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*Beatific Love & Trinitarian Dimension of Beatitude*



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# Beatific Love & Trinitarian Dimension of Beatitude

We have spoken of the beatific vision as the essence of heavenly beatitude. In this talk we shall look at beatific love and its role in consummating beatitude.

## **Theological Debate on the Essence of Beatitude: Knowing God, Loving God, or Both?**

We have seen above that beatitude consists in a loving contemplation of God. Does this consist in an operation of the intellect, of the will (love), or both? This question has caused a long-standing debate among great theologians, which still continues today.

In various texts spanning his career, of which the most well-known are the *Summa contra Gentiles* (*ScG*) III, ch. 26, and *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 4,<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas examines the question of whether beatitude consists *essentially* in the operation of the intellect or the will. He first makes a distinction between the objective final end outside of the rational creature, which is God Himself, and the act(s) of the creature by which God, the final end, is attained. The latter must consist in the highest operation(s) of the creature with regard to God, for every creature reaches its perfection through its proper operations.

But what operations attain beatitude for man? Knowing, loving, delighting in the knowing and loving, or some combination thereof?

St. Thomas holds that the essence of beatitude consists in knowing God in the beatific vision. The will then completes and “consummates” this essential beatitude by delighting in it. Bl. Duns Scotus holds, on the contrary, that the essence of beatitude consists in loving God perfectly with love of charity.<sup>2</sup> The Jesuit theologian Francisco Suárez, following many Scholastics before St. Thomas,<sup>3</sup> argues that the essence of beatitude includes both the complementary acts of seeing God and loving Him perfectly.<sup>4</sup>

The latter view is also described by Dante in his *Paradiso*: “Light intellectual replete with love, love of true

goodness replete with joy.”<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine expressed the same view in *The City of God*: “There we shall rest and see, we shall see and love, we shall love and praise. Behold what will be at the end without end.”<sup>6</sup>

Part of the problem lies in the definition of what is meant by the essence of beatitude. St. Thomas defines it as that operation which “first (*primo*) joins him to his exterior end.”<sup>7</sup> However, how should this “first” be understood? What kind of priority are we looking for? If the acts of the intellect and will are compared, there is no doubt that the act of the intellect logically and naturally precedes, for nothing can be loved unless it is first known. In the beatific vision, the acts of knowing and loving God will be simultaneous and eternal. Nevertheless, there is a logical priority to the act of beatific knowing, which is presupposed by beatific loving. For the same reason, the generation of the Son is logically prior to the procession of the Holy Spirit.

Scotus, however, takes the “priority” that we are trying to establish between vision in the intellect and the love of the will in the sense of a priority of perfection or consummation, which he assigns to the will. The approach taken by Suárez, on the other hand, is to include both vision and perfect charity in the essence of beatitude, considering them as two complementary acts which each have their own sort of priority, and together create a perfect union—intentional and affective—with God.

Let us return to St. Thomas’s position. He begins by looking at the acts of the will with regard to a good: love, desire, and joy. He argues that beatitude cannot consist essentially in desire, love, or joy, because both love and desire precede the attainment of the final end, and joy (delight) rests in its attainment:

Now it is impossible for the act of desiring to be the ultimate end. For it is by desire that the will tends toward what it does not yet possess, but this is contrary to the essential character of the ultimate end. So too, the act of loving cannot be the ultimate. For a good is loved not only when possessed but also when not possessed. Indeed, it is as a result of love that what is not possessed is sought with desire, and if the love of something already possessed is more perfect, this results from the fact that the good which was loved is possessed. So, it is a different thing to possess a good which is the end, and to love it; for love, before possession, is imperfect, but after possession, perfect. Similarly, delight is not the ultimate end. For the very possession of the good is the cause of delight. . . . So delight is not the ultimate end.<sup>8</sup>

1 Other parallel texts are *ST* I, q. 26, a. 2c and ad 2; *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura* 17, lect. 1 (Marietti # 2186); *Quodlibet* 8, q. 9, a. 1; *Compendium theologiae*, I, ch. 107; *In IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 1, a. 1, q. 2.

2 See *Ordinatio*, IV, d. 49, qq. 4-5; *Reportatio Par.*, IV, d. 49, qq. 2-3.

3 This view was very common among the Scholastics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, such as Hugh of St. Victor, St. Bonaventure, and St. Albert the Great (*In IV Sent.*, d. 49, a. 4). See Hugo of St. Victor, *Expositio in Hierarchiam coelestem S. Dionysii*, bk. 7, PL 175, 1065. Although St. Bonaventure puts the emphasis on beatific love, he includes both vision and love in the essence of beatitude in *In IV Sent.*, d. 49, p. 1, q. 5, in which he speaks of them as “dowries” (together with fruition) in the heavenly matrimony between the soul and God.

4 *De ultimo fine hominis*, disp. 6-7, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, pp. 56-94.

5 Canto 30, vv. 40-43.

6 *De civitate Dei*, 22, 30.5; quoted in CCC 1720.

7 *In IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 1, a. 1, q. 2. See also *Quodlibet* 8, q. 9, a. 1.

8 *ScG* III, ch. 26, n. 12.

St. Thomas illustrates this by the example of money. A covetous man who puts his end in wealth both loves and desires money before he actually attains it. Clearly neither the love of money nor the desire of it is able to make him happy. He becomes happy only upon knowing that he actually possesses the money and can use it whenever he wills. His will then delights in the knowledge of the money possessed. St. Thomas therefore concludes that “so it is with an intelligible end. For at first we desire to attain an intelligible end; we attain it, through its being made present to us by an act of the intellect; and then the delighted will rests in the end when attained.”<sup>9</sup>

St. Thomas’ reasoning is clearly correct with regard to the love of *eros*. The love of *eros* does not directly unite the lover with his beloved, but only moves him toward the beloved when absent, or rejoices when the beloved is already present (for *eros* desires union with the beloved as a good for the lover). St. Thomas’ principal concern is to counter the idea that delight (consisting in the satisfaction of *eros*) is the essence of beatitude, and his reasoning is perfectly sound: it is not the essence but its completion and “consummation,” a resting in the substantial happiness of contemplation, which is loved with our noblest *eros*.<sup>10</sup> However, St. Thomas’ argument does not exclude the possibility that another act of the will is involved in the essence of beatitude: the act of spousal love of the soul for God (*agape*).

In a brilliant article, St. Thomas distinguishes two kinds of love, which we can refer to as *eros* and *agape*.<sup>11</sup> To love is to will a good for someone, either for oneself or for

9 *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 4. St. Thomas concludes: “So, therefore, the essence of happiness consists in an act of the intellect: but the delight that results from happiness pertains to the will. In this sense Augustine says (*Confess.* x, 23) that happiness is ‘joy in truth,’ because, to wit, joy itself is the consummation of happiness.”

10 Another argument given by St. Thomas in *ScG*, ch. 26, n. 8, also seems to be valid with regard to love of concupiscence but not love of friendship. He argues that the essence of man’s beatitude must lie in a perfect act of understanding, for understanding is man’s proper operation, whereas love, desire, and delight are not proper to rational creatures, but common also to animals. However, while it is true that we share love of concupiscence (and the corresponding delight in its satisfaction) with the animals, this is not true of love of friendship and the gift of self, which is no less proper to a spiritual being than is the act of understanding. Only a spiritual being with true self-dominion is able to freely give himself to his beloved.

11 *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 4. “As the Philosopher says (*Rhetoric* 2.4), “to love is to wish good to someone.” Hence the movement of love has a twofold tendency: towards the good which a man wishes to someone (to himself or to another) and towards that to which he wishes some good. Accordingly, man has love of concupiscence towards the good that he wishes to another, and love of benevolence towards him to whom he wishes good. Now the members of this division are related as primary and secondary: since what is loved with the love of friendship is loved simply speaking and for itself; whereas what is loved with the love of concupiscence, is loved, not simply speaking and for itself, but for something else.”

another person. It can be seen that every act of love has two aspects: a good that is willed, and a person for whom that good is willed. For example, when I love my spouse, I will the good life for her. I want her to be happy. Thus I will happiness, for her. There is an *eros* for her happiness, and a love friendship or *agape* for her. Or if I love wine, there is a good (real or merely apparent) that is willed (wine) with *eros*, and a person for whom it is willed, who in this case is myself.

The medieval philosophers, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, spoke of these two aspects or types of love as “love of desire (concupiscence)” and “love of benevolence” (or friendship). The former is a kind of “need-love,” whereas the latter is an “oblative love,” leading one to self-donation. In Greek, there are two words that correspond to these two aspects of love: *eros* and *agape*. Love of friendship is properly a mutual love of benevolence or *agape* based on a sharing of life.

God is loved by us with both kinds of love. The virtue of hope is an *eros* for God and for union with Him in heaven. The virtue of charity is a love of friendship or *agape* for God and a love of benevolence for His sons and daughters. Charity involves the gift of self to the beloved: God and neighbor.

In our natural inclination for happiness, there is a movement towards the end, and a delighting in it when it is already present.<sup>12</sup> That kind of love is *eros* or need-love, and St. Thomas demonstrates that that cannot be the essence of heavenly beatitude. *Eros* or need-love leads us toward beatitude and delights in it once attained, but is not the essence of beatitude. In a similar way, *eros* for another person can lead us to seek union with that person, but it does not essentially constitute that union. Love of friendship or *agape*, on the other hand, is the most essential element of union with the beloved.

The same should be true for our union with God. Love of friendship with God in the beatific vision is not simply delighting in a union already completed, but is itself the completion of the movement of the spirit back to God. Through it, the soul gives itself, together with the gift of God that it has received (in the vision), back to God through love. The glorification of God by the creature, and union with Him, is not essentially completed with the act of the intellect, but needs to be completed in the act of self-giving love.

This position is actually strongly affirmed by St. Thomas with regard to the nature of contemplation in general.<sup>13</sup>

12 In other words, the love of friendship does not correspond to any of the three movements of the will that St. Thomas considers in *Compendium theologiae*, I, ch. 107 (desire, love, or joy), when he compares the process of attaining beatitude to local movement.

13 See *ST II-II*, q. 180, a. 7, ad 1: “Although the contemplative life consists chiefly in an act of the intellect, it has its beginning

Quoting Pseudo-Dionysius,<sup>14</sup> St. Thomas speaks of friendship love as a “unitive power”: “It is the very union or nexus or transformation by which the lover is transformed into the beloved, and in some way converted into him.”<sup>15</sup> Through friendship love, “the beloved is contained in the lover, by being impressed on his heart and thus becoming the object of his complacency. On the other hand, the lover is contained in the beloved, inasmuch as the lover penetrates, so to speak, into the beloved.”<sup>16</sup>

Both knowledge and friendship love create union, but in two distinct and complementary ways. Through cognition the beloved object is brought into the knower’s mind; through love of friendship the lover is brought into the beloved, acutely penetrating him.<sup>17</sup> The former creates *intentional* union; the latter creates *affective* union involving mutual “indwelling.” Cognition brings about the conformity of the intellect of the knower<sup>18</sup> with the known object, whereas friendship love realizes the conformity of the will of the lover with the will of the beloved.

It would seem therefore that perfect union with God, which is the essence of beatitude, is effected through the simultaneous and complementary presence of the perfect operation of the intellect and the will: perfect knowledge of God and perfect self-giving love (*agape*).

St. Thomas could also be seen to support this position of the dual role of intellect and will in beatitude from other texts in which he affirms the superiority of loving over knowing, when the object loved and known is higher than the soul.<sup>19</sup> This is because the intellect contains a likeness

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in the appetite, since it is through charity that one is urged to the contemplation of God. And *since the end corresponds to the beginning*, it follows that the term also and the end of the contemplative life has its being in the appetite, since one delights in seeing the object loved, and *the very delight in the object seen arouses a yet greater love*. Wherefore Gregory says that ‘when we see one whom we love, we are so aflame as to love him more.’ And this is the ultimate perfection of the contemplative life, namely that the divine truth be not only seen but also *loved*.” The love that St. Thomas and St. Gregory are referring to here is clearly charity: love of friendship for God.

14 *On the Divine Names*, n. 12 (PG, 3, 709).

15 *In III Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2; *ST I-II*, q. 28, a. 1.

16 *ST I-II*, q. 28, a. 2, ad 1.

17 See St. Bonaventure, *In I Sent.*, d. 1, a. 2, q. un.

18 The intellect of rational creatures is finite, and therefore even with the beatific vision the intellect does not know God as well as He can be known, but only with a reduced knowledge, because it remains finite. See below.

19 See *ST I*, q. 82, a. 3: “But relatively and by comparison with something else, we find that the will is sometimes higher than the intellect, from the fact that the object of the will lies in something higher than that in which lies the object of the intellect. . . . For as we have said above (q. 16, a. 1; q. 27, a. 4), the action of the intellect consists in this—that the idea of the thing understood is in the one who understands; while the act of the will consists in this—that the will is inclined to the thing itself as existing in itself. . . . When, therefore, the thing in

of the thing known, whereas love moves to the beloved as it is in reality outside the soul. The operation of the intellect thus reduces the object to its own level, whereas love draws the soul towards the level of the beloved. Here Thomas is clearly speaking about charity, which is love of friendship for God. This implies that the operation of spousal love of God unites the soul more perfectly with God than any knowledge of Him could do.

It might be objected that the love of God is higher than knowledge of God in this life, short of the beatific vision, but in the vision it would seem to be the reverse.<sup>20</sup> However, this does not seem to conform to the mind of St. Thomas, nor to right reason. Even in the beatific vision, God is still higher in Himself than as He is contained in the understanding of the blessed. The operation of love which is directed to God as He is in Himself is still higher than the intellect’s operation of receiving Him into itself in the vision. St. Thomas writes:

As explained above [*ST I*, q. 27, a. 3], knowledge takes place accordingly as the thing known is in the knower; but love as the lover is united to the object loved. Now higher things are in a nobler way in themselves than in lower things; whereas lower things are in higher things in a nobler way than they are in themselves. Therefore to know lower things is better than to love them; and to love the higher things, God above all, is better than to know them.<sup>21</sup>

## The Contribution of John of the Cross in Understanding Beatific Love

The theologian who, to my knowledge, has most acutely grasped the role of self-giving spousal love in beatitude is a great mystic: St. John of the Cross.<sup>22</sup> It seems that Karol Wojtyla discovered this understanding of the gift of self in John of the Cross’ *Living Flame of Love*,<sup>23</sup> and made it a central focus of his papal teaching. In his dissertation, *Faith According to St. John of the Cross*, Wojtyla quotes the following passage from *Living Flame of Love*:

Being the shadow of God through this substantial transformation, it [the soul] performs in this measure in God and through God what He through Himself does in it.

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which there is good is nobler than the soul itself, in which is the idea understood, by comparison with such a thing, the will is higher than the intellect. But when the thing which is good is less noble than the soul, then even in comparison with that thing the intellect is higher than the will. Wherefore the *love of God is better than the knowledge of God*; but, on the contrary, the knowledge of corporeal things is better than the love thereof.” See also *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 11.

20 This position is taken, for example, by Garrigou-Lagrange in *Beatitude: A Commentary on St. Thomas’ Theological Summa, Ia IIae, qq. 1-54* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1956), 91.

21 *ST I*, q. 108, a. 6, ad 3.

22 See Michael M. Waldstein in his introduction to John Paul II’s *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 24-34.

23 See Karol Wojtyla, *Faith According to St. John of the Cross* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 228-229.

For the will of the two is one will, and thus God's operation and the soul's are one. Since God gives Himself with a free and gracious will, so too the soul (possessing a will more generous and free the more it is united with God) gives to God, God Himself in God; and this is a *true and complete gift of the soul to God*.

It is conscious there that God is indeed its own and that it possesses Him by inheritance, with the right of ownership, as His adopted child through the grace of His gift of Himself. Having Him for its own, it can give Him and communicate Him to whomever it wishes. Thus it gives Him to its Beloved, who is the very God who gave Himself to it. By this donation it repays God for all it owes Him, since it willingly gives as much as it receives from Him.<sup>24</sup>

St. John of the Cross is speaking here about the mystical state of spiritual matrimony with God. Perfect spousal love creates a union of wills. This means that the soul is not content with receiving grace and glory from God, but, impelled by love, seeks to imitate God's giving and thus to make a return for the gift through self-giving love. But what can the soul give in return? Since the soul has received the very indwelling of God Himself, she can return God to God by giving herself (as she has been enriched) entirely to God through love.

This logic can be extended to the state of heavenly beatitude, and implies that the reception of the beatific vision in the intellect makes possible a gift of self different and far richer than is possible for a wayfarer on earth. The gift of self of the blessed to God includes all that they have received. Thus the gift of self to God made by the citizens of heaven includes God Himself who has been received. The blessed in a sense return God to God through their total oblation.

Furthermore, if beatitude is the satisfaction of all upright desire, the soul will not be satisfied until she is able to love God as perfectly as He can be loved by her. The beatific vision alone would not satisfy this desire, if the soul did not also receive beatific love, the capacity to give herself wholly, utterly, and irrevocably to God. The soul rejoices in the gift of the light of glory above all so that she can give all the glory back to God, completing the circle.

Another important text on this subject, also mentioned by Karol Wojtyla, is from the *Spiritual Canticle*, stanzas 38-39. After speaking of the Bride's desire for the beatific vision in the previous stanzas, stanza 38 explains another desire that "she had always been seeking: that is, to love God as purely and perfectly as He loves her in order to

24 *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publ., 1979), in *Living Flame of Love*, stanza 3, no. 78, p. 641 (my emphasis). See also *Living Flame*, stanza 3, no. 80, p. 642: "This is the great satisfaction and contentment of the soul, to see that it is giving to God more than it is in itself and is worth in itself, with that same divine light and divine warmth that is given to it. This is caused in the next life by the light of glory, and in this life by most enlightened faith."

repay Him by such love . . . for lovers cannot be satisfied without feeling that they love as much as they are loved. Since the soul sees through her transformation in God in this life that she cannot, even though her love is immense, equal the perfection of God's love for her, she desires the clear transformation of glory in which she will reach this equality."<sup>25</sup>

St. John of the Cross cites a work incorrectly attributed to St. Thomas in support: "Until attaining this equality of love the soul is dissatisfied, nor would she be satisfied in heaven if, as St. Thomas affirms in the opusculum *De beatitudine*, she did not feel that she loved God as much as she is loved by him."<sup>26</sup> It clearly follows from this that the ultimate perfection of charity is essential to beatitude, for the soul would not feel that she has fully attained the end of union with God without the perfection of her gift of self, in which she gives God back to God.

At this point St. John of the Cross addresses an objection to his doctrine that a Thomist might make. Does not St. Thomas teach that essential beatitude lies in the vision? How could the soul desire something more? He gives two reasons:

First, just as the ultimate reason for everything is love (which is seated in the will), whose property is to give and not to receive, whereas the property of the intellect (which is the subject of essential glory) lies in receiving and not giving, the soul in the inebriation of love does not put first the glory she will receive from God, but rather the surrender of herself to Him through true love without concern for her own profit.

Second, the desire to see is included in the desire to love and already presupposed in the preceding stanzas, for it is impossible to reach the perfect love of God without the perfect vision of God. Thus the force of this doubt is resolved by the first answer. With love the soul pays God what she owes him; with the intellect, on the contrary, she receives from Him.<sup>27</sup>

John of the Cross accepts the Thomistic terminology according to which the beatific vision received by the intellect comprises the essence of beatitude. However, he extends the notion of the essence of beatitude, showing that beatitude would not be completely satisfying and final if it

25 Stanza 38, nos. 2-3, pp. 553-554. He adds: "Just as the soul, according to St. Paul, will know then as she is known by God [1 Cor. 13:12], so she will also love God as she is loved by him. As her intellect will be the intellect of God, her will then will be God's will, and thus her love will be God's love. The soul's will is not destroyed there, but is so firmly united with the strength of God's will, with which he loves her, that her love for him is as strong and perfect as his love for her; for the two wills are so united that there is only one will and love, which is God's. Thus the soul loves God with the will and strength of God himself, united with the very strength of love with which God loves her. This strength lies in the Holy Spirit in whom the soul is there transformed."

26 Stanza 38, no. 4, p. 554. The author of the opusculum, *De beatitudine*, is unknown.

27 Stanza 38, no. 5, p. 555.

did not necessarily also include, in addition to the beatific vision, the act of beatific love whereby the soul gives or “surrenders” herself back to God with God’s own love.

In stanza 39,<sup>28</sup> St. John of the Cross takes this reflection one step further and connects the act of beatific love with the procession of the Holy Spirit. Since the soul in glory loves God with the same love with which God loves Himself, by which the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds, St. John of the Cross concludes that the beatified soul, through its act of perfect charity, participates in the very spiration of the Holy Spirit:

By his divine breath-like spiration, the Holy Spirit elevates the soul sublimely and informs her and makes her capable of breathing in God the same spiration of love that the Father breathes in the Son and the Son in the Father. This spiration of love is the Holy Spirit himself, who in the Father and the Son breathes out to her in this transformation in order to unite her to himself. There would not be a true and total transformation if the soul were not transformed in the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity in an open and manifest degree.

And this kind of spiration of the Holy Spirit in the soul, by which God transforms her into Himself, is so sublime, delicate, and deep a delight that a mortal tongue finds it indescribable, nor can the human intellect, as such, in any way grasp it. Even what comes to pass in the communication given in this temporal transformation is unspeakable, for the soul united and transformed in God breathes out in God to God the very divine spiration that God—she being transformed in Him—breathes out in Himself to her.<sup>29</sup>

God is not content to enable the soul to receive Him perfectly in the vision, conforming the soul to the Son, but enables the soul to perfectly give not only herself, but the uncreated Love back to God, conforming the soul to the Holy Spirit. It would seem that both the receiving (beatific vision) and the self-giving (beatific love) essentially constitute the essence of supernatural beatitude.

### Trinitarian Dimension to Beatitude

This Trinitarian dimension to beatitude is also taught by St. Thomas Aquinas. He teaches that just as the divine processions are the divine models or archetypes (exemplar causes) of creation, so they are likewise the principles of the perfect return of rational creatures to their Source. It is fitting that the return to God be realized through the same exemplar principle by which they were brought forth. This theme, which came to St. Thomas through Pseudo-Dionysius, is beautifully set forth in an early text:

In the going forth of creatures from the first principle there is found a certain circular movement or return (*circulatio vel regiratio*), in that everything returns to its end in that from which it took its beginning. And thus it is necessary that

the return to the end be through that principle from which it was brought forth. Since, as was said above, the procession of the divine persons is the exemplar of the production of creatures by the First Principle, so also the same procession is the exemplar of their return to the end. Since we were created through the Son and the Holy Spirit, so likewise we are joined through them to the final end.<sup>30</sup>

There is a circular movement in creation, by which the creature is meant to be rejoined to its first principle. This rejoining is effected by the same principle by which the creature was brought forth. The principle of our creation is the procession of the divine persons. Therefore, it is fitting that the principle of reunion with our source also be through the same procession of the divine persons: the generation of the Word and the procession of the Spirit of Love. This would seem to imply that the rational creature reaches perfect beatitude through the divinized operation of intellect and will together, although St. Thomas does not expressly draw this conclusion. We return to our source in beatitude by mysteriously participating in the two divine processions through beatific knowledge—seeing the Father through the Word—and beatific love, giving ourselves perfectly back to God through and with the Holy Spirit. By participating in the inner life of the Blessed Trinity in this way, the image of God in the soul becomes a perfect image and likeness of Him.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, the divinization of the soul in glory produces within her the perfect image of the Trinity, as she receives the Word from the Father in the beatific vision, and, on the basis of that vision, breathes forth Love for the Father and Son in and with the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit is the inter-Trinitarian Gift,<sup>32</sup> it is fitting that the divinization of the soul in glory should enable the soul to make a perfect gift of self back to God, thus being fully likened to the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, as St. John of the Cross explains, the beauty of this gift of self is that it includes the Beloved. When the lover has been enriched by the beloved, then his gift of self back to the beloved involves also giving all that he has received. To make the gift of oneself to God means returning to God the gift of God’s very Self that He has given to us in Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The Eucharist reveals to us most perfectly this aspect of self-donation. Christ gives Himself to us so that we can return Him to the Father in the Holy Spirit together with

30 *In I Sent.*, d. 14, q. 2, a. 2.

31 See *ST I*, q. 93, aa. 7-8.

32 See John 4:10.

33 See John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, no. 7: “Being a person means striving towards self-realization (the Council text speaks of self-discovery), which can only be achieved ‘through a sincere gift of self’. The model for this interpretation of the person is God himself as Trinity, as a communion of Persons. To say that man is created in the image and likeness of God means that man is called to exist ‘for’ others, to become a gift.”

28 This text is also quoted by Karol Wojtyła in his thesis, *Faith according to St. John of the Cross*, p. 230.

29 Stanza 39, no. 3, in *Collected Works*, 558.

the gift of ourselves, which has been joined to Christ's gift of self—that is, joined to Christ's sacrifice. As *Lumen gentium* teaches: "Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, they offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It."<sup>34</sup>

## Beatitude and the Gift of Self in Charity (*Gaudium et spes* 24)

It should now be clear that heavenly beatitude involves the perfection of both receiving from God and giving back to Him. Which is primary? St. Thomas emphasized the aspect of receiving in the vision, and this is not at all unreasonable, for it is foundational. Nevertheless, that receiving is itself ordered to the end of giving oneself back to God through perfect charity. St. Thomas brings this out in a text on contemplation in which he states that love is the "ultimate perfection of the contemplative life, namely that the divine truth be not only seen but also loved."<sup>35</sup> The relationship between receiving and giving could be said to be that of perfect complementarity, forming a "vital circle" of intellect and will in which the person finds perfect fulfillment, in the image of the processions of the Word and the Holy Spirit.

Although the position that I have argued here goes beyond the texts of St. Thomas, I do not think that it is opposed to his principles. On the contrary, I think that his theology of the Trinity and his analysis of love call for this development. The very plan of the *Summa*—structured around the going forth from God and the returning back to Him (*exitus* and *reditus*)—seems to call for it.

In conclusion, the role of the total gift of self in human fulfillment has great theological and pastoral importance, for it appears as a unifying principle in all of theology, as John Paul II has abundantly shown. It unites the key doctrines of the Trinity with the beatitude of the soul in heaven, as we have seen; as well as with the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the theology of marriage. Furthermore, it is something that everyone has experienced in some way in their own lives. To the extent that we give ourselves freely to others and especially to God, we find fulfillment, just as we find fulfillment in coming to understand the meaning of our lives. Both aspects are essential to the fullness of human happiness, and wonderfully complement each other. Through loving we are led to understand the meaning of

our lives, and then we can offer that life that has received its meaning back to God in charity.

This appeal to human experience is crucial in pastoral theology, as John Paul II so expertly makes clear. Beatitude in heaven cannot be divorced from human fulfillment on earth. It is thus fitting that the human fulfillment that each person can experience in giving of himself to others, also comprises the summit of the soul's happiness in heaven.

John Paul II uses this notion of total gift of self to explain the reason for the indissolubility of marriage, and why contraception and extra-marital sex constitute grave moral disorders. Matrimony, as "maximum friendship," implies a complete gift of self to one's spouse. A gift of self would not be complete if it could be retracted, and thus it is essential to matrimony that it be indissoluble.<sup>36</sup> An indissoluble marriage is the only context in which the full self-giving that is signified in the sexual act can be objectively realized between two human beings.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the physical expression of that gift of self in the conjugal act would be false and incomplete if it voluntarily and actively excluded the potential gift of one's paternity or maternity. This is the profound explanation for the inseparability of the unitive and procreative dimensions of the conjugal act (and thus of the immorality of contraception) as given by John Paul II in *Familiaris consortio* and elsewhere.

This theme is profoundly expressed in *Gaudium et spes* 24, which connects man's fulfillment with a participation in the infinite self-giving and communion of the inter-Trinitarian life:

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, "that all may be one . . . as we are one" (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, *cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.*

John Paul II quoted this text countless times in a great many contexts,<sup>38</sup> but especially with reference to spou-

<sup>36</sup> See *Familiaris consortio*, no. 11: "The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: if the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally." See also John Paul II, Letter to Families, *Gratissimam Sane*, no. 11.

<sup>37</sup> John Paul II, Letter to Families, no. 11: "The only 'place' in which this self-giving in its whole truth is made possible is marriage, the covenant of conjugal love freely and consciously chosen, whereby man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God Himself which only in this light manifests its true meaning."

<sup>38</sup> See the excellent article detailing John Paul II's use of *GS* 24 by Pascal Ide, "Une Théologie du don: Les occurrences de *Gaudium et spes*, no. 24, 3 chez Jean-Paul II," *Anthropotes* 17 (2001) 149-178, 313-344.

<sup>34</sup> *LG* 11. See also *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 48: "Offering the immaculate victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to offer themselves"; Pius XII, encyclical *Mediator Dei*, no. 98: "In order that the oblation by which the faithful offer the divine Victim in this sacrifice to the heavenly Father may have its full effect, it is necessary that the people add something else, namely, the *offering of themselves as a victim.*"

<sup>35</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 180, a. 7, ad 1.

sal love as it reflects the Trinitarian communion. It is a unifying principle of his understanding of the nature and vocation of man, and he speaks of it as a “summary of Christian anthropology.”<sup>39</sup>

The life of heaven will be the mutual, total and sincere gift of self, first of God to man and then of man back to God. As the Son eternally gives Himself to the Father through the Love which is the Holy Spirit, so the blessed will give themselves back to the Father through that same Spirit of Love eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

The complementarity of beatific vision and beatific love creates a likeness between the blessed in heaven and the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity, who proceed through knowledge and love, respectively. The complementarity of knowledge and love in beatitude thus brings out the Trinitarian dimension of heavenly beatitude. We shall see God in His Word and we shall give ourselves back to Him in the gift of Love that is the Holy Spirit.

Or to put it another way, having been made sons (and daughters) of God the Father in His Son through whom we see Him as He is, we shall give ourselves back to Him through the mutual love of the Father and Son that is the Holy Spirit. It should be no surprise that this movement of return to the Father, through union with the Son, in the power of His Spirit of Love, is the animating principle of the Church’s liturgy on earth. It will be the life of the Church in heaven.

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<sup>39</sup> See *Dominum et vivificantem*, no. 59: “Along this way the Holy Spirit, strengthening in each of us ‘the inner man,’ enables man ever more ‘fully to find himself through a sincere gift of self.’ These words of the Pastoral Constitution of the Council can be said to sum up the whole of Christian anthropology.” See also the essay, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination,” in Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 193, in which, after quoting *GS* 24, no. 3, he writes: “The document of the last council seems in these words to sum up the age-old traditions and inquiries of Christian anthropology.”