Both councils have made it clear that under appropriate conditions the Church as such can teach by the teaching of a pope alone, so that "he is endowed, through the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, with the infallibility that the divine redeemer wanted his Church to be equipped with in defining doctrine of faith or morals" (DS 3074/1839).

It follows that the familiar statement, "The pope is infallible," is misleading. Infallibility is a charism the Church enjoys in holding and handing on her faith. It is not a permanent attribute of bishops or popes but one they enjoy only in performing certain acts: those in which they cooperate with the Holy Spirit, who is infallibility itself, in handing on the Church's faith.<sup>140</sup>

Much of what has been said and written in recent years about infallibility has suggested that it is a special seal placed by the Church on a few teachings by solemnly defining them, and that all her other teachings could be mistaken. This manifests a fundamental misunderstanding of infallibility. Rather than being a special seal placed on selected teachings, infallibility is the Holy Spirit's exclusion of mistakes by the Church as such in identifying, holding, and handing down everything contained in the deposit of faith.

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139. Such infallible teachings are sometimes said to manifest the "infallibility of the ordinary magisterium." For a fuller discussion, see *CMP*, 842-48.

140. Teachings which are not of faith can call for religious assent; for a treatment of Catholics' responsibilities in this matter, see *LCL*, 46-55.

Since truths of faith are absolutely certain, people sometimes wonder what infallibility can add. In fact, it adds nothing to their intrinsic certitude. But because the Holy Spirit excludes mistakes by the Church as such in dealing with elements of the deposit of faith, and this keeps the deposit of faith whole and intact, individual believers have a reason for personal confidence (subjective certitude) about particular Church teachings and practices they might otherwise think mistaken and/or unacceptable.

#### **4) Fidelity to revelation develops the Church's doctrine and practice.**

Since popes and other bishops must draw everything they teach as revealed from the deposit of faith (see DV 10), all of their acts of teaching—and only those acts—that deal with truths pertaining to the deposit of faith can be infallible (see LG 25). An early draft of *Lumen gentium* said that infallibility extends as far as Christ willed his Church to be infallible in defining doctrine of faith and morals. But that formulation was too narrow. Acting at the suggestion of several bishops, the conciliar commission handling the document clarified the extent of infallibility by saying it “extends as far as extends the deposit of divine revelation, *which must be guarded as inviolable and expounded with fidelity.*”<sup>141</sup> The final phrase, which I have italicized, makes it clear that the object of infallible teaching goes beyond truths already articulated in revelation. The Church can infallibly develop received doctrine by making explicit what is implicit in the deposit of faith and by rejecting errors incompatible with any of its elements.

Such development is necessary. It is best understood by contrasting it with a more fundamental development: that of God's self-manifestation itself.

The creator's gifts of revelation and faith deepen and enhance the relationship intelligent creatures naturally had with him. The Father, by sending his Son, further develops those gifts and the covenantal relationship he had established with his chosen people. Rather than abandoning, setting aside, or destroying what God had given before him, Jesus fulfilled it. He gathered up the truths previously revealed and enriched them, while setting aside both inadequate understandings that tended to block his fulfillment of prior revelation and human traditions that were incompatible with it.

Sent to gather up the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Jesus, in completing divine revelation, used and transformed Israel's language and culture. Plainly, too, the apostles, who received and appropriated Jesus' revelation, were all Jews. So, the Church's faith—which includes her beliefs, practices, and structures—initially was articulated and lived out in a Jewish way. Yet the gospel was addressed to everyone, and the new covenant was meant for all. Ways had to be found to communicate the gospel to Gentiles, and the Church herself had to develop so that she could welcome Gentiles into her communion. St. Paul's work was central in that development, though others contributed to it (see Acts 8.25-40, 10.1-11.26), and Paul proceeded in solidarity with St. Peter and others (see Gal

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141. LG 25. For the development of the text, see John C. Ford, S.J., and Germain Grisez, “Contraception and the Infallibility of the Ordinary Magisterium,” *Theological Studies*, 39 (1978): 264-69. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2035, reformulates and develops the point: “This infallibility extends as far as does the deposit of divine Revelation; it also extends to all those elements of doctrine, including morals, without which the saving truths of the faith cannot be preserved, explained, or observed.”

1.18, 2.1-2). Thus, the apostolic collegium brought about an authentic development in the appropriation of God's revelation in Jesus (see Acts 15.1-29).

At the same time, Paul and the others preserved the substance of everything God revealed in Jesus. Had they not, their missionary effort would not have carried out Jesus' commission: it would not have made the Gentiles *his* disciples, brought them into *his* fellowship, formed them by *his* commands. In the course of development, it became clear that Israel's law and religious practices, including circumcision, had pertained to her faith just to the extent they were preparatory for, though distinct from, God's definitive revelation in Jesus (see Gal 3-4). As the placenta, amniotic sac, and umbilical cord are vital organs of unborn human persons but are discarded at birth because their purpose has been fulfilled, so Israel's law and religious practices were left behind by the Church as the Holy Spirit delivered her into the world.

Even though the new covenant is definitive and will never end, God's revelation in Jesus, as it exists in the Church's faith, also is preparatory. But it is not relative to something that will emerge in the course of human history; rather it prepares for the ultimate revelation, the "glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (DV 4). Consequently, Christian faith will never be developed within history in a way similar to that by which Jesus developed the faith of Israel.

Nevertheless, as the deposit of faith is handed on, there is authentic development in the understanding not only of the truths of faith but of the other entities pertaining to the deposit, including the sacraments and the structure of the Church. Development occurs in various ways (see DV 8). First, cherishing what they have received, believers try to understand it better and appropriate it more perfectly; the Spirit enlightens them, and so they come to understand the deposit of faith better. Second, living out their faith, believers experience their relationship with God in Christ, and so more profoundly understand that central reality and others pertaining to the deposit of faith. Third, Scripture scholars and theologians strive to explain the truths of faith and how they are to be applied (see DV 23-24; GS 44 and 62); in doing so, they inevitably make mistakes, sometimes very serious ones; and such disagreements lead to doctrinal development, sometimes by solemn definitions, which until now have usually been the work of ecumenical councils. Fourth, as they preach the gospel and form the faithful to follow Jesus' way in constantly changing cultural contexts, bishops and popes articulate the truths of faith in new ways and adapt nonessential features of the Church's practices and structures so as to hand on the entire deposit of faith.

##### **5) The deposit of faith shapes its own development.**

The experience of the faithful and of the bishops often provides occasions for development and contributes to it. But experience neither has the same status as the elements of the deposit of faith nor does it function in the same ways those elements do in shaping the process of authentic development and determining its outcome. Otherwise, the deposit of faith would lose its integrity, just as one's body would lose its integrity if external factors that occasion and contribute to organic development shaped that process and determined its outcome in the same way, and to the same extent that parts of the body

do.<sup>142</sup> Rather, with the Holy Spirit sustaining the living faith of the Church as a whole, somewhat as the soul sustains the life of the body (see LG 7), the received contents of the deposit of faith provide the criteria of judgment, and so shape the process of authentic development and determine its outcome.

In recent years, many people advocating changes in the Church have argued for an inductive examination of issues and against basing judgments on principles or, as they sometimes put it, against taking positions a priori while disregarding the experience of the people affected. The point is well-taken when judgments concern matters of fact and so-called principles are invoked to avoid facing facts, and, in general, when the principles invoked do not pertain to the deposit of faith, and experience can show their falsity or irrelevance. But God's revelation challenges human beings by making them aware of realities whose claim on them is greater than all their other concerns, and experience at odds with revelation calls for repentance. So, it is right to use principles that pertain to the deposit of faith to settle every issue to which they are relevant.

Our experience is affected by our assumptions. For example, if I commit myself to celibate chastity for the kingdom's sake yet share the view, commonly held by contemporary nonbelievers, that suffering is evil and the primary evil, experiencing the cross I have taken up is likely to convince me eventually that not all sexual activity can reasonably count as infidelity. Therefore, Jesus taught:

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! (Mt 6.22-23)

One's eye is not sound unless one receives Jesus as he wishes to be received—that is, receives God's revelation in him and allows it to permeate one's heart and mind. Otherwise, the apparent light of experience and conscience is darkness. And as John Paul II observes:

An increasing number of Christians seem to have a reduced sensitivity to the universality and objectivity of the doctrine of the faith, because they are subjectively attached to what pleases them, to what corresponds to their own experience, and to what does not impinge on their own habits. In such a context, even the appeal to the inviolability of the individual conscience, in itself a legitimate appeal, may be dangerously marked by ambiguity.<sup>143</sup>

Thus, changes in the Church and her teachings that seem to be required by widely shared experiences might well betray the deposit of faith rather than authentically develop it.

Genuine Christian theology is an intellectually disciplined, cooperative effort to understand elements of the deposit of faith in their relationships with one another and to draw out their implications for worship, the handing on of the faith, and everything else

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142. When external factors shape the process of handing on organic life and determine its outcome, species evolve. Similarly, when experience shapes the process of handing on Christianity and determines its outcome, the development results in a religion that in many ways resembles authentic Christianity but is essentially different from it.

143. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 7, AAS 84 (1992) 667-68, OR, 8 Apr. 1992, II.

in Christians' individual and communal living. Ideally, theology would help Christians gather up all their knowledge and interpret all their experience in a single, completely truthful vision of reality and completely realistic plan of life. So, theologians must attend to experience and secular studies. But the deposit of faith shapes authentic theological development. Therefore, even widely accepted and long-held theological views—and a fortiori recently proposed dissenting theological views—at odds with Scripture and the Church's constant and firm teaching should be set aside. Since not only all that God revealed, but only what he revealed, is to be held by faith and handed on, holding unsound theological views as if they pertained to faith is as bad as denying truths that do pertain to it.

The deposit of faith also shapes development in the doctrine the Church teaches. The teaching role of popes and bishops includes rejecting errors in matters of faith, and that sometimes involves developing doctrine by a solemn definition that clarifies a truth of faith. Here the pioneering work of John Henry Newman remains fundamental.<sup>144</sup> He makes it clear that only by development can the Church's faith maintain its true identity through history, which is the sameness of Christian revelation itself as it becomes available to people of every time and place. Newman and others who independently worked out accounts of doctrinal development somewhat similar to his also show that development depends partly on what is not propositional in the deposit of faith. Developed doctrines are not logically reducible to previously articulated truths of faith, yet they always presuppose such truths and are consistent with them.<sup>145</sup> Analogous development takes place in the Church's practices and structures—for example, in the administration and use of the sacraments—without discrediting earlier forms.

In dealing with development, Vatican I solemnly condemned anyone who “says it can happen that sometimes, in line with the advance of knowledge, a meaning should be given to dogmas that have been proposed by the Church which is different from the meaning [*sensus*] which the Church has understood and understands” (DS 3043/1818). It encouraged progress in understanding, knowledge, and wisdom in both individual Christians and the whole Church, but that progress had to be authentic development: “in the same doctrine, the same meaning, and the same judgment.”<sup>146</sup>

### **6) Propositions are distinct from language; meanings are not judgments.**

Fully to grasp Vatican I's point about development of doctrine and related points, to be considered below, with respect to the teachings of Vatican II and of sacred Scripture, one must understand what propositions are and how they are related to meanings, judgments, and linguistic expressions.

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144. See John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 1878 edition (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1968).

145. See Jan Hendrik Walgrave, O.P., “Doctrine, Development of,” *NCE* (1967), 4:940-44; *Unfolding Revelation: The Nature of Doctrinal Development* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972).

146. Vatican I quotes this phrase (DS 3020/1800) from Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium primum*, cap. 23 (*PL*, 50:668A).

A proposition is something thought that can be true or false. Propositions are distinct from language. If someone says, “The sun is shining” and someone else, “Sol lucet,” we can say the two are saying the same thing—expressing the same proposition, the same content of thought that can be either true or false.

Propositions often are conveyed partly by the nonlinguistic context of communication. In a floor plan with a red dot labeled, “You are here,” the words and image together convey a content of thought that can be true or false. (The proposition would be false, for instance, if the floor plan had been moved from one location in the building to another.)

Because propositions are distinct from language, the same sentence can convey different propositions. That happens in various ways. Contexts sometimes determine the reference of words, as with the words *You* and *here* when one reads a sign saying “You are here.” Less obvious and more important is that the same words may be used with different meanings or senses, as *freedom* and *democracy* were by Stalin and Roosevelt. If the two leaders issued a joint statement saying freedom and democracy were worth defending, their one statement expressed two different propositions.<sup>147</sup>

Because language depends heavily upon context for its meaning, it is relative to culture and must be interpreted with this in mind. But propositional content is not relative to culture; a proposition’s conditions and limitations are built into it. Interpretation and translation attempt to disengage the propositional content—the meaning or sense—from one linguistic vehicle and to articulate it in another.

Scripture and the liturgy contain much more than propositions: commands and requests, images and poetic symbols, and so on. Many sentences may presuppose one or more propositions but not express any proposition—for example, “Glory to God in the highest.” Nor do many expressions in polite conversation express propositions: “Good night” is not a statement about the night or anything else but at most a wish or prayer that the night be good for the person or persons addressed.

The meanings that constitute propositions are not judgments, and different judgments can be made and expressed with respect to the same proposition. One can wonder whether it is true and refrain from making a judgment; one can judge it to be true; one can judge it to be false. And one can express those different judgments. Wondering whether a proposition is true, one can ask a question—though one may also ask questions to encourage others to think or for other reasons. Judging a proposition true and wishing others to accept its truth, one can assert it—though liars assert propositions they do not think to be true. Judging a proposition false, one can deny it.

People with the same proposition in mind can disagree about it in two different ways. If one asserts what the other denies, they contradict each other—their judgments disagree about the reality of the state of affairs the proposition picks out. If one asserts or denies what the other is unsure about, they disagree about the appropriateness of making a

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147. Of course, people sometimes lie, and political leaders often seem to have little regard for truth in choosing words that serve their purposes. However, the abuse of language for lying and manipulation does not affect the *meaning* of words and phrases, which is tied to what those who use them convey rather than to its conformity to what they think is true.

judgment—the one claims to know the actual state of affairs while the other does not accept that claim.

Propositions often are expressed in language without being asserted or denied. One may wonder whether something is so; one may suggest a view as possibly true, even likely, without being prepared to assert it. Conversely, one may suspect a proposition is false without denying it. In reflecting upon and talking about common beliefs or the beliefs of others, people often express propositions without providing any clear indication of their own judgment. Sometimes, one does not even ask oneself what one's own judgment is—for instance, in telling a story, where only the main point is asserted, while subordinate details are sketched in without any pretense of perfect accuracy. Moreover, the conventions of narration are different in different times and places, and even in the same culture in different social situations.

It should be clear, then, that, in dealing with the development of dogma, Vatican I was concerned with something complex. The word *dogmas* refers not to revealed truths in general but to those truths of faith the Church has identified by using a linguistic formula, usually one that explicitly states how faithful Church members express their faith. While care in using language is important, however, the formulae, considered in themselves, are not true or false.<sup>148</sup> The truths of faith and their excluded opposites are the propositions the linguistic formulae express *when they are understood with the meaning the Church understands and are used to express the Church's judgment*. The Church is concerned not only with the dogma as a linguistic formula—for example, the sentence *Mary is the mother of God*—but with that sentence's use to assert the proposition the Church asserts as a truth of faith by using the formula.

The meaning of Vatican I's definition is that progress in the sciences cannot have the result of allowing Catholics to use dogmas (the linguistic formulae) with a meaning other than the Church understands and/or to express a judgment other than the Church's. Vatican I is not denying that the truth of faith expressed by a dogma can be expressed in other language or that a further truth can come to light compatible with the truth the Church expressed in proposing that dogma.

Underlying this teaching of Vatican I is the conviction of faith that authentic human progress—in the sciences, technology, or anything else—is sure to be entirely consistent with the deposit of faith. Only false leads could provide apparent grounds for abandoning anything once embraced by the Church as a truth of faith. Insofar as they were at odds with the deposit of faith, these seeming advances would not be true progress, even though in other respects they might well include elements of truth and human value. And, as a matter of fact, although many nineteenth- and twentieth-century hypotheses in Scripture studies, theology, philosophy, history, anthropology, sociology, and psychology challenged truths of faith, competent work in the same fields regularly challenged those same hypotheses.

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148. Someone might deny this and say, for example: "Not just the proposition but the sentence, 'Mary is the mother of God,' is true." However, the sentence becomes true or false only when it is used to make a statement, and it could be used to make a statement—for example, that God as divine originated from an antecedent mother-goddess—that is rightly denied by any monotheist.

### 7) Vatican II authentically developed Catholic teaching.

Pope John XXIII announced his plan to call a general council in January 1959, shortly after he was elected. His purpose was to bring about renewal in the Church, so that she would be more effective in carrying out her mission in a world that had undergone many rapid changes and was undergoing many more. Most Catholics welcomed his initiative and looked forward to the intensification, consolidation, and completion of renewal efforts undertaken by his predecessors, beginning with Leo XIII, especially Pius XII.

Even so, there naturally was a spectrum of opinion among theologians and bishops about how the council should proceed, with some people at both extremes. Fearful of the threats modern thought and life posed to the Church, preservationists, many of them theologians in the pontifical universities in Rome or cardinals or others employed in the papal curia, had long followed a policy of resistance to change and also had a vested interest in the status quo. While open to minor refurbishing, they wished to keep intact almost everything about the Church, as if all of it were essential. They would resist significant renewal. At the spectrum's other end were reconstructionists, many of them theologians, bishops, or cardinals from central Europe, where the faith had been losing ground for a long time. Working together, they had carried out extensive historical and theological research, and developed an imaginative agenda in which they had great confidence. While anxious to preserve what they considered absolutely essential in the Church, they wanted to replace or modify everything they thought was contributing to decline.<sup>149</sup>

The two extreme groups had been taking shape for many decades and had often skirmished. Considerable mutual animosity had grown up between them.<sup>150</sup>

Pope John no doubt realized that the preservationists would try to block the renewal he sought, and he must have known that some reconstructionists wanted changes he could not accept.<sup>151</sup> But, having great faith, he trusted far more than the preservationists in the durability and resilience of the living deposit of faith, and was far more confident than the reconstructionists in its inherent attractiveness. Surely, too, he knew that neither group was representative of the world's bishops as a whole. Expecting that the Holy Spirit

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149. Their confidence was enhanced by the fact that some of their ideas had never been subjected to cogent criticism. Closely watched by Rome, they had shared certain new ideas only with one another and likeminded people. Of course, some preservationists were convinced that some reconstructionists considered nonessential in the Church many things that are in fact essential, and subsequent developments seemed to support that view. Again, some preservationists thought that some theologians and prelates were posing as reconstructionists but had rejected the faith and were trying to destroy the Church; and, since only God can judge people's hearts, the contrary cannot be proved.

150. Ralph M. Wiltgen, S.V.D., *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber: A History of Vatican II*, British edition (Devon, England: Augustine, 1978), is perhaps the most balanced history of Vatican II. He considers (5-6) the Council Fathers and *periti* from Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium the predominant group at the Council. Not all the bishops and theologians from those nations were reconstructionists, but almost all the reconstructionists were from those nations or their former colonies.

151. Some of the changes proposed by reconstructionists during Vatican II that proved unacceptable to the majority of the Council Fathers or to Paul VI already had been considered and rejected by Pius XII.

would bring his effort at renewal to a happy end and make it bear good fruit, John XXIII began preparing for Vatican II.

For that preparatory work, he had to call on people available in Rome, and most were preservationists. Their virtually exclusive doctrinal emphasis was on guarding the deposit, and that focus shaped the draft documents they prepared, whereas John's project called for a fresh statement of the Church's teachings. Still, not every sort of doctrinal reconstruction would do. In his opening address to Vatican II, John called for a new statement of the Church's teachings and made it clear that it should convey the deposit of faith in a fresh and more effective way, so that the Church could better fulfill her pastoral responsibility to make the one and only deposit of faith available to people today.

Having first described the preservationists' project in respect to doctrine and bluntly dismissed it, saying there was no need to call a worldwide Council for that sort of thing, John immediately went on:

But at present, it is necessary that everyone, with minds serene and peaceful, take up and restudy Christian doctrine as a whole, with no part taken away, doctrine carefully handed on with respect to the language capturing it and precision in expressing it, as especially shines forth from the Acts of the Council of Trent and Vatican I; it is necessary—just as is vehemently desired by all who sincerely have at heart a Christianity that is both apostolic and Catholic—that this same doctrine be more fully and better known, and that it more completely pervade and form minds; it is necessary that this certain and unchangeable doctrine, to which faithful submission should be given, be examined carefully and expounded in the way that our times demand. *For the deposit of faith, or the truths which are contained in our venerable teaching, is one thing; another thing is the manner in which those truths are enunciated, keeping the same meaning and the same judgment.* And to this manner of enunciation very great and patient effort will have to be devoted and carried through, if the task is to be accomplished: of coming up with articulations which express and explain things in ways more appropriate to a magisterium whose character is above all pastoral.<sup>152</sup>

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152. John XXIII, "Allocutio habita d. 11 Oct. 1962, in initio Concilii," AAS 54 (1962) 792, italics added. In adapting the italicized sentence to teach about the role of theologians, Vatican II retained the phrase, "keeping the same meaning and the same judgment" (GS 62). From the day John gave his opening address until now, however, people eager to promote 'developments,' without Pope John's and the Council's care about their authenticity, often have quoted part of the emphasized sentence without its context and without the phrase, "keeping the same meaning and the same judgment." (Some have even denied that Pope John uttered that phrase in the Council hall and claimed it was inserted later. But the phrase appears not only in the AAS but in the Latin text published in the Italian edition of *L'Osservatore Romano* on 12 Oct. 1962, p. 2, col. 3; moreover, in Jan. 1992, Rev. Federico Lombardi, S.J., then director of Vatican Radio, affirmed in writing that a recording of John XXIII's opening address, made on the occasion and still in perfect condition, includes everything in the passage exactly as it was later published in the AAS; see John Finnis, "What Pope John Said," *Tablet* [London], 18 Jan. 1992, 71.) Omitting the context of Pope John's call for development conceals his careful specification of the conditions for the authentic development he wanted. Omitting the phrase, "keeping the same meaning and the same judgment," conceals his allusion to the teaching of Vatican I, which by a related solemn definition also made it clear that there are already-formulated truths of faith, that those formulations have unalterable meanings and express unalterable judgments, and that any authentic development will be consistent with every already-formulated truth.

A few days later, in choosing members of the conciliar commissions—the committees that would manage the work on Vatican II’s documents—the cardinals and bishops chose many who had not been involved in the preparatory work shaped mainly by the preservationists. Subsequently, the drafts prepared beforehand were largely scrapped or radically reworked; the drafts that replaced them were much more acceptable to reconstructionists, who also were well represented on the conciliar commissions.

Even so, constant and insistent demands by moderate bishops, the majority throughout the Council, caused the commissions to exclude even apparent departures from traditional doctrine, to correct mistakes, and to eliminate ambiguities.<sup>153</sup> Very little was accomplished during the first session of Vatican II, and Pope John died only a few months later. But the Council went on to carry out his project as he had spelled it out. Without solemnly defining anything, Vatican II greatly developed Catholic teaching on many matters.

In most cases, that development was mainly a matter of focusing on Christ, drawing heavily on scriptural language, emphasizing some doctrines more and others less than they had been, accepting some theological explanations the popes had not considered, and drawing some conclusions from previously articulated doctrines. In all its work, the Council presupposed the relevant, already-articulated truths of faith and often made clear the harmony of its new teachings with previous formulations. Recognizing that doctrinal soundness and pastoral sensitivity are equally essential and complementary, Vatican II faithfully re-presented the sacred deposit in ways well-designed to promote its reception and increased fruitfulness in today’s world.

For the most part, preservationists realized they had no real alternative to accepting what the Council had done. True, some ignored the new teaching and did their best to proceed as if it did not exist. But only a few bishops, notably Marcel Lefebvre, openly rejected any of Vatican II’s teachings. Many moderate bishops embraced the Council’s work as a whole and did their best to communicate it and put it into practice. The most outstanding example is Karol Wojtyla, the future Pope John Paul II, who had contributed significantly to the Council’s work.<sup>154</sup> But many reconstructionists regarded the Council’s documents as a mere resource and point of departure, and they proceeded with their own agenda, taking from Vatican II’s documents what they found useful, while ignoring or dismissing whatever was not.

At the same time, reconstructionist theologians and journalists propagated the myth that the Council had been divided between a small “conservative” minority (the preservationists) and an overwhelming “liberal” majority (led by the triumphant reconstructionists), a version of events that made it easier for reconstructionists to

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153. As an example, see Francisco Gil Hellín, *Constitutionis Pastoralis “Gaudium et spes” Synopsis Historica, II pars, caput I: De Dignitate Matrimonii et Familiae Fovenda* (Pamplona, Spain: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1982), for the development of one of the most sharply debated chapters in the conciliar documents.

154. An example of his effort to promote Vatican II’s teaching: Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II), *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council* (Polish ed., 1972; Italian rev. ed., 1979), trans. P. S. Falla (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980).

misrepresent the Council as a general endorsement of their views. In this mythmaking, they were greatly helped by secular journalists sympathetic to the reconstructionist agenda.

Even so, the documents of Vatican II stand in the way of efforts to change doctrine substantially, and reconstructionists need to account for that embarrassing fact. This they attempt to do by claiming that, to placate the conservative minority, the liberal majority allowed some traditional language and many references to outdated teachings to find their way into the Council documents. To understand Vatican II rightly, they suggest, one must ignore those sops to the conservatives, read between the documents' lines, and discern what the Council really meant to say.<sup>155</sup> Although it cannot be found in the Council's documents, the result of their effort is attributed to the 'spirit' of Vatican II.

There is no good reason or solid evidence for the view that the majority of the Council Fathers did not say what they meant and mean what they said. Even if there were, the notion that there is a spirit of the Council that diverges from its letter is absurd. For if the Council as such did not mean what it said and say what it meant, it was duplicitous. But although groups working in secret to prepare what they will say in public can be duplicitous, as can individuals, a group that does not work in secret lacks the insulation necessary for duplicity, insulation between insiders' communications among themselves and the group's communications with outsiders.

No doubt the documents of Vatican II were accepted by different bishops and groups at the Council with somewhat different intentions and, sometimes, with different interpretations. But the Council itself acted and taught only in the actions it officially took and the documents it approved and promulgated. Its 'mind' exists only in its deeds and words, all of which were recorded and have been published. It would not have been possible for Vatican II to say something other than what it meant, just as it would not be possible for any other like collective entity that does all its official business in the open. So, Vatican II *cannot* have meant anything but what it said.<sup>156</sup>

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155. Some "interpret" the Council's documents by assuming that they reflect the thought of theologians who contributed to drafts or whose works influenced drafts, even though the drafts the Council Fathers received contained only some elements of those theologians' thought and those drafts were criticized and amended by the Council Fathers.

156. Giuseppe Alberigo, "Preface: 1965-1995: Thirty Years after Vatican II" in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, *Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, Eng. version ed. Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995), xi-xii, takes the priority of the conciliar *event* over the *documents* of Vatican II as the guiding methodological idea of this history: "It is ever more pertinent to recognize the priority of the conciliar event itself, even in relation to its decisions, which are not to be read as abstract normative prescriptions but as an expression and prolongation of the event itself. The task of renewal, the anxious searching, openness to the gospel, fraternal attention to all human beings: these characteristics of Vatican II were not elements of folklore nor at all marginal and transient features. On the contrary, they sum up the spirit of the conciliar event, which any sound and correct interpretation of its decrees must take into account." This way of appealing to the spirit of Vatican II does not in itself involve the absurdity of the usual, less sophisticated way I have criticized. And the various sections of the volumes of the history, written by diverse historians, contain a great deal of information that critical readers will find useful. Nevertheless, editorial bias that will put readers on their guard is evident in the editors' failure to correct what they must have known was a grave misrepresentation of John XXIII's opening address to the Council: Andrea Riccardi, "Chapter 1," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2, *The Formation of the Council's*

The assembly of the Synod of Bishops convoked in 1985 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the close of Vatican II recognized inadequacies in the reception of the Council. It attributed them partly to an inadequate and selective reading of the documents, and partly to confusion between being open to the world, as Pope John and the Council were, and adopting the secularized world's mentality and values. As a remedy, the Synod Fathers called for a deeper reception of the Council, beginning with a deeper and more complete knowledge of what it actually taught:

The theological interpretation of the conciliar doctrine must show attention to all the documents, in themselves and in their close interrelationship, in such a way that the integral meaning of the Council's affirmations—often very complex—might be understood and expressed. Special attention must be paid to the four major Constitutions of the Council, which contain the interpretative key for the other Decrees and Declarations. It is not licit to separate the pastoral character from the doctrinal vigour of the documents. In the same way, it is not legitimate to separate the spirit and the letter of the Council. Moreover, the Council must be understood in continuity with the great tradition of the Church, and at the same time we must receive light from the Council's own doctrine for today's Church and the men of our time. The Church is one and the same throughout all the councils.<sup>157</sup>

That Synod also called for serious and ongoing efforts to encourage assent to the Council's teachings along with taking them to heart and putting them into practice.

### **8) One must try persistently to hear God's word in Scripture.**

In its document on Catholic faith, *Dei Filius*, Vatican I solemnly defined a proposition concerning the Bible: "If anyone does not accept as sacred and canonical the complete books of sacred Scripture with all their parts, as the Council of Trent listed them, or denies them to be divinely inspired, let that person be anathema" (DS 3029/1809). The Church holds the biblical books to be sacred and canonical, Vatican I explained, precisely because they were divinely inspired: "written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, those books have God as their author, and as such have been delivered to the Church" (DS 3006/1787).

Many scholars have tried to explain *how* the Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures, but no such account has been generally accepted and endorsed by the Church.<sup>158</sup> The

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*Identity*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, Eng. version ed. Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997), 14-18, purports to deal with Pope John's opening speech to the Council, but in fact quotes only from a draft, yet nowhere indicates that the speech John actually delivered differs materially from that draft, not least by the Pope's addition of the clarifying phrase, *keeping the same meaning and the same judgment*, at the end of the sentence in which he made the important distinction between the truths of faith and the manner in which they are enunciated.

157. Second Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, "Final *Relatio*," I, 5, *EV*, 9 (1983-85), 1744; *OR*, - 16 Dec. 1985, 6. Avery Dulles, S.J., "Vatican II: The Myth and the Reality," *America*, 188 (24 Feb. 2003): 7-11, describes conflicting readings of the Council by postconciliar "reformers" and "traditionalists," recommends the 1985 Synod's principles of interpretation, and lists twelve points on which the Council has been widely misunderstood.

158. See Richard F. Smith, S.J., "Inspiration and Inerrancy," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, vol. 2, *The New Testament and Topical Articles*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., and Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 505-12.

situation is similar to the conflicting theories about grace and free choice mentioned in **B-4**, above. In both cases there is a tendency to try to determine precisely what God causes and explain how he can cause it without preempting the human agent's role; as I explained, we should not suppose the causality of either God or human agents must be limited to leave room for that of the other. Although Vatican II provides no explanation of *how* the Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures, it seems to me to say all that is necessary about divine inspiration in the first paragraph of *Dei Verbum*, 11:

The things divinely revealed which are contained and presented in sacred Scripture in written form have been attested under the influence of the Holy Spirit. For in their entirety the books of both the Old and the New Testaments, with all their parts, are held by holy mother Church from apostolic faith as sacred and canonical, because, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (see Jn 20.31; 2 Tm 3.16; 2 Pt 1.19-21, 3.15-16), those books have God as their author, and as such have been delivered to the Church.<sup>1</sup> In composing the sacred books, God indeed chose human beings whom he employed, while they used their own powers and faculties,<sup>2</sup> so that with him acting in and through them,<sup>3</sup> they, as true authors, would convey in writing all those things and only those things that he wanted.<sup>4</sup>

1. See First Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith (Dei Filius)*, chap. 2 (DS 3006/1787); Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Decree* (18 June 1915), DS 3629/2180, *EB* 420; Congregation of the Holy Office, *Letter* (22 Dec. 1923), *EB* 499.

2. See Pius XII, Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (30 Sept. 1943), AAS 35 (1943) 314, *EB* 556.

3. *In* and *through* them: see Heb 1.1, 4.7 (*in*); 2 Sam 23.2, Mt 1.22 and *passim* (*through*); First Vatican Council, *Schema on Catholic Doctrine*, note 9, *Collectio lacensis*, VII, 522.

4. Leo XIII, Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (18 Nov. 1893), DS 3293/1952, *EB* 125.

Wishing to communicate with us, God created the actions of a group of human beings that brought about the books of the Bible, so that these books convey precisely what God wished to communicate. Everything about the actions that contributed to the result was inspired, but that takes nothing at all away from the complex set of factors ordinarily involved in human authorship. And since divine creative causality is unlike any created causality, speculating about *how* the Holy Spirit did what he did is confusing and useless.

Being inspired, Scripture expresses and bears witness to divine revelation; it is, as Vatican II teaches, “the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the influence of the divine Spirit” (DV 9). Vatican II also reaffirms a truth crucial for all work in theology: “Now, the sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and, since they are inspired, truly are the word of God; and so the study of the sacred page is as it were the soul of sacred theology.”<sup>159</sup>

The present volume draws mainly on the New Testament, especially the four Gospels. Vatican II reaffirms that they originate from the apostles, who preached as Jesus

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159. DV 24; fn. 3 refers to Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, *EB* 114; Benedict XV, *Spiritus Paraclitus*, *EB* 483.

commissioned them to do. Later, they and some of their associates were influenced by the Holy Spirit in putting the same preaching into writing (see DV 18). The Council also reaffirms that the four Gospels “faithfully hand on what Jesus, God’s Son, while living among us, really did and taught, up to the day on which he was assumed into heaven” (DV 19). The Council goes on to explain that the Gospel narratives benefited from the apostles’ growing understanding, and that pastoral needs shaped the selection and arrangement of material. But the Gospels “always communicate to us true and genuine accounts of Jesus” (DV 19).

If we really believe and take seriously that the Holy Spirit inspired the books of the Bible so that they contain what God wanted to communicate to us, we will listen attentively to them in the liturgy, read them privately, and seriously study them, always with one overarching purpose: to hear, understand, and take to heart what God wishes to communicate to us here and now, either for our own benefit or for the benefit of those whom he has called us to serve.<sup>160</sup> But sometimes, perhaps often, we are likely to be puzzled and even perplexed by what we hear, read, and study: “Why didn’t the Holy Spirit see to it that things would be clearer to me?” we wonder.

Some cryptic remarks by Jesus after explaining the parable of the sower are relevant here:

And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not on a stand? *For there is nothing hid, except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret, except to come to light.* If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.” And he said to them, “Take heed what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. For to him who has more will be given; and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” (Mk 4.21-25, italics added; cf. Mt 13.10-15, Lk 8.16-18)

The italicized sentence appears to be the key to understanding this passage.<sup>161</sup> It points back to Mk 4.11-12 where Jesus, paraphrasing Is 6.9-10, seemed to say that he was not explaining his parables to the public at large lest people repent and be forgiven. The point of that saying is not clear to me, but whatever it was, Jesus now assures us that nothing God reveals is meant to be permanently puzzling and perplexing. The light is meant to reach everyone. Even the obscurities in revelation are there to help communicate the message God wishes us to receive. But to receive it, we must be careful about what we hear—about whom we choose to listen to. Hearing, reading, and studying Scripture will pay off in proportion to what we put into them. If we approach Scripture with sincere faith, our faith will be nourished; but if we approach it without openness to God’s communication, our alienation from him will only be deepened.

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160. John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, 39, AAS 93 (2001) ???. *OR*, 10 Jan. 2001, VIII, calls for precisely that approach: “It is especially necessary that listening to the word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of *lectio divina*, which draws from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives [Latin: quae nos appellat, ordinat, in tota existentia conformat = which calls, guides, and integrally forms us].” *Lectio divina* will be treated in **3-B-2**, below.

161. See Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, Anchor Bible, 27 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 318-22.

Although people form intimate relationships by sharing secrets, even within such relationships people can have good reasons for keeping secrets from one another. Parents, for instance, hide Christmas presents from their children in order to heighten the fun of the celebration. Similarly, our risen Lord Jesus did not at once identify himself to the disappointed disciples on the road to Emmaus, and their ignorance made it possible for them to learn gradually by listening to him and to grow in their relationship with him until they finally recognized him: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Lk 24.32).

Revelation as a whole is a divine manifestation, and it includes more than information and facts. It is God’s self-manifestation for the purpose of forming a relationship with us—the relationship with which he wishes to bless us. Since God’s project requires our cooperation—our readiness to understand and effort to appropriate what is being offered—he provides just what we need to engage us, to allow us to be active in suitable ways. We become who we are to be with God and for him by understanding and appropriating what he offers.

Perplexing messages sometimes are the most effective. Pondering subtle, allusive poetry engages us far more deeply than do the one-dimensional, unambiguous messages usually communicated by the media; puzzling out mysterious remarks of loved ones can lead to ineffable insights into their unique personalities. Similarly, if the Holy Spirit made things easier for us, he would deprive us of opportunities to make an effort to understand and so to grow; instead, the Spirit gives us what we need. Moreover, he speaks to us not only as individuals, but also, and especially, together, and together we must listen to and appropriate God’s message and be formed into the communities of faith we are called to be. Only the hearing of the whole Church is fully sound. Hearing God’s word in the Church, we must move forward together “toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God are consummated in her” (DV 8).

### **9) When biblical writers assert something, it is true, and one should believe it.**

Despite the Church’s teaching about the divine inspiration of sacred Scripture, many today who work at and study theology seem to assume that the writers might well have made mistakes or even told lies. In recent years, some able and respected Catholic scholars have encouraged that view. For example, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., holds that, due to the limitations of its human authors, the Bible contains errors, even on matters religious. It is a mistake, he thinks, to exclude error from the Bible *a priori*; one must look at the evidence and weed out the errors.

Brown is aware that his view is at odds with the Church’s teaching prior to Vatican II. But he explains:

Many of us think that at Vatican II the Catholic Church “turned the corner” in the inerrancy question by moving from the *a priori* toward the *a posteriori* in the statement of *Dei verbum* 11: “The Books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.” Within its context, the statement is not without an ambiguity that stems from the compromise nature of *Dei verbum*. The Council in 1962 rejected the ultraconservative schema “On the Sources of Revelation” that originally

had been submitted, and so it became a matter of face-saving that in the revisions and in the final form of the Constitution the ultraconservatives should have their say. The result is often a juxtaposition of conservative older formulations with more open recent formulations. Those who wish to read *Dei verbum* in a minimalist way can point out that the sentence immediately preceding the one I just quoted says that everything in Scripture is asserted by the Holy Spirit and can argue that therefore “what God wanted put into the Scripture for the sake of our salvation” (which is without error) means every view the human author expressed in Scripture. However, there is noncritical exegesis of Church documents as well as noncritical exegesis of Scripture [note omitted]. Consequently, to determine the real meaning of *Dei verbum* one must study the discussions in the Council that produced it, and one must comb a body of evidence that can be read in different ways [note omitted].<sup>162</sup>

Brown goes on to mention a few facts about the conciliar debate and one theological interpretation of the evidence, and then states his view: “Everything in Scripture is inerrant to the extent to which it conforms to the salvific purpose of God.”<sup>163</sup>

Though Brown does not speak of the spirit of Vatican II, his way of dealing with the Council’s teaching is a paradigm of the method of those who use that expression to suggest that the Council’s real teachings are different from the propositions asserted in its documents. And, like many others who appeal to the spirit of Vatican II, he is an unreliable exegete of the conciliar text.

He focuses on a single sentence: “The Books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation,” and claims those who want to read that sentence “in a minimalist way can point out that the sentence immediately preceding the one I just quoted says that everything in Scripture is asserted by the Holy Spirit.”

When we look at the Council’s text, however, we find that what Brown speaks of as two sentences actually are parts of one complex sentence. He quotes one and inaccurately paraphrases the other. Moreover, the complex sentence begins with “Since, therefore,” which connects it logically with the preceding sentences on the inspiration of *the whole*

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162. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (New York: Paulist, 1981), 18-19.

163. *Ibid.*, 19. The theological interpretation Brown cites is the commentary of Alois Grillmeier, “The Divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 3:199-246. However, Grillmeier’s examination (210-15) of the underlying conciliar documents shows that even before Paul VI’s intervention, the Theological Commission was explaining “the truth of salvation” (replaced by the phrase “the truth which God wanted put into the sacred text for the sake of our salvation”) as implying no material limitation of the truth of Scripture but only indicating its formal specification. In his footnote, which I have omitted, Brown mentions another commentary but brushes it aside as “much more conservative”: Augustin Cardinal Bea, *The Word of God and Mankind* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1967), 184-93. Though Bea’s commentary undermines Brown’s position, Bea was not what is usually called conservative: he was an accomplished biblical scholar; he helped persuade John XXIII to establish the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and served as its first President; he was perhaps the most important person, besides John XXIII himself, who was both heavily involved in preparing Vatican II and not a preservationist; cf. Alberigo, “Conclusion: Preparing for What Kind of Council,” in Alberigo and Komonchak, eds., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 504-6.

of- Scripture (quoted in the previous section), and it includes “it follows that,” which logically connects its two parts. What *Dei Verbum*, 11, actually says is this:

Since, therefore, all that the inspired writers or sacred authors assert must be taken as asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture are to be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error the truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wanted confided to the sacred text.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, “all Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproving, for correcting, for instruction in justice; that the man of God may be perfect, equipped for every good work” (2 Tm 3.16-17, Greek text).

5. See St. Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, ii, 9, 20, *PL* 34:270-271, *CSEL* 28, 1, pp 46-47; *Epistle* 82, 3, *PL* 33:277, *CSEL* 34, 2, p. 354; St. Thomas, *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 2, c.; Council of Trent, session IV, *Decree on the Canonical Scriptures*, *DS* 1501/783; Leo XIII, Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, *EB* 121, 124, 126-127; Pius XII, Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*, *EB* 539.

Obviously, Brown is mistaken in claiming that someone can cite Vatican II as saying “everything in Scripture is asserted by the Holy Spirit.” What the Council actually says is that “all that the inspired writers or sacred authors assert must be taken as asserted by the Holy Spirit.” That difference is significant. There are in Scripture not only many sentences expressing no proposition but many sentences expressing propositions not asserted by their human authors.<sup>164</sup> As evidence of error in Scripture, for instance, Brown cites, among other things, a passage in the book of Job (14.13-22), which he says “many recognize” denies an afterlife.<sup>165</sup> But the passage occurs in one of Job’s speeches as he dialogues with his supposed friends—and it is hardly clear that the author of the Book of Job asserts any of the views asserted by participants in that dialogue.<sup>166</sup>

Moreover, as the expressions, “Since, therefore,” and “it follows that” indicate, the two paragraphs of DV 11 constitute a carefully crafted argument, which Brown overlooked or disregarded. With the sentence fragment he inaccurately paraphrases, Vatican II is not, as he alleges, making a concession to ultraconservatives before getting

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164. The distinction between making statements and asserting them is part of the theological tradition that was available to the Council in drafting *Dei Verbum*, 11. In showing that every lie is sinful, Thomas Aquinas takes up the objection that the evangelists did not sin in writing the Gospels, but at least some of them said things that were false, because different authors report differently what Christ or others said; Thomas answers that in such cases the writers did not assert that those very words were uttered, but that words conveying that sense were uttered (*S.t.*, 2-2, q. 110, a. 3, ad 1). (Thomas also points out that it is inadmissible to say that anything false *is asserted* in the canonical Scriptures, since that would undermine the certitude of faith.) The distinction between what is asserted and what is said without being asserted is one that Thomas uses regularly. For example, in dismissing objections based on mistaken statements quoted from the works of theological authorities such as Augustine and Anselm, he points out that the writers did not *assert* the views expressed in those statements, but only reported them or presented them as opinions: see, e.g., *S.t.*, 1, q. 77, a. 5, ad 3; q. 100, a. 2, ad 2.

165. Brown, op. cit., 16.

166. Toward the end of the book, after God speaks to him out of a whirlwind, Job says: “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42.3), and though God says Job has spoken “what is right” *of him* (42.7), he does not endorse everything Job has said. Also, Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, Anchor Bible, 15 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 108, offers a different reading of Job 14.13-15: “Job here gropes toward the idea of an afterlife.”

to its real point; rather, that sentence fragment states both the Council's conclusion drawn from the preceding paragraph and its premise for the sentence fragment Brown quotes.

Like most arguments informally stated, the two paragraphs of DV 11 leave implicit some elements of the Council's argument. But it can be reconstructed in logical form:

1) In their entirety the books of Scripture, with all their parts, were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. 2) Books written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit have God as their author. 3) Therefore, in their entirety the books of Scripture, with all their parts, have God as their author. 4) Books that have God as their author contain and present things divinely revealed. 5) Therefore, in their entirety the books of Scripture, with all their parts, contain and present things divinely revealed.

6) Books that contain and present things divinely revealed were the work of human authors whom God employed, they using their own powers and faculties, to convey in writing all those things and only those things that he wanted. 7) Therefore, in their entirety the books of Scripture, with all their parts, were the work of human authors whom God employed, they using their own powers and faculties, to convey in writing all those things and only those things he wanted.

8) Books that were the work of human authors whom God employed, they using their own powers and faculties, to convey in writing all those things and only those things he wanted include no proposition asserted by a human author that the Holy Spirit does not also assert. 9) Therefore, in their entirety the books of Scripture, with all their parts, include no proposition asserted by a human author that the Holy Spirit does not also assert.

10) Therefore, in their entirety the books of Scripture, with all their parts, have three attributes: they contain and present things divinely revealed (from 5, above), they convey in writing all those things and only those things God wanted (from 7, above), and they include no proposition asserted by a human author that the Holy Spirit does not also assert (from 9, above). 11) Books having those three attributes are books that teach firmly, faithfully, and without error the truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wanted confided to the sacred text. 12) Therefore, in their entirety the books of Scripture, with all their parts, teach firmly, faithfully, and without error the truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wanted confided to the sacred text.

Restated like this, the premises of the Council's argument obviously not only establish its conclusion but explain why it is true; in doing so, they also specify the meaning of the expressions used to state the conclusion. Thus, the meaning of the words "the truth" in the conclusion must include the truth of, at least, all the propositions asserted by the human authors.<sup>167</sup> In detaching the sentence on which he focuses (12 in my restatement) from the premise he regards as a sop to conservatives (9 in my restatement), Brown rejects Vatican II's conclusion, for he rejects the proposition Vatican II actually taught by the sentence on which he focuses (12 in my restatement).

Since DV 11 makes it clear that only the propositions asserted by the sacred writers convey truths to be believed, DV 12 goes on to set out norms for interpreting the biblical

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167. The argument shows that the truth without error that God wanted to convey through the books of Scripture must include the truth of all the propositions asserted by the inspired writers. But that conclusion is compatible with the position that Scripture texts contain more truths than the sacred writers asserted, namely, those conveyed by the *sensus plenior*, which emerges from considering the biblical books together and in the context of the entire tradition of the Church's faith.

books and identifying the propositions asserted. One must take into account not only the human authors' literary options (for example, the use of dialogue by the author of Job) and sociocultural context but other expressions of faith articulated in cooperation with the Holy Spirit—other biblical books and the living Tradition of the Church—and the coherence of all the truths of faith.

Brown says nothing about identifying the human authors' assertions.<sup>168</sup> Still, he does accept something of what the Council prescribes, for he holds that the Bible is an effective instrument of God's saving purpose when it is considered as a whole and proclaimed within the Church's living tradition as a whole. But *only* thus considered, he thinks, can the Bible, despite its errors, lead us to all the truth we need to help us on the way to salvation. In his view, for instance, later Old Testament passages and, especially, the New Testament make clear the truth about afterlife, thus relativizing the error he thinks he finds in Job.<sup>169</sup> For Brown, any part of the Bible conveys God's word only when considered as a part of the whole Bible and the Church's tradition, and interpreted as such.

Brown's implicit rejection of divine inspiration *as Vatican I and Vatican II understood it* is not surprising. Logically, anyone who denies Vatican II's conclusion (that all the propositions asserted by the inspired authors are without error) must deny at least one of the premises from which it follows. Brown implicitly denies not only that the sacred writers cooperated with the Holy Spirit in asserting what they asserted but that they were divinely inspired in the sense taught by both Vatican II and by Vatican I—the latter with a solemn definition.<sup>170</sup>

It should be noted that, while the teaching in *Dei Verbum* 12 about biblical interpretation implies that Catholics are in a better position than Jews or Protestants to interpret the Bible, Brown's view implies that no book of the Bible can mediate God's revelation to believing Jews and others who do not accept the New Testament or to non-Catholic Christians, who do not receive the Bible within the living tradition of the Church as a whole. Indeed, if one were to take seriously what Brown says, it would seem that most Catholics, who cannot possibly study each bit of Scripture in the context of the whole Bible and tradition, would do better not to read the Bible at all—a conclusion Brown surely would not have welcomed.

It does not follow from what has been said that we should expect the Bible to answer questions having nothing to do with anyone's salvation. It is reasonable to suppose God's saving purpose in communicating with humankind will have limited the propositions the

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168. Like most other Scripture scholars, Brown in his exegetical works provides little help for readers who wish to pick out the propositions that the human author of a biblical book is asserting. Indeed, Catholic exegetes seem to have ignored DV 12; for a commentary on that state of affairs, see Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., "Interpretation of Holy Scripture in the Spirit in Which It Was Written (*Dei Verbum* 12c)," in *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-five Years After (1962-1987)*, ed. René Latourelle, vol. 1 (New York: Paulist, 1988), 220-66.

169. See Brown, *op. cit.*, 19-21.

170. Brown does not intend to deny divine inspiration: "I fully accept the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Bible as the word of God, and the whole discussion assumes that fact" (*ibid.*, 3). He only implicitly denies inspiration by misinterpreting *truth* in the sentence on which he focuses.

inspired writers assert to truths that at least some people needed to know to form their relationship with him and live their lives in response to his love. But this does not amount to agreeing with those who take Vatican II's phrase, "for the sake of our salvation," to be a restriction upon the inerrancy of Scripture. They assume other propositions are asserted in Scripture and might be false. I deny this, and, in denying it, hold that the Holy Spirit inspires every part of every book of Scripture and makes no false assertions.

Moreover, in practice there is a great difference between the two approaches. Someone who supposes that the Bible contains some false assertions tends to ask whether what is taken as an assertion in the Bible is true and then looks to extrinsic criteria to answer the question. This will lead to the exclusion of some propositions that are saving truths but happen to be hard to understand and/or accept. Someone who supposes that, as the Church teaches, the Bible contains no assertions of false propositions is inclined to ask how what is taken as an assertion in the Bible can be true. To answer, it will be necessary to seek the statement's meaning in its larger context and ultimate reference to salvation. In the last resort, one might conclude—with the help of other parts of the Bible, the whole of tradition, and current documents of the Church's teaching office—that some apparently asserted propositions are not really such. In any case, by truly doing one's best to discover God's message in even the most perplexing passages, one will reap the benefit he intended to provide by creating them.

Faithful Catholics should not dissolve perplexities regarding the Bible by assuming the inspired writers erred or lied; they should struggle with the perplexities, firm in the conviction that whatever the writers actually assert is God's truth. But they should bear in mind that it is often hard to tell whether the inspired writers really are asserting the propositions they seem to assert, or even to know what proposition, if any, an inspired writer meant to express. Since most of us can read the Bible only in English translations and lack the historical knowledge required to interpret it, we do well to make judicious use of commentaries by competent exegetes, which often help one avoid gross misunderstandings.<sup>171</sup>

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171. Though Raymond Brown's theological effort to explain the inerrancy of Scripture is gravely defective, his exegetical work on the New Testament is almost always helpful, and I sometimes cite it.

## **D: Jesus the Priest: Obedient Son and Self-Sacrificing Servant**

### **1) Humankind needs to be saved from sin and death.**

Many people today do not believe in original sin. Even among them, however, those who are thoughtful admit that there is something terribly wrong with our lives and societies. As individuals, we are in a state of general conflict—of inner turmoil, of falling short of our own standards, of struggling with others. Meanwhile, nations, classes, and groups of all sorts pursue what they regard as their own good, often with little or no consideration for others and sometimes to their detriment.

Many factors other than bad free choices sometimes account for antisocial behavior: immaturity, misunderstandings and mistakes, psychological illnesses, defects in the sociocultural environment, and so on. People who do not believe in free choice often attribute all misbehavior to such factors. Marxists and many Western secular humanists consider evil a stage of evolutionary development and expect the unfolding dialectic of history or human progress eventually to overcome it.<sup>172</sup> But it is a different story when people encounter calculated injustice toward themselves and their loved ones, in which they perceive the guilty party's irreducible responsibility for a malicious free choice: "How could you do that?"

Some who recognize the reality of wrongful free choices do not accept the traditional doctrine of original sin. Some identify original sin with inevitable aspects of the human condition, while others identify it with the persisting social effects of the actual sins of persons and groups—the structures that constitute a worldwide tangle of ongoing sinful practices in which all of us are more or less enmeshed. Some of the latter group suggest that this tangle of sinful practices is the sin of the world that Jesus came to take away (see Jn 1.29).<sup>173</sup> No such theory is a sound theology of original sin. Baptism frees us from original sin, but it does not eliminate inevitable aspects of human nature or extricate us from the worldwide network of sinful practices.

As Vatican II teaches, one not only finds oneself involved in pervasive disorder but realizes that such evils "cannot come from our good creator" (GS 13); and if pervasive evils cannot be referred to God, we must look instead at the beginning of human history. The Council teaches: "Though constituted by God in righteousness, from the very beginning of his history, man, persuaded by the Evil One, abused his liberty, setting himself against God and wanting to attain his end apart from God" (GS 13).

Again, although death is inevitable and in some sense natural, the peoples of most cultures have expected some sort of survival beyond death. Deep in our hearts we

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172. Paradoxically, secular humanists often passionately condemn and praise people for what they do. Of course, there is a sense in which we can reasonably hold even an animal responsible for its behavior, and compatibilist theories (see **B-1**, above) suggest various senses in which actions, even if determined, could be free and imputable to human agents.

173. For a fuller discussion of various positions and references, see *CMP*, 336-39 and 356.

consider death abominable, a sign that something is profoundly wrong with the human condition. This common sense of humankind is confirmed by revelation: “God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist” (Wis 1.13-14). Sin and death are tightly related. Vatican II teaches that human beings would have been immune from bodily death had they not sinned (see GS 18); and death also lends a kind of support to sin, since the wicked seek oblivion in death (see Wis 1.16-2.9).

In its teaching on original sin, Vatican II reaffirms what the Council of Trent taught in much greater detail and definitively: that the first man, Adam, was constituted in justice and holiness; that he disobeyed a divine command; that he thereby lost justice and holiness, and incurred death as a punishment; that his loss of justice and holiness was for the whole of humankind as well as for himself; that he passed on to all men and women not only the punishment (that is, death) but the sin itself; that the sin is passed on by propagation, not by bad example; that it is right to baptize infants and cleanse them of original sin, for they really do contract it; and that concupiscence—that is, unruly emotion that inclines people to sin—remains even in the baptized. Trent’s teaching is rooted in Scripture, and not only in Genesis: Trent also asserted that the Church has always understood Paul to teach (in Rom 5.12) the universality of both original sin and the need for redemption from it.<sup>174</sup>

The doctrine of original sin raises many questions. Some are rooted in details of the account in Genesis and its elaboration by the Church Fathers that are not part of Trent’s careful treatment. They need not concern us. But others, which bear upon truths of faith defined by Trent, do need to be considered. For instance, sin usually is something one does, not something one is born with—so how can original sin be passed on by propagation? Someone’s sinful choice cannot be passed on to anyone who does not join in it. What is passed on pertains to a state of sin resulting from a sinful choice, together with some of that state’s consequences.<sup>175</sup> It seems to me that one can explain what Trent defines about original sin’s transmission as follows.

God gave the first human beings sanctifying grace and called them to be the beginning of a human community that would live together as his family on earth.<sup>176</sup> It was up to those first human beings to respond to that call, to carry out their responsibility to live together as a community in friendship with God. In a patriarchal family, the

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174. See DS 1511-15/788-92; this teaching prescinds from the case of Mary (see DS 1516/792). On original sin, also see CCC, 385-421; *CMP*, ch. 14. On concupiscence, see CCC, 2515.

175. See CCC, 404-5. The *Catechism* says (in 404): “How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam ‘as one body of one man’”; and here refers (fn. 293) to Thomas Aquinas, *De malo*, q. 4, a. 1, for the quoted phrase. Thomas there considers the whole human race as a single community, which was in Adam inasmuch as he had the power and the responsibility to keep it in friendship with God. The *Catechism* then goes on: “By this ‘unity of the human race’ all men are implicated in Adam’s sin, as all are implicated in Christ’s justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand.” Thomas’s explanation seems to me to suggest, without fully articulating, an account along the lines I shall propose.

176. Vatican II teaches that God, “planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation . . . from the start manifested himself to our first parents” (DV 3).

husband-father's choice usually is required for the family's action. However, the action of any group of people who share a common responsibility always finally depends on the choice of a particular individual—for example, the leader of a group that has a single leader, or the member of a group of leaders whose choice is decisive, or the last person who forms the consensus required for the group to act, or the first one who blocks a consensus without which the group cannot act. Therefore, whether the initial group of human beings was a single couple or a larger group, *Adam* can be understood as naming the individual whose choice made it impossible for the initial group of human beings to respond to God's call as they should have done.

Had Adam not sinned, the initial group could (and perhaps would) have responded to God's call to be the beginning of his human family, and that family could (and perhaps would) have lived in peace with God and remained undivided in itself.<sup>177</sup> In that case, each new member would be a member of God's family and would share in the grace it enjoyed. But Adam did sin, the first human beings as a group did not respond to God's call, and they and all subsequent members of the human species passed along being-human-in-that-graceless-state. Coming to be as human is not coming to be as a member of God's family.<sup>178</sup> That lack of grace is a privation insofar as God at the beginning called humans to share in his friendship by coming to be as members of a human community that shared in it. Thus, when members of the fallen human community come to be without grace, they lack what they should have enjoyed, and thus share in the state that Adam's sin initiated.

In the past, Christians generally assumed that the details of the Genesis story were asserted by the sacred writer (see **C-9**, above), and so supposed that the human race descended from a single pair of individuals. This is called "monogenism." However, some people now think that the human race could not have descended from a single pair of individuals but must have evolved from a sizable, interbreeding population. This is called "polygenism." However, if the human race did evolve, no matter how organically like us various now-extinct primates were, they were not yet human as long as they were without intelligence and free choice—capacities involving self-reference and self-causation that cannot be accounted for as modifications of organically based functions. Whether formed from the dust of the earth or from some group of subhuman primates, therefore, human persons had to come into being by a divine act of creative power. The emergence of humans in the world therefore had to be sudden, and so I can imagine no scientific evidence that could tell against the explanation I offer, even if polygenism is admitted.<sup>179</sup>

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177. I say, "could (and perhaps would)," because we know nothing about what would have happened had Adam not sinned.

178. According to Thomas (*S.t.*, 1-2, q. 82, aa. 1-2), the central privation that constitutes the evil of original sin in those to whom it is transmitted is the absence of grace from concrete human nature; also see T. C. O'Brien, O.P., "Appendix 7: Sin Caused by Origin," in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 26, ed. T. C. O'Brien, O.P. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 133-43.

179. My explanation does not concede polygenism but is compatible with it. Both Pius XII and Paul VI warn that polygenism *appears* incompatible with the Church's teaching: Pius XII, DS 3897/2328; Paul VI, "Original Sin and Modern Science: Address of Pope Paul VI to Participants in a Symposium on

How can death, which seems natural, have resulted from sin?

Death is natural in two senses: (1) As organisms, human persons are in principle susceptible to death; and (2) in the present human condition, death is inevitable.<sup>180</sup> As the destruction of the bodily person, however, death is a great evil and hardly appropriate for persons created in God's image and called to share in divine life. So, as some Church Fathers suggested, the Church's teaching is best understood to imply only that God would have *preserved* humans from bodily death if they had not sinned (see *CMP*, 347). We can only speculate about how he would have done that and what would have happened if only some individuals sinned while the human race as such remained in friendship with God.

How can concupiscence—unruly emotion that inclines to sin—be a consequence of original sin? Human beings were created in God's friendship—in a “state of holiness and justice” (DS 1511/788). Losing that state by sin, they were doomed to die. Moreover, no longer unified by their common friendship with God, they were bound to experience more or less serious conflict among themselves.

Human beings are in a more difficult situation than other creatures destined to die. Animals will die, but they do not know it. We do know it and are profoundly anxious.<sup>181</sup> Due to original sin, human beings “through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage” (Heb 2.15). At the same time, interpersonal conflict generates anger and hatred, and skews people's emotions to favor themselves and their group against others. Given anxiety and self-concern, the whole human emotional makeup is distorted. Pleasure becomes desirable as an anodyne for dread; wealth provides a sense of security; power and status offer freedom from subjection to others. Rather than submit to sound judgments of conscience, feelings resist, as St. Paul points out: “I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members” (Rom 7.22-23).

Since they affect memory and learning, emotions disordered by anxiety about death and by social stresses make our experience in general very different from what it would otherwise have been, and our sense of what is good and sympathy are skewed and limited. This disorder is reflected in what we do and make—in language, art, science, and technology. Human culture as a whole is affected for the worse. Sin's cultural consequences set up a kind of vicious circle in which distortion at the cultural level

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Original Sin,” *AAS* 58 (1966) 649-55, *The Pope Speaks*, 11 (1966): 234. But Edouard Dhanis, S.J., and Jan Visser, C.Ss.R., “The Supplement to ‘A New Catechism’: On Behalf of the Commission of Cardinals appointed to examine ‘A New Catechism,’” in *A New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults (with Supplement)* (New York: Seabury, 1973), 527-29, 534-37, offer a speculative account, somewhat like mine, that renders the Church's essential teaching on original sin compatible with polygenism. Although the editors of that *Catechism* did not revise it in accord with the contents of that “Supplement,” Paul VI did not pursue the matter, and thus tacitly accepted the modifications of the Dhanis-Visser supplement as adequate corrections of the *New Catechism*, at least with respect to original sin.

180. Pius V condemned the proposition of Michael de Bay: “The immortality of the first human being was not a gift of grace but a natural condition” (DS 1978/1078).

181. For psychological literature that supports this statement, see Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973).

returns to and reinforces distortion already existing on the individual psychological level. Think of children who are imbued with a perverse view of reality, a distorted understanding of what is good, by watching television indiscriminately.

Original sin not only brings about this pervasive change for the worse, which gives rise to temptations that would not have occurred in the condition of innocence, but weakens the will so that human beings are more vulnerable to temptation. How can the will be weakened before committing sins that develop vices? The will cannot be weakened in itself. However, one chooses among a range of possibilities, and some possibilities can be far more or far less attractive than others to a person as a whole. Given the change for the worse in this “person as a whole” described above, there are more, and often more attractive, morally unacceptable possibilities, and fewer, and often less appealing, morally acceptable ones.

Thus, original sin results in concupiscence—a skewing of feelings and weakening of will which together constitute an inclination to sin that even baptism does not remove.<sup>182</sup>

Why does God punish babies for a sin committed by their most remote ancestor?

Divine punishments are not like human punishments. Human punishments are chosen from among various possibilities and are imposed on wrongdoers. If one imagines that God does the same in punishing sins, the punishment of original sin will seem unfair. But the punishments for sins are their inevitable bad consequences, considered insofar as God permits them in dealing appropriately with the sins (see *CCC*, 1472). In the case of original sin, the consequences are indeed horrible, yet God permits them because they make possible great goods—ultimately, the goods of salvation and everlasting life through Christ Jesus (see Rom 5.12-21), so that, during the Easter Vigil, “the Exultet sings, ‘O happy fault, . . . which gained for us so great a Redeemer’” (*CCC*, 412). Note, too, that the consequences would not count as a punishment if those suffering them did not somehow share in the sin. But, as I have explained, all of us do share in original sin simply by coming to be as members of fallen humankind.

If original sin is something included in humankind’s hereditary makeup, how did God prevent Mary from inheriting it?

Original sin is not included in humankind’s hereditary makeup as an essential part of human nature; it is not a sort of genetic defect that corrupts and replaces our nature as it was in the beginning. If it were, Mary (and, for that matter, Jesus himself) would have inherited it along with human nature. However, original sin did not change human nature in itself but only changed its condition: The human race as a whole is not, as it could and

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182. Were Jesus and Mary subject to concupiscence? On the one hand, concupiscence is defined as a consequence of original sin, to which Jesus and Mary were not subject; therefore, they were not subject to concupiscence. On the other hand, at least some temptations we experience are due to concupiscence—which is not sin—and Jesus is “not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4.15). That Jesus is “like us in all things but sin” is also included in the Council of Chalcedon’s definitive teaching regarding him (DS 301/148). So, it seems, Jesus (and, presumably, Mary) shared the weaknesses that in us pertain to concupiscence, but without being subject to concupiscence. Moreover, in them, human weaknesses never led to venial sin, as concupiscence sometimes does; and their consistently making and carrying out good and holy choices integrated their feelings.

should have been, a community whose members live together in friendship with God. People do not receive grace just by beginning to be as human beings, and it is that lack of grace, insofar as it results from the fallen human condition, that essentially constitutes original sin. But the human condition could not prevent God's Word from becoming man in divine friendship, since the Word who is God cannot be alienated from God. Nor could the fallen human condition prevent God's preserving Mary from original sin by bringing her to be in grace, any more than it can prevent his redeeming others, who come to be in original sin, by giving them grace.

## **2) God sent his Son to save everyone from original sin and its consequences.**

Jesus' very name signifies his mission: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1.21). *His people* here refers to all of fallen humankind, without exception: God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2.4).

God revealed himself to the first human beings, and after their sin promised them redemption (see Gn 3.15; DV 3). With an offering of a covenant to Abraham and its acceptance (see Gn 17.1-14), the history of God's chosen people begins. His saving work develops when he liberates Abraham's descendants from Egypt and establishes with them the Sinai covenant through Moses (see Ex 20 and 24). That covenant clearly articulates essential requirements of a human community in friendship with God (see Ex 20-23, Dt 5-6). Yet even the Sinai covenant was only a stage in God's saving work; it pointed forward to an inclusive covenant and an everlasting kingdom. God's people will be expanded to include all nations (see Is 2.2-3, 25.1-9, 42.1-7, 49.1-7, 60.1-5, 66.10-19). The new covenant will be written on people's hearts rather than stone tablets, and every one of God's people will know him intimately (see Jer 31.31-34; cf. Is 59.21, Ez 36.26-27).

The promise of salvation is fulfilled in Jesus: "The law was given through Moses; grace and peace came through Jesus Christ" (Jn 1.17). Indissoluble communion of God and humankind is realized in his very person, and the ultimate purpose of all the covenants is finally fulfilled (see Gal 3.15-29). Jesus' mission is to save the whole world: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3.16-17). Having carried out his personal mission, Jesus commissions his disciples to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28.19; cf. 8.11).

God's saving work in Jesus deals definitively with original sin, as Paul most clearly teaches:

If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. (Rom 5.17-19)

Jesus is the new Adam, but, as Paul makes clear, Jesus is more effective in redeeming humankind than the original Adam was in implicating it in sin.

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3.8). The Evil One had a role in original sin (see CCC, 390-91, 397), and Satan has a kingdom in this world (see Mt 12.26, Mk 3.24-26, Lk 11.18). Jesus announces the reign of God, and, by both his words and his deeds, shows that it is displacing Satan’s: “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Mt 12.28). When Jesus’ disciples report that they have cast out demons in his name, he sees their success as the Evil One’s defeat: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Lk 10.18).

To deal with humankind’s self-deprivation of divine fellowship, Jesus serves personally as the nucleus of God’s family on earth<sup>183</sup>—a family whose members are reborn by faith and baptism into the kingdom (see Tit 3.4-7; cf. Jn 1.12-13, 3.5-8). Having justified by grace those who accept him with faith, Jesus empowers them with the Spirit to live as God’s children (see Rom 8.1-17) and shows them how: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me” (Mt 11.29). He also empowers and teaches his disciples to live together in love, forgiving one another and working for one another’s salvation: “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15.12).

Many Jews believed that death would be overcome by resurrection, and Jesus affirmed that belief (see Mt 22.29-33, Mk 12.24-27, Lk 20.34-38) and also made clear how the hoped-for resurrection will be achieved. He himself is its principle: “I am the resurrection and the life” (Jn 11.25). And he makes resurrection available through the Eucharist: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn 6.53-54; cf. CCC, 994). Having himself died and risen from the dead, he “will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil 3.21). Although those who live in fellowship with Jesus still die, death will be overcome in the end (see 1 Cor 15.20-28).

Even now, those who live in Jesus enjoy better options. Confidently hoping to share in his resurrection, they are no longer enslaved by fear of death. Concupiscence remains, but its power is broken. Having been raised with Jesus, they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and by his power they can replace the inclination to sin with an inclination to live in the peace of Christ and for the glory of God (see Col 3.1-17).

### **3) Rejected by Israel’s leaders, Jesus prepares to establish his Church.**

Although the Old Testament pointed to a universal reign of God (see **A-1**, above), those who rejected Jesus failed to welcome it when it arrived. Jesus called people to repentance and to faith—in *himself*. He was asking people to accept his leadership and follow him in carrying out God’s plan for ushering in the kingdom. Once Jesus became a public figure, what he said and did had to be taken seriously by the establishment. But

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183. As CCC, 542, puts it: “Christ stands at the heart of this gathering of men into the ‘family of God.’ . . . Into this union with Christ all men are called.”

his approach challenged cherished assumptions, and provoked opposition and resistance. What happened to him “cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today” (NA 4). But conflict with the elites was inevitable.

Underlying it were incompatible conceptions of evil and how to deal with it. The old covenant establishes a community in friendship with God, but it is limited; and in the context of conflict between God’s chosen people and other nations with their false gods, the Israelites naturally tended to think of enemies as evil. Moreover, Israel’s profound appreciation for God’s otherness lent support to practices based on the idea that holiness required separation from anything defiled. At least some of the Pharisees externalized evil and viewed it as something localized, from which those who wished to be pure must keep themselves apart. Their legalism promised a secure relationship with God in exchange for behavioral exactness.

By contrast, Jesus did not regard evil as something that can be segregated and shunned, but as a privation primarily affecting the human heart (see Mt 15:1-20; Mk 7:1-23) and mutilating God’s good creation. The reign of God involves filling the wound of evil with healing love. Some Pharisees were shocked and scandalized at seeing Jesus regularly dining with the irreligious, ignoring the distinctions between clean and unclean, “sinners” and “righteous.” In their view, he was not only breaking the rules for dealing with evil but being far too indiscriminate about the kind of people he was ready to accept into the kingdom. The conflict came to a head over Jesus’ curing on the sabbath and his explanation that to overcome evil God’s creative activity had to continue even then (see Jn 5.17).

Jesus presented a threat that such Pharisees had to resist (see Jn 5.37-47, 9.1-41). Their resistance moved him to fury (see Mt 23.1-35), while his opponents for their part were moved to an exercise of destructive power—exerting pressure against those who would have believed Jesus and seeking his death (see Jn 11.45-53, 12.42-43).

Jesus’ attitude and behavior were hardly less unsettling to another group, the zealots. They also tended to externalize evil, but emphasized politics.<sup>184</sup> The Roman domination of Israel was terribly offensive to them, and their preferred response was violence. Though Jesus’ proclamation of God’s kingdom also threatened the established order, he rejected recourse to violence: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy’”; but he proposed a radically different rule of conduct: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt 5.43-44). Again, Jesus’ answer to evil is healing love; but as that answer was not acceptable to the zealots, here, too, conflict was inevitable.

Jesus also came into conflict with many of the leaders of the priestly caste, defenders of the status quo anxious to maintain their privileged position. This troublesome upstart from Galilee threatened the stability that suited them. It was necessary to get rid of him.

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184. N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 189-97, argues that there was a significant overlap between Pharisees and zealots.

In undertaking to gather up “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 10.6, 15.24), Jesus hoped Israel would accept the good news he brought, repent, join with him, and carry on as God’s incipient kingdom on earth. But it became increasingly clear to him that was not going to happen.<sup>185</sup> Jesus’ many miracles and exorcisms, culminating in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, were signs sufficient to make it unreasonable for his opponents to reject him and his message (see Jn 10.24-32). Still, they demanded a sign from heaven, a sign such as the prophets called down (see Mt 16.1; cf. Mk 8.11-12). He refused: “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah” (Mt 16.4). Jesus himself is the sign from heaven, but many leaders of Israel would not recognize him.

Jesus warned his disciples: “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Mt 16.6). The disciples misunderstood, showing weak faith in Jesus even though he had multiplied loaves and fishes. When he repeated the warning, they finally realized he was warning against the Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ teachings (see Mt 16.7-12). With the elite’s refusal to recognize him, it was clear that Israel’s teachers not only failed to practice what they preached but would no longer even teach reliably.

At this turning point, Jesus and his disciples reached the northernmost part of Israel, the district of Caesarea Philippi. Jesus was about to head south toward Jerusalem. But first

... he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. (Mt 16.13-20)

Recognizing that Israel as a whole would not be the incipient kingdom, Jesus elicits Peter’s acknowledgment of who he really is, then makes that act of faith the principle of

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185. As God, Jesus was omniscient, but his divinity and humanity were not merged together. Here and in what follows, I accept the evangelists’ indications that Jesus’ human understanding of his mission developed. Since people cannot make free choices unless they think the options confronting them really are unsettled, ignorance of relevant future events is a necessary condition for making free choices. Since Jesus was a man like us in all things save sin (see DS 301/148, 554/290), he really made human free choices. So, Jesus generally could not humanly foresee many future events. He really tried to gather up the lost sheep of the house of Israel and learned by experience that they would not cooperate (see Mt 23.37, Lk 13.34). I also accept the evangelists’ indications that Jesus knew he was God’s Son and knew what he was doing when he named Peter the rock on which the Church would be built, instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and so on. The Holy Spirit, who provided the prophets with knowledge naturally unavailable to human beings, certainly provided Jesus with whatever human knowledge he needed, and would not otherwise have had, to understand his mission and carry it out. For a fuller treatment of Jesus’ human knowledge, see Jean Galot, S.J., *Who Is Christ? A Theology of the Incarnation*, trans. M. Angeline Bouchard (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1981), 344-75.

his new house of faith—"my church"—by designating Peter the "rock" on which he will "build" it (cf. Jn 1.42).

Of course, Jesus himself will remain the Church's solid foundation (see 1 Cor 3.10-11); but he gives Peter, who has received God's revelation, a participation in being her foundation.<sup>186</sup> Through Peter, who will serve as the Church's leader on his behalf, Jesus will maintain a visible, human presence in the world. As with the chamberlain of a royal household, Peter will be given keys to use in this world—the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, Jesus' Church will exist in the world as the beginning of God's kingdom.<sup>187</sup>

Why will the powers of death ("gates of hades") not prevail against Jesus' Church built on Peter? Were Jesus a false messiah, his death would convince those who believed in him that they had made a mistake, and there would be no lasting community. Jesus knows he is about to die but he also knows that what he will do at the Last Supper together with his death and resurrection will establish the fellowship of the new covenant, that he will vivify it by sending the Holy Spirit, and that he will remain with it not only invisibly but, by means of Peter and his successors, visibly. Thus, the powers of death will not prevail over the Church Jesus will establish; the kingdom of heaven will prevail over the realm of the dead.

Some commentators argue that Jesus cannot have spoken of "my church." They think this expression must rather reflect the early Church's claim to have sprung from Jesus' initiative and to enjoy his sponsorship and authority. But solid scholarship supports the authenticity of the expression. In assuming the title, "Son of Man," Jesus alluded to Daniel 7.13-14, where the Son of Man is not merely a private person, but the representative of God's holy ones; similarly, the title, "Messiah" (Christ), which Jesus accepts, designated Israel's hoped-for, saving leader.<sup>188</sup> No community can act except by its leaders' actions; so, recognizing that Israel, by her leaders' actions, would reject him, Jesus had to think of the remnant of Israel that followed him as his own community. Thus, Albright and Mann translate *ekklesia* in Matthew 16.18 by "my community" and comment:

*my community (ekklesia).* The use of this Greek word in the Pauline letters antedates the final edition of the Greek gospels by some two decades. It is hard to know what kind of thinking, other than confessional presupposition, justifies the tendency of some commentators to dismiss this verse as not authentic. A Messiah without a Messianic Community would have been unthinkable to any Jew, and how precisely one Jewish group (at least) thought of that Community has been brought sharply into focus by the Qumran literature. The LXX [Septuagint] used *ekklesia* to translate words which denoted an assembly of any character, and it is a word which

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186. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, cap. 16, lect. ii, on v. 18, thus plausibly reconciles diverse views.

187. See W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, Anchor Bible, 26 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), 196-97.

188. See K. L. Schmidt, "ekklesia," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:521; Schmidt's treatment of Mt 16.18 and 18.17 as a whole (518-26) supports the authenticity of "my church" in 16.18.

invariably translated Hebrew equivalents from the stem *qhl*. The character of the assembly in Hebrew is denoted by possessive genitives (e.g., “of the Lord,” “of the children of Israel,” “of the prophets”).<sup>189</sup>

Of course, arguments against the authenticity of “my church” also are unacceptable if they assume or claim that the author of the Gospel according to Matthew is asserting something false (see **C-9**, above).

Some commentators say that “Son of God” adds nothing to “Messiah.” They point out that the identification of Jesus by Peter as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” cannot mean that Peter affirmed the doctrine defined by the Council of Chalcedon (see DS 301-2/148) more than four centuries later. And, as a matter of fact, “Son of God,” considered in itself, can have a limited sense. “In the Old Testament, ‘*son of God*’ is a title given to the angels, the Chosen People, the children of Israel, and their kings [note 44 omitted]. . . . When the promised Messiah-King is called ‘son of God,’ it does not necessarily imply that he was more than human, according to the literal meaning of these texts.”<sup>190</sup>

However, the faith in Jesus’ divinity that Chalcedon eventually defined was attested by many other passages of the New Testament, not only explicitly, as in the first chapter of John’s Gospel, but also clearly, though implicitly, when Jesus claims divine prerogatives.<sup>191</sup> Peter’s confession occurs in a context suggesting that Jesus is superior to any and all of the prophets. Had Peter meant no more by “Son of the living God” than similar expressions meant in the Old Testament, anyone who considered Jesus the Messiah could have said the same thing. But Jesus responds, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood [a human being] has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 16.17). The implication plainly is that Peter’s confession has a meaning previously unavailable to human beings.<sup>192</sup> So, Peter may well have articulated for the first time the truth of faith that Chalcedon, using concepts not yet available in New Testament times, solemnly taught with its developed doctrine.

Peter’s confession is not the only passage in the Synoptics to speak of Jesus as the Father’s Son in an unprecedented sense:

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189. Op. cit., 195-96.

190. CCC, 441; omitted note 44: “Cf. Deut 14:1; (LXX) 32:8; Job 1:6; Ex 4:22; Hos 2:1; 11:1; Jer 3:19; Sir 36:11; Wis 18:13; 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 82:6.”

191. For example: Jesus forgives the sins of a paralytic; some Scribes and Pharisees think Jesus is blaspheming because only God can forgive sins; knowing what they are thinking, Jesus confirms his authority to forgive sins by healing the paralytic. The paralytic and the crowd glorify God and the crowd is amazed (see Lk 5.18-26; cf. Mt 9.2-8, Mk 2.3-12); in Lk 5.26, the crowd exclaims: “We saw wonderful things today.” *Wonderful things* here translates *paradoxa* (literally, against belief or opinion), which in the New Testament occurs only here. Jesus, though a human being, had claimed a divine prerogative and made good his claim—something believed impossible. But the crowd knew what they had seen.

192. Implicit in Jesus’ response, too, is a claim to such intimacy with his heavenly Father that he is privy to the Father’s act of making his identity known to Peter. On this point, see CCC, 442, which also mentions Paul’s statement (in Gal 1.15-16) that God revealed “his Son to me” and the assertion (Acts 9.20) that Paul “proclaimed Jesus, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’”

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Lk 10.21-22; cf. Mt 11.25-27)

Here, too, Jesus is claiming a unique relationship of mutual intimacy with the Father, and therefore a unique capacity to reveal him.<sup>193</sup>

In sum, Peter's act of faith was elicited by Jesus precisely as the starting point of the faith of the Church. And Jesus designates Peter to exercise leadership in the Church on his behalf. Thus, Jesus' execution will not stop him from leading into God's kingdom those willing to follow him.

#### **4) Jesus enters Jerusalem, preaches the gospel, and forms the new covenant.**

Jesus' mission required him not only to announce in Jerusalem, as he had throughout Galilee, the good news of the kingdom's coming, but to enter Jerusalem as Messiah and form the new covenant. So, after responding to Peter's profession of faith, "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem," but at once added that there he would "suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Mt 16.21; cf. Mk 8.31, Lk 9.22). Peter strenuously objected: "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you" (Mt 16.22; cf. Mk 8.32).

Aware that Jesus was the Messiah, Peter expected him to usher in God's reign by defeating Israel's oppressors; the prospect of his suffering and dying filled Peter with horror. He expected Jesus, who had just promised him a leading role in the kingdom, to be a victor rather than a victim. Not a zealot and aware of Jesus' aversion to violence, Peter probably expected him to triumph by using the extraordinary power he had so often displayed. But Jesus had rejected that strategy when Satan tempted him in the desert (see Mt 4.1-7; Lk 4.3-4, 9-12), and now, rejecting it again, he makes it clear that his human role in redemption is one thing, God's victory another, and that Peter is mistaken in focusing on human things rather than the things of God (see Mt 16.23).

Jesus goes on to explain that in accepting suffering and death, he is blazing the hard but only route, which his disciples will have to follow, to enter into the glory of the kingdom (see Mt 16.24-28; cf. Mk 8.34-9.1; Lk 9.23-27). Later, approaching Jerusalem, Jesus predicts again and in greater detail his suffering, death, and resurrection.

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193. John P. Meier, *Matthew* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1980), 127, points out the similarity between Mt 11.25-27 and Mt 16.16-17 and observes: "There is a mutual knowledge between Father and Son which puts them on a level of equality (cf. 28:19). It therefore belongs to the very nature of Jesus to possess a transcendent, divine sonship, which infinitely exceeds that adoptive sonship he grants as a grace to his disciples." On Lk 10.21-22, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Gospel according to Luke*, Anchor Bible, 28A (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 869, comments: "Without using the title 'Son of God' or making that the object of a revelation explicitly, these sayings assert a *unique* relation of Jesus to the Father, precisely as 'the Son,' who alone through this mutual relationship (of fatherhood and sonship) is able to reveal." Fitzmyer also mentions (870) that Paul (see 1 Cor 15.28) uses 'Son' in the same absolute way, and after discussion concludes: Jesus "must have said or insinuated something similar to what is recorded here to give rise to the rapid conclusion, which emerged not long after his death, that he was indeed the Son of God (albeit not yet understood in the sense of Nicaea)."

Responding to an inappropriate proposal that James and John be given places of honor in the coming kingdom, he has them agree to share in his suffering (see Mt 20.17-23, Mk 10.32-40). Then he explains to all the apostles that those who aspire to leadership in the kingdom are not to dominate others but serve them (see Mt 20.25-27, Mk 10.42-44; cf. Lk 22.26), “even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20.28; cf. Mk 10.45).

The title, *Messiah*, suggested someone more like King David than Jesus ever meant to be (see A-1, above).<sup>194</sup> Now he has made it clear that, though he is indeed the Messiah, he will be a servant who suffers. “Servant of God” had been used broadly to refer to persons with a special mission to God’s people, but the concept also had undergone a prophetic development, especially in Isaiah’s “Suffering Servant” songs (see Is 42.1-4; 49.1-6; 50.4-9; 52.13-53.12). Sent to speak for God, to be a prophet, that Servant is to reassemble and teach Israel, with which he is also mysteriously identified. By patiently and humbly enduring suffering, this Servant carries out God’s will, not only saving the Jews but justifying all of sinful humankind: “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Is 49.6).

But Jesus still had to go to Jerusalem as the Messiah, the one anointed by the Spirit to save Israel, and claim his capital. He arrived in the city riding on an ass as a sign of his peaceful intentions. The crowd greeted him as the anointed king, shouting “Hosanna!” (“Save us!”) (see Mt 21.1-11, Mk 11.1-11, Lk 19.28-38, Jn 12.12-16).<sup>195</sup> He proceeded to the temple, drove out those buying and selling there, and upset the tables of the money changers (see Mt 21.12-13, Mk 11.15-17, Lk 19.45-46), thereby condemning not only their irreverent practices, but the tolerance of the priests, who should have prevented them.<sup>196</sup> He then began to teach in the temple and debate with opponents, as he had in so many synagogues. Now, however, he included warnings of the disaster that lay ahead for the city and the temple.

As often before, Jesus spoke and acted with an authority that shocked those unwilling to believe in him. The chief priests and elders demanded, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” (Mt 21.23; cf. Mk 11.28, Lk 20.2). Jesus challenged them to take a stand on the significance of John’s baptism and, when they would not, refused to answer their question about the source of his authority (see Mt 21.24-27, Mk 11.29-33, Lk 20.3-8). He perceived their insincerity and told pointed parables that they knew referred to them (see Mt 21.28-45, Mk 12.1-12).

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194. Had many people regarded Jesus as this kind of Messiah, the civil authorities might well have eliminated him, acting on a misunderstanding of his intentions; since that would have served no purpose, Jesus had good reason to try to avoid being publicly identified as Messiah. In the end, Israel’s leaders sought Jesus’ execution on religious grounds, and, though aware that Jesus was uninterested in civil power, Pilate both put down the Jews and rationalized executing Jesus by labeling him “king of the Jews.”

195. See Meier, op. cit., 231-34; Albright and Mann, op. cit., 251-53.

196. N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 2, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 405-28, 490-93, argues cogently that Jesus’ cleansing of the temple also was a messianic act.

So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council, and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.” But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.” . . . So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death.

Jesus therefore no longer went about openly among the Jews, but went from there to the country near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim; and there he stayed with the disciples. (Jn 11.47-50, 53-54)<sup>197</sup>

Jesus posed no threat to the Roman authorities, and he had taken care not to provoke them needlessly. But the religious elites perceived him as a threat, and Caiaphas offered a cogent rationalization for any who hesitated to kill him.

Though expecting to be killed in Jerusalem, Jesus returned there in order to eat the passover with his disciples (see Mt 26.1-19; Mk 14.1-16; Lk 22.1-13; Jn 12.27-33, 13.1). During that Last Supper, he explicitly proclaimed the new covenant. Afterwards, Jesus did the only thing he rightly could do to prevent his death: He asked the Father to remove the cup, though he again obediently submitted to the Father’s will.<sup>198</sup> Then, for the last time, Jesus accepted death by asserting at his hearing before Caiaphas, the chief priests, and the council that he was the heavenly Son of Man—a witness to truth that the religious authorities rejected and condemned as blasphemous (see Mt 26.63-66, Mk 14.61-64; cf. Lk 22.67-71, Jn 10.33-38).

The suffering and death that follow are not things Jesus does but things he undergoes, things done to him, which he had freely accepted in choosing to return to Jerusalem for the Last Supper.

In fact, Jesus did not search out death as a means for the salvation of human persons; he accepted death, in sorrow and in submission, as the crowning of his life of faithfulness. Jesus was faithful to the mission received from his Father, that of proclaiming the Good News concerning the God of compassion and concerning love for the brethren. He maintained this stance against enemies who wanted to silence him, by not defending himself with violent means and by entrusting himself without reserve to the God who is faithful. . . .

Jesus, therefore, did not go looking for death for its own sake, however salutary that might be. And one can only be quite wrong to so interpret the words he spoke concerning his desire to drink the cup of his passion. Jesus simply wanted to be faithful to the end. He understood himself to be within that line of prophets, whose typical experience was one of persecution; for authentic service to God ends up in rousing up men and women’s wrath against those who believe the gospel. . . .

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197. Jn 11.51-52, is an aside, pointing out the deeper truth that Caiaphas had uttered without knowing it: “He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”

198. See Mt 26.39, Mk 14.36, Lk 22.42. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave-* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1:165-78, deals helpfully with the consistency between Jesus’ prayer that the cup might pass and his previous discernment of the Father’s plan and perfect obedience to it.

In attentively considering the interpretations Paul gave to Christ's death, one perceives that the sacrificial and even redemptive understandings of this death hold up only when they are definitively located in relation to Jesus' love and God's love. Put in another way, when the Son surrenders himself and when the Father surrenders his Son, it is in no way *for the sake of* some chastisement nor *for the sake of* some satisfaction; it is *for his remaining faithful to the mission of love*.<sup>199</sup>

Jesus could have stayed away from Jerusalem and avoided being killed. But he returned to celebrate the Passover and institute the new covenant, because he knew that the Father willed it. Thus, the Father permitted the evil of Jesus' being killed, and Jesus freely accepted death.

### 5) Jesus' self-sacrifice is the perfect and definitive priestly act.

Many things can impede communication and cooperation between two people. Sometimes a third party, a mediator, can help overcome the obstacles and promote communication and cooperation. People in most cultures have felt the need for mediators in their relationship with God or 'the gods.' The mediators formulate messages and proposals (prayers), offer gifts (sacrifices) to win favor or appease hurt feelings, utter oracles, and so on. Such mediators are priests—as cultural anthropologists understand priesthood.

Old Testament priests were mediators of that sort. Serving in the sanctuary of the temple in Jerusalem and following prescriptions of the law of Moses and traditions they had developed, they alone carried out priestly functions. In doing so, they were separated from the people by an elaborate system of purifications, physical boundaries, and so on.<sup>200</sup>

Jesus takes the role of priest by undertaking to overcome sin and restore friendship between humankind and God. His priesthood is different from every other in many important ways. The Letter to the Hebrews treats Jesus' priesthood and contrasts it with the priesthood of the Old Testament.

First, according to the law of Moses, Jesus' ancestry ruled out his being a priest, let alone a high priest (see Heb 7.14, 8.4), and no human community authorized him to represent it before God. However, Jesus is God's Son, superior to the angels, and was designated priest by God to serve his "house"—his human family.<sup>201</sup> So, Jesus is not merely a priest but a high priest and an *eminent* high priest (see Heb 1.1-4, 2.5-9, 3.1-6, 4.14, 5.5, 5.10).

Second, while Jesus is now "separated from sinners [and] exalted above the heavens" (Heb 7.26), during his earthly life, having been sent by God, "he had to be

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199. Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Life and Death in the New Testament: The Teachings of Jesus and Paul*, trans. Terrence Prendergast (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 276-78 (his emphasis).

200. See Albert Vanhoye, S.J., *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest: According to the New Testament*, trans. J. Bernard Orchard, O.S.B. (Petersham, Mass.: St. Bede's, 1986), 19-38. This excellent work provides most of the insights in this section bearing on priesthood in the Letter to the Hebrews.

201. On "house," see *ibid.*, 99-105. Unlike the temple, the new house of God is built of living stones; rather than remaining remote, God lives in his new people (see 1 Pt 2.5; 1 Cor 3.16-17, 6.19; 2 Cor 6.16; Eph 2.21).

made like his brethren in every respect” (Heb 2.17). So, unlike Old Testament priests, Jesus sought and maintained solidarity with those he served. Because others suffered, it was fitting that he blaze the trail to salvation by suffering (see Heb 2.10). He would not deal with evil by withdrawing from it, in order to approach divine holiness, but by drawing near to evil, suffering it, and overcoming it with the power of love. Precisely by doing that, Jesus attained to glory, while at the same time not only showing others how to attain to the same glory but gaining the credibility necessary to lead them effectively to it (see Heb 2.8-15).<sup>202</sup>

Third, whereas Old Testament sacrifices were offered repeatedly but never overcame sin, Jesus’ one sacrifice is completely effective. The Old Testament priests tried to promote better relations between sinners and God, but Jesus transformed the relationship itself by establishing an entirely new sort of covenant (see Heb 8-9).

Fourth, unlike Old Testament priests, Jesus is sinless and lives forever in heavenly glory (see Heb 7). Neither infidelity nor death will ever end his self-determining obedience: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever” (Heb 13.8). His self-sacrificing choice and action perdure: “Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7.25).

Fifth, rather than merely conveying the message of the law and the prophets, Jesus, being the Son by whom God speaks to us (see Heb 1.2), is a unique messenger who delivers the entire content of our faith—he is “the apostle and high priest of our confession” (Heb 3.1)—and he speaks to us from heaven (see Heb 4.14, 12.25). Therefore, he deserves unwavering faith and total obedience (see Heb 4.11-13).

Finally, Jesus’ obedience together with God’s response of raising him from the dead and sending the Holy Spirit actually transform those Jesus saves. The new covenant is not only in Jesus but in their hearts and minds, so that it brings them into permanent fellowship with God (see Heb 10.1-18).<sup>203</sup>

Permanently transforming human beings and their relationship with God, Jesus’ priesthood supersedes every other priesthood. John Paul II sums up the transformation:

God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5.19). And precisely because he has reconciled it in Jesus Christ, as the firstborn of all creation (cf. Col 1.15), *the union of man with God has been irreversibly consolidated*. This union, which the “first Adam” had, in himself, once consented to be taken away from the whole human family, cannot be taken from humanity by anyone, since it has been rooted and consolidated in Christ, the “second Adam.” And therefore humanity becomes continually, in Jesus Christ, a “new creation.” It becomes this, because in him and

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202. See *ibid.*, 73-87, 95-99.

203. See *ibid.*, 213-22. Vanhoye explains (219-20) that Jesus in the same act becomes priest, consecrates himself as sacrifice, and brings about reconciliation. Old Testament priests sanctified by ritual separation; “For Christ it was a question of an act which united him at the same time to God and to his brothers; indeed, the passion of Christ is at once an act of obedience to God and one of extreme solidarity with mankind” (220).

through him the grace of the remission of sins remains inexhaustible before every human being: “With him is plenteous redemption.”<sup>204</sup>

This real transformation of humankind’s relationship with God is what Jesus merited by satisfying for humankind’s sins (see *S.t.*, 3, q.48, aa. 1-2).

## 6) Why did Jesus have to suffer and die?

Jesus suffered and died in order to save us. But just how does Jesus’ suffering and dying bring about our salvation? Various passages in the New Testament tell us that, in freely accepting suffering and death, Jesus (1) offers himself as a sacrifice to the Father, (2) ransoms or redeems us, and (3) takes our sins on himself and is punished for them. These three accounts of Jesus’ salvific suffering and death call for explanation.

(1) In forming the Sinai covenant, Moses first gave the people the Lord’s commandments, and they agreed to obey. Moses then had young men offer sacrifices, splashed half the blood on the altar—which represented God—had the people repeat their commitment, and sprinkled the other half of the blood on them (see Ex 24.3-8), saying: “Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Ex 24.8). Finally, Moses and his fellow leaders went up the mountain, saw God, and ate and drank in his sight (see Ex 24.9-11). Thus, the covenant was constituted by the people’s agreement to cooperate with God on terms he set, and that covenantal bond was sealed and enlivened by the life-force in sacrificed animals’ blood. Then, having taken the Israelites as his people, God received their leaders and treated them as associates, with whom he shared the sacrifice they had offered him in forming the covenant.

Throughout his public life, Jesus, like a new Moses, taught the people the Lord’s commandments (see, e.g., Mt 5.1 - 7.12), and warned them of the consequence of failing to keep them: “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 7.21). At the Last Supper, Jesus made it clear that, with his imminent suffering and death, he would consummate the new covenant (see Mt 26.26-29; Mk 14.22-25; Lk 22.14-20; 1 Cor 11.23-25). The Eucharist Prayers provide a standardized formula that includes the common and essential elements:

Before he was given up to death, a death he freely accepted,  
 he took bread and gave you thanks.  
 He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:  
**Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you.**  
 When supper was ended, he took the cup.  
 Again he gave you thanks and praise, gave the cup to his disciples, and said:  
**Take this, all of you, and drink from it:  
 this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.  
 It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven.  
 Do this in memory of me.**<sup>205</sup>

204. John Paul II, Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 1983, 3, *OR*, 5 April 1983, 2.

205. “Eucharistic Prayer III,” *Roman Missal: The Sacramentary*, 1969.

This narrative makes it clear that Jesus offered himself in sacrifice, and did so for the forgiveness of sins; that he sealed a new covenant with his own blood, and wanted his words and deeds on this occasion to be repeated in his memory. The Letter to the Hebrews also makes it clear that, by offering the better, once-for-all sacrifice of himself (see Heb 7.27, 9.23-26), Jesus cooperated with the Father in establishing a new and better covenant on better divine promises (see Heb 7.22, 8.6).

(2) In ancient Israel, as in many other cultures, goods and people on whom others had claims sometimes were redeemed or ransomed—that is, a price was paid to get them back or free them (see Lv 25.23-55). Adapting that practice, Yahweh promises that, using *force majeure* rather than money, he will bring the Israelites “out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.”<sup>206</sup>

Similarly, after Jesus tells the Twelve that the Son of Man will be unjustly judged, crucified, and raised on the third day (Mt 20.18-19; Mk 10.33-34), he explains in terms of ransom why he accepts suffering and death for humankind: “The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20.28; cf. Mk 10.45). But no one will be able to keep that ransom, for Jesus will reclaim his life: “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father” (Jn 10.18). Thus, Jesus makes it clear that his accepting death is part of God’s plan for delivering humankind from its bondage and uniting humankind with himself by the new covenant.

(3) A passage in Isaiah indicates that the suffering Servant underwent punishments others deserved: “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed” (Is 53.5), and the passage goes on to blend this idea with that of self-sacrifice and to make it clear that the Servant freely accepts his suffering: “He makes himself an offering for sin” (Is 53.10) and “He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Is 53.12).

By saying he came to serve, Jesus perhaps identifies himself with the suffering Servant. In any case, New Testament catechesis clearly identifies Jesus with the Servant voluntarily suffering in others’ place: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pt 2.24).

The preceding paragraphs clarify what it means to say that, in freely accepting suffering and death, Jesus (1) sacrificed himself for us, (2) ransomed or redeemed us, and (3) accepted punishments we deserved. Since the three are ways of talking about the same thing—the salvific efficacy of Jesus’ suffering and death—it is not surprising that New Testament passages, in addition to those already mentioned, blend two of the three accounts. For example, (1) and (3) are blended in: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1.29); (2) and (3) are blended in “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal 3.13); and (2) and (1) are

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206. Ex 6.6; cf. Is 52.2: “You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.”

blended in “You were ransomed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pt 1.18-19).

What do the three ways of understanding Jesus’ saving work have in common?

In freely accepting suffering and death for us, Jesus truly “loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5.2). But developing the Old Testament—“Thou hast no delight in sacrifice . . . The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit” (Ps 51.16-17)—and beginning with Jesus himself, the New Testament purifies the idea of sacrifice. Rebuking some Pharisees, Jesus says: “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice’” (Mt 9.13, Hos 6.6; cf. Mt 12.7). When a scribe says that love of God and neighbor “is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mk 12.33), Jesus commends him: “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (Mk 12.34).

So, Jesus’ self-sacrifice was salvific because it differed from previous sacrifices, as the Epistle to the Hebrews explains:

When Christ came into the world, he said,  
 “Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired,  
 but a body hast thou prepared for me;  
 in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure.  
 Then I said, ‘Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,’  
 as it is written of me in the roll of the book.”

When he said above, “Thou hast neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then he added, “Lo, I have come to do thy will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second.

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Heb 10.5-10)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, after quoting the final verse of this passage and referring to the whole of it, explains: “From the first moment of his Incarnation the Son embraces the Father’s plan of divine salvation in his redemptive mission: ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work’ (Jn 4.34).”<sup>207</sup>

The *Catechism* thus makes it clear that Jesus’ self-sacrifice was salvific precisely because he *did the Father’s will* in freely accepting suffering and death. Similarly, when discussing the passage in which Jesus says he came to give his life “as a ransom for many,” the *Catechism* not only cites Mt 20.28 but adds “cf. Rom 5.18-19,”<sup>208</sup> thus referring readers to that passage in St. Paul: “Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” Again, the *Catechism* quotes the second verse of the same passage and explains: “By his obedience unto death, Jesus accomplished the substitution of the suffering Servant” (CCC, 615).

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207. CCC, 606, with fn. 414.

208. CCC, 605, fn. 411.

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5.19). By the Word’s becoming flesh—that is, becoming a man—God already permanently united humankind with himself. That man, Jesus, was “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God,” who then “raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2.23-24). With Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Father makes him the leader of a new covenantal community, which will be open to every human being. That community’s friendship with God cannot fail, because its principle is the obedience to the Father’s plan by which Jesus freely accepts suffering and death, and Jesus, now risen, will never die again and will never withdraw his obedience to the Father.

However, if Jesus’ obedience was the essence of his saving work and if he *always* did the Father’s will, why did God’s plan permit Jesus’ death?

Jesus’ death certainly was not necessary to make the price he paid adequate, to make his self-sacrifice acceptable, or to make the punishment for the sins he took on himself sufficient to satisfy divine justice. Already before his suffering and death, the Word, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men,” and Jesus “humbled himself and became obedient” (Phil 2.6-8). His obedience was so perfect that he had already sufficiently satisfied for human sin. The death he freely accepted was superabundant satisfaction (see *S.t.*, 3, q. 48, a. 2). Moreover, the Father gained nothing by permitting Jesus’ self-sacrifice, received nothing from the ransom he paid, needed no placating by his Son’s punishment in sinners’ place.

Indeed, the heart of the Father’s salvific plan is his own entirely gratuitous love of fallen humankind, and the plan included Jesus’ death so that human persons who believe in him could be united with him so closely that they, too, would be raised from death to eternal life: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3.16). Again: “God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2.4-6).

Although the Father’s plan included Jesus’ being delivered up, God did not *intend* Jesus’ death or any other: “God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living, for he created all things that they might exist” (Wis 1.13-14). Being nothing but the privation of life, death cannot be created, but God allowed created persons to sin, and their sin resulted in death: “God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it” (Wis 2.23-24).

The Father permits not only Jesus’ death but his awful sufferings in order to manifest God’s love and Jesus’ human love for “the many”—that is, for the whole of all fallen humankind: “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5.8; cf. 1 Jn 4.9-10). “By this we know love, that he [Jesus] laid down his life for us” (1 Jn 3.16).

Every human being can benefit from this manifestation of God's love and Jesus' human love. Alienated from God by sin, fallen human beings suspect his motives and blame him for all the evil in the world. So, they will respond to the Gospel's challenge to repent only if their distrust of God is overcome by evidence of his disinterested love. Alienated from one another by sin, fallen human beings suspect one another of self-interested manipulation. Thus, God's and Jesus' manifest love for sinners are necessary to motivate them to respond with love: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. . . . We love, because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4.10, 19). "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12.32).

Assured that God is a loving Father and drawn to Jesus by his unquestionably selfless love, sinners can repent, believe in Jesus, and receive from him "power to become children of God" (Jn 1.12). Receiving baptism, they are "born anew" (Jn 3.3) "of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3.5). Thus, by sharing fully in our humanity, even to the point of accepting its subjection to suffering and death, which are consequences of sin, Christ enables us to share in his sinless divinity: "For our sake, he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5.21). It is significant that, rather than saying, "so that we might be justified by God," Paul says "so that we might become the very righteousness of God,"—that is, sharers in the divine nature (see 2 Pt 1.4).

Jesus also commands his friends to follow the example of love he provides by dying for them: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you" (Jn 15.12-14). Living in the fallen world, Jesus' disciples will reach their fulfillment in the kingdom only by dealing rightly with evil and its consequences, which inevitably cause suffering and end in death. Had Jesus not been crucified, he could not have taught: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16.24; cf. Mk 8.34, Lk 14.27).

Another reason why God's plan included allowing Jesus to die was so that he could overcome death by rising from it: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again" (Jn 10.17). So, in talking with the disillusioned disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus asks rhetorically: "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Lk 24.26). Having made him like us in everything but sin (see Heb 2.17, 4.15), God willed that Jesus freely accept death so that he, as Lord in glory, could share with us his resurrection life: Jesus our Lord "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom 4.25; cf. Rom 5.9-10, 17-21).

But how does Jesus' death enable him to share his resurrection life with us? Jesus shares his resurrection life with us by uniting us with himself in the Eucharist. Jesus freely accepted death in choosing to return to Jerusalem to celebrate the passover: "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Lk 22.14; cf. Mt 26.1-19, Jn 13.1). That passover was the Last Supper, in which Jesus ratified the new covenant and commanded: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22.19, 1 Cor 11.24), thus making

permanently available to all who would believe in him not only participation in his human friendship and divine communion with the Father but participation in Jesus' glorified self, in his very body and blood: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10.16). That participation in Jesus is salvific: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6.54); because it constitutes intimate union with Jesus: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (Jn 6.56).

In sum. By his perfect obedience to the Father's plan, Jesus established a new covenant between God and a human community that lives within the fallen world. Due to Jesus' permanent role in that community, it always remains faithful to God. The Father's plan included permitting Jesus' suffering and death and Jesus' human, free acceptance of suffering and death for several reasons. One was in order to manifest divine love and Jesus' human love. For fallen human beings, that manifestation of love makes repentance, trust in Jesus, and the request for baptism an appealing option, and those who accept that option are not only admitted to Jesus' covenantal community but in him made children of God, and thus saved by grace through faith. By freely accepting suffering and death, Jesus also shows his disciples how to love others as he loved them, and thus how to live uprightly in the fallen world. Another reason why the Father's plan included permitting Jesus' death and why Jesus freely accepted death was so that Jesus could overcome death by rising from it and share his resurrection life with us by instituting the Eucharist.

## **E: Hell: The State of Definitive Separation from God**

### **1) God neither intends evil nor sends anyone to hell.**

The evil in bad things is not a positive reality, but a privation, a lack of what ought to be. In creating, God wills only positive realities—that is, good things. Thus, God never *intends* any evil; he only *permits* the evils that are incidental to the goods he chooses to create. For instance, in creating martyrs, God permits the evils they suffer.

Among created realities are people's free choices. Since God is incomprehensible, we cannot understand how he can create free choices. In creating them, he does not determine what anyone chooses. If he did, the choices would not be free. Rather, he determines that a certain possibility be realized, namely, the possibility that there be persons other than himself making truly free choices.

Both by the law written on our hearts, which St. Paul speaks of, and by revelation, God directs all human beings toward what is good for them. When created persons are aware of God's direction but freely choose to act at odds with it, they themselves bring about in their actions the privations of reasonableness and of conformity to God's will that make their actions morally evil and sinful. Since those privations are not positive realities, they cannot be created. God does not intend creatures' sins. He only permits them.

Until recently, most Christians—and until Vatican II, most Catholics—worked out their salvation, at least during parts of their lives, with considerable fear and trembling, as enjoined by St. Paul (see Phil 2.12-16). People committed themselves to clerical or consecrated life in large part to save their own souls and help others save theirs, and devout parents were deeply concerned about their children's salvation.<sup>209</sup> During the past two centuries, however, more and more non-Catholic Christians became convinced that every human being will be saved.

The great theologian of the Protestant reformation, John Calvin, held that God predestines some people to hell just as he predestines some to heaven. In some of his writings, Martin Luther seemed to hold the same position, though he did not hold it consistently.<sup>210</sup> However, that view never has been accepted by the Catholic Church.

Most Protestant ecclesial communities either never held or soon abandoned the doctrine that God predestines some to hell. Moreover, rightly insisting that salvation

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209. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton: Collected Writings*, vol. 2, ed. Regina Bechtle, S.C. and Judith Metz, S.C. (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 2000), 627, writing to her son, William, gently interjects amidst other expressions of affection, her anxiety that he will go to hell: "Dearest Kit has her usual health, always tender enough to keep me on the look out—mine dearest has taken a new reef and I seem laying by for this world still many a long year—let no one say that deep affliction can kill since I grow strong in my absence from you for it is like a daily Death to me in which every minute carries the pain of that separation—and so often the anguish of my most reasonable fears that it will go even beyond this sad life since you are in a path of so many many dangers—God alone knows my conflict my beloved."

210. See A. G. Palladino, "Predestination (in Non-Catholic Theology), *NCE*, 11:719-22.

entirely depends on God's grace but mistakenly thinking that damnation could result only if God withheld his grace, an increasing proportion of Protestants concluded that God somehow will save all human beings, despite their sinful choices, and that nobody will end in hell.

Since 1960, some respected Catholic theologians, notably Hans Urs von Balthasar, have adopted and vigorously defended a more cautious view: that all human beings may well be saved, though the possibility that some will be damned cannot be absolutely excluded. Dissemination of that view in catechesis and popular publications has led many Catholics to conclude that in practice one need not be concerned about the prospect of hell for either oneself or anyone else.

## 2) Hell is a real possibility for human beings.

"God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3.17). Nobody is excluded from the world to be saved, and God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2.4). Moreover, with almost the last words of his public ministry, Jesus proclaims, "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12.31-32).

Still, Jesus makes it clear that "he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (Jn 3.18). Among those who do not, in the relevant sense, *believe* are some who will say, "Lord, Lord!" while ignoring the Father's will (see Mt 7.21-23). On the day of judgment, Jesus "will say" to those who were uncharitable, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25.41). He pictures an uncharitable rich man "in anguish in this flame" with no possible relief, since "a great chasm has been fixed" (Lk 16.24, 26) between him and the saved.<sup>211</sup> While encouraging his disciples to trust in providence and not fear adversaries who might kill them, Jesus purposely instills in them fear of hell: "I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear him!"<sup>212</sup> And Paul teaches:

Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5.19-21; cf. 1 Cor 6.9-10)

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211. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 28A:1129, comments: "Jesus may be using in that part folkloric material and the details may be derived from such a background; to identify it as such does not eliminate the critical character of the message itself. Indeed, the first part of the parable inculcates that there is a reward-aspect to human conduct and that Christian disciples are called upon to recognize it."

212. Lk 12.5; cf. Mt 10.28. Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, 959, rejects the opinion that *him* in Lk 12.5 refers to Satan: "In the NT one is otherwise counseled to resist Satan, not fear him (Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9). The fear of God, however, is not beneath a follower of Jesus (cf. Acts 9:31); nor is it merely an element of Lucan bourgeois piety (cf. Rom 11:20; 2 Cor 7:1; Phil 2:12; 1 Pet 1:17; 2:17)."

Paul also asserts that “those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus . . . shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thes 1.8-9).<sup>213</sup>

Many documents of the magisterium include clear statements about hell, and at least two documents contain definitive statements. One is a solemn profession of faith issued in 1215 by the Fourth Lateran Council, which Innocent III convoked to deal with various heresies. Beginning, “We firmly believe and unqualifiedly profess that . . .,” it taught that “the devil and the other demons were indeed created by God naturally good, but they became evil by their own doing” (DS 800/428), and also taught about the perpetual punishment of both the devil and some human beings:

[Christ] will come at the end of the ages, will judge the living and the dead, and will render to individuals according to their works, both to the reprobate and to the elect: all of whom will rise with their own bodies, which they now have, that they might receive according to their works, whether good or bad, for the latter perpetual punishment with the devil, and for the former everlasting glory with Christ. (DS 801/429)

The other document containing definitive statements about hell is the constitution issued by Benedict XII in 1336 regarding the last things:

We define, moreover, that according to God’s general plan the souls of those dying in actual mortal sin descend right after their death into hell, where they are tormented with infernal sufferings, and that nevertheless on the day of judgment all will appear with their own bodies “before the judgment seat of Christ,” to render an account of their own deeds, “so that each one may receive, according to what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” [2 Cor 5.10]. (DS 1002/531)

Both of these documents definitively teach *at least* that hell is a real possibility for human beings, and their authors plainly believed that some will end there. Benedict XII’s definition makes it clear, *as a truth of Catholic faith*, that nobody dying in unrepented mortal sin can be saved.

What, then, about God’s desire that all be saved and Jesus’ assertion that he would draw all human beings to himself? In recent years, Hans Urs von Balthasar—a leading, generally faithful theologian—and many others influenced by him have claimed that

in the New Testament, two series of statements run along side by side in such a way that a synthesis of both is neither permissible nor achievable: the first series speaks of being lost for all eternity; the second, of God’s will, and ability, to save all men.<sup>214</sup>

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213. Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1959), 206, comments: “As eternal life can be defined in terms of the knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:3), so the eternal destruction which is here in mind is ‘from the face of the Lord.’ ‘From’ appears to have the meaning ‘away from’ [note omitted] (contrast I Thess. 4:17). It indicates that separation from the Lord which is the final disaster [note omitted]. The solemnity of this thought should not be minimized. Those who oppose the things of God here and now are not engaged in some minor error which can be put right in the hereafter. They are engaging in that defiance of the will of God which has eternal consequences.”

214. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”? with a Short Discourse on Hell*, trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 29.

That claim is untenable. Statements express assertions, and, no matter how disparate they may be, assertions logically consistent with one another can be truths about distinct aspects of a single complex reality; an adequate account of such a reality is a coherent synthesis of the assertions. To say, therefore, that the two sets of Scripture passages described above *cannot* be synthesized implies the claim to know what assertions are expressed by the statements of both sets and the claim that the assertions expressed by the statements of the two sets are logically inconsistent with one another. But the assertions of two inconsistent sets cannot all be true, and so the claim that the two sets of New Testament statements cannot be synthesized implies that the authors of some of them assert false propositions. That, however, implies either that their writings are not divinely inspired or that their divinely inspired writings include false assertions, both of which are contrary to faith (see **B-9**, above). This inescapable dilemma no doubt explains why many Fathers and Doctors of the Church have suggested ways of reconciling the two sets of statements, and no Father or Doctor has ever held what Von Balthasar holds: that a synthesis of the two is neither permissible nor achievable.<sup>215</sup>

Without undertaking such a synthesis, I shall comment on a few texts often invoked by those who deny that hell is a real possibility for human beings.

First, after saying: “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (Jn 12.32), Jesus went on to teach the absolute need for faith:

I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. (Jn 12.46-48)

While drawing every human being to himself, Jesus compels no one. He lays down his life to provide motivation sufficient to lead reasonable people to faith (see **D-6**, above). But he does not speak of some who *may be* judged by his word on the last day, but of those who, having rejected him, *will be* judged by it.<sup>216</sup>

The statement that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2.4) must be read in its context. The letter’s introductory chapter already has made clear, among other things, that faith and a good conscience are essential (see 1 Tm 1.5, 19). Chapter two begins the letter’s pastoral guidance:

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215. Von Balthasar, *op. cit.*, 47-72, deals sympathetically with the few who synthesized all the Scripture passages with the view that everyone will ultimately be saved. He not only treats unsympathetically but accuses (64-65; cf. 25) of presuming to *know* “about the outcome of divine judgment” those who synthesized the Scripture passages with the view that some will be damned, including Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Basil, Chrysostom, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Anselm, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas, as well as John Henry Newman.

216. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *op. cit.*, 2:393, comments on Jn 12.32: “The victorious character is reinforced by [*pantas*] [note omitted]: there is no limit to Jesus’ saving power—except the resistance of unbelief. In spite of the universalistic overtone and (corresponding to v. 24, ‘much fruit’) intent of the statement [note omitted], faith is still included as a condition (cf. 3:15, 16; 6:37 with 40; 6:45b with c). Despite the mythological ring, the presence of the cross of Jesus preserves the historical perspective of the statement, and the demand for faith (cf. vv. 34-36) its personal appeal.”

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time. (1 Tm 2.1-6)

The writer is exhorting the church he addresses to practice inclusivity in respect to those prayed for, and specifically to pray for kings and other people of high status, whose conversion would make it possible for the Church to carry on her mission in peace. Apparently, the practice had been to limit those prayed for—perhaps to Church members and people who showed themselves to be open to the gospel. The writer therefore explains that praying for outsiders is acceptable to God, for he wants everyone to accept the gospel and be saved, as shown by the fact that God provided one mediator, Jesus, who gave his life as a ransom for all. This is to say that Christians should not regard the Church as an exclusive club for those already saved, but should pray for everyone and work for everyone's salvation.

More puzzling than such passages, it seems to me, is Paul's teaching about the final stage of creation, which will follow Jesus' coming:

As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection under him," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one. (1 Cor 15.22-28)

By explicitly excluding God from the domain subject to Jesus' kingship, Paul makes it clear that "all things" refers to every created reality,<sup>217</sup> and thus implies that even the damned must be included within the "every one" to whom God will in the end *be everything*. This is puzzling, and I shall propose a tentative solution to the puzzle (in **6**, below). For now, it suffices to notice that Paul implies that in the end some will *not* be saved, since he speaks of the resurrection of "those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor 15.23). Moreover, the reality of Satan and other fallen angels, attested by the New Testament and certainly a matter of faith,<sup>218</sup> poses the same problem about the ultimate state of created reality. In any case, precisely because God's being everything to everyone is mysterious,

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217. The allusion is to Ps 8.6, in which "all things" refers to the whole of creation, which is to be restored and exalted in Christ; see R. Morissette, "La citation du Psaume VIII, 7b dans I Corinthiens XV, 27a," *Science et Esprit*, 24 (1972): 313-42.

218. See DS 411/211 (which may not be a solemn definition, but remains an important witness to the Church's faith); DS 800-801/428-29 (the profession of faith of the Fourth Lateran Council, quoted above); and CCC, 391-93 (a summary of faith about the fallen angels).

one cannot claim that Paul's teaching here contradicts his and other New Testament teachings about hell.

In recent years some also have argued that the New Testament's teachings—and so the Church's teachings—about hell ought not to be understood as descriptions of the future, but as threats intended to guide people in making choices here and now.<sup>219</sup>

It surely is true that the New Testament's teachings about hell are meant to guide choices, and some of the teachings do look like threats.<sup>220</sup> But God does not threaten to punish sin, for punishments of sin “must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin” (CCC, 1472). God permits evils only as side effects of the goods he chooses to create (see **B-9**, above). The chief punishment that constitutes hell is eternal separation from God (see CCC, 1035), and that separation is the prolongation of the state of mortal sin that remains unrepented at death.<sup>221</sup> Therefore, the New Testament's teachings about hell are not threats, but warnings: statements asserting that the repugnant state of affairs—definitive separation from God and its consequences—will be the inevitable outcome of unrepented mortal sin.

Like threats, though, warnings can be asserted honestly only by someone who thinks that the repugnant outcome will come about if the warning is ignored. For instance, while wasteful people are likely to find themselves in need, a wealthy father would be dishonest if he warned his children against waste on that basis while himself being confident that they would never experience need. Being asserted by the Holy Spirit, however, the New Testament's warnings are both honest and based on perfect knowledge of all reality. If, then, human beings die in mortal sin, they will be in hell, and nothing will prevent it, neither anything in creation nor anything pertaining to God—his love and mercy, his universal salvific will, his plan to unite all things in Christ, his sovereign power, the superiority of his grace to human sinfulness, or anything else.

If grounded in an appeal to some such factor, therefore, any argument that God either will or might well save all human beings is unsound. For example:

Man is *under* judgment and must choose. The question is whether God, with respect to his plan of salvation, ultimately depends, and wants to depend, upon man's choice; or

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219. See Karl Rahner, “Hell,” in Karl Rahner, ed., *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 602-4; Von Balthasar, *op. cit.*, 30-34, 183-87.

220. To threaten is to assert that one intends, subject to a condition, to bring about something repugnant to those threatened. A threat is honest only if the one making it believes that nothing will prevent carrying it out and intends to do so if the condition is met. If the New Testament's assertions about hell are regarded as threats, the Holy Spirit must be considered to be making them (see **C-9**, above), and so they are honest. Those who regard the New Testament's teachings about hell as threats therefore should conclude: If the condition is met, God *will* carry them out—that is, allow the bad consequences of our self-alienating choices to occur—and *nothing whatsoever will prevent those consequences*.

221. CCC, 1033: “To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called ‘hell.’” This formulation clearly captures previous Church teachings quoted above.

whether his freedom, which wills only salvation and is absolute, might not remain above things human, created, and therefore relative.<sup>222</sup>

This line of thought involves a view of divine causality like that of those who think that, if God does not predestine some to hell, he must efficaciously will to save everyone (see **B-4**, above). It is true that God does not depend on human free choices; yet human beings really make them, really sin, really can remain unrepentant until death, and really can end in hell.

In one of his Wednesday audiences, John Paul II summarized the Church's teaching about hell: "It is not a punishment imposed externally by God but a development of premises already set by people in this life." While the New Testament teaches that Jesus has extended his saving work to the realm of the dead, "redemption nevertheless remains an offer of salvation which it is up to people to accept freely. This is why they will all be judged 'by what they [have done]' (Rv 20:13)." Scripture's images of hell must not be misunderstood: "They show the complete frustration and emptiness of life without God. Rather than a place, hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy."<sup>223</sup> And some already have separated themselves from God forever: "They are the spiritual creatures that rebelled against God's love and are called demons (cf. *Fourth Lateran Council*, DS 800-801)."<sup>224</sup>

While John Paul does not teach here that hell is more than a real possibility for human beings, an amendment subsequently made to the text as it had appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano* is relevant to that point. After a passage saying what happened to the demons is a warning to us, the *L'Osservatore Romano* text reads: "Eternal damnation remains a real possibility, but we are not granted, without special divine revelation, the knowledge of whether or which human beings are effectively involved in it."<sup>225</sup> The words "whether or" seem to imply that Scripture and other witnesses to divine revelation do not tell us whether any human being will be lost forever. However, the final and only official version of the text of that audience omits the Italian words "se e" (corresponding to "whether or"), thus indicating that, on reflection, John Paul II asserted only that without special divine revelation we cannot judge *which* people are in hell.<sup>226</sup>

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222. Von Balthasar, op. cit., 15. Von Balthasar rejects the view that all *will* be saved, but holds (see, e.g., 197) that Christians ought to *hope* that all will be saved, which implies they might well be. Arguments like the one quoted prove nothing unless they prove that something about God *will* prevent the damnation warned about (or, as Von Balthasar usually puts it, threatened) from ever being realized.

223. The Pope is not denying that hell involves suffering, including bodily pain. Even the grief resulting from a loved one's loss is emotional suffering, which includes some bodily pain. The point is that, inasmuch as it "is not a punishment imposed externally by God," hell does not include things such as flames and gnawing worms created in order to torment the damned.

224. John Paul II, General Audience (28 July 1999), *Inseg.* 22:2 (1999) 80-82, *OR*, 4 Aug. 1999, 7.

225. This sentence begins the second paragraph of section 4, *OR*, 4 Aug. 1999, 7; in the Italian *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 July 1999, 4, the sentence reads: "La dannazione rimane una reale possibilità, ma non ci è dato di conoscere, senza speciale rivelazione divina, se e quali esseri umani vi siano effettivamente coinvolti."

226. The only official publication of the text of the 28 July 1999 Wednesday audience is in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, which is published by the Vatican itself; in *Inseg.* 22:2 (1999) 82, the sentence reads: "La dannazione rimane una reale possibilità, ma non ci è dato di conoscere, senza speciale

That amendment makes it clear that John Paul II did not hold that all human beings may be saved. His teaching therefore leaves the issue of whether all human beings will be saved to be settled by Scripture and tradition.

In sum, hell is a possibility already realized for the fallen angels and is a real possibility for human beings. The realization of this possibility by its proper cause—dying in unrepented mortal sin—is consistent with everything else, including everything that is true about God, being just as it is.

### 3) Scripture and Church teachings indicate that not everyone will be saved.

In order to show that Scripture and the Catholic Church teach that not all human beings will be saved, I begin by considering some New Testament passages.

One of the most effective ways of warning people about a dangerous practice is to tell them what happens to people who indulge in it. For instance, a father warning his youngsters about drugs might say, “Nobody who tries cocaine expects to become addicted, but many people do.” Warnings of that sort can be expected in the New Testament about sinning and hell. And, in fact, Jesus does warn his disciples.

For example, he asserts that not all who acknowledge his lordship and act in his name will enter the kingdom:

“Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’” (Mt 7.21-23)

Again, when pointedly asked, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” (Lk 13.23), Jesus exhorts his listeners to strive earnestly and promptly to enter the kingdom. First, though, he indirectly answers the question by saying that many *will be unable to enter*: “Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Lk 13.24; cf. Mt 7.13-14). A respected Scripture scholar comments: “*many . . . will not be able*. So Jesus answers indirectly the question put to him. Many may crowd before the narrow door, but not all of them will succeed in passing through it.”<sup>227</sup> That comment confirms my interpretation of what the sacred writer is asserting.

Anyone who believes that the Holy Spirit is asserting what the sacred writers assert should be convinced without an exhaustive study. Still, other Scripture texts might be examined, among them those concerning Judas which have led many saints to regard his final impenitence and eternal perdition as a truth of faith.<sup>228</sup>

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rivelazione divina, quali esseri umani vi siano effettivamente coinvolti.” Moreover, John Paul II’s assertion that we cannot judge, without special divine revelation, *which* people are in hell must be read in the light of the Council of Trent’s parallel teaching: “It cannot be known, without special revelation, which people God elects for himself” (DS 1540/805). In saying that, Trent could not have meant that public revelation does not tell us that Mary has been saved. Similarly, John Paul II’s teaching should not be read as saying that public revelation does not tell us that Judas has been damned.

227. Fitzmyer, op. cit., 1025.

228. See, for example, Thomas More, *The Sadness of Christ*, trans. Clarence H. Miller (Princeton, N.J.: Scepter, 1993), 80-84, arguing from Jn 17.12; Acts 1.20, 26; Ps 109.7-8. Note that More’s argument is

The definitive Church teachings quoted (in 2, above) about the reprobate and those dying in actual mortal sin are reasonably interpreted only in the light of the New Testament, not on the supposition that “the reprobate” and “those dying in actual mortal sin” might well turn out to signify concepts without instances, mere empty classes.

Moreover, some magisterial documents are more explicit. For example, in November 1459, Pius II condemned several peculiar positions held by one Zaninus de Solcia, labeling them “most pernicious errors” against the doctrines (Latin: *dogmata*) of the holy Fathers. Among them was the assertion that “all Christians are to be saved” (DS 1362/717b).

Earlier, and more significantly, in 853, a Council at Quiercy, in rejecting the heretical claim that God predestines some people to evil—and thus to damnation—taught:

Almighty God “wills all human beings” without exception “to be saved” [1 Tm 2.4], although not all will be saved. Now that certain ones are saved is the gift of the one who saves, but that certain ones perish is what those who perish deserve. (DS 623/318)<sup>229</sup>

Though Quiercy was not a general council, its teaching against double predestination was universally accepted by Catholics. Seven centuries later, the Council of Trent definitively taught: “If anyone says that the grace of justification is given only to those who are predestined to life, and that all the others who are called, are called indeed, but do not receive grace, as they are predestined to evil by divine power, let that person be anathema” (DS 1567/827). Trent’s “all the others” obviously presupposes the truth of what the Council of Quiercy explicitly asserts: that not all human beings will be saved. For Trent, too, not all who are called are “chosen” (see Mt 22.14).<sup>230</sup>

Vatican II restated previous definitive teachings about hell, using New Testament expressions:

Since however we know neither the day nor the hour, as Our Lord warns, we must be constantly vigilant so that, having finished the one course of our earthly life (see Heb

not based on a text regarded as inadequate by John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed. Vittorio Messori (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 186: “Even when Jesus says of Judas, the traitor, ‘It would be better for that man if he had never been born,’ (Mt 26:24), His words do not allude for certain to eternal damnation.”

229. The Latin word translated “although” is *licet*, which sometimes means “even if”; but if the meaning here were “even if,” the sentence that follows would not speak unconditionally of certain ones who perish (“but that certain ones perish is what those who perish deserve”); rather it would speak conditionally: but if certain ones perish, they will deserve to perish.

230. Mt 22.11-13 makes it clear that Christians, though invited into the wedding feast, will be excluded if they lack their wedding garment. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, xxii, 11-14, explains that the wedding garment is Christ, who is put on by baptism (see Gal 3.27), by charity and love (see Col 3.15), by bearing death in mind, and by works that measure up (see Rom 13.14). Due to the lack of one or more of these, the wedding guest, though addressed as “friend,” because he had been loved, is excluded from the wedding feast. For the meaning of “many are called but few are chosen,” Thomas refers to Mt 7.14 (the same verse quoted by CCC, 1036), which indicates that those who find the narrow gate that leads to life “are few.” On Mt 22.14, Albright and Mann, op. cit., 269, comment: “called. The Greek is derived from the same verb as ‘invited’ in vs. 3. Many are called into the Messianic Kingdom, but few will be finally chosen for the Father’s Kingdom at the judgment.”

9.27), we may merit to enter into the marriage feast with him and to be numbered among the blessed (see Mt 25.31-46), and not be ordered, as wicked and slothful servants (see Mt 25.26), to depart into eternal fire (see Mt 25.41), into the exterior darkness where “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 22.13 and 25.30). For before we reign with Christ in glory, all of us must appear “before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive, according to what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor 5.10), and at the end of the world “they will come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who carry evil deeds to the grave, to the resurrection of judgment” (Jn 5.29 [Vulgate]; cf. Mt 25.46).<sup>231</sup>

The way the Council arrived at this passage makes it clear that it implies that not everyone will be saved.

First, in an early draft, there was no mention of “eternal fire”; it was inserted in response to amendments proposed by many bishops.<sup>232</sup> Second, the day before the Council’s final vote on chapter seven of *Lumen gentium*, articles 48-50, an official explanation of how the Council’s Theological Commission had dealt with proposed amendments was distributed. It explained that a Council Father had proposed deleting words near the beginning of article 48 which stated that, along with the human race, the whole world will be restored in Christ. The Commission said that the proposer “fears that these words will be taken as an affirmation of the salvation of the (whole) human race along with the whole world (which is Origen’s error).” The Commission’s response was that the amendment was unnecessary, “because the text does not speak of the salvation of the *whole* human race.”<sup>233</sup> Third, in response to a Father’s proposal that article 49 should indicate that there will in fact be damned (*reprobati*) and that damnation is thus no mere hypothesis, the Commission said that this would not fit into article 49—which deals with people who love God—and pointed out that already “article 48 cites Gospel words in which the Lord himself speaks in a grammatically future form about the damned.”<sup>234</sup> That reply implied that the proposed amendment was unnecessary because the statement of Jesus already included in article 48—that “those who carry evil deeds to the grave” (unrepentant mortal sinners) “will come forth . . . to the resurrection of judgment”—asserts the truth about what *will* be rather than about what *might* be, that is, the truth about a possibility that will be realized rather than about a real possibility that might never be realized.

Nevertheless, since Vatican II many Catholics have accepted the view that every human being will be saved or, at least, have stopped regarding hell as something one must avoid oneself and try to help others avoid. Fallacious arguments like those criticized

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231. LG 48. The passage cited as comparable (Mt 25.46) says of those who will have failed to meet others’ pressing needs: “And they will go away into eternal punishment.”

232. *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, III:5 (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 19??), 59 and 63-64.

233. “Relatio de Particularibus,” reply to 7, in *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, III:8 (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1976), 140; the vote on the chapter was 2,127 *placet*, 4 *non placet* (374).

234. *Ibid.*, reply to 40, 144-45.

(in 2, above) implying, perhaps unintentionally, that hell is not even a real possibility have contributed to this change.

So have some publications widely used in religious education. For example, the catechism published by the German bishops' conference, while rightly and firmly asserting that hell is a real possibility, also claims: "Neither Holy Scripture nor the Church's Tradition of faith asserts with certainty of any man that he is actually in hell. . . . Holy Scripture does not tell us, of course, whether any man has ever actually decided against God with ultimate finality and thus radically missed the meaning of his existence."<sup>235</sup> That statement might only mean that neither Scripture nor the Church's constant and very firm teachings assert the damnation of any particular individual—which itself is arguable. But it can be interpreted as meaning that neither Scripture nor the Church's Tradition of faith teaches that some human beings will be lost.

Like Vatican II, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1033-37) does not teach *explicitly* that some human beings will be lost. However, it accurately summarizes the Church's teaching about hell. It quotes a passage in which Jesus warns that many take the route leading to destruction:

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few (Mt 7:13-14). (CCC, 1036)

Also, in fine print the *Catechism* adds a quotation from the teaching of Vatican II (LG 48), quoted above, in which the King speaks in the grammatical future about people who arrive at the wedding feast without the proper garment: "men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Mt 22.13).

Finally, the testimony of saints who have received private revelations must be considered.

Hans Urs von Balthasar appeals to the testimony of some saints who he alleges believed, either on the basis of a private revelation or their personal reflection, that God's merciful love will or may well bring about the salvation of every human being.<sup>236</sup> Von Balthasar's interpretation of these saints' writings often overlooks something relevant in the context from which he draws a passage or even in the passage he quotes. However, rather than analyze and criticize Von Balthasar's interpretations of the testimony he invokes, I offer the opposing testimony of a single witness: St. Mary Faustina Kowalska.

Faustina (1905-38) was a religious who outwardly lived a simple life and served her community as cook, gardener, and porter. At the same time, she enjoyed intimate union with God and received extraordinary spiritual gifts. Eventually, "The Lord Jesus chose Sr. Mary Faustina as the apostle and 'secretary' of his mercy, so that she could tell the world about his great message. 'In the Old Covenant,' he said to her, 'I sent prophets

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235. *The Church's Confession of Faith: A Catholic Catechism for Adults* (originally published by the German Bishops' Conference), trans. Stephen Wentworth Arndt, ed. Mark Jordan (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 346. The Church's moral teaching was promised (11) in a second part of this catechism, which has never appeared.

236. See op. cit., 97-111, 214-21.

wielding thunderbolts to my people. Today I am sending you with my mercy to the people of the whole world.”<sup>237</sup> Accordingly, Faustina recorded the private revelations she received in notebooks, which were transcribed and published after her death. In canonizing her, John Paul II endorsed the authenticity of her communication of the message of mercy she had received: “Sr. Faustina’s canonization has a particular eloquence: by this act I intend today to pass this message on to the new millennium.”<sup>238</sup>

Among other things, Faustina reports that, during her eight-day retreat in 1936, she was led one day by an angel through hell, which she found to be “awesomely large and extensive.” She describes the various sufferings of the damned. Then she goes on to explain why she records this experience:

I am writing this at the command of God, so that no soul may find an excuse by saying there is no hell, or that nobody has ever been there, and so no one can say what it is like.

I, sister Faustina, by the order of God, have visited the abysses of hell so that I might tell souls about it and testify to its existence. I cannot speak about it now; but I have received a command from God to leave it in writing. The devils were full of hatred for me, but they had to obey me at the command of God. What I have written is but a pale shadow of the things I saw. But I noticed one thing: that most of the souls there are those who disbelieved that there is a hell.<sup>239</sup>

Thus, the mystery of divine mercy itself plainly requires testimony to the reality of hell in order that people will believe in and fear it, accept God’s mercy, and avoid the sufferings of those who fail to do so.

#### **4) It is unreasonable to suppose that very few people die unrepentant.**

The whole Bible testifies to the reality and prevalence of grave sin. The Church’s doctrine about and practice of the sacrament of penance manifests her belief that, small children aside, most of her members are capable of committing mortal sins and many do, at least during some portion of their lives. Some people credibly accuse themselves of having sinned very gravely, and sometimes repeatedly, over long stretches.

Many today hold or suggest that people almost never are free enough or insightful enough about the wrongness of their choices to be guilty of mortal sin. I grant that many people who do things that are gravely wrong sin only venially. With consciences malformed by the prevalent, secularist culture and/or by dissenting theological opinions, many people are blind to the evil of many kinds of acts. However, with respect to some kinds of acts that are both common and gravely wrong, it is hardly plausible that few sin mortally.

237. Editorial, “St. Faustina, apostle of Divine Mercy,” *OR*, 3 May 2000, 2.

238. Homily at the Mass for the canonization of Sr. Mary Faustina Kowalska (30 Apr. 2000), 5, *Inseg.*, ???; *OR*, 3 May 2000, 1. Toward the end of his homily, directly addressing Faustina in prayer, John Paul II said (*ibid.*, 8): “May your message of light and hope spread throughout the world, spurring sinners to conversion, calming rivalries and hatred and opening individuals and nations to the practice of brotherhood.”

239. Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul*, - notebook 2, #741 (Stockbridge, Mass.: Marians of the Immaculate Conception, 1999), 297.

For example, colonization since the fifteenth century often involved killing, enslaving, robbing of lands and property, lying to, breaking faith with, and economically exploiting native peoples all over the world. The industrial revolution brought with it widespread, well-documented economic exploitation that provoked both Marxism and the development of the Catholic Church's social teaching. Industrialization and modern modes of communication and transportation also have made warfare more horrendous than ever before. Leave aside the question of the justice of the wars themselves. Some who fought in them killed or abused noncombatants or took revenge on prisoners; some betrayed their fellows for the sake of self-interest.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, abortionists have killed hundreds of millions, perhaps even billions, of unborn babies. While the culpability of many women who obtained abortions was more or less diminished by subjective factors, some surely understood that they were having their babies killed and fully consented. Many of the men who begot those babies were unwilling to father them; some broke off their relationships with the mother; some preferred paying for an abortion to paying child support.

Purveyors of addictive substances, not all of them addicts themselves, have promoted addiction, and deliberately and persistently lied about the harmful results of using these substances. Many people accused of crimes or involved in civil disputes lie under oath; some seek to cast suspicion on innocent persons. Many people in authority cover up wrongdoing rather than rectify it, sacrificing victims of injustice to their own self-interest and the misconceived good of their company, government, or church. People who have been hurt by others often seek revenge.

Some of these sins are elements of ongoing ways of life. Moreover, only someone willing to make restitution can sincerely repent of any sin that calls for it, and the difficulty of making it is likely to deter sinners from repenting. Therefore, it is likely that some who commit sins of the listed kinds have resisted grace, rationalized, become obdurate, and never repented.

Often, of course, sins like these are supported by unjust social structures that provide ready rationalizations for committing them. In this situation, many young people initially experience pangs of conscience; and if they fail to repent and instead make the rationalizations their own and become obdurate, some particularly disturbing incident may eventually reawaken their consciences. Even so, it is wishful thinking to suppose that all such persons will repent before death. Moreover, some people die suddenly in the act of sinning in grave matter, and one cannot reasonably suppose that their sins never are mortal.

Despite Benedict XII's definitive teaching that nobody dying in unrepented mortal sin can be saved (see **2**, above), some theologians have held that no specific choice or set of choices—not even obduracy until death in mortal sin—need prevent a human person from being saved. On their view, purgation after death would be precluded only by a fundamental option rejecting God or Christ and closing oneself against truth and love. Proponents of that view might well dismiss the preceding argument and maintain that no factual evidence about human sinfulness can provide reasonable grounds for affirming

that many, or even any, people die unrepentant.<sup>240</sup> Moreover, they might invoke the authority of Benedict XVI in support of their view.

Pope Benedict has taught clearly that hell is real and eternal: “Jesus came to tell us that he wants us all in Paradise and that hell, about which little is said in our time, exists and is eternal for those who close their hearts to his love.”<sup>241</sup> He also has affirmed that hell is a real possibility for human beings:

Our choice, which in the course of an entire life takes on a certain shape, can have a variety of forms. There can be people who have totally destroyed their desire for truth and readiness to love, people for whom everything has become a lie, people who have lived for hatred and have suppressed all love within themselves. This is a terrifying thought, but alarming profiles of this type can be seen in certain figures of our own history.<sup>242</sup>

However, Benedict also has admitted the hypothesis that very few people are so wicked: “For the great majority of people—we may suppose—there remains in the depths of their being an ultimate interior openness to truth, to love, to God.”<sup>243</sup>

Moreover, after reporting the opinion of some recent theologians that purgatory consists in being judged by Christ and purified by his love, Benedict suggested that only thoroughly wicked people will end in hell:

In this way the inter-relation between justice and grace also becomes clear: the way we live our lives is not immaterial, but our defilement does not stain us for ever if we have at least continued to reach out towards Christ, towards truth and towards love. Indeed, it has already been burned away through Christ’s passion. At the moment of judgment we experience and we absorb the overwhelming power of his love over all the evil in the world and in ourselves. The pain of love becomes our salvation and our joy.<sup>244</sup>

Still, in presenting his musings, Benedict never mentioned fundamental option. Moreover, he made no attempt to ground in Scripture or the Church’s teaching the suggestion that only thoroughly wicked people will end in hell. Indeed, he did not assert the view, but offered it only as a hypothesis, as he later made clear in briefly restating what he had written: “I tried to say: perhaps those who have destroyed themselves in this way, who are for ever unredeemable, who no longer possess any elements on which God’s love can rest, who no longer have a minimal capacity for loving, may not be so numerous. This would be Hell.”<sup>245</sup>

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240. For an analysis and criticism of several versions of fundamental option, see *CMP*, 382-90, together with fns. 6-30 (404-7).

241. Homily in Mass at Parish of St. Felicity and Her Children, Rome (25 March 2007), *Inseg.*, ???; *OR*, 4 Apr. 2007, 8.

242. Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, 45, *AAS* 100 (2008) ???, *OR*, 5 Dec. 2007, X.

243. Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, 46, *AAS* 100 (2008) ???, *OR*, 5 Dec. 2007, X.

244. Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, 47, *AAS* 100 (2008) ???, *OR*, 5 Dec. 2007, X.

245. At a Meeting with the Clergy of Rome (7 Feb. 2008), *Inseg.*, ???; *OR*, 20 Feb. 2008, 7. The quoted statement was part of a response to a question raised by a priest who had pointed out that hell is seldom mentioned in catechesis; Benedict was trying to put what he said in *Spe salvi* about hell into the context of the encyclical as a whole.

By contrast, John Paul II carefully considers the proposal that only those who violate their fundamental option end in hell. He teaches that the true fundamental option of Christian life is the act of faith, and he firmly rejects the notion that only unfaithfulness to that fundamental option can lead to damnation.

In point of fact, man does not suffer perdition only by being unfaithful to that fundamental option whereby he has made “a free self-commitment to God” [note omitted]. With every freely committed mortal sin, he offends God as the giver of the law and as a result becomes guilty with regard to the entire law (cf. Jas 2:8-11); even if he perseveres in faith, he loses “sanctifying grace,” “charity” and “eternal happiness” [note omitted]. As the Council of Trent teaches, “the grace of justification once received is lost not only by apostasy, by which faith itself is lost, but also by any other mortal sin [note omitted].”<sup>246</sup>

In fact, Trent solemnly defines that unbelief is not the only mortal sin (see DS 1577/837), and to show this, the Council points out that, according to St. Paul, divine law also excludes from the kingdom “those with faith who are fornicators, adulterers, effeminate [molles], sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, eviltongued, greedy (see 1 Cor 6.9-10), and all others who commit mortal sins” (DS 1544/808).<sup>247</sup>

Again, some theologians suggest that every human being has a final option—a final, decisive choice to make for or against God—at the moment of death.<sup>248</sup> If that were so, it might well be true that everyone then in mortal sin finally repents. These theologians begin from a genuine question: Why and how does death end our opportunity for repentance and commitment, and seal our fate forever? They answer that death is not simply something that happens to a person, but something a person does, a human act. Moreover, it is not simply one act among others: “The all-important act of our earthly life is its very last act, whereby *becoming* yields its place to *being*. It is the act of death.”<sup>249</sup> No prior act is so truly one’s own: “Death is man’s first completely personal act.”<sup>250</sup> It is not simply acquiescing in the inevitable: “In an act of such decision it appears possible that the personal freedom of the composite person could be engaged to an extent hitherto unrealized.”<sup>251</sup> For the act of death fulfills the acting person precisely as such: “This act

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246. John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, 68, AAS 85 (1993) 1187-88, *OR*, 6 Oct. 1993, X. The final omitted note is: “Council of Trent, sess. VI, *Decree on Justification*, ch. 15: DS 1544; can. 19: DS 1569.”

247. By this use of Paul’s text, the Council implicitly defines the proposition which Paul asserts in it. For, in refuting one proposition by asserting another logically incompatible with it, one necessarily asserts the second proposition at least as firmly as the first is rejected. Thus, Trent’s solemn definition against Luther’s notion that unbelief is the only mortal sin implicitly defines as a truth of Catholic faith the Pauline proposition Trent invoked.

248. See Emile Mersch, S.J., *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1951), 262-70; Robert W. Gleason, “Toward a Theology of Death,” *Thought*, 32 (Spring 1957):39-68; Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, *Quaestiones Disputatae*, 2 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961); Roger Troisfontaines, S.J., *I Do Not Die*, trans. Francis E. Albert (New York: Desclee, 1963); Ladislaus Boros, S.J., *The Mystery of Death* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965).

249. Troisfontaines, *op. cit.*, 149.

250. Boros, *op. cit.*, 84 (emphasis omitted).

251. Gleason, *op. cit.*, 64.

has to be free, as its very essence shows; it is the passage of a free being to the definitive stage which its liberty has prepared.”<sup>252</sup> In sum, in the opinion of these theologians, “As the end of man, who is a spiritual person, it [death] is an active consummation from within brought about by the person himself. It is a growing up, the result of what man has made of himself during this life, the achievement of total self-possession. It is the real self-creation, the fullness of his freely exercised personal reality.”<sup>253</sup>

Of course, such theologians do not claim that they or their readers can identify the act of death they describe in their own experience. Rather, they posit the act as part of each human being’s final and incommunicable experience. But just *when* does a dying person do this act? Some people die suddenly. Most people who die over a stretch of time—whether from accidental injury, disease, or old age—seem less and less capable of any human act as they approach the end. On the other hand, one cannot make one’s final option *after* one dies, for death does seal one’s fate forever.<sup>254</sup> Recognizing this problem, a proponent of the theory can say that the act “occurs neither before nor after death, but *in* death” and that to hold that the final option takes place after death would “be contrary to the Church’s teaching on the unalterability of the state a man reaches through his death.”<sup>255</sup> Thus, some proponents insist that the option pertains to the whole person, somehow including the body,<sup>256</sup> and some that it occurs in the very moment of death, which, they argue, is not yet after death.<sup>257</sup>

All of these theologians contrast the final option with all the acts that preceded it and, in describing it, inadvertently reveal what sort of acting subject that unique act would require. “Freedom was indispensable for the acts of earthly life, because they exercised some definite influence; surely freedom is indispensable for the act which definitely settles everything. The *personal self* was whole and free when it was confined to the body and shared in its servitudes; it must be so all the more at the moment of liberation.”<sup>258</sup> “In disengaging itself from the body, *the soul* freely assumes a consistent attitude to the world of values that was not realizable to this extent before. It wills as spirit what is forced upon it as body—its own temporary separation from the body.”<sup>259</sup> “If at the moment of separation, of death, *the soul* is active, its activity is of the same nature as that of the separate intelligences.”<sup>260</sup> “In death the *individual existence* takes its place on the confines of all being, suddenly awake, in full knowledge

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252. Mersch, op. cit., 265.

253. Rahner, op. cit., 39.

254. As is clear from the Church’s teachings: DS 856-58/464, 1000-1002/530-31, and 1304-6/693.

255. Boros, op. cit., 4.

256. See Mersch, op. cit., 265; Gleason, op. cit., 63-64.

257. See Troisfontaines, op. cit., 154; Boros, op. cit., 4-5.

258. Mersch, op. cit., 267 (emphasis added). Note that the phrase, “the moment of liberation,” manifests the influence of self-body dualism—the idea that human beings really are spirits confined within bodies, not bodily beings.

259. Gleason, op. cit., 64 (emphasis added).

260. Quoted with approval from P. Glorieux, by Troisfontaines, op. cit., 157 (his emphasis deleted, mine added).

and liberty. The hidden dynamism of existence by which a man has lived until then—though without his ever having been able to exploit it in its fullest measure—is now brought to completion, freely and consciously.”<sup>261</sup>

The subject of the hypothetical final option must be the *personal self* no longer confined to the body, the *soul* willing as spirit, the *soul* acting as the angels act, the *individual existence* no longer located in the physical universe. But a living person’s soul does not think and choose; the *person* thinks and chooses. During the time of an acting person’s life, it is not the soul that deliberates, freely chooses, and acts.<sup>262</sup> Rather, the bodily person, alive by his or her informing soul, acts by exercising not only spiritual capacities of intelligence and freedom but also capacities of imagination, feeling, and so on—capacities that involve bodily organs. But, according to final-option theorists, the subject making the supposed final option is not the bodily person informed by his or her soul. Rather, the subject of the consummatory act is a soul no longer informing a bodily person.

Such a soul, however, is the soul of someone who has died. So, even though advocates of final option speak of the body’s involvement and an act at the very moment of death, what they say about the subject making the option makes it clear that it could only be made after death. But an after-death option that could settle one’s eternal destiny is theologically untenable.<sup>263</sup>

In sum, even though we must not presume to judge anyone’s internal guilt, any realistic consideration of the facts about human sinfulness supports the conclusion that not all human beings will be saved. For, considered in the light of faith, the facts make it clear that it is unreasonable to suppose that very few human beings die in mortal sin.

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261. Boros, *op. cit.*, viii (emphasis added). The passage goes on (viii-ix): “Man’s deepest being comes rushing towards him. With it comes all at once and all together the universe he has always borne hidden within himself, the universe with which he was already most intimately united, and which, in one way or other, was always being produced from within him. Humanity too, everywhere driven by a like force, a humanity that bears within itself, all unsuspecting, a splendour he could never have imagined, also comes rushing towards him. Being flows towards him like a boundless stream of things, meanings, persons and happenings, ready to convey him right into the Godhead. Yes; God himself stretches out his hand for him; God who, in every stirring of his existence, had been in him as his deepest mystery, from the stuff of which he had always been forming himself; God who had ever been driving him on towards an eternal destiny. There now man stands, free to accept or reject this splendour. In a last, final decision he either allows this flood of realities to flow past him, while he stands there eternally turned to stone, like a rock past which the life-giving stream flows on, noble enough in himself no doubt, but abandoned and eternally alone; or he allows himself to be carried along by this flood, becomes part of it and flows on into eternal fulfillment.” How could anyone not be carried along into eternal fulfillment? Boros is not describing a final option, for every option has a real alternative; what he describes is compelling—too good to refuse.

262. As St. Thomas teaches, actions are of suppositis—that is, of complete, acting entities, not of any part or principle of them (see *S.t.*, 2-2, q. 58, a. 2, c.); this truth is important in Christology (see *De unione Verbi*, art. 1, ad 16).

263. For a fuller treatment of final option, including a discussion of the problems that suggested the theory, see Germain Grisez, “Death in Theological Reflection,” *Linacre Quarterly*, 69:1 (February 2002): 4-11.

### 5) Christians should hope for each human being's salvation.

The certitude of Christians that not all human beings will be saved in no way prevents or impedes love for each one of them, hope that each will be saved, concern that each might be lost, and earnest prayer for every single person on earth. One is aware that some will be lost, but one cannot judge the internal guilt or innocence of anyone other than oneself and unable to predict anyone's, even one's own, future good and bad free choices. So, one must hope for the best and fear the worst for each and every one. The Church always has prayed for everyone on earth, and Christians should continue to do so, because no one can repent or persevere without God's grace.<sup>264</sup>

Indeed, if someone believes that all human beings will be saved, he or she will be unable to choose to do anything for his or her own salvation or anyone else's. We cannot choose to act for the sake of something we believe will come about without our action, any more than we can choose to try to prevent something from happening if we are convinced it will happen no matter what we do.

The point can be illustrated by an analogy. Suppose I have an uncle who, though a billionaire, lives as a good Christian should, and who has been very kind. I love him. Uncle learns that he has Alzheimer's and in a few years will be unable to manage his own affairs. Consider two scenarios.

(1) Uncle creates an irrevocable trust, by which he both funds his own future care and provides a life annuity for me that will begin in precisely five years, no matter what I do. I still love Uncle, and now am very grateful to him. But since I expect the life annuity as a sure thing, rather than hope for it, I cannot choose to do anything to get it.

(2) Uncle creates an irrevocable trust by which he both funds his own future care and provides either (a) a donation to the Missionaries of Charity; or (b) a life annuity for me that will begin in precisely five years, provided I meet certain conditions. Uncle at once pays off all my debts and provides an allowance to enable me to live decently and to do some charitable works. The conditions for receiving the life annuity are that I use the allowance for just those purposes, and not waste any money as the prodigal son did, or run up debts, or gamble, or live luxuriously rather than decently, and so have little for charitable works. Uncle explains the point of his conditions: He fears that receiving the annuity could be disastrous for me if I do not learn self-control and prudent use of money, and he hopes that, with the allowance and the guidance of his conditions, I will shape up, receive the annuity, and use it to live as a good Christian should, doing many charitable works.

Assume that I will be unable to cheat—the trustees will know whether I meet the conditions and will carry out their trust without fail. I have a choice: to try to meet the conditions and receive the annuity, or not. If I really love Uncle, I will accept his gift and

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264. CCC, 1058: "The Church prays that no one should be lost: 'Lord, let me never be parted from you.' If it is true that no one can save himself, it is also true that God 'desires all men to be saved' (1 Tim 2:4), and that for him 'all things are possible' (Mt 19:26)." Note that the celebrant's prayer (quoted from the Mass) is for his own salvation, 1 Tm 2.1-6 requires that nobody in this world be excluded from the Church's prayer, and Mt 19.26 asserts that God can save individuals of all sorts.

its reasonable conditions, and will faithfully meet them. If I decide not to try to meet the conditions, or at first undertake to do so but give in to temptation and fail to fulfill the commitment, I show that I no longer love Uncle or lack fidelity, for I am unreasonably refusing or forgoing his good gift.

The connection between meeting the conditions and receiving the annuity is not as close as the connection between living a Christian life and entering the kingdom. Uncle could entrust his wealth to me without setting any conditions, because the two things are neither identical nor necessarily connected with each other. By contrast, God cannot give us the kingdom, which is a communion of love, unless we die in love. Unless we make the right free choices, even God cannot give us the kingdom—just as he cannot make circles that are square, rain drops that are dry, or any other nonsensical ‘thing.’

Thus, believing that everyone will be saved makes it impossible to choose to do anything about my own or anyone else’s salvation. But God both desires that everyone be saved and knows that some resist his mercy. Therefore, he warns that hell is a real possibility that will be realized all too often, and encourages everyone to fear hell, hope for salvation, and so walk in the life of good deeds prepared for him or her.

Many people who do not believe everyone will be saved are likely to find appealing the hypothesis that only very wicked people will be lost. Although that view is at odds with Trent’s definitive teaching concerning the relationship between grace and mortal sin (see 4, above), it has a certain appeal. But there is no good reason for optimism about the proportion of those who will be saved. True, there are good reasons to think “many are called, but few are chosen” does *not* mean that fewer are saved than damned.<sup>265</sup> True, too, there are good reasons for supposing that the human ability to commit mortal sins is limited in ways Augustine and Aquinas did not know about. But our own sinfulness and the apparent sinfulness of others rule out complacency about how many will be lost. The truth is, we do not know, and assuming that almost everyone will be saved nurtures presumption and undermines hope, just as assuming that almost nobody will be saved nurtures despair and undermines hope.

In our own meditation and in sharing our faith with others, we ought to focus principally, as Jesus and Paul did, on the kingdom and on love, not on hell and fear. The kingdom and love take priority with respect to understanding, because they can be understood in themselves, while hell and the fear of God can be understood rightly only by reference to the kingdom and love. With respect to emotional motivation, focusing on the kingdom elicits feelings of gratitude and leads to joy, while concentrating on hell either provokes resentment, which is disastrous, or elicits only the servile compliance of legalistic minimalism. Still, as Jesus and Paul also did, we should bear in mind and point out to others the need to avoid hell and the appropriateness of fear. Perfect love does drive out fear; but since none of us loves perfectly, fear is an ally that deserves our

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265. See Ben F. Meyer, *Christus Faber: The Master Builder and the House of God* (Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick, 1992), 81-90 (ch. 5). Meyer’s thesis in the chapter is its title: “Many (=All) Are Called, but Few (=Not All) Are Chosen.” Other New Testament passages that seem to say that the majority are lost, such as Mt 7.13-14 and Lk 13.23-34, can be understood in an analogous way.

respect and, for the time being, our hospitality: “If you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile” (1 Pt 1.17).

### **6) Although some will end in hell, all shall be well.**

Some passages in Scripture (for example, 1 Cor 15.20-28, Eph 1.7-10, and Col 1.15-20) suggest that in the end the divine plan is to incorporate absolutely everything into a single harmonious whole. While those passages neither say nor imply that all created persons will be saved, they seem at odds with hell’s reality, understood as people existing without beatitude, separated from both God and those who live in his love. This consideration is powerful. It was one of the things that led some of the Church Fathers to suppose that the punishment of the damned will eventually end. But that view was condemned (see DS 411/211), and even Von Balthasar distances himself from it.<sup>266</sup>

The matter is difficult and speculation about it is undoubtedly dangerous. But perhaps one can maintain that the permanent damnation of the demons and some humans will not be a loose end in the final state of God’s creation. That will be so if the reality of hell will involve no permanent residue of intelligible evil, and if the wills of even the damned are brought into harmony with the wills of God and the blessed.

If intelligent creatures naturally required the beatific vision for their fulfillment, permanently missing out on it by any of them would entail a permanent residue of evil in the universe. However, although intelligent creatures were created for heaven, no creature is by nature capable of intimacy with God, much less due such intimacy. For each and every one of the blessed, sharing in beatitude is pure grace; even the merits of the blessed are divine gifts, as Trent teaches (see DS 1548/810). The view that intelligent creatures have a natural exigency for intimacy with God—a natural desire for the beatific vision—must be rejected as incompatible with the gratuity of that intimacy.<sup>267</sup> And, while living faith is a gift that everybody ought to accept with joyful gratitude, and while beatitude is a merited crown for the blessed, beatitude is not due those who, by sinning, refuse living faith or fail to cherish it. So, although the damned, who lack heavenly beatitude, miss out on a great gift, they do not on that account lack what they ought to have, and so do not on that account suffer privation. Consequently, their condition of lacking divine intimacy—and in that respect being separated from God—is not in itself evil.

Someone might argue that the lack of divine life in the damned must be a privation, for original sin certainly is a privation, and the essence of that sin is the lack of divine life in human beings that resulted from its loss by the sin of the first humans. The answer is that coming to be without sanctifying grace is a privation for human persons because God gave divine life to the first humans as a family, rather than only as individuals, and that first human family could and should have cherished the gift and handed it on to all their descendants. The damned, by contrast, are not deprived of anything they ought to have

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266. Op. cit., 154.

267. Pius XII condemned the view that God could not create intelligent creatures without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision; see *Humani generis*, DS 3891/2318.

and enjoy, but lack divine life because they have forgone the gift by sinning mortally—that is, by freely determining themselves in a way incompatible with intimacy with God.

Original sin is like a situation in which a fabulously wealthy man sets up a trust to support his descendants in perpetuity. They would suffer no privation had he instead left his wealth to the poor. But if his children, who should safeguard the principal, violate the terms of the trust and squander it, subsequent generations are deprived of what ought to have been their heritage. Dying in mortal sin is like personally choosing not to meet the trust's requirements and thereby forgoing the income one otherwise might receive. While someone who did that would not enjoy the gift, he or she would not suffer any privation.

Not loving others as themselves, the damned also can have no authentic interpersonal relationships with other people; they will lack friends. But although friendship is a fundamental human good, its lack need not be a privation. With respect to human goods in general, people's capacity is open-ended, and nobody can be fulfilled with respect to every possibility. Of course, with respect to certain goods, such as life and health, human nature requires fulfillment. But with respect to friendship and certain other goods, people's capacity is determined, not by nature, but by their own free choices. Having freely incapacitated themselves for intimacy with God and everyone else, the lack of those goods by people in hell is not a privation.

The wills of sinners are evil insofar as they freely choose unreasonably—that is, in ways not in accord with relevant moral truths. But even sinners intend some authentic goods. Let us suppose that, once raised from the dead, the damned will find themselves in a situation such that they have no power to destroy, damage, or impede any human good but do enjoy life and good health, and have the power to act for and enjoy various other goods: knowledge of truth, experience of beauty, play, and “work.”

In such a situation, even if the damned did not and could not repent, they might eventually stop willing wrongly and hating God. How? Perhaps they would learn by experience that willing wrongly and hating God are always self-defeating. Understanding clearly their own limited but real capacity to share in some human goods—ones that do not involve the selfless love they have freely refused—they might learn the necessary conditions for participating optimally in those goods, and so necessarily will those conditions, including their own existence and their appropriate interaction with other creatures, along with the good will of God on which they depend. Thus, by insight into the necessary conditions of the limited fulfillment to which they have consigned themselves, the damned would have no alternative but to will in accord with God's will rather than hate him. So, despite themselves, the damned—including demons—would live in harmony with God, with Christ, and with the blessed, though lacking the intimacy that the blessed will enjoy with the divine persons and one another.

This hypothesis may seem absurd and incompatible with faith. But faithful Catholics for centuries entertained without difficulty a somewhat similar hypothesis: limbo for the unbaptized.<sup>268</sup> I am not suggesting that the damned are in limbo. Although hell as

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268. See St. Thomas, *De malo*, q. 5, aa. 1-3. As I argued in **A-5**, above, Thomas's teaching regarding limbo is inconsistent with his claim that the true ultimate end of human persons is God alone attained by the beatific vision.

described here would be like limbo in excluding the beatific vision while affording its occupants some human fulfillment and harmony with God's will, the two also would differ in important respects. (1) Limbo was thought to be a condition of real evil, because the lack of beatitude was regarded as a privation; hell, on the present hypothesis, entirely excludes evil. (2) Limbo was thought to involve no suffering. Hell, even if free of intelligible evil, will involve suffering.

How can there be suffering without intelligible evil?

The experience of sensible evil also is suffering. What is sensibly evil usually also is intelligibly evil. Damage to one's body is an intelligible evil that involves a privation; so, it causes pain that provokes negative feelings. And thinking about intelligible evils often involves imagery that provokes negative feelings. But pain sensations also can be triggered before one's body is damaged, with the result that bodily conditions involving no privation can cause suffering and so be perceived as sensibly evil. Likewise, awareness of a lack that is not a privation can involve imagery that provokes negative feelings. For example, lack of children on the part of those who commit themselves to celibacy or virginity for the kingdom's sake can be emotionally painful without being a privation, or even being mistakenly regarded as a privation.

Human persons who are damned may initially undergo a hard process of learning by experience the limits and conditions of their existence. In that process, they may well experience sufferings more or less similar to those they have caused others. But, eventually, that suffering may diminish and cease as they learn to will only what is truly good—not by their conversion but by gaining insight into their unalterable situation.

Yet the end of that process would not be the end of their suffering, for they still would enjoy no intimate relationship with God or anyone else. They would know that they might have done so, and despite understanding their situation, they would experience, due to their sentient nature, unsatisfiable curiosity and irremediable loneliness. Inevitably involving emotional suffering, those experiences would be the worm that does not die and the fire that is not quenched (see Is 66.24, Mk 9.48). But that suffering would be intelligibly good, for it would be a positive reality appropriately corresponding to a situation in itself intelligibly good. Hence, whereas limbo was thought to be a punishment for original sin involving evil without suffering, hell, on this hypothesis, would be a punishment for personal sin involving suffering without intelligible evil.

Some might argue that hell thus conceived would be insufficient punishment for the damned. I grant that. But God's mercy is so great that the lot of every human person will be far better than he or she deserves. Without God's redemptive work in Jesus none would be saved: all would die in their sins, none would enjoy heavenly beatitude, none would rise from the dead, and all would remain forever alienated from God and one another. But by grace all human beings, including the damned, will have been saved by Jesus from at least much of what they truly deserved.

Some reports of private revelations can be read as pointing to a view along these lines. For example, like most Christians of times past, Julian of Norwich accepted on the word of the Lord as a truth of faith what many recent theologians deny to be one, namely,

that many human beings will be damned. But though the Lord did not tell Julian that all human beings might well be saved, he did tell her that, just as the Trinity created all things good in the beginning, the Trinity would make all well in the end. Thus, Julian firmly believed that the Lord had revealed to her: "I shall preserve my word in everything, and I shall make everything well."<sup>269</sup> Her two beliefs are compatible if the Lord Jesus will free even hell from evil, so that every creature will be integrally good, as was every creature in the beginning.

Although hell thus conceived would involve both (1) the lack of divine and human fellowship and (2) consequent emotional suffering, it would differ greatly from hell as it has been conceived, for it would involve no intelligible evil whatsoever. Thus, the single harmonious whole that God will bring about as the final state of things would include the demons and some human beings forever suffering in hell. Still, even if hell is to involve no intelligible evil, the prospect of missing out on intimacy in the kingdom and living forever with emotional anguish remains awful. Therefore, with this hypothesis, it remains possible both to fear and to hope, and it remains urgent to follow Jesus, be prepared for his coming, and strive to promote others' salvation.

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269. *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A. and James Walsh, S.J. (Marway, N.J.: Paulist, 1978), 233 (long text, ch. 32).



## F: The Church: God's Family and Salvific Agency in the World

### 1) All members of the Church are called to share in Jesus' priesthood.

The expression, "members of the Church," is ambiguous, since in one sense it refers to those who have been baptized into the Catholic Church and, in another, to everyone whom the Holy Spirit has gathered into the fellowship of the new covenant (see UR 2-4). Vatican II clarified this ambiguity in reaffirming and explaining a truth of faith defined by Lateran Council IV: "There is but one universal Church of the faithful, outside which no one at all is saved" (DS 802/430; cf. LG 14, AG 7). Salvation is impossible unless one is and remains in union with God; no member of fallen humankind can be in union with God except by being in union with the unique mediator, Jesus; and no one can be in union with Jesus without becoming a member of his Church, the fellowship of the new covenant.

But the dogma does not mean that only Christians in communion with the Roman see are saved, much less that all such Christians are saved. Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a net that gathers good and bad fish (see Mt 13.47-50). But sinners cannot benefit from their association with him except by repenting and following him. Thus, members of the Catholic Church who fail to persevere in charity are not saved: "All the children of the Church are to bear in mind that their special condition must be ascribed, not to their merits, but to Christ's unique grace; and if they do not respond to that grace by thought, word, and deed, not only will they not be saved but they will be judged more severely" (LG 14).

At the same time, those not in communion with the Roman see can be saved. Although people do lose the opportunity for fellowship in the new covenant if "they know that the Catholic Church was established by God through Jesus Christ as necessary yet refuse to enter into her or to remain in her" (LG 14). Those who desire to be baptized by that very fact become members of the Church (see LG 14). And although the Church of Christ *subsists* in the Catholic Church (see LG 8; cf. UR 4, DH 1), she recognizes herself to be united in various ways with all the baptized, even those separated in some respects from her (see LG 15). Indeed, all who "sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience" somehow are embraced by God's saving will (LG 16; cf. GS 22), and thus somehow share in the fellowship of the new covenant (see CCC, 846-48).

In sum, it remains true that outside the Church there is no salvation, but the Catholic Church now recognizes that nobody in good faith is entirely outside her. Therefore, though I shall use *members of the Church* to refer directly to people who have been baptized or received into the Catholic Church (see CIC, cc. 204-5), I do not mean to exclude others who share in the fellowship of the new covenant.

All the baptized do share to some extent in the priesthood of Jesus, the unique mediator. While they cannot do what Jesus did, they can enter into the sanctuary (see

Heb 10.19), give God acceptable worship (see Heb 12.28), and offer sacrifices (see Heb 13.15-16).<sup>270</sup>

God promised the people of Israel that if they kept the covenant, they would be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19.6). Through the remnant of Israel that constituted Jesus’ “little flock,” Christians inherited that promise and are called to share in its fulfillment. Jesus’ sacrifice made that possible:

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pt 2.4-5)

The sacred writer next points out that, for those who fail to obey Jesus’ word, he becomes a stumbling stone.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy. (1 Pt 2.9-10)

Christians share in Jesus’ priesthood only because they are united with him by baptism. They exercise their share in his priesthood only by cooperating with him in offering spiritual sacrifices, which, *through him*, are acceptable to God.<sup>271</sup> Still, insofar as Jesus has redeemed people from every part of humankind and formed them into one new kingdom, all Christians can be said to share in his priesthood and rule: Jesus has “made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth” (Rev 5.10).

Referring to the relevant New Testament texts, Vatican II taught that all the baptized, by their rebirth and the Holy Spirit’s anointing, form a spiritual house and holy priesthood, so that they should offer themselves as a living sacrifice and bear witness to Christ (see SC 14, LG 10). Jesus’ redemptive work is carried out in us through the liturgy, and especially by the Eucharist (see SC 2). Jesus is present in liturgical celebrations and makes his redemptive act present by means of the minister (see SC 7). In carrying out their missions from the Father, the Holy Spirit and Jesus wish to sanctify every disciple, but they need each disciple’s cooperation. Jesus provided the sacraments as good and easy ways for his disciples to cooperate (see *CMP*, 30-B-C).

In being baptized or in appropriating the baptism one received as an infant, one accepts the priestly, saving service of Jesus’ redemptive act, much as the disciples did at the Last Supper by letting Jesus wash their feet. In choosing to accept a service, one intends that it be given; thus, in being baptized, one intends that Jesus continue doing what he chose to do in laying down his life (see Heb 7.25; **D-5**, above). Intending this, one formally cooperates with Jesus’ priestly act and thus begins to exercise the royal priesthood.

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270. Vanhoye, *op. cit.*, 222, explains that the author of Hebrews, who focuses on mediation, never calls Christians “priests.”

271. See John H. Elliott, *I Peter*, Anchor Bible, 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 419-23, 435-38, 449-55.

People likewise formally cooperate with Jesus' redemptive act when they participate in the Eucharist, as Jesus commanded, and thus join him in offering himself. At the same time, they should offer themselves (see SC 48)—that is, offer their commitment to do the Father's will and offer everything they do and suffer in carrying out that commitment. In that way, they exercise priesthood by offering "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2.5).

Similar analyses can be made of participation in the other sacraments. Through the sacraments—especially through one's self-offering in the Eucharist—one's priesthood can and should be exercised in everything else that makes up a holy Christian life: personal prayer, self-denial, fulfilling the duties of one's state in life, other charitable works, patient suffering, and so on (see LG 10-11).<sup>272</sup>

But the priesthood of the faithful has important limitations. Three in particular should be borne in mind.

First, no human person is a full partner with Jesus in his priestly act. Christians' cooperation with Jesus does not bring about but presupposes the transformation brought about by his mediation and the Father's response to it.<sup>273</sup> The cooperation has a priestly character only because it involves intending Jesus' priestly act. Christians cooperate in enjoying its benefits—including that of enabling them to worship God in spirit and in truth—and helping others to enjoy them.

Second, the priestly, human cooperation of Jesus and of those who receive the sacraments does not by itself bring about the salvific benefits that follow from it. Divine causality is necessary. Thus, the power of the Holy Spirit acts in and through the sacraments (see CCC, 1128; *CMP*, 30-D). The sacraments contain and confer grace (see DS 1310/695, 1606/849) precisely because they are ways in which Jesus enables Christians to cooperate with the Holy Spirit, who confers grace.

Third, for the fruitfulness of Jesus' priestly act, those he intended to save must cooperate with him insofar as they can. Had no one repented, believed, and accepted his priestly service, Jesus' self-sacrifice would have been fruitless. But although the repentance, faith, and cooperation of those who share in the fellowship of the new covenant are their own acts, those human acts, like everything salvific, also are gifts of the Holy Spirit.

## **2) The Church both is and is not the kingdom of God.**

Moses' mediation did not establish the Sinai covenant. Rather, it was established by God's offer and the people's commitment in accepting it. Once the covenantal community existed, it did not depend on Moses, and it continued to exist after he died. By contrast, Jesus' human cooperation with God established the new covenant on behalf of all fallen human beings without any action of theirs, and to participate in

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272. See *CMP*, chapters 30-33, for a detailed treatment of the ways in which baptism, confirmation, penance, anointing of the sick, and the Eucharist can and ought to shape the whole of a Christian's life, each in a distinctive way.

273. LG 62 alludes to this point in explaining "Mediatrice" as applied to Jesus' mother.

the covenant's fellowship, Jesus' Church, requires being united with him. That union is threefold.<sup>274</sup>

First, it is the union in human acts explained above in reference to the priesthood of all the baptized. Jesus reveals God's reign by his human words and deeds, and asks other human beings to accept him with faith and cooperate with him by doing what he commands. In the Gospels, Jesus demands this faith; in Acts, to become a Christian is to believe; in Paul, faith in Christ saves. In every case, faith involves not only accepting the truth taught first by Jesus and then by the apostles but personally committing oneself to Jesus, trusting him, and obeying him.<sup>275</sup> Like the self-commitments of faithful people generally (see **B-2**, above), the self-sacrificing act of Jesus lasts in him. Since Jesus lives forever, that act lasts forever for others to share in (see Heb 7.24-25). He provided the sacrament of baptism so that anyone prepared to join in the faith of his Church might be united with his redemptive act by being baptized into his one body (see 1 Cor 12.13).

Second, union with Jesus is bodily—a real, though sacramental, human unity of many in one flesh. In the Last Supper, Jesus gave his flesh and blood to be eaten and drunk, and provided that this bodily self-giving would be continued in the Eucharist. By sharing in his flesh and blood, Christians become his members so that they form one body with him and in him (see 1 Cor 6.15, 10.16-17, 12.27; Eph 5.30). This bodily union is a mutual indwelling and a sharing in Jesus' resurrection life, the principle by which Christians themselves will be raised up (see Jn 6.53-58). In the celebration of the Eucharist, Jesus' redemptive act is “remembered”—made present so that the faithful, gathered together, can consciously unite themselves with it, reaffirming and deepening their baptismal commitment; then covenantal fellowship is completed by the giving and consuming of the Lord's flesh and blood.<sup>276</sup>

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274. On this threefold union, see also *CMP*, 461-68.

275. See John L. McKenzie, S.J., *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 268-71. While the act of faith is the believer's free self-commitment, it also is the work of the Holy Spirit, a divine gift. The same is true of *everything* human persons do that contributes to their salvation. As explained in **B-3** and **B-4**, above, Christians both transform themselves by salvific acts and are transformed by God's grace in doing so.

276. The choice Jesus began to carry out when he laid down his life by celebrating the Last Supper with his disciples was not only to celebrate the Passover with them and to establish the new covenant but also to institute the sacrament of the Eucharist; he wanted his disciples—not just the few with him on that occasion but those who would gather for each Mass until the end of time—to be able to share both in his self-offering to the Father and, by receiving Communion, in his resurrection life. Rather than merely recalling Jesus' redemptive act or repeating it or adding another human act to it, therefore, each Mass is *part* of the carrying out of the choice in which Jesus freely accepted his passion and death as a side effect. That same choice still lasts in Jesus now living in glory, and he himself, by means of the ordained minister acting *in persona Christi*, is the principal celebrant of each Eucharist (see SC 7). John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 11-12, AAS 95 (2003) 440-41, *OR*, 23 Apr. 2003, II, emphasizes the real presence of Jesus' redemptive act in every Eucharist: “This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father *only after he had left us a means of sharing in it* as if we had been present there. . . . Jesus did not simply state that what he was giving them to eat and drink was his body and his blood; he also expressed its *sacrificial meaning* and made sacramentally present his sacrifice which would soon be offered on the Cross for the salvation of all. . . . The Church constantly draws her life from the redeeming sacrifice; she approaches it not only through faith-filled remembrance, but also through a real contact, since *this sacrifice is made present ever anew*, sacramentally perpetuated, in every

Since Jesus is both God and man, Christians' union with him, both bodily and in human acts, makes the divine-human fellowship of the new covenant different in kind and far more intimate than the fellowship of any previous covenant. But with the bond created by baptism, the faithful are united with Jesus in a third way: by sharing in his very divine life. Christian baptism is "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28.19)—an adoption into the family of God.<sup>277</sup> John baptized with water for repentance, but Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit (see Mt 3.11, Mk 1.8, Lk 3.16, Jn 1.33; cf. Acts 1.5, 19.1-6). Christian baptism is a new birth of water and the Spirit that makes human persons children of God (see Jn 1.12-13, 3.5-8); "and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom 8.17).

Although, as Paul notes, this sharing in Jesus' heritage can be lost by Christians who fail to live up to it, it is real, not metaphorical. It is a sharing in the divine nature (see 2 Pt 1.4) and therefore in the intimate life of the Trinity. Jesus prayed for all who were to believe in him:

. . . that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. . . . I have made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. (Jn 17.21-23, 26)

Jesus is asking that his disciples be one in him and in the Father as Jesus and the Father are in each other. He says he has given his disciples the "glory" he receives from the Father, and that he makes known the Father's name to his disciples so that the Father's love and Jesus himself may be *in* the disciples. That way of putting the matter may seem insufficiently precise to those who accept a theology sharply differentiating Christians' status as children of God from Jesus' divine sonship.<sup>278</sup> However, the sacred writer's assertions should be believed and contrary theological opinions rejected.

In sum, human persons who enter into the new covenant are profoundly transformed in three ways. First, from living as sinners in a sinful world, they enter into a community

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community which offers it at the hands of the consecrated minister. . . . The Mass makes present the sacrifice of the Cross; it does not add to that sacrifice nor does it multiply it."

277. Albright and Mann, *op. cit.*, 362, argue that "the expression used in this verse describes an entrance into fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Vatican II often calls the Church "the family of God" or "the family of God's children": LG 28, 32; UR 2; PO 6; GS 32, 40, 42, 92. The first Eucharistic Prayer also asks the Father to "accept this offering from your whole family"—an expression unchanged from the Roman Canon that was in use for many centuries.

278. In commenting on these verses, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Gospel according to John*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 29A:778-79, makes this point. He also soundly argues (776): "Some type of vital, organic unity seems to be demanded by the fact that the relationship of Father and Son is held up as the model of unity. The Father-Son relationship involves more than moral union; the two are related because the Father gives life to the Son (vi 57). Similarly the Christians are one with one another and with the Father and the Son because they have received of this life."

formed by Jesus' perfect obedience to the Father and are enabled by the Church's sacraments to cooperate with that obedience. Second, from living as bodies doomed to die, they enter into the Church, Christ's body, and share in his resurrection life. Third, from living as creatures alienated from God, they become the Father's very dear children, formed by the Holy Spirit into intimate communion with the Son begotten by God: "The *Church* is this new communion of God and men" (CCC, 2790). The third transformation—becoming God's children and sharing in the divine inheritance—is the key point of God's redemptive work in Christ (see Rom 8.14-17, Gal 4.4-7; cf. Jn 1.12-13, 1 Jn 3.1).<sup>279</sup>

The threefold union with Jesus that constitutes the fellowship of the new covenant accounts for the distinction between—and the identity of—the Church and the kingdom. In the Church of the present age, cooperation with Jesus' redemptive act depends on faith and is by means of the sacraments; sharing in his resurrection life requires faithfulness to death; and the divine inheritance can be squandered by grave sin.<sup>280</sup> For those who enter the kingdom that is to come, all those limitations on the new covenant's fellowship will be overcome.

Still, insofar as the Church and the kingdom are identical, the Church will last forever and the kingdom is already realized.

In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus announces the kingdom as a reality already present or imminent. Moreover, he implies that his Church will be the kingdom in naming Peter the rock on which the Church will be built and promising him the keys of the kingdom of heaven (see **D-3**, above). Again, the priesthood of Christians is *royal*, not because they belong to some human kingdom or family, but precisely because they are God's people and members of his household (see Ex 19.5-6 with 1 Pt 2.9-10). Paul prayed that the Colossians would give "thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col 1.12-13).

Yet the kingdom also is still to come, and we must pray for its coming (see Mt 6.10, Lk 11.2). Many passages point to the end of the present age and the coming of a new one (see Mt 12.32, 13.39-40, 13.49, 24.3, 28.20; Mk 10.30; Lk 18.30, 20.34-36). Jesus'

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279. With that in mind, one can understand Paul's puzzling statement: "For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5.21). Paul does not say "so that in him we might be justified by God," as one would expect, but "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." How can we become God's righteousness? By union with Jesus, who, as God's Son, not only is righteous but righteousness itself—just as he is not only a mediator but *the* way, not only truthful and faithful but *the* truth, not only alive but *the* life. Jesus is made *to be sin* inasmuch as the Father sends him in mortal flesh to be obedient unto death—to unite himself with fallen humankind so that fallen humankind will be united with righteousness itself and thus share in being that very righteousness (cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Super II ad Corinthios*, cap. 5, lect. 5; CCC, 602).

280. Only after baptism do Christians gradually learn all that Jesus asks of them (see Mt 28.20); their repentance must continue and their faith must grow (see 2 Cor 10.15, 1 Thes 3.9-10, Heb 12). Thus, Christians are exhorted: "Build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And convince some, who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear" (Jude 20-23).

kingdom will be everlasting (see Lk 1.33); he will come gloriously “in his kingdom” (see Mt 16.27-28; cf. Mt 25.31-46, Mk 9.1, Lk 9.27). At the Last Supper, he looks forward to a future banquet “in my Father’s kingdom” (Mt 26.29; cf. Mk 14.25; Lk 22.18, 30).

How can the kingdom be both present and future? Its *coming* is a process rather than a single event; the heart of its reality is divine action, which transcends history (see A-2, above). God begins to realize his reign in the world with the Incarnation of the Word; Jesus makes the reign of God manifest both by his perfect obedience and by proclaiming the kingdom and providing signs of its coming; Jesus’ death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit make the kingdom real in a manner at once ongoing and hidden, in the fellowship of the Church. The kingdom’s full realization does not belong to this world or to the present age, but will be heavenly (see 2 Tm 4.18) and eternal (see 2 Pt 1.11). Therefore, though the reign of God really was present when Jesus walked the earth, his kingship is not of this world (see Jn 18.36), and we still await “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pt 3.13).

The faithful who die in union with Christ will be raised up by him, and will be with him (see Jn 6.53-54, Phil 1.23; cf. Jn 14.3, 1 Thes 4.17). They will see God as he is, face to face (see 1 Jn 3.2, 1 Cor 13.12; cf. DS 1000-1001/530). Thus, the Church

will attain her full perfection only in the glory of heaven, when the time will come for the restoration of all things (Acts 3.21); and the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to human beings and achieves its purpose through them, will be perfectly reestablished in Christ (see Eph 1.10, Col 1.20, 2 Pt 3.10-13). (LG 48)

After having overcome every evil and gathered up all things, Jesus will deliver the kingdom to God the Father (see 1 Cor 15.20-28).

Consequently, as Vatican II teaches, the Church and the kingdom are not simply identical. The Church on earth is the kingdom’s hidden presence or initial budding forth (see LG 3, 5). One might use the analogy of the butterfly’s development: from embryo (Jesus’ little flock), to caterpillar (his present Church on earth), to pupa (those who have died in him but not yet entered into glory), to mature butterfly (the glorious kingdom).

Of course, that analogy also breaks down. Unlike the organism that finally becomes a butterfly, the Church is not an individual substance of a natural species but a super-substantial reality: the divine-human communion centered in the risen Lord Jesus. All human persons who abide in God’s love fully share in that holy fellowship, and thus are a communion of saints. The newly baptized already are united with the souls in purgatory and with Mary and the Church in glory; together they all make up the one holy Church (see LG 49-50).

But even though she is not yet the hoped-for kingdom, the Church on earth “has for her end the kingdom of God” (LG 9) and will be transformed into the kingdom. The banquet in the kingdom, to which Jesus looked forward at the Last Supper, will be the marriage feast of the Lamb, whose bride is the Church, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God (see Rv 19.6-8, 21.1-14). Meanwhile, Christians already belong by hope to the kingdom that is to come. Celebrating the Eucharist in remembrance of Jesus, they even now are a communion of saints—a holy people enjoying holy things

together (see CCC, 946-53). They join with all the saints and angels in singing: “Holy, holy, holy!” (see Rv 4.8; LG 50), participate in the unending heavenly liturgy, and are among those blessed in being called to share in the supper of the Lamb.<sup>281</sup>

### 3) The Church’s other features are relative to divine-human communion.

Defects and shortcomings are inevitable in the Church on earth. She gathers up sinners, and all her members must admit their sinfulness (see 1 Jn 1.8-10). Yet the Church is holy by virtue of the Spirit’s indwelling and her union with Jesus. She gathers up sinners precisely in order to transform them into saints. Therefore, the holy Church always needs to be purified in her members (see LG 8) and reformed insofar as she is an institution of human beings living in the present age (see UR 6).

Vatican II also teaches that the Church has many good things that are not permanent: “In her sacraments and institutions, which belong to the present age, the pilgrim Church bears the mark of this world, which will pass away” (LG 48). Still, as the mention of the sacraments indicates, some of the Church’s impermanent features were initiated by Christ and implemented by the Holy Spirit during the apostolic age. Such features, which are not subject to change even by those holding supreme authority in the Church, are therefore essential to her during the present age. The inspired Scriptures, the preaching of the word, and the holding and handing on of faith are vital now but will be displaced when faith gives way to sight. Ordained ministry is sacramental and its basic structure also is essential: apostolic and episcopal collegiality, Petrine and papal primacy, and the subordinate orders of presbyters and deacons (see DS 1776-77/966-67, 3059-64/1826-31; LG 18-29). But when all those who die in Christ are living with him in glory, there will be no need for clerical service, and the hierarchical structure of the Church will pass away.<sup>282</sup>

Some features of the Church were inevitable insofar as she is a human society within the world as it is. This is true, for instance, of her organization as a communion of particular churches. After Pentecost, the Church quickly was built up “throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria” (Acts 9.31), yet remained one. Soon, groups of Jesus’ disciples living at some distance from one another—for example, in Jerusalem and in Antioch—had to act more or less independently. So, while remaining one Church *in* both Antioch and Jerusalem (see Acts 11.22-26), the local groups also became distinct churches *at* one or another place (see Acts 13.1), and each needed its own clergy (see Acts 14.23). Paul’s writings also make it clear that particular churches emerged within the single, unique communion of the faithful with God and Christ.<sup>283</sup> While speaking of

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281. Scott Hahn, *The Lamb’s Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 6, develops the idea: “The Book of Revelation will show us the Mass as *heaven on earth*.”

282. Still, the good fruits of clerical service, not only in those who received it but in those who provided it, will be found again in the kingdom (see GS 39), and the sacramental character received at ordination will forever belong to clerics; and, presumably, clerics who inherit the kingdom will somehow be fulfilled as such.

283. For a plausible exegesis of many New Testament texts referring to the one Church and the many churches, see Lucien Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), 95-117, 187-215.

“all the churches of Christ” (Rom 16.16) and the “churches of God” (1 Cor 11.16), he also confesses that he persecuted the “church of God” (1 Cor 15.9, Gal 1.13; cf. Phil 3.6) rather than “the churches of God” or “the church at” some particular place.<sup>284</sup> Paul rejoices in suffering for Christ’s “body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known” (Col 1.24-25). Paul also took pains to maintain fellowship with the leaders of the church at Jerusalem (see Gal 2.1-2), and they and Paul manifested the Church’s unity by working together to resolve an important, divisive issue (see Acts 15.1-21).

Thus, the many people who belonged to the Church inevitably became organized into a communion of particular churches, whose supervising leaders—that is, bishops—had received their office, directly or indirectly, from the apostles. Yet the fundamental and permanent reality of the Church is the unique divine-human communion centered upon the Lord Jesus. The multiplicity of local churches, ordinariates, and other ecclesial groups, now existing or yet to be invented, will pass away.<sup>285</sup>

In having essential features that are impermanent, the Church is like a person still in the womb. Placenta, umbilical cord, and amniotic sac are absolutely vital organs for an unborn baby. At present, the communion with God that Jesus has made available to fallen human beings depends on faith; the sacraments are essential to bring Jesus’ redemptive act to bear so as to overcome sin, form the Church, equip her members for their essential functions, and allow them to anticipate the heavenly wedding feast; and the Church’s essential structure is necessary for her human leaders and members to remain in communion with one another and cooperate in her apostolate. All those features are sacred and are to be revered, and the Holy Spirit enables the Church to identify and sustain them (see **C-3**, above). But when the Church has completed her role of being the sign and instrument of divine-human communion, that sublime life together will be everlasting while many now-essential features will be left behind like afterbirth.

Many other nonessential things in the Church are important. Some were deliberately created, while others sprang up and won official acceptance. The Church developed techniques and instruments of evangelization and catechesis, including much provisional theology; the liturgical rites (except for their essential elements), particular sacramentals and indulgences, and the process for canonizing saints; canon law and tribunals; general and regional councils, and synods; patriarchs, archbishops, and auxiliary bishops; the

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284. See J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, Anchor Bible, 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 161-63.

285. Before that day arrives, dioceses and eparchies (which generally divide the Church geographically) might well become considerably less important than they have been. In a primarily agricultural economy, territory and locality are very important. Today, mobility and instant communication are generating new social structures. As this happens, nonterritorial ways of organizing particular groups of the faithful for worship and apostolate may be used and eventually become dominant. *CIC*, c. 372, §2, provides that the Holy See, with the advice of relevant bishops’ conferences, can create dioceses or other particular churches that are not limited to a definite territory but “distinguished by the rite of the faithful or some other similar reason.” Similarly, *CIC*, c. 518, states: “As a general rule a parish is to be territorial” but provides for “personal parishes” when expedient. Ordinariates have been created for the military personnel of particular nations wherever located; see John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution, *Spirituali militum curae*, AAS 78 (1986) 481-86; *The Pope Speaks*, 31 (1986): 284-88.

college of cardinals, the Roman curia, and bishops' conferences; the method of selecting bishops and the practice of promoting successful pastors; requirements for church buildings, their furnishings, and vestments; and so on. Various groups of the faithful created or developed particular institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life; Catholic schools, hospitals, and media; popular devotions, hymns, and literature; and so on. Most if not all of these have contributed to the Church's holiness and apostolate, and none should be altered or ended without good reason. But some will wane, and others now firmly established may have to be changed for the sake of the Church's effectiveness as sign and instrument.

Even considered as one human society among others in the world, the Church is unique. True, she is superficially like a political society due to her size, the comprehensiveness of her interest in her members' welfare, and some of her impermanent features, especially levels of governance and the territorial division of the units governed. Due to these superficial similarities, some Church members retain political attitudes and expectations in thinking about problems in the Church and their possible solution. But a closer look reveals how greatly the Church differs from political societies.

The Church is vaster than any political society, for she has active members all over the world and even beyond it. But while everyone is subject to the jurisdiction of political societies and most people have no choice about belonging to one, Church membership depends on faith and baptism, and members who renounce their faith cannot be compelled to submit to her jurisdiction. Political societies take—or, at least, should take—a very broad interest in the welfare of their members because most human interests depend upon the goods such societies should focus on promoting and protecting: national security, domestic tranquillity, justice, prosperity, and so on. But the Church has an all-embracing interest in human welfare. She regards as her actual or potential members all human beings, including those yet to be conceived, and her purpose is to promote everyone's salvation and everlasting life, in which every authentic human good will be realized.

In nations, smaller units (such as states or provinces) and larger ones (sovereign powers) generally are concerned with very different matters; representatives of smaller units or diverse regions often bring conflicting interests to bear in the deliberations of the larger ones. But the divine-human communion centered on the risen Lord and all the Church's essential features in this world are present in every particular church, so that in every one of them “the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative” (CD 11; cf. LG 26). Thus, the universal Church and each particular church are concerned almost entirely with the same matters, and the interests of representatives of particular churches or groups of them differ legitimately only when it is a question of instantiating the same good—in which all share together—under somewhat different conditions and in different sets of individuals.<sup>286</sup>

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286. On the relationship between the Church and the particular churches, see also Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, II (7-10), AAS 85 (1993) 842-44, OR, 17 June 1992, 8. Since

The goods with which political societies are mainly concerned are never fully realized or securely possessed; it is necessary always to work at realizing them, and the precise shape they will take never can be determined in advance. Thinking up fresh options, deliberating about them, resolving conflicts among different legitimate interests, and making decisions—not just about what a political society will do but about what it will become—are constantly required.

By contrast, divine-human communion, the good with which the Church is mainly concerned, is a gift of God already realized in the risen Lord Jesus and those with him in glory, and is freely available through the Holy Spirit to everyone on earth willing to share in it. Accepting the gift of divine-human communion, enjoying it, and sharing it with others are the main concerns of the Church, and her main ways of acting also have been given her: bearing witness to the gospel, celebrating the sacraments, and maintaining communion. Therefore, there are in the Church no significant conflicts of legitimate interests to be reconciled. Any conflicts that arise call for the repentance of at least some and often all of those in conflict, not reconciling their true interests. Moreover, nothing anyone does will affect what the Church is going to become, but only whether and how her members and others will be involved in the kingdom into which God will transform her. In the Church, important matters that need resolving call for the discernment of God's will, not communal self-determination after deliberation. So, unlike a political society in which democratic processes and political parties are appropriate, there is no place in the Church for such institutions.

Partisanship does arise, as it did in the church at Corinth. In confronting it, Paul first addressed the contending parties' underlying misconception of the Church. They manifest immature faith by behaving as people usually do and forming parties for Paul and for Apollos (see 1 Cor 3.1-4), who are only servants cooperating with God (see 1 Cor 3.9). By contrast, "You are God's field, God's building" (1 Cor 3.9). Paul laid the foundation—Jesus Christ—and the Corinthians are to build on him; whether they build well or badly is not for them to judge (see 1 Cor 3.10-15). Rather, they must bear in mind what they are, and not tear the Church apart: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are" (1 Cor 3.16-17). Political cleverness is entirely out of place (see 1 Cor 3.18-20).

It hardly needs saying that Paul might well have been addressing contemporary Catholics who have misunderstood Vatican II's teaching that the Church is the people of God by replacing the scriptural idea of *people* with an idea drawn from a political context—"We the people of the United States" or "power to the people." Such Catholics need to recall Paul's final exhortation to the Corinthian partisans: "Let no one boast of men. For all things are yours . . . ; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3.21, 23).

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particular churches differ greatly in their financial and human resources, they may seem to have conflicting interests; however, their common, legitimate interest is the more equitable distribution of resources that would build up the one body.

Of course, those who hold office in the Church herself and in religious institutes and other ecclesial entities are more or less imperfect. Some of them at times gravely abuse their power or omit gravely required actions. Whenever that seems to be happening, other members of the Church should admonish and exhort the apparently defective office-holder to do better.<sup>287</sup> Moreover, the Church's supreme authority should provide the faithful with practicable avenues of recourse against grave wrongdoing and negligence by office-holders.<sup>288</sup>

Jesus points out that political rulers lord it over their subjects and great men make their authority felt: "It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave" (Mt 20.26-27). Jesus lays down his life in serving others and wants his apostles to follow his example (see Mt 20.25-28, Mk 10.42-45, Lk 22.25-27). Insofar as the those who hold office in the Church herself and in ecclesial entities heed Jesus and imitate his characteristics in serving, they provide generous and selfless service, hoping only that "when the chief Shepherd is manifested" he will reward them with "an unfading crown of glory" (1 Pt 5.4).

#### **4) Cooperating with the Holy Spirit, the Church carries on Jesus' mission.**

Jesus, the Messiah (the one anointed by the Spirit), was not only conceived by the Spirit but consecrated by him for service and accompanied by him in carrying it out.<sup>289</sup> Jesus' obedience unto death and his resurrection really transformed the fallen human condition. The forming of the new covenant made it possible for all human beings to believe, to be baptized, and to be changed by receiving God's love in their hearts (see Rom 5.5), so that they can live in friendship with him. All those who undergo that transformation can then cooperate with Jesus in spreading the kingdom throughout the world and preparing materials for it (see LG 17, GS 38-39, AA 2, AG 36).

As Jesus is preparing to die, he promises to send his disciples the Spirit, who will enable them to carry on his work and greatly extend the fellowship of the new covenant: "He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (Jn 14.12). He promises to send the Spirit of truth—that is, of divine revelation—and also to come to them himself (see Jn 14.16-18). They are to bear witness to Jesus; they will be persecuted as he was, but the Spirit will bear witness along with them (see Jn 15.20, 26-27). Seeing them saddened at the prospect of his leaving, Jesus assures them that "it is to your advantage that I go

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287. On the responsibility to admonish those who seem to be sinning (the duty sometimes called "fraternal correction") and how to fulfill it, see *LCL*, 226-32. As St. Thomas points out, this responsibility includes admonishing superiors (see *S.t.*, 2-2, q. 33, a. 4; *In Sent.*, 4, d. 19, q. 2, a. 2, qu'la. 3).

288. Lacking practicable avenues of recourse, many devout people patiently suffer wrongdoing and negligence by office-holders, but scandalized weaker souls sometimes more or less abandon practice of the faith or even entirely reject the Church. Moreover, while recourse to public authorities against office-holders in the Church is repugnant to all faithful Christians (see 1 Cor 6.1-7), sometimes only civil lawsuits have stopped grave and ongoing wrongdoing.

289. See Yves Congar, O.P., *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 3:219.

away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (Jn 16.7).

Why would the Spirit not come unless Jesus went away? Soon after he rose, Jesus appeared to his disciples, said “Peace be with you,” showed them his hands and side, conferred the Holy Spirit on them, and sent them to carry on his mission of reconciliation (see Jn 20.19-23). However, he then appeared to them for a time, to confirm their faith and prepare them for the mission he had given them. Had Jesus continued being visibly present, Peter and others could not have acted in his person, and those hearing the gospel could not have believed without seeing. Jesus had done for his human brothers and sisters what no one else could do, but he could not live their lives for them. They needed to live their own lives to become the persons God was calling them to be. Moreover, Jesus’ glorified humanity is the principle of the *new* creation—of the age to come. To maintain the distinction between this present age and the age to come, the risen Lord Jesus needed to remove himself from this present age. Therefore, having completed his visible, human service within the present age, Jesus ascended to heaven, where he reigns in glory, while his disciples receive the gift of playing their proper parts in carrying out God’s salvific plan. As they do so, they experience the presence and action of the Spirit in an entirely new way.

Jesus’ followers are to make disciples of all nations (see Mt 28.19)—to make the fellowship of the new covenant available throughout the world until the end of the age. The disciples gather, pray, and, at Peter’s initiative, select Matthias to take Judas Iscariot’s place (see Acts 1.12-26). The Holy Spirit already is working with the disciples, but they are waiting for him to give them power and initiate their mission (see Acts 1.8). Then the Spirit comes manifestly and empowers them to speak effectively, and the Spirit and they begin to bear witness together (see Acts 2.1-42). Throughout the remainder of the book of Acts, the Spirit guides the disciples in bearing witness outwardly with words and deeds, while himself acting inwardly, renewing hearts and building up the Church.<sup>290</sup>

It is a mistake to suppose that, in those early days, Paul and the other apostles established the Church or gave her life. Jesus’ action at the Last Supper and the Father’s action in raising him up had established the Church, and what the Spirit did on and after Pentecost vivified her (see LG 7). Rather, the apostles and other disciples were cooperating with Jesus, under the Spirit’s direction and by his power, in building up the fellowship of the new covenant by sharing all the good things God gave them through Jesus with as many other people as would accept them.

What Jesus told the apostles to do remains the apostolate of his Church. Vatican II states the point clearly:

For this the Church was founded: that by spreading the kingdom of Christ everywhere in the world for the glory of God the Father, all people might be made participants in saving redemption [note omitted], and through them the whole world

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290. That relationship between the visible Church and the Holy Spirit is permanent, as Vatican II makes clear by an analogy: “For, as the nature assumed by the divine Word serves as a living organ of salvation permanently united to him, in a somewhat similar way, the Church’s social structure serves the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies her, in building up the body (see Eph 4.16)” (LG 8).

might really be ordered to Christ. All activity of the mystical body directed to the attainment of this goal is called the apostolate. The Church carries it on through all her members, though in various ways; for the Christian vocation, by its nature, is also a vocation to apostolate. Just as, in the structure of a living body, no part is merely passive, but every part shares in the body's workings as in its life; so, too, in the body of Christ, which is the Church, the whole body, "by the appropriate functioning of every part, brings about bodily growth for the building up of itself" (Eph 4.16). Indeed, so closely are the members of this body joined and knit together (see Eph 4.16), that members who fail to do their part for the growth of the body must be said to be good for nothing to the Church and to themselves.<sup>291</sup>

As Paul teaches, one is justified by belief in the heart but saved only by confessing faith with one's lips (see Rom 10.8-10). To be sincere, one must put into practice what one confesses with one's lips. Confessing the faith leads to salvation because it involves living a Christian life. Thus, every member of the Church should help carry out her apostolate. To make that possible, Jesus "makes his whole Mystical Body share in the anointing by the Spirit with which he himself has been anointed" (PO 2).

Like those who received the Spirit at Pentecost, later Christians must receive the Spirit and cooperate with him to fulfill their apostolic responsibility. That explains the sacrament of confirmation: having been united with Jesus' redemptive act in baptism, those being confirmed are again signed with the sign of the cross and now anointed with chrism as a sealing—an effective sign—of the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>292</sup> The Council of Florence teaches: "The effect of this sacrament is that the Holy Spirit is given in it for strength just as he was given to the apostles on Pentecost, in order that the Christian may courageously confess the name of Christ" (DS 1319/697).

Vatican II develops and clarifies this. In a passage in which the Council moves from its treatment of baptism to confirmation, it teaches concerning the baptized: "Reborn as children of God, they must confess before men the faith that they have received from God through the Church. Bound more intimately to the Church by the sacrament of confirmation, they are endowed by the Holy Spirit with special strength, and hence are the more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith both by word and by deed as true witnesses of Christ" (LG 11).

Just as Jesus' priesthood supersedes all other priesthood, his prophetic service supersedes all other prophecy. Once God "has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1.2), no further revelation can be expected until Jesus appears in glory (see DV 4). Similarly, his messiahship is the ultimate kingship: "Of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1.33); he is "Lord of lords and King of kings" (Rev 17.14). Members of the Church participate not only in Jesus' priesthood, but in his prophetic and kingly roles. In

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291. AA 2. The Council repeatedly emphasizes the responsibility of all Church members to contribute, according to their gifts, to carrying on her apostolate; see also LG 17, AG 36.

292. See *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, trans. The International Commission on English in the Liturgy (New York: Pueblo, 1976), 296. The Council of Trent definitively teaches that confirmation is a sacrament really distinct from baptism (see DS 1628/871). On confirmation and the apostolate, see *CMP*, 749-64.

treating of apostolate, therefore, magisterial documents beginning with Vatican II often speak of the three offices.

### **5) The Church's unity must harmonize diverse members and various gifts.**

The Church's unity, as has been explained, is grounded in the divine-human communion centered in the risen Lord Jesus, which embraces human persons by the gift of the Holy Spirit. In exhorting the Ephesians to maintain ecclesial unity, Paul points out various aspects of it: "Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph 4.3-6).

The unity to be maintained is that effected by the divine love given by the Spirit to those who enter into the fellowship of the new covenant, the bond of peace reconciling fallen humankind with God and sinful men and women with one another. The Church is one body, formed by the one Holy Spirit and called to everlasting life in heavenly communion, a life centering upon the one risen Lord Jesus; every member enters the Church by the same faith in Christ and the same baptism into him, which makes them all children of God and thus brothers and sisters of one another.

Elements of this compact account of the Church's unity are more fully explained by Paul in other places.<sup>293</sup> Especially important is Paul's linking of the "one body" with the Eucharist: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10.16-17). Sharing by means of the Eucharist in the body of the gloriously risen Christ, the many who were baptized into him become in reality one body with him and are therefore united with one another.

Paul nowhere states explicitly how the ecclesial body resulting from the Eucharist is joined to Jesus' individual body, present in the sacrament. But he regards the Church as the bride of Christ (see Eph 5.22-27, 32) and states: "The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body" (Eph 5.23). This implies that the unity of Christ and the Church with each other is similar to a married couple's one-flesh unity, which fulfills the spouses and, without in any way compromising their distinct personalities, is a real oneness. So, Paul's analogy suggests that the Eucharist fulfills both Christ as man and Christians without merging them, by making them really one and so also making Christians really one with one another.<sup>294</sup>

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293. For a helpful analysis of Pauline texts on the Church's unity, see Cerfaux, *op. cit.*, 228-61.

294. The covenantal union entered into when faith unites the baptized with Jesus' redemptive act is related to that union's completion by bodily Communion in the Eucharist as the covenantal union established at a wedding by the couple's mutual consent is related to their marriage's consummation by conjugal intercourse, in which the two really become one flesh. A married couple are not metaphorically but literally one flesh insofar as they form a single organic principle of reproduction. So, it seems to me that the relevant New Testament texts require no less realism regarding the Church's bodily oneness with her risen Lord insofar as the Church shares in Jesus' resurrection life by her members' receiving the Eucharist. In rightly rejecting blatant misconceptions of the unity of Christ and the Church, Pius XII,

Salvation is available to everyone. While grave sinners who fail to repent cannot enter God's kingdom (see 1 Cor 6.9-10, Gal 5.19-21), all who repent, believe, and are baptized are alive in Christ Jesus. Differences among persons that make it difficult or impossible for some to participate in societies other than the Church are no obstacle to anyone's sharing fully in the Church's unity: "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3.26-28). This must be interpreted precisely: "Religious, social, and sexual pairs of opposites are not replaced by equality, but rather by a newly created unity."<sup>295</sup> Thus, united in the Lord Jesus, his members are called to exercise their diverse gifts in complementary ways for the sake of the one body of Christ (see 1 Cor 12.12-26). Christians are to seek and abide in love so as to maintain and perfect their unity with Jesus and one another (see 1 Cor 13.1-7). In creating that unprecedented, ecclesial unity, God treats as irrelevant differences that were important even in the old covenant.

Even so, very relevant in the Church's life are certain differences among her members, namely, their different gifts, which enable them to make distinctive and complementary contributions. Near the beginning of his moral exhortation in Romans, Paul makes it clear that the Church's members should humbly discern their roles by considering their particular gifts, and should use those gifts to contribute to the coordinated action of the community as a whole. He implicitly excludes competition for one or another role considered more important (see Rom 12.3-8). Paul develops the same line of thought more richly in First Corinthians:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. . . . All these [people with different gifts] are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. . . . God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of

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*Mystici Corporis Christi*, AAS 35 (1943) 254, PE, 225.86, seems to me to overlook the real unity of bridegroom and bride and so, I think mistakenly, says that, in calling the Church the body of Christ, Paul used "metaphorical language."

295. Martyn, op. cit., 377. He goes on: "In Christ (in what Paul will later call 'the body of Christ,' 1 Cor 12:13, 27) persons who were Jews and persons who were Gentiles have been made into a new unity that is so fundamentally and irreducibly identified with Christ himself as to cause Paul to use [in Gal 3.28] the masculine form of the word 'one' [note omitted]. Members of the church are not one *thing*; they are one *person*, having been taken into the corpus of the One New Man." For a discussion of social roles and Gal 3.28, see Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant, 1980), 137-63.

you.” . . . God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way. (1 Cor 12.4-7, 11-14, 18-21, 24-31)

Paul goes on in chapter thirteen to speak of love, which, as he says elsewhere, “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3.14) and is the Spirit’s first and greatest gift (see Rom 5.5, Gal 5.22).

The diversity of gifts contributes to the Church’s richness as an expression of God’s goodness and a manifestation of the Spirit’s power. If members of the Church abide in love, each member benefits the others by making full use of his or her own gift; and all of them mutually support and strengthen one another in their proper actions. At the same time, each member is personally fulfilled by realizing his or her own potentialities and being needed, helpful, and appreciated. Most important, if Church members abide in love, they make disciplined and faithful use of their proper gifts to serve her common mission. At the same time, they avoid, or cease, acting like selfish children—constantly demanding attention, self-absorbed, jealous of their rights, and prone to follow fads—and grow together into a mature and flourishing community, until they “all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4.13).

Being children of God, mature Christians become like Jesus, the Father’s fully mature Son. To do that, they must subordinate themselves as he did and concentrate on playing the part the Spirit assigns them in Christ’s body, the Church. Building it up in love, they will attain to true human maturity: “Christians in the state of perfection will appear not as a parade of individual saints in our modern sense, but as ‘one perfect man.’”<sup>296</sup> They will be the whole Christ living and working in the world for its salvation, manifesting even now both the kingdom’s hoped-for fellowship and its ready availability and human appeal. That is how the Church will be a real and effective “sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG 1).

By doing their part in the Church, moreover, mature Christians will contribute to Jesus’ own human fulfillment. For although he is “the first-born of all creation” in whom “all things were created, in heaven and on earth” (Col 1:15-16), he is not himself the whole of creation. His humanity is a single created reality, the first but not everything, the principle but not the whole: Jesus as man is to be completed by the rest of creation. To be sure, his unique mission within the present age is already complete: he perfectly fulfilled

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296. George T. Montague, S.M., *Maturing in Christ: Saint Paul’s Program for Christian Growth* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1964), 206.

the Father's will and lives now in glory. But other creatures are necessary to Jesus' fullness as head. To build up the Church, which is his body, his disciples must discern their gifts, commit themselves to using them unselfishly, and carry out their commitment.

Many faithful Christians strongly resist the thought that anything at all can in any way complete Christ. After all, they reason, Jesus is God; nothing completes God; therefore, nothing can complete Christ. This is true insofar as Jesus is God. But the Incarnation must be taken seriously. Jesus is also man, and no man is complete in himself. The uncreated Word became flesh—a creature, one human individual. Individual creatures must exist with and be completed by others. In Jesus' case, it is the Church, the community of his followers, “which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:23). Thus, the cooperation of others is required to complete Jesus.

In a true sense, then, Jesus needs faithful and mature disciples. The working out of God's plan requires their living out of their own Christian lives. Their own fulfillment lies in being united with Jesus and exercising their own gifts to the full. In this way, they have a subordinate but real part in the fulfillment, the completion, of Jesus as man which is central to God's whole plan. “In my flesh,” says Paul, “I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col 1:24). What is true of suffering is equally true of everything mature disciples do in using their gifts to build up the Church.

Since God's saving work in Jesus bears on the whole of the human world and even on the cosmos (see Rom 8.18-23), the Church's mission likewise extends to everything human and to the cosmos itself.<sup>297</sup> Vatican II teaches: “Christ's redemptive work, while essentially concerned with the salvation of humankind, includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring to all people the message and grace of Christ, but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the gospel” (AA 5).

While the Church's primary concern is each person's salvation (see LG 17, AG 5), she also must work to make human salvation integral. John Paul II teaches: “If the Church makes herself present in the defense of, or in the advancement of, man, she does so in line with her mission, which, although it is religious and not social or political, cannot fail to consider man in the entirety of his being.”<sup>298</sup> Her concern is not limited to personal piety, but includes social justice, peace, and the advancement of science and culture, for these elements of the temporal order pertain to the fullness of human persons. Indeed, “man in the entirety of his being” includes in its reference even the physical environment, for people cannot live without the natural world. Thus, everything else on

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297. A useful history and analysis of magisterial teaching from Vatican II through *Evangelii nuntiandi* concerning the relationship between eschatological Christian salvation and human temporal progress: Bonaventure Kloppenburg, O.F.M., *Christian Salvation and Human Temporal Progress*, trans. Paul Burns (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1979). Also see: “Human Development and Christian Salvation (1976),” in International Theological Commission, *Texts and Documents: 1969-1985*, ed. Michael Sharkey (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 145-61.

298. John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of Latin America, 2, AAS 71 (1979) 199, OR, 5 Feb. 1979, 4. Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, 15, AAS 71 (1979) 289, PE, 278.48; Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum*, ASS 23 (1890-91) 654-55, PE, 115.28-29.

earth pertains to human beings, and their salvation would be incomplete were not the rest brought back to God in Jesus.

John Paul II's statement also indicates how the Church's mission includes all these dimensions of persons. She becomes concerned with all the elements of the temporal order, which have their own value as created goods, insofar as they pertain to the fulfillment of human persons, and so are destined for a place in the kingdom, where all goods will be restored to God in Jesus (see GS 39, AA 7).

Among the diverse gifts required by the Church's mission are those for clerical and consecrated service and life. They must be understood in relation to one another and to the gifts of the laity.

One might suppose that clerics are responsible for the Church's primary concern and lay people for what is secondary. But all Catholics have responsibilities with respect to the Church's entire mission, though not all are concerned with its different aspects in the same way. John Paul II teaches:

The *lay* state of life has its distinctive feature in its secular character. It fulfills an ecclesial service in bearing witness to, and in its own way recalling for priests, women and men religious, the significance of the earthly and temporal realities in the salvific plan of God. In turn, the *ministerial* priesthood represents in different times and places, the permanent guarantee of the sacramental presence of Christ, the Redeemer. The religious state bears witness to the eschatological character of the Church, that is, the straining toward the Kingdom of God that is prefigured and in some way anticipated and experienced even now through the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.

All the states of life, whether taken collectively or individually in relation to the others, are at the service of the Church's growth. While different in expression, they are deeply united in the Church's "mystery of communion" and are dynamically coordinated in its unique mission.<sup>299</sup>

The essential characteristics of clerical and consecrated life will be treated at length in chapter two, but here I shall say something by way of introduction.

Clerics are ordained primarily for sacred ministry (see LG 31). They act in Jesus' person when they proclaim the gospel and teach the faith, celebrate the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and provide pastoral direction (see LG 20-21, AG 39, PO 2). Plainly, then, their primary responsibility bears on the primary component of the Church's mission. But they also have a twofold responsibility regarding the temporal order. First, they must be concerned with the temporal goods necessary to carry out the Church's primary mission, for example, the Church's property. Second, they have a wider responsibility concerning temporal realities in general: to teach the moral principles to be followed in temporal affairs and provide others with the spiritual help they need to restore the temporal order in Jesus (see AA 7, 24).

All Christians should bear witness by holding fast to the faith, living it out, and growing in holiness (see LG 9-12). By "exercising an apostolate of evangelizing and

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299. John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 55, AAS 81 (1989) 503, OR, 6 Feb. 1989, 18. For the canonical distinction between clergy and laity, and between those in the religious state of life and others, see *CIC*, c. 207.

sanctifying” (AA 6), lay people complement those in holy orders in carrying out the Church’s primary, saving mission (see AA 6). But besides bringing to others the gospel and the witness of holiness, lay people have the special responsibility “of permeating and perfecting the temporal order with the spirit of the gospel” (AA 2). “In following out the Church’s mission, the laity, therefore, exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders” (AA 5). The temporal order includes everything of human value other than the religious: the goods of life and family, work and business, culture, the arts and professions, political institutions, international affairs, and so on (see AA 7). Thus, lay people are called to “seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God” (LG 31).<sup>300</sup>

That apostolate requires that lay people know and respect the proper principles of the realities of the temporal order, which direct action to its specific goods and human benefits (see LG 36; GS 36, 43; AA 7). They also must know and respect the traditions of their own society, and live their faith within the framework of their own culture (see AG 21).

But how, then, will what they do in the temporal order differ from the outwardly similar activity of others, and so be authentic apostolate? First, by being done for the kingdom’s sake and in accord with a conscience formed by Scripture and the Church’s constant and firm teachings; and thus, insofar as possible, healing and restoring the realities of the temporal order in the light of the gospel (see LG 36; AA 2, 7). Second, they must love the world as Jesus loves it, and act according to the demands of Christian love of neighbor (see LG 34, 36; GS 38-39; AA 7). Third, they must combine their apostolic deeds with apostolic words, using every opportunity to “announce Christ by words addressed either to nonbelievers with a view to leading them to faith, or to believers with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them toward a more fervent life” (AA 6; cf. 1 Pt 3.15, LG 35). In these three ways, the activities of faithful lay people will bear witness to God’s truth and love, and thus arouse hope, which draws people to the kingdom (see GS 93).

Those who commit themselves to live according to the counsels of celibate chastity, poverty, and obedience meet their apostolic responsibility in a distinctive way. Their state of life is not something “in between” the clerical and lay states (see LG 43), and each of them is either a cleric or a lay person. The clerics are concerned with the two components of the Church’s mission as diocesan clerics are; the lay persons have diverse apostolic responsibilities proper to their diverse forms of life. Some concentrate almost entirely on prayer or various ecclesial ministries, while others are as involved in secular affairs as other lay people are.

Still, all who faithfully fulfill their commitment to live according to the counsels have this in common: their lives manifest in an especially clear way the hope that should

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300. See also John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 14-15, AAS 81 (1989) 409-16, *OR*, 5 Feb. 1989, 4-5. The development in and after Vatican II of the Church’s teaching regarding the apostolate of the laity was prepared by an important theological study: Yves M. J. Congar, O.P., *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1957).

shape every Christian's life. Life according to the counsels closely imitates Jesus' life and calls attention to the fact that the kingdom and its claims transcend all worldly values (see LG 44). The witness of chastity, poverty, and obedience is especially both needed and powerful in secularized societies, where many people without hope for everlasting life care only for pleasure, possessions, and freedom to do as they please.

Another sort of diversity and variety fully consistent with the Church's unity is that of the particular churches in full communion with the see of Peter and with one another. While united in all of the Church's essential features (see **3**, above), certain particular churches differ considerably in nonessential aspects of theology, liturgy, governance, law, and so on (see OE 1-5). This diversity enriches the Church in various ways, not least by helping her serve effectively in diverse cultures.

### **6) Differences that impair fellowship call for living the truth in love.**

A death in a family is a major tragedy; the spiritual death of any member of the Church who sins mortally is a far greater tragedy for God's family. Like marital infidelity and other wrongs by family members toward one another, sins against the Church herself especially impair fellowship: denying the faith, heresy, schism, leading others into sin, abusing pastoral authority, and so on. But neither such sins nor mortal sins in general will be discussed here, though the impact on the Church of various sorts of wrongdoing by clerics and those who have committed themselves to live according to the counsels will be treated in later chapters.

The concern here is with differences arising from disagreements among leaders and members of the Church about essentials—that is, features initiated by Christ and implemented by the Holy Spirit during the apostolic age, together with their authentic developments. When at least some of those involved in a controversy over doctrine, sacramental practice, and/or Church order are convinced that something essential is at stake, faithfulness to Christ will prevent them from acting contrary to what they consider essential and require them to try to safeguard it. The result is that a disagreement about what are perceived as essentials will prevent the parties from cooperating in any relevant ecclesial action and thus impair their fellowship. When not resolved, many such disagreements have led to divisions institutionalized by the establishment of separate ecclesial communions.

Ecumenism is a way for Christians whose divisions have been institutionalized to live the truth of their faith in love toward and with one another. The movement was developed by Christians who recognized that their divisions damage the Church's fellowship but do not *completely* destroy it. In committing the Catholic Church to ecumenism, Vatican II pointed out that in various degrees separated Christians still retain essentials (see LG 14-15; UR 4, 14-23). John Paul II has drawn the conclusion: "To the extent that these elements are found in other Christian communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them"; he interpreted Vatican II as speaking (in LG 15) "of a certain, though imperfect communion" of those separated communities with the

Catholic Church.<sup>301</sup> He also has affirmed the fundamental unity of the Church in a relevant and striking way:

“I believe in the one Church”: what we profess in the Creed has *its ultimate foundation in Christ, in whom the Church is undivided* (cf. 1 Cor 1:11-13). As his Body, in the unity which is the gift of the Spirit, she is indivisible. The reality of division among the Church’s children appears at the level of history, as the result of human weakness in the way we accept the gift which flows endlessly from Christ the Head to his Mystical Body. The prayer of Jesus in the Upper Room—“as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us” (Jn 17:21)—is both *revelation* and *invocation*. It reveals to us the unity of Christ with the Father as the wellspring of the Church’s unity and as the gift which in him she will constantly receive until its mysterious fulfillment at the end of time. This unity is concretely embodied in the Catholic Church, despite the human limitations of her members, and it is at work in varying degrees in all the elements of holiness and truth to be found in the other churches and ecclesial communities.<sup>302</sup>

In saying the unity of Jesus’ Church “is concretely embodied in the Catholic Church,” John Paul is restating Vatican II’s teaching that Jesus’ Church’s unity “subsists in the Catholic Church” (UR 4). At the same time, in saying that that unity “is at work in varying degrees in all the elements of holiness and truth to be found in the other churches and ecclesial communities,” he is developing Vatican II’s teaching about the real though limited communion of the separated communities with the Catholic Church. Elsewhere, he explains:

All these elements bear within themselves a tendency towards unity, having their fullness in that unity. It is not a matter of adding together all the riches scattered throughout the various Christian communities in order to arrive at a Church which God has in mind for the future. In accordance with the great Tradition, attested to by the Fathers of the East and of the West, the Catholic Church believes that in the Pentecost event God has *already* manifested the Church in her eschatological reality . . . This reality is something already given. Consequently we are even now in the last times. The elements of this already-given Church exist, found in their fullness in the Catholic Church and, without this fullness, in the other communities (see UR 4), where certain features of the Christian mystery have at times been more effectively emphasized. Ecumenism is directed precisely to making the partial communion existing between Christians grow towards full communion in truth and charity.<sup>303</sup>

In other words, insofar as Christians separated from the Catholic Church are truly Christians, they not only participate in the divine-human fellowship of the new covenant but remain in fellowship with the Catholic Church. Although separated from her insofar as they lack essential elements, other Christian communities sometimes outdo the Catholic Church in particular ways: “certain features of the Christian mystery have at times been more effectively emphasized.”

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301. John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, 11, AAS 87 (1995) 927, *OR*, 31 May 1995, III.

302. John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, 48, AAS 93 (2001) 301, *OR*, 10 Jan. 2001, IX.

303. John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, 14, AAS 87 (1995) 929, *OR*, 31 May 1995, III.

Ecumenism must begin from a mutual presumption of good faith. Recriminations against others for existing divisions are excluded (see UR 3), because the Gospel proclaims: “Judge not” (Mt 7.1, Lk 6.37). Vatican II explains that “God alone is the judge and searcher of hearts; for that reason he forbids us to make judgments about the internal guilt of anyone” (GS 28).

Because communion with Jesus in the Holy Spirit is the source of Christians’ communion with one another, ecumenism’s most important element is that conversion which is true repentance: “There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without an interior conversion” (UR 7). If we were better Christians, we would be less divided: “The more purely [Christians] strive to live according to the gospel, the more they are fostering and even practicing Christian unity” (UR 7). The renewal and purification of the Church are necessary, and that not only obliges every member to “aim at Christian perfection” (UR 4) but requires the Church herself to remedy deficiencies of various sorts so as to be more faithful “to her own calling” (UR 6). Other ecumenical efforts will be lifeless and fruitless without personal and communal repentance and prayer: “This conversion of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement” (UR 8).

Ecumenism also involves collaboration in overcoming conflicts and tensions resulting from disagreements over nonessentials. The parties must make serious and persistent efforts to eliminate language, judgments, and actions that are inaccurate or unfair to those on the other side (see UR 4). Vatican II also affirms that Christians ought to maintain unity in essentials, enjoy liberty with respect to things that are not essential, and practice charity in all matters (see UR 4). This requires both sides to identify and recognize as legitimate variations those incidental differences that they can mutually accept without compromise (see UR 9, 11, 15-17).

Another aspect of ecumenism is dialogue between competent representatives of the divided groups. Vatican II explains: “Through such dialogue, everyone gains a truer knowledge and more just appreciation of the teaching and religious life of both communions. In addition, these communions pursue a fuller cooperation in whatever projects a Christian conscience demands for the common good” (UR 4). The Council also teaches: “Catholic theologians engaged in ecumenical dialogue, while standing fast by the teaching of the Church and searching together with separated brethren into the divine mysteries, should proceed with love for truth, with charity, and with humility” (UR 11). The Council insists on presenting doctrine in its entirety: “Nothing is so alien to ecumenism as a false irenicism, by which the purity of Catholic doctrine is harmed and its genuine and certain meaning is obscured” (UR 11). John Paul II stresses the same point: “The unity willed by God can be attained only by the adherence of all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety. In matters of faith, compromise is in contradiction with God who is Truth.”<sup>304</sup> But the manner and order of expressing Catholic faith should not be an obstacle, and the priority of the more central truths should be taken into account (see UR 11).

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304. John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, 18, AAS 87 (1995) 932, *OR*, 31 May 1995, IV.

The norms for dialogue suggest its potential benefits. By overcoming misunderstandings and setting aside incidental differences in expression, dialogue can clarify the nature and extent of existing agreement about essentials. By avoiding false irenicism and compromises, dialogue can clarify the existing disagreement about essentials. By proceeding with humility and charity, the clarifications achieved by dialogue can help maintain existing fellowship and promote cooperation wherever possible. By proceeding with a firm commitment to truth, clarifications also can help the parties resist temptations to create a false appearance of unity by ignoring or hiding disagreements, to rationalize acting against their own consciences, and to falsify worship by sharing in liturgies that bespeak a unity that does not exist (see UR 8).

Still, insofar as there really are disagreements about essentials, the ecumenical process can never restore unity. Rather: “The Holy Spirit, who dwells in believers and fills and rules the whole Church, brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them all together so closely in Christ, so that he is the principle of the Church’s unity” (UR 2). Public and private prayer for unity among Christians is necessary (see UR 8), for only the Spirit can cause Christians who are separated, but in good faith, to discern the truth they have been missing and make whatever sacrifices they must to embrace it. When they do, the ecumenical effort is completed and transcended.<sup>305</sup>

Vatican II teaches that the responsibility for ecumenism “pertains to the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike” (UR 5), and, of course, to each member according to his or her ability to take part. John Paul II teaches that ecumenism must not be compartmentalized: “The effort toward unity and ecumenical concern constitute a necessary dimension of the whole life of the Church. Everything can and must contribute to it.”<sup>306</sup> If that norm were observed, the Church’s pastors and those exercising authority in ecclesial entities, including religious institutes, would never ignore possibilities for ecumenical cooperation and any likely negative impact on such cooperation when making administrative decisions, planning and carrying out programs, and drafting and issuing documents. In all their preaching, teaching, counseling, and writing, close collaborators would carefully avoid expressions and statements that would be inappropriate if they were in the presence of separated brothers and sisters.

We can see what would constitute sound ecumenical practice by considering how it would shape the fundamental Christian activity of evangelization. Every faithful Christian continually strives to hear the gospel more fully, to appropriate it more perfectly, and to bear witness to it more effectively by his or her life. Faithful Christians also strive to help one another do likewise and to share their faith with non-Christians.

Members of ecclesial communions that disagree about essentials cannot cooperate in evangelizing non-Christians as they would if they were not divided. No communion’s

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305. That is why Vatican II, immediately after affirming that the unity of Jesus’ Church “subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose” and expressing “the hope that it will go on increasing until the end of time” says: “But it is obvious that the preparation and reconciliation of those individuals who desire full Catholic communion is to be distinguished from the ecumenical initiative; yet there is no opposition, since both proceed from the marvelous providence of God” (UR 4).

306. John Paul II, Address to Cardinals and Collaborators of the Roman Curia, 4, *OR*, 15 July 1985, 3.

members can set aside anything they believe to be essential. Still, members of different communions can cooperate significantly by working together to clarify the extent to which they agree and finding mutually acceptable ways of expressing and bearing witness to all that they hold in common, as each group evangelizes non-Christians. Proceeding in this way would not only increase the impact of their common witness but lessen the scandal of their remaining division.

Separated Christians should regard one another's faith with respect and cherish the unity they already enjoy as a basis for cooperating in the quest for the greater fidelity to Jesus and the gospel required to overcome division. They should not treat one another as they do nonbelievers, whom they try to evangelize, or members of their own communions whose deviations sometimes need correcting. Instead, separated Christians should help one another appropriate, perfect, and live out the faith they share. Moreover, if they adhere to sound norms for ecumenical dialogue, they will promote one another's faith in discussing matters about which they disagree, for they will be working together, with mutual respect and patience, toward the fullness of their faith. Each will share with the others his or her personal experience of faith. Since every Christian's faith can develop authentically, one who prepares adequately and participates properly in such a process is sure to benefit.

The unresolved disagreements of members of each ecclesial communion about essentials that have not yet reached the point of being institutionalized also impair fellowship and pose very grave and difficult moral challenges for faithful Christians. Such disagreements exist in most contemporary Christian communities, if not all. Few if any of the large number that emerged in the Catholic Church during and after Vatican II have been resolved.<sup>307</sup> Though many people are no longer greatly concerned about them, those disagreements continue to trouble thoughtful Catholics who devote their lives to ecclesial service. Some of the problems they pose will be treated in later chapters.

Disagreements of this sort are, paradoxically, inherently *more* complex than those that have been institutionalized. When conscientious people in the same communion disagree, conflict results. The institutional framework they share is likely to specify responsibilities that at least some of them will be strictly obliged to fulfill. For example, those in authority should not tolerate teachings and practices at odds with essentials, while those under obedience cannot rightly do something that they are convinced will violate something essential. So, when people in the same communion disagree about something that at least some of them consider essential, it may be easy for everyone concerned to rationalize infidelity. But if the temptation is resisted, fidelity will oblige some people who find themselves in this situation to resign from offices they can no longer occupy with a good conscience; while the fidelity of key leaders who persistently disagree with each other will require them to institutionalize their disagreement.

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307. Some close collaborators dissent from constant and very firm Church teachings about contraception and sexual activities; some clerics disregard norms based on Trent's definitive teachings about the sacrament of penance by offering general absolution, and about the indissolubility of marriage by encouraging civilly remarried divorced persons to participate fully in the Eucharist; some close collaborators continue advocating the ordination of women; and so on.

Even so, the ecumenical approach can serve to some extent as a model for Catholics involved in such disagreements to avoid both violating their consciences and treating one another uncharitably. The mutual presumption of good faith, the common practice of self-examination and repentance, cooperation in dealing with conflicts and tensions arising from nonessentials, mutually respectful and sincere dialogue, and cooperation carried on in accord with its results can mitigate the occasions of sin for people involved in disagreements with one another about essentials.

Realistically, however, Christians whose disagreements have not been institutionalized will find it very difficult to use the ecumenical model. Even if they presume mutual good faith, as they should, they are likely to find it hard to behave consistently in accord with that presumption. Mutual suspicion and psychological trauma are likely to poison their relationships. So may disagreement about whether their disagreement concerns essentials—although, if either party is convinced it does, then the parties do not agree about what is essential, and so are, in fact, disagreeing about essentials. Even if the parties succeed in clarifying the extent and limits of their disagreement, they are likely to find it hard to cooperate well to the extent cooperation is possible and to avoid inappropriate behavior to the extent it is impossible.

## **G: Christian Living, Holiness, Personal Vocation, and Evangelical Life**

### **1) Persistent mistakes about morality must be avoided.**

The moral theology developed by Catholic seminary professors after Trent, which persisted until Vatican II, strove to codify Christian morality and, in doing so, fostered legalism (see *CMP*, 12-13). Even before Vatican II, secularism began influencing the moral reflection of many Catholics, and since the Council, it has grounded dissent by many moral theologians. While different and in some ways opposed, legalism and secularism are persistent mistakes to be avoided, and I shall briefly treat each of them.

Moral norms are truths about what it is good or bad to do. Everyone ought to seek religious truth; unmarried couples should not engage in intercourse; suicide is wrong—these are truths that guide our choices toward what is really good for us. Often, though, people suppose that moral norms, like positive laws, are merely rules chosen by someone or agreed upon by some group. That view can be called “legalism.” To someone who takes a legalistic view of moral norms, their obligatory force seems to depend on the rulemaker’s will rather than on intelligible requirements for realizing and safeguarding human goods.<sup>308</sup>

Legalism is both involved in and promoted by a common and very serious confusion about criminal law, namely, the notion that a public authority makes something wrong by identifying it as a crime and punishing it as such, and that legalizing crimes changes previously wrong actions into morally acceptable ones. In fact, however, just law presupposes the moral truth about actions such as abortion and robbery, and legalizing crimes cannot change that truth. It only changes how public authorities deal with people known to be doing the actions.

Christian legalists reduce moral obligation to God’s law, understood as a set of precepts he chooses and imposes. Some have thought God could even have obliged us to hate him; more plausibly, most have held that various kinds of actions are in themselves either suitable or unsuitable to human nature, and that God imposes moral obligations by requiring suitable actions and forbidding unsuitable ones. On this view, God’s legislative will transforms fitting and unfitting behaviors into morally good deeds and sins.

Legal systems typically include a presumption in favor of liberty: What is not forbidden is permitted; doubtful laws do not bind. So, legalism suggests that we are generally free to do as we please, that moral obligations limit this freedom, and that this limitation need not be accepted unless an obligation is clear.

To help motivate compliance, human lawmakers attach penalties not only to inherently wrongful behavior but to any behavior they decide to prohibit. Since the penalties are not inevitable consequences of legally prohibited acts, the authorities can impose, mitigate, or forgo them for policy reasons or, in some systems, as anger or

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308. For a fuller treatment of legalism, see Germain Grisez, “Legalism, Moral Truth, and Pastoral Practice,” in *The Catholic Priest as Moral Teacher and Guide* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 97-113.

sympathy moves them. Legalists think God similarly backs up morality with sanctions, heaven and hell being God's reward and punishment for obeying his law or disobeying it.

Only manifest transgressions of positive laws are punishable, and a law is not broken by being minimally observed. On a legalistic view of morality, then, it seems unnecessary to commit oneself to pursuing the goods and avoiding the evils to which moral norms point; avoiding disobedience will suffice, and so legalists are minimalists. Also, since those invincibly ignorant of a law cannot disobey it with malicious intent, legalists tend to suppose that, other things being equal, wrongdoing through ignorance is preferable to disobedience, and that leaving people ignorant and in good faith is often appropriate.

Legalism is very common. It also is persistent. Even after fully understanding the mistake, one tends to backslide and think legalistically about certain obligations. There are several explanations for that tendency.

Since children initially cannot grasp the reasons behind any of the norms adults present to them, all norms at first seem alike—the important thing about any of them is that adults want it obeyed. Thus, as children become aware of moral obligations, they regard them legalistically; and that mentality is confirmed when parents reinforce moral norms by rewarding good behavior and punishing naughtiness. Carrying this way of thinking into later life, even adults tend to think that moral norms receive their directive force from some authority's will.

Additional factors are at work among Christians. To begin with, the Old Testament can easily be misused to support a legalistic conception of morality. Read out of context, the account of original sin in Genesis is likely to be misunderstood as supporting the view that moral norms are arbitrary rules. Moreover, Israel hands on moral precepts as the nucleus of her God-given law. But since Israel is a theocratic polity, her code necessarily not only embraces morality but commingles with it a whole body of positive law. It is easy to confuse the morality with the positive law and to suppose that both depend on God in the same way.

It is significant, too, that insofar as Israel's hopes were this-worldly and nationalistic, their realization did not presuppose Israel's righteousness, and her sinfulness did not necessarily lead to her hopes' disappointment. Thus, the carrying out of the blessings and curses attached to Israel's law as a whole, *including its moral precepts*, seemed to be up to God, much as carrying out the rewards and punishments attached to human law is up to public authorities.

Christian moral instruction sometimes conveys legalism along with the sound moral content of the Old Testament. The first explanation of morality many Christian children hear is that some of the rules adults insist on are God's commands, and he will eventually reward obedience and punish disobedience. While that has a true sense, it also tends to confirm children's natural legalism, and they are likely to grow up thinking God could have prevented all sins if he simply had not required hard things and forbidden enjoyable ones.

Last but not least, legalism appeals to sinful human beings. Even if you break the rules, legalism suggests, you still can hope to escape punishment, because the offense may be forgiven and the deserved punishment remitted. Besides, if sinning is mere rule

breaking, it is not inherently foolish and deadly. And if moral norms are laws, they do not cover most of your life, and you are generally free to do as you please. Of course, freedom in a few matters is limited, but it is often possible to find a way to do as one pleases without grossly transgressing moral limits. Then too, those who obey the rules can be sure they are good, and an occasional lapse cannot totally spoil a generally good record.

The Old Testament nevertheless does offer starting points for a nonlegalistic understanding of moral norms. God's will is creative; it brings creatures to be and moves them toward their fulfillment. God creates only what is good, and orders all things wisely and lovingly. His law is not a burdensome imposition, but a blessing, a light to one's path, and ignoring his direction is foolish and self-destructive, while following it is fulfilling. Moral goodness begins with reverence toward God and love of neighbor. Rather than requiring mere outward conformity, morality is primarily a matter of the heart, so that, when sinners repent, God heals the self-mutilation caused by their sins by creating new hearts in them. God's revelation in Jesus unfolds these beginnings, as will be explained below.

New Testament catechesis also directly challenges legalism. Paul explains that sinners experience moral norms as impositions that provoke rebellion, while wayward emotions are a "law" in one's members tempting one not to follow moral truth, the "law" in one's mind. So, although doing what is morally good is reasonable and humanly fulfilling, it often seems unreasonable and inhumanly burdensome (see Rom 7.4-23). But those who live by the Spirit are motivated by love and no longer mistakenly regard moral truth as an imposed law. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8.2).<sup>309</sup> John teaches essentially the same thing: "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 Jn 4.18).

With the gradual rejection during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of Christian faith that had been widespread in the West, a new, secularist understanding of morality developed and began to take hold. Versions of this secularist ethics are now widely accepted in most affluent nations. While they differ significantly, they also tend to agree in some important respects.

Acknowledging no source of meaning and value beyond human beings, secularists do not accept any higher reality that might limit human freedom. Like legalists, they assume that being free to do as one pleases is a good thing; but unlike legalists, they view authentic moral limits on individual liberty as truths that express the requirements for minimizing suffering and promoting desirable experiences. The focus on experiences implies that everything intrinsically bad or worthwhile is within consciousness.

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309. Brendan Byrne, S.J., *Romans*, Sacra Pagina, 6 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 234-35, comments: "Against the dark background of slavery under the regime of the law (7:7-25), Paul invites his audience to rejoice in the new era of freedom and ethical 'possibility' brought by the Spirit."

Almost all those who hold a secularist ethics deny free choice and see no moral significance in how people determine themselves by their choices.<sup>310</sup> Any way of acting whatsoever can be reasonable if it offers sufficiently bright prospects of mitigating suffering and/or increasing desirable experiences. Insofar as they assume that only what is within consciousness is intrinsically good or bad, secularists consider human life good only to the extent that it is the necessary condition for consciousness. Rather than a gift for which we should be grateful, being alive is simply an inexplicable fact that grounds the possibilities of functioning well and having desirable experiences.

Since the set of realities secularists regard as intrinsically worthwhile is limited, they reject many norms of theistic ethics. Seeing death as bad only if it ends desirable experience, they suppose that abortion and euthanasia can be appropriate. Considering enjoyment important and overlooking the significance of self-determining choices, they regard restrictions on sexual activity among consenting adults as unwarranted, and hold that fidelity to commitments and honesty, though sometimes useful as means to other ends, are not in themselves morally required.

The inherent limitations of secularist views of human beings and their situation weaken the motivations of most people who accept them to be truthful and faithful. Mutual trust becomes difficult and the social fabric dissolves. Family life is unstable. Intellectual, economic, and political collaboration are impeded.

The different versions of secularist ethics maintain, though not always with the same reasoning, that there should be equal opportunity for people to do as they please, and that poverty and warfare should be eliminated, so that everyone would enjoy equal liberty and share in growing prosperity in a permanently peaceful world. While some specific norms of secularist and Christian ethics coincide, the secularist understanding of the human person, of society, and of ethics contradicts Christian faith in many respects. John Paul II rejects as incompatible with revealed truth elements of secularist thought that have influenced some Catholic theologians and philosophers in recent years.<sup>311</sup> But because secularist views pervade the cultures of affluent nations, they influence to some degree the thinking of most Christians in those nations.

Secularist visions for a better world are similar to Isaiah's vision of the new heavens and the new earth—but without God. The secularist understanding of the human person and the human situation overlooks sin, and the secularist worldview does not provide motivation sufficient to induce more than a few people to change their ways and make the sacrifices necessary to realize any secularist vision. Thus secularist movements have effected significant changes in the world only by enlisting the support of people,

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310. Most who hold a secularist ethics verbally affirm, and many even passionately insist upon, freedom of some sort that is compatible with determinism. But almost none admit free choice and character formation by it.

311. Various elements of secularist ethics—not all mentioned here—are most straightforwardly rejected by John Paul II in *Veritatis splendor* and *Evangelium vitae*. But he also criticizes them in many other documents, especially those touching on marriage and on liberation theology.

including Christians, motivated by other views, appealing to people's self-interest in change, or imposing change by force—or some combination of these.<sup>312</sup>

Secularist ideologies presented a seemingly formidable challenge to Christian faith at the start of the twentieth century, but events have considerably reduced their plausibility (see *LCL*, 35-37). Up to now, Marxists organized the greatest single effort to realize a secularist vision for the world, but their promises proved to be empty and their activities involved and resulted in immense evils.

## **2) Faith working through love both fulfills oneself and serves others.**

Liberalized Christianity is a blend of Christian faith and secularism that has less to offer than either of its ingredients (see *CMP*, 813-16). Genuine Christian faith, however, provides satisfying accounts of (a) the world in which we find ourselves, (b) the human condition, and (c) our experiences of other people and ourselves, while also offering a prospect worth hoping for—namely, the kingdom of God—and adequate motivation to repent and commit oneself to Jesus and service to the kingdom.

The Creator gives us being and sustains us in it, puts us in a beautiful and generally supportive world, directs us by the law written on our hearts toward our own fulfillment, and often makes our efforts fruitful. These facts alone give us reasons to be grateful to him and, when he reveals himself, to trust him. The realization that sin has alienated humankind from God and resulted in death, and that God is offering reconciliation and life, provides additional reasons for gratitude and trust, and fresh grounds for hope. Recognizing that Jesus, by suffering and dying, established divine-human communion, enabled us to become children of God, and showed us the way to the heavenly kingdom, we have reasons and powerful emotional motives to be grateful to him and to accept his invitation to follow him. Thus, it is right to make and keep the commitment of faith, for it responds affirmatively to God's invitation, as gratitude and trust require.

In view of the prospect of salvation and perfect fulfillment that revelation offers, the commitment of faith also is in our true self-interest. Those who keep that in mind and remain clearheaded persevere in that commitment. Refusing to do so would be foolish. Still, one can be tempted to refuse, because an authentic commitment of faith includes the renunciation of one's sinful self (see Jn 3.16-21).

Usually, if someone's proposal—for example, of marriage or a job—calls for someone else's commitment, the latter can rightly reject it. By contrast, it is obligatory to make the act of faith and hold fast to it, because God's goodness and trustworthiness, as well as our own true self-interest, leave us no reasonable alternative. Thus, Paul says God's revelation in Jesus "is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith" (Rom 16.26; cf. Rom 1.5). To the sinful heart, that *obedience* seems like subjection, but to the reconciled and grateful heart, it is experienced as joyful cooperation.

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312. When free to do as they please, most people who strongly profess secularist ideals of justice and peace tend to seek political means to promote their ideals at other people's expense, while condemning political opponents for lacking either toughness or compassion, being overly concerned about legal niceties or denying others their rights, and so on.

Someone might wonder: But why does Paul speak of the *obedience* of faith rather than of the *assent* of faith? Throughout the Bible, faith involves assent to God speaking, trust in God promising, and obedience to God guiding. Because baptismal faith initiates a personal relationship with God, it is a commitment (analogous to marital consent), and because the personal relationship that faith initiates is grounded in God's self-communication, the commitment involves firm assent to the propositional truths God has revealed (see *LCL*, 3-6). But because the commitment is an undertaking to cooperate, assent to the truths of faith is fruitless for those who fail to trust God's plan of life and to obey by carrying it out.<sup>313</sup>

With the Sinai covenant, God, having brought the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, undertook to continue treating them as his own people, while they undertook to obey his commandments (see Ex 19.3-8, 24.3-4). Jesus calls all human beings into the divine-human communion of the new covenant, and the commitment of Christian faith likewise is an undertaking to obey. The obedience in both cases is not to some arbitrary requirement, but to requirements inherent in the covenantal relationship itself.

The very possibility of interpersonal communion depends on mutual love. Therefore, as Jesus teaches, the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all one's mind, heart, soul, and strength; the second, to love one's neighbor as one's self.<sup>314</sup> These sum up all the moral requirements of the old covenant, and are more important than any ritual requirements (see Mt 22.34-40, Mk 12.28-34, Lk 10.25-28).

More than just a feeling, love is practical. Loving someone is not just affection. It is willing that person's good and doing what one can about it. Loving God means appreciating his goodness, rejoicing in it, and praising it, along with wanting what he wants and therefore doing what he wills—even, and not least, when one finds doing it unpleasant. Loving neighbors means appreciating, rejoicing in, and praising their goodness, together with protecting and promoting whatever is truly good for them insofar as one can reasonably do so—even, and not least, when one feels neither joy in these things nor desire for them.

With the Decalogue, the Old Testament articulated some of love's specific requirements. Jesus reaffirms these but asks for more: wholehearted discipleship, which

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313. Commenting on Paul's phrase, "for an obedience of faith," which also appears in Rom 1.5, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *Romans*, Anchor Bible, 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 237, notes the phrase's literal meaning but translates it: "to promote a commitment of faith." He explains: "Because 'obedience' often has a pejorative connotation, it is better rendered as 'commitment.'" However, replacing *obedience* with *commitment* is misleading, for although the act of faith is a commitment, that commitment is to a proposal one does not excogitate for oneself but still cannot reasonably reject. Thus, making and fulfilling that commitment is obedience. Fitzmyer's translation is a concession to legalism and to sinful hearts' misconception of obedience as subjection.

314. Vatican II does not treat the two love commands as self-evident, but deduces a single, unified love command from the fact that human beings, having been created in God's image, are called to divine-human communion; the Council describes that calling, then goes on: "For this reason [*Quapropter*], love of God and of neighbor is the first and greatest commandment. We are taught by sacred Scripture that love of God cannot be separated from love for neighbor" (GS 24). In other words, *because* God's kingdom is the ultimate end, the first principle of morality is the love of God and neighbor that realizes the communion that constitutes the kingdom.

sets everything else aside to follow him (see Mt 19.16-26, Mk 10.17-27, Lk 18.18-27). Moreover, the parable of the good Samaritan makes it clear that Jesus' disciples may not exclude anyone from the circle of those who are to be treated as neighbors and thereby transformed into neighbors (see Lk 10.29-37).

For Jesus, loving the Father means not only keeping the commandments but doing his will in everything. That is true for him (see Jn 4.34) and for those who wish to reign with him: "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7.21; cf. Mt 12.50). God's will is to overcome evil in the whole of fallen humankind (see **C-2**, above). Thus mercy, the love that overcomes evil, is the justice of the new covenant (see **LCL**, 365-67). In this context, a demand for mercy is implicit in the Golden Rule's requirement of fairness. For those who accept Jesus' self-sacrificing service must do for others what he has done for them. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15.12-13). And: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mk 8.34-35; cf. Mt 16.24-25, Lk 9.23-24).

Overcoming evil requires not only avoiding sin but loving one's neighbor without limits: forgiving wrongs, doing good to enemies, and refraining from judging others' inmost hearts (see Mt 5.7, 5.38-47, 6.12-15, 7.1-5, 7.12, 18.21-35; Mk 11.25; Lk 6.27-38, 11.4, 17.3-4).<sup>315</sup> God's children must love inclusively, as he does: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven . . . You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5.44-45, 48). A Christian who truly loves others, including enemies, strives to help them share in what is most precious—the gospel, new life in Christ, inheritance of the kingdom. Thus, the great challenge of Christian life is to devote one's whole life to the Church's apostolate, and one plays one's part in apostolate by priestly, prophetic, and kingly service.

Christians exercise their priesthood by offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (see 1 Pt 2.5, LG 34). The first and all-embracing spiritual sacrifice is the same for Jesus' disciples as for him: doing God's will in all things. His will is that all be saved. Thus, Paul teaches:

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Cor 10.31-11.1; cf. Col 3.17, AA 4)

Just before saying this, Paul had discussed eating meat offered to idols and explained that, although eating it is permissible, one should abstain when necessary to avoid

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315. The prohibition of judging others' inmost hearts forbids not only condemning but acquitting; however, it does not forbid identifying wrongdoing and pointing out its inconsistency with moral truth. For example, one rightly identifies both the sexual play of a couple that preceded date rape and the date rape itself as immoral behavior but wrongly judges either the date rapist morally guilty or his victim morally blameless.

spiritually injuring others (see 1 Cor 10.18-30). Summing up and concluding, he generalizes and states the underlying principle. Jesus gave himself completely to save others, and Paul is imitating him and exhorting the Corinthians to do the same. Practicing perfect love of others consistently—in eating, drinking, whatever—fulfills God’s will, and thus is the spiritual sacrifice that thanks God and glorifies him.<sup>316</sup>

Fulfilling the commitment of faith by obeying God’s call to serve others unselfishly, we prepare our “living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom 12.1) and exercise our priesthood by offering our lives with grateful hearts, together with Jesus’ self-sacrifice, in the Eucharist: “I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord, I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people” (Ps 116.13-14).

Christians also function as prophets by bearing witness to their faith. Since not just truths but the complete interpersonal reality of divine-human communion has been revealed in Christ, bearing witness to that revelation requires not only words but deeds (see DV 2). Christians exercise their prophetic office by receiving in full and deeply cherishing all that God has revealed in Christ, then courageously professing that faith and consistently doing its truth in love.

Questioned by Pilate, Jesus says, “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth” (Jn 18.37). After his resurrection, he told his disciples, “You shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1.8; cf. Mt 28.18-20). Vatican II teaches that every Christian shares the responsibility of providing such witness:

Wherever they live, all Christians have an obligation to manifest, by the example of their lives and the testimony of their words, that new man which they put on through baptism, and the power of the Holy Spirit, by whom they were strengthened through confirmation, in order that others, considering their good works, may glorify the Father (see Mt 5.16) and perceive more fully the real point of human life and the universal bond of human communion. (AG 11; cf. LG 12, 33, 35)

Someone who loves others as he or she has been loved by Jesus asks: What is the best thing I can do for others? In serving others unselfishly and explaining to them the evangelical basis of one’s life whenever that is opportune, one presents them with God’s truth and love in concrete form, a reality inexplicable by worldly standards—challenging but not threatening, appealing but promising authentic human fulfillment rather than mere passing satisfaction. Compelling and consistent witness to faith helps others to believe or to grow in faith, and so promotes their true best interests—their salvation and sanctification.

In bearing witness, the Christian grows in holiness. Compelling and consistent witness to faith requires that one’s every thought and judgment be in harmony with faith and that one’s every choice implement it. As one carries out such choices, one’s feelings

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316. Vatican II criticizes the tendency to divorce the rest of life from faith: “This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age” (GS 43). The Council calls for a vital integration of all activities—domestic, professional, social, and technical—with religious values, which should direct everything to the kingdom (see GS 43). An emphatic reassertion of this conciliar teaching: John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 59, AAS 81 (1989) 509-10, *OR*, 6 Feb. 1989, 19-20.

and capacities to speak and behave are brought into more and more perfect harmony with those choices and the judgments directing them. Therefore, by witness to faith one progresses toward serving God with all one's mind, heart, soul, and strength—toward appropriating the divine love that the Holy Spirit has poured forth into one's heart (see Rom 5.5): in a word, toward holiness.<sup>317</sup>

That progress is kingly service, rightly understood. A king's proper role is not to live more splendidly than others, dominate them, or be a mere symbol of a society's unity and aspirations. It is to serve his people by guiding and helping them toward their true good and fending off threats to it. Vatican II states succinctly how Jesus and his disciples exercise kingship:

Christ, made obedient unto death and therefore exalted by the Father (see Phil 2.8-9), has entered into the glory of his kingdom. To him all things are subjected, until he subjects himself and all created things to the Father, so that God may be all in all (see 1 Cor 15.27-28). That power he has communicated to his disciples, so that they too might be constituted in royal liberty and may conquer the reign of sin in themselves by self-denial and a holy life (see Rom 6.12)—indeed, that also serving Christ in others, they may by humility and patience lead their brothers and sisters to that king, to serve whom is to reign. (LG 36)

Jesus overcame sin and is reconciling all things to God (see Col 1.19-20). Establishing God's reign on earth, Jesus is preparing all creation for its true fulfillment in the kingdom that will never end.

Jesus' disciples share in his kingship by overcoming sin in themselves and serving others in ways that contribute to their salvation. Those who do that *in all their conduct* become holy (see 1 Pt 1.14-16). For example, as he shared in governing England by serving Henry VIII, St. Thomas More shared in governing the whole of creation by serving God—resolutely resisting temptation, humbly and patiently caring for others, and bravely accepting death rather than swear a false oath.

Jesus' priesthood, prophetic office, and kingship were not three separate roles, each one exercised some of the time. He did the Father's will in everything and thus, offering the only acceptable sacrifice, acted always as a priest; he acted always as a prophet by making divine truth and love accessible to fallen humankind by everything he said and did; he acted always as a king inasmuch as everything he did was meant to help his people overcome the evil afflicting them and reach their true fulfillment in the kingdom. Similarly, every authentic exercise by his disciples of their participation in the three roles will pertain simultaneously to all three. Christian apostolate does not consist in three separate sets of activities—priestly, prophetic, kingly—but in one complete life, all of whose components can and ought to have those three meanings.

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317. Thomas Aquinas, *De perfectione vitae spiritualis*, cap. 5, explains that to love God with one's whole heart is to order one's whole life to the service of God, with one's whole mind is to subject one's intellect entirely to divine revelation, with one's whole soul is to relate all one's affection to God and love everything else in him, and with one's whole strength is to perform all one's outward words and deeds out of love.

### 3) Seeing how one's life can bear upon the kingdom intensifies hope.

To follow Jesus is to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness (see Mt 6.33), and these supreme goods are gifts God offers. The prospect of receiving them ought to shape our lives.

God willed to provide "strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us"—hope for the kingdom grounded upon Jesus, who "has gone as a forerunner on our behalf" (Heb 6.18, 20). Hope attaches us to the risen Lord. It is the fixed principle of Christian life, the "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Heb 6.19), that enables us to stand firm despite hardships and tempting alternatives.

While devout Christians hope principally to be with Jesus (see 2 Cor 4.14, Phil 1.23) and to share in his intimate life with the Father and the Spirit (see 1 Cor 13.12, 1 Jn 3.2), they also look forward to living with friends and loved ones, without fear of sickness and death, and in circumstances of joy and contentment. For those who do not see how life in this world can contribute to the coming kingdom, however, the anticipation of those joys often is weakened, with the bad result that hope does not pervade their thoughts as fully as it might and is less lively than it could be.

Belief in redemption, resurrection, and a new creation in Christ can lead Christians to entertain a kind of simplistic optimism—to expect more and better of the world, of life, and of others than they eventually experience, and so to be sorely disappointed. Injustice and conflict abound in the world. Good people are misunderstood, cheated, lied about, betrayed; they lose things, get hurt, get sick, and eventually die—some dying young. Despite the bright hopes for ecclesial renewal during Vatican II, few Catholics, if any, are pleased with what has transpired in the Church since then. Devout Christians marry, or are ordained for dioceses, or become members of institutes of consecrated life in the conviction that they are doing what God wants, and they look forward to living happily ever after. But all discover imperfections—in their marriages, dioceses, or communities—and some experience a lifelong purgatory. And although conscientious Christians, realizing their own weakness and sinfulness, may be more realistic about their personal lives, if they resist self-deception they often will be dissatisfied with themselves, and occasionally shocked by evils they find in their hearts.

While all these disappointments are perplexing, part of the perplexity comes from paying too little attention to the bad news intermingled with the New Testament's good news. The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount hold out great prospects in the kingdom—for those who in this world are poor, meek, mourning, starving for justice, and persecuted. Jesus warns his disciples that they will have to take up their crosses every day and follow him, that they will be hated, that some will scandalize little ones, that families will be divided by conflicts over him, and that it is an open question whether he will find faith on earth when he returns.

The New Testament makes it clear that not all went smoothly with the early Church. The disciples experienced the predicted hardships. There were conflicts even among the apostles, quarrels and divisions within the churches, serious defections, and frustrated efforts. The descriptions of the end times in the Gospels and book of Revelation hardly suggest the present world is on its way to becoming a good, just, and peaceful global

community. Encouraged to rejoice in hope, the faithful are reminded that “now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials” (1 Pt 1.6). Christian life will never be easy: “For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6.12).

Christians who do not fully receive the New Testament’s bad news are like the disciples on the road to Emmaus who, not expecting the Messiah to suffer and die, were so disappointed by Good Friday that they did not take seriously the first reports of Jesus’ resurrection (see Lk 24.19-24). He had to teach those “foolish men” that it was “necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory” (Lk 24.25-26). Optimistic disciples in every age need to apply Jesus’ lesson to themselves and adjust their expectations. Of course, when tempted to substitute pessimism for optimism, they also need to apply to themselves the lesson Jesus presented to Peter, James, and John by taking them to the top of the mountain to witness his transfiguration: suffering is the way to the fullness of the glory that it temporarily hides (see CCC, 554-56).

Optimism and pessimism are opposite tendencies, neither of them grounded in evidence and reasons. The prejudice of optimists is to expect good outcomes from risk taking and from processes that neither they nor anyone who cares for them can control; the prejudice of pessimists is to expect bad outcomes. Christians should resist both tendencies, which often lead people to focus on whatever supports their expectations while ignoring or underestimating the significance of other factors. The optimist overlooks signs of trouble and plunges ahead without sufficient caution, unrealistically expecting to overcome longstanding evils and change the world or the Church for the better, and so wasting time, energy, and resources that should go to pursuing more realistic objectives. The pessimist overlooks opportunities, is immobilized by anxieties, alienates others by distrust, and invites trouble by self-fulfilling prophecies. Neither optimist nor pessimist is well equipped to deal with the mixture of blessings and disasters, amazing grace and shocking evil, always present in the world, the Church, and every individual’s life.

Inasmuch as optimism and pessimism are nonrational tendencies and inasmuch as they bear on risk taking and processes not only beyond our own control but beyond the control of anyone who cares for us, Christian revelation and hope support neither of them. Revelation provides reasons for hope, and hope bears on the kingdom and God’s re-creative work, and is grounded in trust in his promises. Christian hope has to do with the safeguarding or realization of goods in this world only insofar as one hopes that those goods will in some way contribute to the kingdom.

Faithful Christians always have realized that, like Jesus’ prayer that the cup might pass, their hopes and prayers for good things in this world must be conditional: “Please do not let my loved one die, Lord—but your will be done”; “God willing, I shall complete this task”; and so on. In teaching that goods promoted on earth will be found again in the kingdom, purified and transformed, Vatican II supplies some insight into how specific hopes and prayers not answered in the present age will receive specific answers in the age to come (see **A-3**, above).

When confronted with hard realities, today's Christians also need to remember other truths that strengthened their ancestors' faith.

One is that sufferings are transient and of only relative significance. Jesus explained, "When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn 16.21-22). And Paul taught, "The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom 8.18).

Again, Jesus told his disciples to entrust themselves completely to the Father's providential care (see Mt 6.25-32, 10.29-31), and Vatican I affirms that God's wisdom and love embrace everything:

By his providence, God guards and governs everything which he has made, "reaching from end to end mightily and ordering all things well" (Wis 8.1). For "all are open and laid bare to his eyes" (Heb 4.13), even those which will obtain by the free future action of creatures. (DS 3003/1784)

Though we seldom can understand why God permits particular evils, we can be sure that God permits no evil unless it is a side effect he must accept in creating the kingdom that Christ will hand over to the Father (see **B-9**, above).

Third, we can be sure that if we love God he will not allow us to suffer anything that is not for our ultimate benefit: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."<sup>318</sup>

Of course, the wrongdoing of others and the bad things that happen call for appropriate efforts to deal with the trouble. But they also call for meekness rather than resentment toward God, and calm trust in his wisdom and love rather than questioning and anxiety, along with patience with others, especially those responsible for evils that make one suffer, readiness to forgive, consideration toward other sufferers, and gratitude toward those who try to help. Suffering is always an opportunity to grow in—and to bear clear witness to—one's faith and hope, and so to benefit others as well as oneself. Greater sufferings offer greater opportunities. While no one is likely to feel pleased by sufferings, one should recognize their benefits and be grateful for them.

In retrospect, we sometimes can see how the bad things that have happened to us or those we love really were blessings. They led to conversion, taught a needed lesson, elicited love, cemented a lasting friendship. There is a lesson, relevant here, in Paul's analogy between Christian life and an athletic contest (see 1 Cor 9.25-27). An athlete who easily wins a gold medal against mediocre competition does not deserve much admiration; there is far more glory in overcoming severe handicaps with extraordinary effort and skill, and winning the gold cleanly against unsportsmanlike competitors and despite a dishonest judge.

Jesus, "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb 12.2). Saints who willingly undergo greater suffering for the kingdom's sake are

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318. Rom 8.28; cf. CCC, 313; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 521-24.

more like Jesus than those whose lives are easier. In a forge shop, metal is heated until it becomes soft and then pounded with powerful hammer blows; the process strengthens the metal and shapes it into something useful. The world is the Holy Spirit's shop for forging saints.

#### 4) Success is unnecessary; faithfulness is essential.

Realizing that this world is passing away, a Christian might feel that only mortal sins will have permanent significance, while good actions are entirely transient except to the extent they further some this-worldly goal. We can begin to overcome this false sense of the transience of good acts by taking into account the fact that choices last (see **B-2**, above) and shape our character and interpersonal relationships, not least our relationships with Jesus, Mary, and others we hope to live with forever in heaven. We make further progress if we realize that good acts, good character, and loving relationships will survive death and contribute to the permanent reality of members of the kingdom and their fellowship. Finally, a sense of the great, permanent, and unique significance of our every good act fully replaces the feeling that our daily lives have no lasting significance when we bear in mind that the goods we try to promote or protect by our good acts will be included within the kingdom's everlasting reality, where we shall find them again if we persevere in faithfully doing God's will (see GS 38-39; **A-3**, above).

Still, our present lives cannot mirror the structure of that divine masterpiece. An unknown poet proposed a simple analogy that clarifies the point:

My life is but a weaving between my God and me.  
I may not choose the colors; he knows what they should be.  
For he can view the pattern upon the upper side,  
While I can see it only on this, the under, side.<sup>319</sup>

A more complex analogy suggested by Vatican II's teaching may make the point even clearer. God's plan for the kingdom is being realized on earth in the lives of all who faithfully serve him, just as an architect's plan for a cathedral is being realized by people who gather materials for it on a lot near the construction site. But just as someone who looked at that lot expecting to glimpse a noble edifice would be disappointed, we inevitably experience many elements of our lives as jumbled and even pointless. Even if we grasp the general significance of our lives in relation to the kingdom, we cannot see how the Holy Spirit will complete and transform everything good in them and knit all those goods into the kingdom's fabric. Yet the grandeur of God's plan for the kingdom will be obvious to those who finally enter it, as the grandeur of the cathedral will be obvious to those who visit it when it is completed.

Jesus, too, experienced frustrations. Near the end of his life he lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her

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319. This poem has additional verses and appears in many versions; I copy the lines from a version in Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R., *Stumbling Blocks or Stepping Stones: Spiritual Answers to Psychological Questions* (New York: Paulist, 1987), 139.

wings, and you would not!” (Lk 13.34; cf. Mt 23.37). Yet, faithfully doing the Father’s will, Jesus perfectly cooperated in carrying out the divine plan for overcoming evil. For us, too, faithfulness is necessary and entirely adequate, but success is neither.

In making choices, one always has some hoped-for benefit in view. Success is in realizing the benefit by carrying out the choice. Yet no human action by itself is ever sufficient to bring about what was hoped for. Other things must go right, and they can go wrong, as when good farmers do everything they should, but the crop fails because of drought or some other natural disaster. Failures need not show that one made wrong choices. Right choices are those shaped by genuine love. And although people often are tempted to try to improve their chances of success by choosing bad means or by choosing something easier to do than what genuine love calls for, giving in to such temptations is infidelity.

Of course, faithfulness requires that we do our very best to provide the good service to which we have committed ourselves, using all our resources to the limit, working hard and constantly, taking all due care to promote and safeguard goods here and now, and to deal appropriately and promptly with evils that damage or threaten them. That requires that we care deeply about the instantiations of relevant goods in those we serve, as Jesus cared deeply about the repentance and faith of each person he met.

It is necessary also to understand the difference between faithfulness and mere stubbornness. The faithful do their best to fulfill their responsibilities despite all obstacles and the seeming fruitlessness of their efforts. Those who are not faithful but merely stubborn are attached to certain means to the goods they ought to serve, so that they persist in practices or projects that were given to them, or ones they devised, even when it becomes apparent that the means are ineffective. When a means proves ineffective, the faithful are creative and prepared to try another: Love finds a way. The merely stubborn are unfaithful when they do not love enough to find a better way of fulfilling responsibilities.

Those who deal with more or less tangible goods often receive evidence of the value of faithfulness. For example, faithful driving instructors are apt to see their diligence rewarded by able students who want not only a driver’s license but the skill to drive well. But people who deal with less tangible goods receive less affirmation of this kind. For example, parents trying to raise their children to be good people and good Christians cannot tell how well they are doing, since it is the children’s hearts that are all important, not their outward conformity to standards. And eventually, seeing good fruits of their efforts, the parents may be tempted to take more credit than they deserve. Much of good parenting is simply faithful apostolate, and the apostle only plants the seed or nurtures it, while the Holy Spirit creates the fruit.

The more difficult it is to see the value of being faithful, the greater the temptation to redefine responsibilities in terms of measurable objectives. ‘Good’ parents have healthy children who get good grades; their children are well supervised after school and get along well with others; and so on. These things are desirable, but it is legalistic evasion to limit responsibility by any such list. Moreover, such a list’s requirements sometimes can be met only by compromising some parental responsibility or using bad means.

Therefore, Christians must discern very carefully what God is calling them to do, and then do their best to do just that, whether or not they turn out to be successful, as long as they can.

### 5) True holiness transcends moral goodness but includes it.

The word *holiness* is likely to bring to mind moral excellence—for example, the heroism of St. Edmund Campion and St. Anne Line<sup>320</sup> or the obvious goodness of Pope John XXIII and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Originally, however, the idea of holiness pertained not to morality but to religion, including religions whose objects of worship neither exemplify nor promote moral goodness. *Holy* signified the very reality of the divine—mysterious, frightening to many, but important to almost everyone. Sound religious thought recognizes that everything else depends on God for all it is and does, and especially that humankind depends on him for guidance and help in surviving, flourishing, and dealing with evil. In such thought, *holy* signifies God’s transcendence (otherness, separateness, beyondness) and utter incomprehensibility.

The Old Testament frequently speaks of holiness in its core meaning: “There is none holy like the Lord, there is none besides thee; there is no rock like our God” (1 Sam 2.2); “Let them praise thy great and terrible name! Holy is he!” (Ps 99.3); “To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One” (Is 40.25). Especially in Isaiah, God often is called simply “the Holy One of Israel.”

Occasionally, the New Testament uses *holy* to signify God’s transcendence. The first petition of the Lord’s Prayer (see Mt 6.9, Lk 11.2), that the Father’s name be hallowed, seeks reverence for his unique holiness.<sup>321</sup> And, though Jesus usually addresses his Father familiarly, when praying at the Last Supper for his disciples’ unity, he says “Holy Father” (Jn 17.11).

The core meaning of holiness appears most clearly in liturgy. Isaiah’s vision of the angelic worship of God, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts” (Is 6.3), is echoed in John’s vision of the heavenly court:

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to sing,

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320. Anne Line was executed in London (27 Feb. 1601) for harboring a priest; she was canonized (25 Oct. 1970) by Paul VI with 39 other English martyrs. She and her husband, Roger, had been brought up as non-Catholics; while still teenagers, both sacrificed the favor and wealth of their families of origin by converting to Catholicism. They married young. In 1585, Roger, then only nineteen, was jailed; he got out, fled to Flanders, and died there in 1594. Anne took vows as a widow, risked her life caring for priests, and gladly paid with her life (see G. Fitz Herbert, “Line, Anne, Bl.,” *NCE*, 8:771-72). John Finnis and Patrick Martin, “Another Turn for the Turtle,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 5220 (18 Apr. 2003): 12-14, show how William Shakespeare beautifully but cryptically memorialized the couple with his poem, “The Phoenix and the Turtle.”

321. See *CCC*, 2807-15. Sincere prayer presupposes hope that what is asked for be granted, and hope presupposes earnest desire for the benefit sought. If those praying earnestly desire what they seek, they will do what they can to promote its realization. The second commandment forbids taking God’s name in vain (see Ex 20.7, Dt 5.11; *CCC*, 2142-44). Jesus teaches his disciples to “‘vindicate the holiness’ of [God’s] great name, which had been ‘profaned among the nations’” (see Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 28a:898), and to ask the Father to vindicate it ultimately and completely.

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was and is and is to come!” (Rev 4.8)

In every Mass we join in the heavenly worshippers’ acclamations by responding “Holy, holy, holy!” to the Preface.<sup>322</sup>

Beginning from the sense of *holy* signifying the very reality of the divine, people of every religion use the word to refer to other things considered insofar as they are related to the divinity the people worship. If the object of worship is frightful, such acquired holiness may be more a curse than a blessing. Even if what is worshiped is benign, reverence for it leads people to reserve for religious uses things that acquire holiness.

Sacred things in this way are segregated from other things, which thereby become profane, that is, *not*-sacred. The taking over or making over of something not-sacred for religious purposes requires drawing it out of the sphere of the profane and consecrating it, that is, setting it apart from the profane for its special relationship to God. At the same time, when people deal with the profane, as they must, they become, as it were, contaminated by it (“unclean”). Then they must be ritually purified before engaging again in worship.

The Old Testament attributes the holiness that derives from a relationship with the divine to the mighty deeds and the words by which the Lord reveals himself; to the places where he dwells or becomes present; to the covenant and all its provisions; to the patriarchs, prophets, and priests; to everything required for worship and the times and places set aside for it; and, not least, to the whole community insofar as it is God’s chosen people.

This attribution of holiness to the people of God continues in the New Testament. The Church and her members are God’s incipient kingdom and adopted family. In virtue of the Holy Spirit’s pervasive activity in and through the Church, everything specifically required for Christian worship is holy, and the Church’s essential structure and appropriate activities share in her sacredness. Regardless of their personal moral character, popes are called “His Holiness”; clerics and those consecrated for the things of the Lord also are holy in this sense, as are things that have no moral character at all, such as holy days, holy water, and holy pictures.

How, then, does holiness come to connote moral excellence? In his relationship with Israel, God, the Holy One, manifested fidelity and loving kindness, righteousness and compassion (see Ex 34.6-7). “The Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he” (Dt 32.4). He directed Moses to teach the Israelites to imitate that aspect of his holiness by introducing a restatement of moral law with a specific commandment calling Israel to holiness: “Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lv 19.2).<sup>323</sup> Thus, Israel’s law was holy, not only because the Holy One gave it

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322. *Holy* also is used with its core meaning when the *Gloria* is sung or recited and the reason for our worship is explicitly stated: “For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.”

323. See Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, Anchor Bible, 3A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1602-8.

to his chosen people, but because its moral requirements guided that people toward fitness for covenantal friendship with their holy God by teaching them to imitate his own goodness.

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I command you this day for your good? Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it; yet the Lord set his heart in love upon your fathers and chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of Lords, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. (Dt 10.12-19)

Because Yahweh is not only mighty and terrible but loving and faithful, the people he has chosen must walk in his ways, love him, and keep all his commandments—which he gives them *for their own good*.<sup>324</sup> Insofar as they sin, God’s people will not be holy but impure and unworthy of him. That is why Isaiah, contemplating the worship of the thrice-holy Lord and becoming acutely aware of his and Israel’s unworthiness to participate in it—“I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Is 6.5)—is cleansed by a seraph with a burning coal, a cleansing not of mere ritual impurity but of sin: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven” (Is 6.7). In this way he is prepared for prophetic service.

The New Testament presupposes the Old Testament’s teaching that holiness belongs primarily to God, who communicates it to human beings. The new covenant’s communication of holiness, however, is far more profound, for the divine Word becomes the man “called holy, the Son of God” (Lk 1.35), and consecrates himself so that he can sanctify his disciples in truth (see Jn 17.17, 19). By perfect obedience to the Father, Jesus frees humankind from sin, radically transforming those who believe in him (see **D-2**, above) so that he can present them “holy and blameless and irreproachable” (Col 1.22) to the Father. Christians are baptized with the Holy Spirit (see Lk 3.16), who dwells in the entire Church (see 1 Cor 3.16), and so dwells in them, making them holy.

Intimate fellowship with God requires moral excellence of Christians (see, e.g., Rom 6.15-23, 8.1-17, 12.1-2; Gal 5.13-6.10). The development of this line of thought can be seen in statements of Peter that refer to holiness. When Jesus manifests his divine power by bringing about a miraculous catch of fish, Peter exclaims: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Lk 5.8). After Jesus feeds the five thousand (see Jn 6.4-14), Peter explicitly recognizes him as “the Holy One of God” (Jn 6.69), and after Jesus rises from

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324. Commenting on the command to love God with all one’s heart, soul, and might (Dt 6.5), Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, Anchor Bible, 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 351-52, explains that the command is modeled on the provisions of covenants by which vassals promised an overlord exclusive devotion and service (all one’s heart), even to the point of death (all one’s soul), and employing all one’s strength and resources (all one’s might).

the dead Peter bears witness to him and challenges the people of Israel: “You denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 3.14-15). Finally, the First Letter of Peter recalls the Old Testament’s teaching and calls all Christians to holiness:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. . . .

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. (1 Pt 1.14-17, 22)

John develops the same line of thought without using the concept of holiness. Jesus’ intimate communion with the Father and their mutual indwelling (see Jn 10.38, 14.10-11) are extended to embrace those who believe in Jesus (see Jn 14.20, 17.21-23). He manifests his love for the Father and abides in his Father’s love by doing what his Father commands (see Jn 14.31, 15.10). “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 Jn 5.3). Loving Jesus, abiding in his love, and remaining in communion with the Father thus require those who believe in Jesus to keep his commandments (see Jn 14.15, 21, 23; 15.10, 14; cf. 1 Jn 2.3-6)—which are not only his but the Father’s (see Jn 14.24). First among them is that Jesus’ disciples love one another as he has loved them (see Jn 15.12, 17; cf. 1 Jn 2.7-11, 3.9-24, 4.7-21).

### **6) All the baptized are called and empowered to pursue perfect holiness.**

In Vatican II’s document on the Church, the fifth chapter, “The universal vocation to holiness in the Church,” begins by affirming and explaining the Church’s unfailing holiness, which is a gift of the uniquely holy God. Jesus, the Son of God, “loved the Church as his spouse, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her (see Eph 5.25-26), and for God’s glory joined her to himself as his body and filled her with the gift of the Holy Spirit” (LG 39). The Council immediately draws the conclusion that every member of the Church is called to holiness. It supports that inference by quoting Paul, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thes 4.3), and citing his teaching that God chose the Church’s members in Christ so that they “should be holy and blameless before him” (Eph 1.4). Although Christians cannot by themselves respond to that call to holiness, the Council teaches that the Holy Spirit constantly brings about fruits of grace that in diverse ways manifest the Church’s holiness among all those whose plan of life tends toward perfect charity.<sup>325</sup> The Council also notes that the Church’s holiness “appears in a certain special way in the practice of the counsels, which have customarily been called ‘evangelical’” (LG 39).

The Council emphatically teaches that Jesus, the paradigm of perfection, preached “holiness of life to each and every one of his disciples of every condition: ‘You,

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325. See LG 39. As will be shown, not only those in a canonical state of perfection and clerics but all who seek to do God’s will in everything and who accept everything that befalls them from his hand have a plan of life that tends toward perfect charity.

therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5.48)."<sup>326</sup> But is that really possible? The Council points out that Jesus empowered his disciples to love all-inclusively: he sent them the Holy Spirit to inspire them to love God perfectly and to love one another as Jesus loved them (see LG 40). Due to God's graces rather than to anything Christians themselves do, they have been called to follow Jesus, justified in him, given in baptism a new birth as sons and daughters in the Son, and thus really made holy: "Hence they must by God's grace cling to and complete the holiness they have received" (LG 40). The Council concludes that all the Christian faithful, regardless of their place in the Church, are called "to the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity." To attain such holiness they must cooperate with God's grace and use what Jesus gives them so that, "following in his footsteps and becoming conformed to his image, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and the service of neighbor, doing the Father's will in all things" (LG 40).

Holiness is not realized in a compartmentalized set of religious activities. Doing the Father's will in *all* things is the key, as the Council proceeds to explain:

In the various kinds and duties of life, one holiness is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God. Obeying the Father's voice and adoring God the Father in spirit and truth [by offering their lives with Jesus in the Eucharist<sup>327</sup>], they follow the poor, humble, cross-bearing Christ so that they may deserve to share in his glory. But according to each one's particular gifts and responsibilities, he or she must advance unhesitatingly along the way of living faith, which arouses hope and works through love. (LG 41)

The Council explains how different sorts of Church members—bishops and other clerics, married couples and other lay people, and those overwhelmed by various afflictions—can live holy lives by exercising the theological virtues in using their gifts to do God's will as they fulfill the responsibilities and meet the challenges of their daily lives. The Council sums up:

All Christ's faithful, therefore, will grow in holiness day by day in and through all the conditions, duties, or circumstances of their life if they accept all these with faith from the heavenly Father's hand and cooperate with the divine will, manifesting to everyone by their temporal service itself the charity with which God loved the world. (LG 41)

If all God's gifts were used as he wills in loving service and all the afflictions he permits were accepted with faith and hope, one would cooperate fully with the divine will and day by day steadily grow in holiness.

The Council completes its chapter on the universal vocation to holiness by focusing on charity. By the gift of the Holy Spirit, God, who is love, pours his love into the hearts of all who believe and are baptized, and those who abide in that love abide in God, who

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326. LG 40. As the context of Mt 5.48 (see 5.43-47) makes clear, *perfect* in that saying means all-inclusive in love of neighbor.

327. Eucharistic Prayer I: "Bless and approve our offering; make it acceptable to you, an offering in spirit and in truth."

also abides in them (see Rom 5.5, 1 Jn 4.16). “So, the first and most necessary gift is charity” (LG 42). The growth of charity requires constant cooperation with God’s grace: repenting promptly any sin one commits (see LG 40), willingly listening to God’s word and doing his will, and participating devoutly in the liturgy, especially the Eucharist (see LG 42). At the same time, charity itself directs and enlivens all the means of sanctification: speaking and listening to God in loving prayer, exercising all the virtues in doing his will, denying oneself in serving others (see LG 42).

The greatest witness of love and most perfect imitation of Jesus’ love are to lay down one’s life for him and for others; just after that the Council places the self-giving of those who observe the counsels “which the Lord in the gospel commends to his disciples” (LG 42; cf. CCC, 914-16, 2473). But all Christians, even though they are given neither the opportunity for martyrdom nor the charisms for observing the counsels, are called and required to take up their crosses, follow Jesus, and confess him before others, despite having to suffer for it (see LG 42). Likewise, all the Lord Jesus’ faithful are called and bound to pursue holiness and the perfection of their own state. All therefore must shape their interests in worldly realities in such a way as to avoid any attachment that would deprive them of the freedom to love perfectly (see LG 42; cf. 1 Cor 7.29-31).

### **7) Pursuing holiness organizes one’s entire life as an answer to the Father’s calling.**

Commenting on Vatican II’s teaching on the perfection of charity, John Paul II links holiness to each individual’s vocation: “As the Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few ‘uncommon heroes’ of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual.”<sup>328</sup> But every way of holiness involves accepting with faith from the Father’s hand all the conditions and duties of life, doing the Father’s will in all things, and using all his gifts in loving service. Doing those things consistently will organize one’s entire life as a response to the Father’s calling—as the carrying out of one’s unique, personal vocation.

But the lives of many Catholics are not organized in that way.

Baptized infants have been made holy, as children of God in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. Given good example and catechized well, little children will wonder at God’s goodness, love Jesus, praise him and the Father, and thank them for all their gifts. When making their First Communion, they will delight in their oneness with Jesus, and their holiness will increase.

Children begin making choices, however, before they can grasp the ideas of accepting everything with faith from the Father’s hand, doing his will in all things, and using all his gifts in service. Good children obey the norms they are taught and their

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328. *Novo millennio ineunte*, 31, AAS 93 (2001) 288, OR, 10 Jan. 2001, VI-VII. Pope John Paul makes the same link in *Pastores gregis*, 54, AAS 96 (2004) 894, OR, 22 Oct. 2003, XV: “It is essential to promote a vocational culture in the broadest sense: young people, in other words, need to be helped to discover that life itself is a vocation. The Bishop would do well, then, to appeal to families, parish communities and educational institutes to assist boys and girls in discovering God’s plan in their lives and in embracing the call to holiness which God from the beginning addresses to each person.” A footnote refers to the Synod’s *Propositio* 52.

parents' and teachers' commands; yet, when left to themselves, they spontaneously do as they please. Thus, they tend to develop a variety of interests unrelated to one another and to their faith and its practice, and they do not easily grasp most of the readings they hear at Mass during the Liturgy of the Word. As a consequence, their initially innocent interests develop without reference to the kingdom of God, usually generating attachments to earthly realities that impede growth in charity toward perfection and are likely eventually to lead to temptations.<sup>329</sup>

What happens as children grow up?

Some are so poor that they lack many of the necessities of life. Seeing no prospect of bettering their condition, they have little motive to look ahead unless they are well catechized, and so are unlikely to consider their lives as a whole. Instead, they will try to survive from one day to the next, while seizing every chance of escape and gratification.

Others are economically better off. In most cases their parents and teachers encourage them to look ahead, consider their possibilities, get clear about what they want out of life, and develop personal agendas. When it become burdensome to carry out the requirements of an agenda that promises gratification only in the distant future, young people may take a break in transient escapes—for example, college students who work hard most weekdays but get drunk and “party” every weekend. When undertakings are unsuccessful or the results are disappointing, a project or relationship (even a marriage) may be abandoned as “broken down” or “dead” to clear the way for a fresh attempt.

Both poor young people and those who are better off may continue, more or less, to practice their faith and to try to avoid mortal sins, at least those they feel are *really bad*. The more kindhearted may include in their agendas doing something to promote social justice and may enjoy spending some time in service projects. But even those who think they might have a “vocation” to the priesthood or religious life are likely to think of that as a possible agenda item and evaluate it as they would any other: “How much of what I want out of life can I expect to get by being ordained for this diocese . . . professed in that institute? How much else of what I want will I still be able to pursue? How much of what I would like will I need to forgo?” That is entirely different from the way the Bible indicates one should think about vocation.

Abraham learned of his vocation when God appeared to him and said: “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.’ Then Abram fell on his face” (Gn 17.1-3). Moses was curious about a burning bush and, despite his seemingly reasonable objections, was drafted to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (see Ex 3.1-4.17). The young Samuel did not realize that the Lord was calling him, but the call was repeated until he replied: “Speak, for thy servant hears” (1 Sm 3.10). Against Samuel’s judgment, God chose the youthful David for anointing as Saul’s successor; David’s immediate response is not recorded (see 1 Sm 16.1-13). Isaiah did volunteer for his prophetic service (see Is 6.8), but he seems to have realized that he had been formed for it from

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329. For this reason, timely catechesis regarding personal vocation is an urgent need of every Catholic child.

the womb (see Is 49.1-6). Jeremiah also was formed and consecrated for his role, but found himself drafted for it despite his misgivings (see Jer 1.4-10); only after he committed himself was he informed that his prophetic office required, among other things, that he remain celibate (see Jer 16.1-4).

John the Baptist is destined before his conception for his important but subordinate role, which he humbly accepts and heroically fulfills (see Mt 14.1-12; Mk 6.14-19; Lk 1.5-25, 3.1-20, 9.7-9; Jn 1.15, 19-36; 3.25-30). Angels tell Mary and Joseph they are to serve as Jesus' parents, and they submit to the Lord's plan for them (see Mt 1.18-25, Lk 1.26-38). Jesus calls those who will be the Twelve to drop what they are doing, leave everything behind, and follow him (see Mt 4.18-22, 9.9-13; Mk 1.16-20, 2.14; Lk 5.1-11, 27). Only John's Gospel suggests that their curiosity plays a role in their calling (see Jn 1.35-51), but John also makes it clear that their vocation was not their choice: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit" (Jn 15.16). The youthful Paul was sure he was doing God's work by persecuting Jesus' followers until Jesus blinded him into seeing his error and becoming Jesus' chosen instrument for opening the Gentiles' eyes (see Acts 9.15, 26.9-18). Only in retrospect did Paul realize he had been consecrated for his role before he was born and was being prepared for it until God saw fit to reveal it to him (see Gal 1.13-17).

In all these cases, God's or Jesus' wise and loving plan is the source of people's vocations. The Lord has his plan, and he assigns those he chooses a unique part in carrying it out. He has prepared them and expects them to accept their part and cooperate. In many cases, he enables them to do what at first they think impossible. Once they become aware of God's plan and begin cooperating with it, they no longer set their own agenda, for God takes charge of their entire lives. Spiritually changing and maturing as his plan for them unfolds, their lives take on meaning they could never have foreseen. In doing great things, they become great people.

Jesus calls people to follow him and collaborate in his mission. But with revelation's completion in him, the manner in which vocation is communicated had to change. Before then, God's will, revealed to all in the law, sufficiently guided most people, while those prepared and called for some special role in God's redemptive work received their vocations as a fresh divine revelation, as a new truth of faith. But the New Testament includes teachings, unprecedented in the Old Testament, about personal vocation for Jesus' disciples.

Jesus lays the foundation. Drawing on previous revelation, he commissions his disciples to be the salt of the earth and light of the world (see Mt 5.13-16). He teaches them to trust God for necessities, and to focus on seeking his kingdom and righteousness (see Mt 6.24-34). He warns them against believing in him while neglecting to do the Father's will (see Mt 7.19-21). By the simile of the vine and the branches, he teaches them that every disciple must abide in him and bear fruit, lest he or she be cut off and discarded (see Jn 15.1-11). Jesus teaches that all disciples must offer their unique, personal witness and must be ready to sacrifice life itself in doing so:

And he said to all, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever

loses his life for my sake, he will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” (Lk 9.23-26; cf. Mt 17.24-27, Mk 8.34-48)

When a rich man asks what he must do to have eternal life, Jesus makes it clear that keeping the commandments, while necessary, is not sufficient; one also must follow him and must give up everything that would prevent doing so.<sup>330</sup> With the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus teaches his disciples that the commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself requires more than fulfilling specific duties to particular people; everyone in need is to be treated as a neighbor and thus made into a neighbor (see Lk 10.25-37). With the description of the last judgment he teaches them that he himself is served by loving service which meets others’ genuine needs, while failure to serve those in need is neglect of him (see Mt 25.31-46).<sup>331</sup> By the parable of the talents he teaches that different servants of God receive different resources for promoting his kingdom and that, *even if otherwise blameless*, those who fail to do what they can with what they are given will lose their opportunity to share in the kingdom (see Mt 25.14-30, Lk 19.11-27).<sup>332</sup>

The implication of these teachings is that disciples must do the Father’s will, as Jesus himself did, by obeying not only the commandments that specify obligations everyone must fulfill but the commandment to love, which requires that they bear witness by their entire lives to the truth of God’s revelation and use their particular God-given abilities and resources to meet others’ genuine needs. Only such a life serves Jesus himself, effectively promotes God’s kingdom, and will lead to sharing in it.

Paul instructs Christians to offer their bodies—their very selves, their lives—as a living sacrifice (see Rom 12.1). Regarding the surrounding non-Christian world as the decadent residue of the age that is passing away, he encourages forward-looking thinking: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove [Greek *dokimazein* = discern] what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12.2). All Christians are to recognize and humbly

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330. See Mt 19.16-22, Mk 10.17-22, Lk 18.18-23. Recent, sound Scripture studies make it clear that the rich man does not rightly reject Jesus’ guidance. For him as for everyone, having eternal life requires following Jesus; but for him though not for everyone, to follow Jesus requires getting rid of his wealth. See S. Légasse, O.F.M.Cap., *L’Appel du Riche* (Marc 10.17-31 et parallèles) (Paris: Beauchesne, 1966), 257-60 (conclusions); Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 509-16. Thus, John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, 18, *AAS* 85 (1993) 1148, *OR*, 6 Oct. 1993, IV, teaches: “This vocation to perfect love is not restricted to a small group of individuals. *The invitation*, ‘go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor,’ and the promise ‘you will have treasure in heaven,’ are meant for everyone, because they bring out the full meaning of the commandment of love for neighbor, just as the invitation which follows, ‘Come, follow me,’ is the new, specific form of the commandment of love of God. Both the commandments and Jesus’ invitation to the rich young man stand at the service of a single and indivisible charity, which spontaneously tends towards that perfection whose measure is God alone.” Thus, Jesus’ “If you would be perfect” (Mt 19.21) should not be read as offering the rich man a better option for discipleship, but as articulating the requirement of charity—“Love one another as I have loved you”—that transcends other commandments and requires each Christian to find, accept, and undertake his or her personal vocation.

331. See John P. Meier, *Matthew* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1980), 301-306.

332. See *ibid.*, 297-300.

accept their limited roles, and each is to use his or her particular gifts in building up the one body of the Lord Jesus.<sup>333</sup>

That catechesis, so beautifully developed by Paul, is not peculiar to him; the same insight is briefly expressed elsewhere, using the analogy of servants in a household rather than that of members of a body: “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Pt 4.10). But only Paul makes it clear that each Christian receives the charisms needed to live his or her entire life in response to God’s call, according to the exhortation: “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3.17).

How such a life, completely eucharistic and completely holy, responds to God’s calling of each person is most clearly articulated in the letter to the Ephesians. It begins by summarizing the calling of Christians to holiness, their predestination to adoption, their redemption by Jesus’ blood from sin, their insight into God’s plan to gather up all creation in Christ, and their assignment to live for the praise of God’s glory (see 1.3-14). Even though dead in their sins, Christians were nevertheless loved by God, who, being rich in mercy, raised them to life with the Lord Jesus, so as to manifest his infinite goodness (see 2.1-7). Salvation, then, is entirely the fruit of God’s grace, not of human works:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (2.8-10)<sup>334</sup>

Christians have been recreated in Jesus precisely for the sake of their good works, which God prepared for them and gives them to live out. Paul goes on to summarize his own vocation, the life of good works the Lord gave to him (see 3.1-12), and then, after praying for those to whom he is writing (3.14-19), he begs them “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4.1). Because “grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (4.7), this is a personal calling to each of them to live his or her unique life of good works.<sup>335</sup> Diverse individuals have received diverse graces to make their particular contributions to the building up of Christ’s body (4.7-13) until all attain to holiness—to “mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4.13).

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333. See Rom 12.3-8. Brendan Byrne, S.J., *Romans*, Sacra Pagina, 6 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 368, comments: “The sober self-assessment of believers rests upon the way in which they perceive themselves to have been gifted by God at the moment of coming to faith . . . . Presupposed is Paul’s distinctive view that each person, on coming to Christian faith, is addressed by God in a way that constitutes their ‘calling’ (*klesis*) and bestows upon them the distinctive ‘gift’ (*charis*) which they then contribute to Christian community life.” Also see 1 Cor 12.4-31.

334. This passage implies that Christians’ holy lives are entirely the fruit of grace, and that God creates free choices; see **B-3** to **B-8**, above, for a defense of the coherence of those propositions.

335. See Markus Barth, *Ephesians, 4-6*, Anchor Bible, 34A (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), 453-57.

Paul's teaching makes it clear that, while each vocation is individual in the sense that it calls someone to walk in the unique life of good deeds that God prepared for him or her, all vocations also are social in the sense that they are callings to act for the common good of the kingdom of God. Embracing the whole of creation, providence orders everything to the kingdom; thus, the providential plan for each person is a vocation to do his or her share for the kingdom's coming and thereby reach fulfillment in it. The Church as a whole carries out the apostolate that fulfills her mission only insofar as each of her members cooperates by responding to his or her personal vocation and faithfully fulfilling the responsibilities it entails.<sup>336</sup> All Christians are called to use the charisms the Spirit gives them to contribute to the Church's apostolate (see AA 2). These various charisms not only are complementary but are often shared by many, in such a way that those sharing them are called to work together—their vocation is con-vocation. Using gifts to serve others unselfishly not only fulfills the individual (see GS 24) or community working together but builds up the Church, and that benefits all her members and potential members—every human being alive or yet to be born.

The theology of personal vocation that I have been drawing from Scripture in this section has been briefly formulated by John Paul II in a splendid passage:

As a kingly people, the Church sees herself rooted in and enlivened by “the law of the Spirit of life” (Rom 8.2), which is essentially the royal law of charity (see Jas 2.8) or the perfect law of freedom (see Jas 1.25). Therefore, the Church fulfills her mission when *she guides every member of the faithful to discover and live his or her own vocation in freedom and to bring it to fulfillment in charity.*

In carrying out her educational role, the Church aims with special concern at developing in children, adolescents and young adults a desire and a will to follow Jesus Christ in a total and attractive way. This educational work, while addressed to the Christian community as such, must also be aimed at the individual person. Indeed, God with his call reaches the heart of each individual, and the Spirit, who abides deep within each disciple (see 1 Jn 3.24), gives himself to each Christian with different charisms and special signs. Each one, therefore, must be helped to embrace the gift entrusted to him or her as a completely unique person, and to hear the words which the Spirit of God personally addresses to him or her.

...

The aim of education for a Christian is to attain the “stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4.13) under the influence of the Spirit. This happens when, imitating and sharing Christ's charity, one turns one's entire life into an act of loving service (see Jn 13.14-15), offering to God a spiritual worship acceptable to him (see Rom 12.1) and giving oneself to one's brothers and sisters. *The service of love is the fundamental meaning of every vocation . . .*<sup>337</sup>

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336. Thus, John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, 21, AAS 71 (1979) 318, PE, 278.87, teaches that an initiative can serve genuine renewal in the Church only insofar as it “is based on adequate awareness of the individual Christian's vocation and of responsibility for this singular, unique and unrepeatable grace by which each Christian in the community of the People of God builds up the Body of Christ.”

337. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 40, AAS 84 (1992) 724-25, OR, 8 Apr. 1992, X-XI. The passage is concerned with the responsibility of the Church's pastors to promote vocations to the priesthood,

Attaining to the “stature of the fullness of Christ” is attaining holiness; turning one’s entire life into an act of loving service is living one’s whole life in response to the Father’s calling. Thus, one attains holiness by living one’s whole life in response to one’s personal vocation.

In sum, every Christian is called to be a saint—not some generic sort of saint but a particular saint. Mary was called to be the saint she became by living her unique life, Peter to be the saint he became by living his unique life, and so on. One becomes holy as one responds to one’s unique vocation. God calls and sets apart every single Christian for a unique relationship with himself and a unique role in his plan. He takes the initiative; vocation is first and always his idea and his gift, a gift that includes all one’s abilities and resources, one’s awareness of God’s call, and one’s ability to respond to it. Someone can refuse the gift or accept it. If one accepts, the life of good deeds that will carry out one’s vocation becomes the object of a profound and free self-commitment. For those who cooperate with God, the whole, living relationship is a great blessing, a covenant of faithful love, of fellowship and cooperation for the heavenly kingdom—which will include God’s glory, the world’s salvation, and their own complete fulfillment.

### **8) Every part of life should respond to one’s vocation and contribute to holiness.**

God’s providential plan embraces absolutely everything. No possible good can come about unless God creates it, and no evil can occur unless he permits it. Therefore, someone who means to do the Father’s will in all things always listens for God’s call before deciding what to do and never makes any choice, no matter how seemingly trivial, unless confident that carrying it out will be doing the Father’s will. And someone who means to accept everything in faith from the Father’s hand refrains from reacting to bad things—those others do and those that simply happen—without first recalling that God has permitted them and asking what response he wants.

One obviously must avoid mortal sin. But venial sins also are serious evils: “Venial sin weakens charity; it manifests a disordered affection for created goods; it impedes the soul’s progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good; it merits temporal punishment. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin” (CCC, 1863). But striving to avoid sin, important as it is, does not provide much in the way of loving service. One must act for the sake of the kingdom; one must do the truth in love. Religious responsibilities are fundamental of course: listening to God’s word, participating in the liturgy, praying, and so on. But religious acts should not be compartmentalized; they should enliven and transform the whole of one’s life.<sup>338</sup>

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but the Pope rightly sees that responsibility to be part of the wider responsibility to help every Christian find his or her personal vocation.

338. John Paul II, *Christifidelis laici*, 59, AAS 81 (1989) 509, OR, 6 Feb. 1989, 19, makes the point that the vocations of the lay faithful are all-inclusive: “There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called ‘spiritual’ life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called ‘secular’ life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life, and in culture. The branch, engrafted into the vine which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity. In fact, every area of the lay faithful’s lives, as different as they are, enters into the plan of God, who desires that these very areas be the ‘places in time’ where the love of

Most adults make major commitments: to be a husband or wife, to be a cleric, to be a religious, and so on. Commitments like these cannot be made by oneself. For example, one cannot commit oneself to be a husband or a wife without getting married to a particular person, who makes a corresponding commitment. Those who make such commitments with well-grounded confidence that to do so responds to God's call—to be, for example, a deacon for this diocese or a permanent member of this institute—have heard and accepted in principle at least very central elements of their vocations.

I say “in principle” because major commitments need to be reaffirmed day by day as their particular responsibilities emerge or take shape. I say that these people have accepted “at least very central elements” of their vocations because God's plan might call them to make other commitments, perhaps even major ones. Spouses die, and religious may find themselves called to unanticipated service—for example, to found a new institute, as Mother Teresa did. Moreover, seldom if ever is it the case that a person's set of commitments settles everything. Almost everyone is free to make some additional choices about leisure activities, friendships, and so on. And that “free” area is not outside God's plan, for the life of good deeds he has prepared is a tightly integrated whole, and such elements of one's vocation not only are important in themselves but are likely to have a significant impact on other, more central elements.

Furthermore, the ongoing activities that make up a great part of their lives must quite often simply be accepted rather than chosen by Christians. Most children have little choice about whether to go to school; many people have no real options about what nation to live in; and some have no choice about what kind of work to do. But even so, one can meekly accept such things as elements of one's vocation and fulfill unchosen responsibilities with the intention of pleasing God. Thus Paul taught: “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; not in the way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men” (Eph 6.5-7).<sup>339</sup>

Other conditions beyond one's control can pertain to a vocation. After speaking of the more obvious elements, such as work and state of life, John Paul II adds: “And I am thinking also of other situations: for example, of the husband who is left a widower, of

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Christ is revealed and realized for both the glory of the Father and service to others. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility—as, for example, skill and solidarity in work, love and dedication in the family and the education of children, service to society and public life, and the promotion of truth in the area of culture—are the occasions ordained by Providence for a ‘continuous exercise of faith, hope, and charity’ (AA 4).”

339. That teaching implies neither that slavery was just (although slavery imposed as a punishment for crime may have been just—see St. Thomas, *In 4 Sent.*, d. 36, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2) nor that those who recognized its injustice were wrong in working to abolish it. It implies instead that those who suffer injustice can and should cooperate with God and thus escape from evil rather than being enslaved by it as are those who answer evil with evil. See 1 Pt 2.18-25 and the rich commentary by John H. Elliott, *I Peter*, Anchor Bible, 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 511-50. Elliott rightly points out (542): “What is said of and to slaves here at the outset of the domestic exhortation pertains ultimately to all within the household of God. The condition and experience, the attitude and the steadfastness, the vocation and the reward of the household slaves are all typical of and paradigmatic for the household of God as a whole.”

the spouse who is abandoned, of the orphan. I am thinking of the condition of the sick; the old, infirm and lonely; and of the poor.”<sup>340</sup> Accepting everything in faith from the Father’s hand means acknowledging that God has permitted such things and then dealing with them properly—as opportunities to cooperate with him in bringing the good he intends out of the evil one suffers.

Though the life God prepares for one is a perfectly coherent whole, the calling to live it is not communicated all at once, but piecemeal over one’s lifespan. When devout children or young people first begin to understand their vocations, they often are surprised at how God’s providence has already formed them and brought them to that moment. Moreover, nobody immediately receives a complete itinerary and lifetime schedule of events, and the kindly light that leads often illuminates no more of the path ahead than is necessary to follow it. Only the blessed can, retrospectively, understand their vocations as a whole.

Often one’s vocational path does not lead where one expects. God sometimes calls couples to become engaged but not married, calls men to be seminarians but not ordained, calls men and women to be novices but not professed. Knowing that, Christians who are becoming saints make the most of their engagement or their formation as seminarians or novices, without setting their hearts on the wedding, ordination, or profession—that is, without ever pursuing their own agenda. They say, “If the Lord wills,” and then listen patiently for his definitive call.<sup>341</sup> Those who are becoming saints never stop listening and are always prepared for shocking turns along the path ahead.

They also are prepared for bruising falls, which include their sins. God, of course, does not call anyone to sin, but he permits even those who are becoming saints to do so. Then it is part of one’s vocation to acknowledge that this evil, too, has been permitted by God, and to deal with it as he wills—with honesty, genuine contrition, appropriate restitution to those one has injured, gratitude for the Lord’s mercy, and suitable penance.

Many Christians, perhaps partly due to poor catechesis, construct agendas that organize large parts of their lives without taking their faith and hope into account. What becomes of such people’s vocations? Or of the vocations of those who through sin make binding commitments they should not make or in ways that cannot be remedied fail to make commitments that they were called to make? Suppose a young woman, careless about God’s plan for her life, ignores her vocation to the religious life, marries, has children, and only then becomes devout: Has she missed her vocation, once for all?

No, she has not. God remains faithful and always calls one to holiness and a unique life of good deeds that will lead to it. But what God calls one to do is always within one’s possibilities. Having become a wife and mother, this woman has assumed responsibilities that she is morally obliged to fulfill. Her marriage and parenthood are central parts of her vocation, and she ought to seek holiness by fulfilling those roles in an exemplary way. As

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340. John Paul II, Homily at Mass at St. Joseph Cafasso Parish, 4, *Inseg.* 4.1 (1981) 215-16, *OR*, 16 Feb. 1981, 6.

341. Jas 4.14-15: “You do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that.’”

God calls those who have defrauded others to restitution, so he calls sinners who missed what would have been their vocation had they not sinned to that life of holiness available to them now, even at the eleventh hour (see Mt 20.1-16). Hence, although sinners miss or even reject their vocations, a repentant sinner once more has a complete personal vocation.<sup>342</sup>

Not all those who disregard God's call in planning their lives make commitments other than those they would have made had they done their best to discern their vocations. Young people, not previously devout, who experience a conversion sometimes can see in retrospect that the Lord has used their own self-seeking to prevent them from making irreversible commitments and/or to develop their gifts in ways that enable them now to undertake the lives of selfless service to which they see themselves called.<sup>343</sup> Of course, to do so they will need to reconsider the reversible commitments they have made and the projects they have undertaken, and bring everything in their lives into conformity with God's plan.

The understanding that each Christian is called to a life of good deeds that God has prepared in advance may lead someone to suppose that such a vocation is like a role in a drama, a scripted part that need only be acted out. If that were so, however, no one could be called at the eleventh hour. Is a vocation then more like the directions provided by a guidance system that continuously takes into account one's present position and, regardless of wrong turns or deliberate deviations, always tells one how to get home? That analogy captures some features of vocation missed by the role-in-a-drama analogy, but it obscures the fact that the Father not only calls all of his children to dwell with him but calls each one to mature into that unique member of his family that he or she will be forever.<sup>344</sup>

Once misleading analogies are set aside, one can see that, although God's action is primary in vocation, it does not render Christians passive, and so prevent them from shaping their own vocations. In discerning one's vocation one does construct a tentative plan of life. Then too, while God sometimes moves Christians who have been living sinful lives to repentance by calling them to some challenging service that appeals to them, many Christians merit at least some of the more central elements of their vocations by their docility in accepting other elements and diligence in fulfilling them. That is suggested by the parable of the talents (see Mt 25.14-30, Lk 19.11-27), in which the

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342. While sinners always rightly hope for God's forgiveness and trust in his mercy, people tempted to commit sins sometimes wrongly trust in their own power to repent and presumptuously count on God's forgiveness. Those who reject their vocations to follow their own agenda may find themselves with unexpected, onerous responsibilities that they must fulfill under pain of grave sin, and the foolish may find themselves unrepentant before their Judge.

343. This point is exemplified by many saints—for example, in very different ways, Augustine and Vincent de Paul.

344. In fact, no analogy does justice to vocation in general and in itself. For any analogy leads us to think about God's action and wonder how what he is doing is related to our own actions. Such thinking is similar to the theological reflection that led to the conflicting theories about grace and free choice mentioned in **B-4**, above, and like that reflection, is bound to be not only futile but misleading (see **B-5** through **B-8**).

faithful servants are entrusted with greater responsibilities. (Such merit, of course, also is a gift of grace.) Moreover, Christians who find appealing something they know they should not adopt as part of an agenda can rightly ask God to call them to that same thing, as some have prayed for the opportunity to lay down their lives as martyrs.

Constantly listening for God's calling, regularly accepting it, and faithfully carrying it out leads to holiness.

Someone conformed to the world and living by its standards would never hear God calling. One must be transformed by a renewal of mind, so that one's thinking is attuned to God's word. Moreover, one will listen for God's call only if one is interested in what he is interested in: the completion of his creative-redemptive-sanctifying work. Such listening therefore presupposes that one is seeking the kingdom and hoping for its coming. When hope dominates one's attitude toward life, one is ready to expend oneself completely here and now without becoming attached to anything precisely as it here and now is: "Those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it" (1 Cor 7.29-31). Such people stop worrying about success, care only about being faithful, and wait without anxiety for the Lord's coming.

Sinful options regularly come to the attention of those who aim no higher than to avoid sin while carrying out their own agendas. But many temptations are precluded for the person who always has this or that to do because it is what God wants, or has this or that to deal with because God has permitted it, and one must deal with it as God wants. Preoccupied with the good, one is not so easily distracted by what is bad. People who use all their time and resources to do the Father's business have no unused capacity to put to bad uses.

Living a life that is meaningful through and through, one is grateful for God's gift of it and wishes to give oneself back to him. Of course, people cannot package themselves up and ship themselves to heaven, nor can they surrender themselves in such a way that they no longer are responsible for themselves. A person becomes Jesus' mother and brother and sister by hearing his or her Father's word and keeping it, by listening to God's calling and responding to it (see Mt 12.49-50, Mk 3.31-35, Lk 8.21). So, one takes up the cup of salvation and calls on the Lord's name: one offers oneself with Jesus in the Eucharist. What is offered is gathered into the Lord Jesus and laid up as material for the kingdom (see **A-3**, above). And such material is sanctified when one participates in the Eucharist. My whole self would be sanctified if my entire life were fit to be offered with Jesus' sacrifice. If only . . .

### **9) Various elements of one's vocation are obligatory in diverse modes.**

There are at least five reasons why one ought to find, accept, and carry out one's personal vocation.

First, we are not our own. We are created and have been redeemed, "bought with a price" (1 Cor 6.20) by the Father, who gave his only Son for us. So, we owe him gratitude and service. He has entrusted us with all our abilities and resources. If we fail to

use them productively, we will deserve to be cast out, and we will be, as the parable of the talents makes clear (see Mt 25.14-30).<sup>345</sup> It might seem that the unproductive servant is treated too severely: frightened by the master's reputation, he is indeed overcautious; but he does not steal or lose the sum entrusted to him. Yet he is condemned as wicked, slothful, worthless, and is cast out (see Mt 25.26, 30). The point, however, is that he did not use what he was entrusted with to make a profit, as his master intended. Thus, the overcautious servant was disobedient. His defense, even if truthful, makes it clear that he knew he was disobeying and did so deliberately.<sup>346</sup>

Second, by the act of faith, we agree to receive Jesus' service, to benefit from his laying down his life. Having benefited from his self-sacrifice, we owe him a debt of gratitude. He wants his disciples' cooperation: If you wish to be my disciple, take up your own cross and follow me (see Mt 10.38, 16.24-27; Mk 8.34-88; Lk 9.23-26). One cannot rightly refuse. Moreover, Jesus' response to the rich man (see Mt 19.16-22, Mk 10.17-22, Lk 18.18-23) shows that to accept his invitation to discipleship and deny oneself everything at odds with it is advice one cannot safely reject.

Third, fairness requires that we treat others as we wish to be treated. But in accepting Jesus' service, we wish to be saved by his self-sacrifice. And since the kingdom is constituted by mercy, fairness requires its members to treat others with mercy, as Jesus makes clear with the parable of the merciless official (see Mt 18.23-35). We ought therefore to sacrifice ourselves in meeting others' needs, chief among them the need to repent, believe, and abide in love. Those who fail to use their gifts to promote others' salvation deserve to be treated as the merciless official was.

Fourth, Jesus commissions his Church to carry on his mission, and the Spirit sees to it that each of the baptized receives the gifts needed to do his or her full share in that apostolate. People do that only by using those gifts in service, and not to use them fully is a defect in gratitude to the Spirit.<sup>347</sup>

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345. Jesus makes the point repeatedly and in different ways. Branches that bear no fruit will be taken away: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (Jn 15.1-2). Fruitless trees will be eliminated; saving faith is alive and active: "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits. 'Not every one who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven'" (Mt 7.19-21). Indeed, since the productive use of God's gifts also is his gift, even if one perfectly fulfilled one's personal vocation, honesty would require one to say: I am an unprofitable servant, for I have done only what I ought to have done: see Lk 17.10; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Gospel according to Luke: X-XXIV*, Anchor Bible, 28A (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 1144-46.

346. In the Lucan version, the master says: "I will condemn you out of your own mouth, you wicked servant!" (Lk 19.22). At the same time, Christians who know what God wants and do their best to do it cannot fail to please him: fidelity suffices, success is unnecessary. The servant, by contrast, had he been obedient and done his best, might well have lost his master's deposit and been blamed for that.

347. Thus, canon law directs the faithful to fulfill their personal vocations: *CIC*, c. 204, §1: "The Christian faithful are those who, inasmuch as they have been incorporated in Christ through baptism, have been constituted as the people of God. For this reason, made sharers in their own way in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and royal function, they are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world, in accord with the condition proper to each." One cannot trace this canon back to any

Fifth, even though the divine persons stand to gain nothing by all they have done, are doing, and will do for us, “in everything God works for good with those who love him” (Rom 8.28). In creating, redeeming, and sanctifying us, God desires that we seek first his kingdom and do our part in preparing material for it, since otherwise we will not come to be all that he wishes us to be forever (see **A-3**, above). Children blessed with wise and unselfish parents ought to obey them in everything, and are foolish and self-defeating when they do not. Similarly, God’s children ought to be eager to know what the Father wants, ready to cooperate in everything, and steadfast in doing so.

The first three of these arguments make it clear that some elements of a personal vocation are obligatory in the sense that refusing or failing to respond to the call is grave matter. Those who abide in love and live in the Lord Jesus bear *some* fruit even if they never think about vocation; so, those who bear no fruit at all evidently do not abide in love and do not live in the Lord—they are living in mortal sin.

Sometimes Christians must either bear witness to their faith or sin gravely, whether by directly denying that faith or by committing some other mortal sin. It is gravely wrong not to rise to such a challenge even though one’s life is at stake; and when the stakes are not that high, giving in is still more gravely wrong. Also, sometimes Christians who fail to help neighbors in need or to forgive those who have wronged them sin gravely against charity (see Mt 6.14-15, 18.23-35, 25.41-46; *LCL*, 306-20, 788-821).

Furthermore, even if people are thinking of their own agendas rather than their vocations in undertaking a major commitment—like marriage, accepting ordination, making vows in a religious institute—the grave responsibilities that flow from the commitment then pertain to their personal vocation. John Paul II has this in mind when he first says that the Church “is the community of the disciples, each of whom in a different way—at times very consciously and consistently, at other times not very consciously and consistently—is following Christ,”<sup>348</sup> and then goes on to talk about the Christian moral norm that each Christian receives a gift and ought to use it to build up the one body:

This principle, the key rule for the whole of Christian practice—apostolic and pastoral practice, practice of interior and of social life—must with due proportion be applied to the whole of humanity and to each human being. . . . It is precisely the principle of the “kingly service” that imposes on each one of us, in imitation of Christ’s example, the duty to demand of himself exactly what we have been called to, what we have personally obliged ourselves to by God’s grace, in order to respond to our vocation. This fidelity to the vocation received from God through Christ involves the joint responsibility for the Church for which the Second Vatican Council wishes to educate all Christians.<sup>349</sup>

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single passage in Vatican II’s documents. But the Council’s teachings in LG 9-17, 31, 34-36; AA 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, imply what the canon encapsulates.

348. John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, 21b, AAS 71 (1979) 317; *PE*, 278:86.

349. John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, 21c, AAS 71 (1979) 318, *PE*, 278.87.

Even if Christians are not consciously responding to God's call, their vocations include all their obligations—those all Christians share and those that arise from their peculiar circumstances or previous choices—whether those obligations are grave or not.

Among the obligations that are not grave are those bearing upon the vocation itself: to strive to identify all of its elements and to accept them precisely as elements of one's vocation. Part of identifying the elements of one's vocation is discerning among otherwise morally acceptable options the one God prefers that one choose.

Two objections are likely here. On the one hand, given the grave moral dangers to people who construct personal agendas without considering what God is calling them to do, the obligation to think in terms of personal vocation would appear to be grave. On the other hand, since discernment deals only with options that one is certain are morally acceptable, it seems one is morally free to choose whichever option one likes and has no obligation at all to discern which God prefers.

The answer to the first objection is that one does have a grave obligation to take God's will into account in making every choice, not least a central commitment. And faithful Christians who construct their own agendas without explicitly thinking about vocation do take God's will into account, at least to the extent of not including anything they know would involve a mortal sin or probably lead to committing one. For instance, without thinking of marriage as a vocation, faithful Catholics who fall in love and want to marry see a priest, do what is necessary for the marriage to be valid in the eyes of the Church, and commit to such a marriage; once married, they do God's will with respect to their marital and parental responsibilities, at least insofar as they realize that not doing his will is mortally sinful.

True, if Catholic young people thought in terms of personal vocation, they would be more likely to consider celibate chastity for the kingdom's sake as a possible alternative to marriage. And if they thought they were called to marriage, thinking in terms of vocation—before falling in love, while courting, in deciding to marry, when planning the wedding, and in carrying out their commitments—would make them less likely to marry imprudently, better prepared to resist temptations, and more likely to be sanctified by married life and parenthood. But neither Scripture nor the Church's teaching makes it clear that a Christian sins gravely by marrying without considering what God is calling him or her to do, and they surely would have done so if the matter were in fact grave. Therefore, unreasonable as it is to make central commitments without considering what God is calling one to do, the matter is not grave. In my judgment, even deliberate refusal to think about one's life in terms of personal vocation would be, *in itself*, a venial sin.

The answer to the second objection is that Christians who are sure that all the options before them are morally acceptable in themselves are morally free to choose whichever one they like, *unless* they are considering those good options as means to some ulterior good end.<sup>350</sup> If the options are being considered as means, one should consider which of

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350. If options morally acceptable in themselves are not considered as means to some ulterior good end, the cases for each of them are incommensurable; otherwise, they would not both be morally acceptable options.

them would be more conducive to the end and choose it—unless one has a good reason, not just an emotional motive, to choose otherwise. Since Christians ought to think in terms of vocation, they ought to consider any set of morally good options as possible ways of giving God a gift, and the option most conducive to that end is the one he prefers. Giving that preferred gift certainly also will be more conducive than giving any other to one's own fulfillment in the kingdom. So, there can never be a good reason not to give it. Therefore, if one could discern which one of an otherwise morally acceptable set of options God prefers but does not do that, or discerning fails to choose accordingly, one chooses unreasonably. But any unreasonable choice is morally wrong. Hence, we do have an obligation to discern God's preference whenever we can and to choose accordingly.

That obligation is of a special sort, however. Only the fourth and fifth of the arguments above bear upon it. It is not like the obligation to avoid mortal sin or even like the obligation to avoid what is in itself a venial sin—for example, a harmless lie to avoid embarrassment. It is analogous to the obligation people have to welcome and make good use of a present they receive from a spouse or friend, even if they would have preferred something else. Unlike objects of other duties, the whole value of that subordination of preference lies in its manifesting and eliciting love, thus deepening and strengthening the marriage or friendship. Thus, because mutual subordination of preferences strengthens interpersonal communion, loving spouses and friends practice it. To do so is not so much owed to the other party as it is to the communion itself, considered as the concrete, personal and interpersonal reality of we-two-together, where *yours* and *mine* are no longer meaningful expressions.

The obligation to use God's gifts fully by discerning among morally acceptable options and choosing the one God prefers is something like that.<sup>351</sup> God does not demand it, but it is an obligation to the kingdom—to the coming, everlasting communion of God and created persons, considered as the concrete personal and interpersonal reality of the whole divine family: we Uncreated Persons and created persons together.

If we have an obligation to think in terms of vocation and to identify all of its elements and accept them, why has the Church not said more about personal vocation?

In fact, the Church has taught about it to some extent, but almost always without using the expression *personal vocation*. The Church always presented the New Testament, proposed Jesus, Mary, and other saints as models, and taught people to pray: "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." She encouraged her children not only to avoid sin but to be grateful to God, love him, and strive to please him. She taught them to remember that life is short and to detach themselves from earthly things, hope for heaven, fear hell, and live their lives accordingly.

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351. Still, an important difference remains. While giving spouses and friends gifts we think they will prefer strengthens interpersonal communion, that particular good does not include other aspects of one's own good, and people can focus on one relationship to the detriment of other responsibilities. Thus, good spouses sometimes subordinate acting for their own communion to some good of their children or others. However, giving God what he prefers always is more conducive to one's own fulfillment in the kingdom; so, focusing on strengthening one's relationship with him cannot be detrimental to any other responsibility.

Today the Church is teaching explicitly about personal vocation. Besides the implications for personal vocation of Vatican II's teaching about holiness (already treated above), the Council, in explaining the responsibilities of presbyters as spiritual fathers of the faithful who have been entrusted to their care, said:

Wherefore it belongs to priests, as educators in the faith, to see to it, either personally or through others, that each of the faithful is led in the Holy Spirit to cultivate his or her own vocation in accord with the gospel, to practice real charity, and to live in the freedom with which Christ has set us free (see Gal 4.3; 5.1, 13). Little will result from ceremonies, even if beautiful, or associations, even if flourishing, unless they are suited to educate people in pursuing Christian maturity. (PO 6)<sup>352</sup>

This is echoed by John Paul II in *Pastores dabo vobis*: “The Church *fulfills her mission* when she guides every member of the faithful to discover and live his or her own vocation in freedom and to bring it to fulfillment in charity.”<sup>353</sup>

Some good pastors through the ages have done this. St. Ignatius, St. Francis de Sales, other saints, and their followers understood personal vocation without calling it that, and taught many people to think in those terms. Moreover, until modern times, most Christians were brought up in Christian cultures without the secularization now afflicting affluent nations; and most people had far fewer choices to make than we do, far less wealth, and a shorter life span. With both the Church and their own experience constantly teaching them about divine providence, they were predisposed to find God's plan in conditions that were for them a given. Good pastors often provided such people with direction along the lines expressed by De Caussade, an eighteenth-century spiritual writer:

Would to God kings and their ministers, princes of the Church and of the world, priests, soldiers, peasants, laborers, in a word, all men, knew how easily they can attain eminent sanctity! They have but to fulfill the simple duties of religion and their state in life, and bear with submission the crosses these duties bring, and accept with faith and love the work and suffering which unsought and unceasingly come to them through the order of Providence. This is the spirituality which sanctified the patriarchs and prophets before there were so many methods and so many masters of the spiritual life.

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352. John Paul II, General Audience, 4, *Inseg.*, ???, *OR*, 26 May 1993, 11, having quoted this passage, comments on it: “The Council stresses the need to help each member of the faithful to discover his specific vocation, as a proper, characteristic task of the pastor who wants to respect and promote each one's personality. One could say that by his own example Jesus himself, the Good Shepherd who ‘calls his own sheep by name’ (see Jn 10.3-4), has set the standard of individual pastoral care: knowledge and a relationship of friendship with individual persons. It is the presbyter's task to help each one to utilize well his own gift, and rightly to exercise the freedom that comes from Christ's salvation, as St. Paul urges (see Gal 4.3; 5.1, 13; cf. also Jn 8.36).”

353. Italics changed. By this remarkable statement, John Paul II surely does not mean to deny the centrality to the Church's mission of the Eucharist, about which he teaches richly in *Ecclesia de eucharistica*, where he also both follows and develops the teaching of Vatican II. The point, however, is that the Eucharist will be fruitless if the faithful do not learn to use their gifts to live lives that they can bring to the holy sacrifice to be offered to the Father and returned to them fully incorporated into the body of Christ—materials ready to be transformed into the everlasting kingdom..

This is the spirituality of all ages and of all states, which cannot be more surely sanctified, or in a manner more noble, more extraordinary, more easy than by the simple use of that which God, the Sovereign Director of souls, gives them each moment to do or suffer.<sup>354</sup>

Unfortunately, despite what Vatican II and John Paul II say regarding personal vocation, few Catholics today receive such clear and helpful teaching.<sup>355</sup>

### **10) Consistently responding to one's personal vocation is living an evangelical life.**

Because professing the counsels traditionally called “evangelical” and living accordingly constitutes consecrated life (see LG 39, PC 1), the various forms of consecrated life often are called *evangelical life*. This is especially true of those who, by their community life and practice of poverty, try to imitate the Christian community described in Acts 2.42-47 and 4.32-37. But anyone who lives in accord with the gospel and thereby bears witness to it can reasonably be said to live an evangelical life, and anyone who walks in the life of good deeds that God prepared in advance for him or her will live in accord with the gospel and thereby bear witness to it. Therefore, anyone who earnestly strives to find and faithfully fulfill his or her entire personal vocation can reasonably be said to be living an evangelical life.

Moreover, recent Church teaching sometimes uses *evangelical life* to refer to more than consecrated life. Vatican II teaches that the lay apostolate of evangelization and sanctification demands special formation: “Since in our times materialism of various kinds is everywhere pervasive, even amongst Catholics, lay people not only should learn Catholic doctrine very diligently, especially those parts of it that are called into question, but also make manifest the witness of an evangelical life against every form of materialism” (AA 31). In the context, *evangelical life* might well mean no more than a life concerned with the authentic goods of persons rather than one preoccupied with having and enjoying material goods. But the context does not preclude a richer meaning, and the Council uses the same expression in telling missionaries to dare to speak boldly in proclaiming the gospel and to bear witness “by a truly evangelical life . . . to their Lord, if need be, even to the shedding of their blood” (AG 24). Here the context makes it clear that *a truly evangelical life* refers to following the Lord Jesus and acting with virtues similar to his, including genuine charity, poverty, obedience, humility, meekness, patience, longsuffering, and pleasantness. This passage is addressed not only to “priests,

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354. J. P. de Caussade, S.J., *Abandonment or, Absolute Surrender to Divine Providence*, ed. H. Ramière, S.J., trans. Ella McMahon, from 8th French ed. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1887), 40-41.

355. Besides Vatican II's explicit teaching about personal vocation, certain parts of the Council's documents contain teachings especially relevant to personal vocation in general and/or the personal vocations of lay people: LG 9-17, 30-38, 41; SC 1-20; GS 33-39, 47-52, 63-71; AA 1-8, 28-32; AG 11-12; GE 1-8; DH 11, 14. John Paul II's relevant teachings are too numerous to list here; for some of the most directly relevant, see the references in the sections on apostolate and personal vocation in the second volume of the present work: *LCL*, 104-129. Other relevant teachings of John Paul are referred to throughout that volume, for it is designed to help Catholics, especially lay Catholics, understand all their moral responsibilities in terms of their unique personal vocations, rather than legalistically, and so to live Christian life as apostolate and way toward holiness, rather than as one part of life among others, each of whose minimal demands have to be met.

brothers [and], sisters” but to “lay people” (AG 26) who undertake “evangelization and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where she has not yet taken root” (AG 6). But since the laity at large will contribute effectively to the apostolates proper to them only by providing the same witness of life required of all missionaries—not only clerical and religious but lay—the reasonable presumption is that the Council uses *evangelical life* in the same, rich sense in both passages.

Then too, if an evangelical life is defined by the exercise of Christlike virtues, the definition also will be satisfied by entirely fulfilling any personal vocation. Christlike virtues cannot be acquired by imagining Jesus’ external behavior and mannerisms and trying to mimic his imagined way of speaking, gestures, facial expressions, and so on. Rather, Christlike virtues develop from becoming one in mind and heart with Jesus—from undertaking, as he did, to do his Father’s will in everything and to accept everything from his hand. A selfish eight-year-old boy, told to share a candy bar with his younger sister, does not do his parents’ will by resentfully shoving half of it into her mouth, and one does not do the Father’s will by outwardly performing what he asks in a way that would not please him. To do the Father’s will, therefore, one must not only choose what he wants one to choose but make these choices *for his reasons*, insofar as he has made those reasons known, while doing one’s best to bring one’s feelings into harmony with those reasons. If one does that, Christlike virtues will develop so that one’s emotional motives in carrying out one’s choices will shape one’s speech, gestures, facial expressions, and so forth in ways likely to make one’s actions bear the fruit God desires. Thus, as for the missionaries addressed by Vatican II, so for all Christians, accepting their vocations and really responding to God’s will as Jesus did is the way to acquire Christlike virtues.

Many Catholics who undertake to live the evangelical life in response to their personal vocations ought to join institutes or associations of the faithful recognized by the Church. But not all out to. Some are not called to do so, because membership would bring responsibilities at odds with elements of their personal vocations. If their pastors do not supply the spiritual direction and support such people need, they can obtain it from members of various institutes and associations. And they can carry out the elements of their vocations requiring collaboration beyond their families and parishes by cooperating with recognized institutes and associations without joining them, and/or participating in or developing appropriate associations that do not require ecclesial recognition.