

Association of Hebrew Catholics Lecture Series
The Mystery of Israel and the Church

Fall 2014 – Series 14

Beatitude and the Last Things, Part 1

Talk #3

*God is Our Final End:
Natural and Supernatural Wisdom*



© **Dr. Lawrence Feingold STD**
Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy
Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri

Note: *This document contains the unedited text of Dr. Feingold's talk.
It will eventually undergo final editing for inclusion in the series of books being published by
The Miriam Press under the series title: "The Mystery of Israel and the Church".
If you find errors of any type, please send your observations to lfeingold@hebrewcatholic.org*

*This document may be copied and given to others. It may not be modified, sold, or placed on any web site.
The actual recording of this talk, as well as the talks from all series, may be found on the AHC website at:
<http://www.hebrewcatholic.net/studies/mystery-of-israel-church/>*



Association of Hebrew Catholics • 4120 W Pine Blvd • Saint Louis MO 63108
www.hebrewcatholic.org • ahc@hebrewcatholic.org

God is Our Final End: Natural and Supernatural Wisdom

God Is Man's Final End

In the last talk we saw that no created and finite good can satisfy man's desire for unlimited goodness. Seeking to enjoy a created good as if it were man's final end in which one could fully rest, is a kind of idolatry.

St. Thomas identifies this as the essence of a mortal sin.¹ In every mortal sin, man deliberately prefers some created good or satisfaction in grave matter to the will of God as known in conscience. And in preferring it to the will of God, one is in effect preferring it to or putting it over the goodness of God. As we saw last time, the tragedy of such a choice is that no created satisfaction can possibly satisfy our thirst for unlimited goodness, which God alone can satisfy. We saw God complaining through the prophet Jeremiah 2:12–13: “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

St. Augustine on What Is to Be Used and What Is to Be Enjoyed

St. Augustine begins his work, *On Christian Doctrine*, with an interesting distinction between the goods that are to be used to arrive at beatitude and the Good in which one fully rests in the enjoyment of beatitude. The latter is God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The former is every other good: goods of the body, goods of knowledge, human friendship, and even goods of the soul such as virtue and grace. He writes:

So then, there are some things which are meant to be enjoyed, others which are meant to be used, yet others which do both the enjoying and the using. Things that are to be enjoyed make us happy; things which are to be used help us on our way to happiness, providing us, so to say, with crutches and props for reaching the things that will make us happy, and enabling us to keep them. We ourselves, however, both enjoy and use things, and find ourselves in the middle, in a position to choose which to do. So if we wish to enjoy things that are meant to be used, we are impeding our own progress, and sometimes are also deflected from our course, because we are thereby delayed in obtaining what we should be enjoying, or turned back from it altogether, blocked by our love for inferior things.

Enjoyment, after all, consists in clinging to something

1 St. Thomas, *ST I-II*, q. 72, a. 5: “When the soul is so disordered by sin as to turn away from its last end, God, to Whom it is united by charity, there is mortal sin; but when it is disordered without turning away from God, there is venial sin.”

lovingly for its own sake, while use consists in referring what has come your way to what your love aims at obtaining, provided, that is, it deserves to be loved. Because unlawful use, surely, should rather be termed abuse or misuse. . . . If we wish to return to our home country, where alone we can be truly happy, we have to use this world, not enjoy it, so that we may behold “the invisible things of God, brought to our knowledge through the things that have been made” (Rom 1:20); that is, so that we may proceed from temporal and bodily things to grasp those that are eternal and spiritual. The things therefore that are to be enjoyed are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.²

This does not mean that all created goods, such as human persons and friendship, contribute nothing to beatitude or are merely instrumental goods. Quite the contrary! Human persons, friendship, justice, beauty, and truth are all intrinsic or honest goods, which participate in and manifest the glory of God. Hence we do enjoy them, but not so as to rest in them as in what gives us complete and final fulfillment, as if they were the highest good.³ All the goodness of

2 St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.3–5, trans. Edmund Hill, *Teaching Christianity: De Doctrina Christiana* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996), 107–108. See also 1.22.20–21, pp. 114–115, where he addresses the kind of love with which we should love human persons, and concludes that we should love them for God's sake, who alone is to be loved and enjoyed entirely for His own sake, as is indicated in the great commandment to love God with our whole heart, mind and soul (Mk 12:31; Dt 6:5). In *De doctrina christiana* 1.22.21, p. 115, he writes: “Thus all your thoughts and your whole life and all your intelligence should be focused on him from whom you have received the very things you devote to him. Now when he said ‘with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole mind,’ he did not leave out any part of our life, which could be left vacant, so to speak, and leave room for wanting to enjoy something else. Instead, whatever else occurs to you as fit to be loved must be whisked along toward that point to which the whole impetus of your love is hastening. So all who love their neighbors in the right way ought so to deal with them that they too love God with all their heart, all their soul, all their mind. By loving them, you see, in this way as themselves, they are relating all their love of themselves and of others to that love of God, which allows no channel to be led off from itself that will diminish its own flow.”

3 St. Augustine is using the term “enjoy” (*frui*) not in our ordinary sense of the word, but in the sense of enjoyment of something as one's ultimate end or highest good. This distinction between goods to be used to attain beatitude and that which is to be ultimately enjoyed is also present in the rabbinical tradition. The Saadia Gaon, a great Jewish sage from the tenth century, has an interesting discussion of true happiness. Like Aristotle before him and St. Thomas Aquinas afterwards, he first discards the erroneous positions of most people concerning the object of beatitude. He then says: “Life of this world should be beloved by him [the wise man] only on account of the world to come because of its being the vestibule of the latter, not for its own sake” (Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967], 400).

creatures — and especially human persons — contributes to beatitude, but not by being *final* ends; rather they manifest the goodness of God through their own unique participation in that goodness. Created goods are like arrows pointing to their Maker, and created persons are images of God pointing to the Love that is their source.

Beatitude Is an Activity Attaining to God

In his discussion of the final end, St. Thomas points out that it can be understood in two ways: as an end external to us to which we seek to unite ourselves; and as the action of uniting with that external good. We start by looking for that in union with whom beatitude consists, and then proceed to the mode of union. As seen above, the end, understood in the first sense, is God as the infinite Good and source and exemplar of all good. In the second sense the end is an activity by which we attain to the most intimate union with God.⁴

St. Thomas, following Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, holds that beatitude is the final end of man in this second sense. Beatitude essentially consists in activity, the most perfect act of one's highest power(s), which unites one to the highest possible object—God. The most perfect and proper activities of creatures below man allow them to attain their end of some limited likeness with God. Rational creatures can attain happiness not only by achieving similitude to God, but also by having God as the object of their rational operations of knowing and loving, which alone attain to God as object.⁵ Hence man's beatitude will be knowing and loving God as perfectly as possible. Happiness or beatitude therefore consists essentially in a loving contemplation of God. Or to put it in another way, happiness is essentially the exercise of wisdom and charity.

Natural and Supernatural Beatitude

But how is this union with God through knowing and loving Him to be achieved? A fundamental thesis of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Thomistic tradition is that beatitude can exist in two analogical forms: *natural* and *supernatural*. (And both of these categories can be further subdivided according to whether we are speaking of the imperfect happiness that can be had during this earthly life, or the definitive happiness after this life.) At the beginning of his first major work, the Commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, St. Thomas writes:

All who have thought rightly have held that the end of human life lies in the contemplation of God. However, the contemplation of God is twofold. One type is through creatures, and this is imperfect. . . . There is another contemplation of God, by which He is seen immediately in His essence, and this is perfect. It will be realized in heaven and is possible for man according to faith.⁶

4 See *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 8.

5 See St. Thomas, *In IV Sent.*, q. 49, q. 1, a. 2, subq. 2.

6 St. Thomas, *In I Sent.*, d. 1, q. 1.

Natural happiness is the contemplation of God that we can have through seeing His glory reflected in the things that He has made, whereas our supernatural end is seeing God no longer through creatures alone, but directly in Himself, face to face.

In his work, *De veritate*, St. Thomas makes the same distinction:

Man by his nature is proportioned to a *certain end for which he has a natural appetite*, and which he can work to achieve by his natural powers. This end is a certain contemplation of the divine attributes, in the measure in which this is possible for man through his natural powers; and in this end even the philosophers placed the final happiness of man. But God has prepared man for another end that exceeds the proportionality of human nature. This end is eternal life which consists in the vision of God in His essence, an end which exceeds the proportionality of any created nature, being connatural to God alone.⁷

Notice that St. Thomas thinks that man's natural end was rightly grasped by "the philosophers." He is not referring to philosophers like the Epicureans who put man's end in pleasure, but to Plato⁸ and Aristotle,⁹ among others, who put man's end in natural wisdom, which is the contemplation of God through the created order. This is one their greatest achievements: rightly identifying man's natural end as lying in the contemplation of the divine.

St. Thomas thinks that this distinction between a natural and supernatural end even applies to the angelic order. In his *Summa of Theology*, I, q. 62, a. 1, he poses the question as to whether the angels were created already in the possession of beatitude. He answers, typically, with a "yes and no," and takes the opportunity to explain the two kinds of beatitude, natural and supernatural:

By the name of beatitude is understood the ultimate perfection of rational or of intellectual nature; and hence it is that it is naturally desired, since everything naturally desires its ultimate perfection. Now there is a twofold ultimate perfection of rational or of intellectual nature. The first is one which it can procure of its own natural power; and this is

7 St. Thomas, *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 2. See also *De virtutibus*, q. un., a. 10: "It should be considered that human good is twofold: one which is proportionate to nature, and another which transcends the capacity of his nature."

8 This is borne out by the account of St. Justin Martyr of his conversion, which was first to natural or philosophical wisdom and then to the supernatural wisdom of the Christian faith: "In this troubled state of mind the thought occurred to me to consult the Platonists, whose reputation was great. Thus it happened that I spent as much time as possible in the company of a wise man who was highly esteemed by the Platonists and who had but recently arrived in our city. . . . The perception of incorporeal things quite overwhelmed me and the Platonic theory of ideas added wings to my mind, so that in a short time I imagined myself a wise man. So great was my folly that I fully expected immediately to gaze upon God, for this is the goal of Plato's philosophy" (*Dialogue with Trypho* 2, trans. Thomas Falls [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948], 150–151.)

9 See *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7–8; *Metaphysics* 1.2.

in a measure called beatitude or happiness. Hence Aristotle (*Ethic.* x.) says that man's ultimate happiness consists in his most perfect contemplation, whereby in this life he can behold the best intelligible object; and that is God. Above this happiness there is still another, which we look forward to in the future, whereby *we shall see God as He is*. This is beyond the nature of every created intellect, as was shown above (Q. XII., A. 4).

As regards this first beatitude, which the angel could procure by his natural power, he was created already blessed. Because the angel does not acquire such beatitude by any progressive action, as man does, but, as was observed above, is straightway in possession of it, owing to his natural dignity. But the angels did not have from the beginning of their creation that ultimate beatitude which is beyond the power of nature; because such beatitude is no part of their nature, but its end; and consequently they ought not to have it immediately from the beginning.

They were created in a state of natural happiness lying in the contemplation of God through His creation; but they were not created with the beatific vision, seeing God face to face. That was to be the reward of their fidelity in their moment of trial, which corresponded to the free choice to order themselves either to God loved above all things, or to set themselves over God, loving themselves and their own glory more than God. Those who chose to love God above all, the blessed angels, were immediately rewarded with a supernatural beatitude, the vision of God, which is theirs forever. Those who loved themselves over God, the fallen angels, never received supernatural beatitude, and lost the natural beatitude in which they were made.

As we shall see below, only supernatural beatitude perfectly fulfills the notion of beatitude, conceived as the state in which all natural desire comes to rest. Both of these forms of beatitude, however, lie in the contemplation of the glory of God. Man's happiness therefore, whether natural or supernatural, is a happiness in God and a contemplative happiness.

Natural beatitude essentially consists in a contemplation of God through created realities that reflect His Beauty, Goodness, Truth, and Unity. All created goodness, beauty, truth, and communion has the vocation of supplying the foundation for the marvel, awe, and praise of God that essentially constitutes natural beatitude. No noble earthly reality is extraneous to this return of creation to the glory of God.¹⁰ In every innocent joy, whether in family life, aesthetic experience, creative work, romantic love, friendship, generosity, the beauty of nature, etc., we rejoice in what in fact is a certain participation in the divine goodness.

All beauty, whether of nature, the human person, human friendship and love, the family, art and music, or the beauty of Revelation and Scripture, point to God as their source

¹⁰ See Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* 167: "Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus."

and Exemplar. In his recent Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel* 167, Pope Francis speaks of the role of all true beauty in pointing to God: "Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus."

St. Thomas speaks of three parts or aspects of beauty: wholeness, harmony, and splendor. All created wholeness or unity, all harmony and all splendor point to God as their source.

Natural happiness consists in being struck in awe before the splendors of God's work in creation and Providence, and glorifying and praising Him in His work, and participating in it through acquired virtue, both moral and intellectual, and especially through wisdom.

God Is a Hidden God

Isaiah 45:15 speaks of God as a "hidden God": "Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior." Other texts of Scripture state the same truth in another way. John 1:18 says: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known."

We cannot see the face of God while we live this earthly life. Yet we are to contemplate and love Him whom we cannot yet see, by knowing Him through the things He has made. In Romans 1:20, St. Paul says that God's existence and power can be known "in the things that have been made." The same point is made eloquently in Wisdom 13:1–5:

For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. For *from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.*"

We can know that God is, but by reason alone we cannot know *who* He is, and what the divine nature is in itself. Thus God remains far more unknown to us than He is known. We know of God as the first cause of all the things that are made. In other words, we know God through His effects in creation, and these effects are infinitely below He who Is. Thus they fail to fully disclose Him, and in fact fall infinitely short of doing so. Nevertheless, man's wisdom and natural happiness lies in having a "perception of the Creator" through "the greatness and beauty of created things."

When St. Paul speaks to the Athenians in the Areopagus in Acts 17:23–28, he mentions the fact that he saw an altar dedicated to the “Unknown God.” He takes that opportunity to say that the Unknown God can be known through Revelation:

What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being.’

Although man cannot naturally *see* God or understand who He is, we are made, as St. Paul says, to seek Him, and by seeking, to come to know and love Him better.

Levels of Wisdom

Both natural and supernatural happiness lie in the possession of true wisdom, which is not just any knowledge, but the highest kind of knowledge, knowledge of God and His Goodness, and the ability to judge and order all things in the light of God and His love. It is beautiful to see that wisdom has been sought both by the philosophers and by the saints.

Philosophical Wisdom

Aristotle begins his *Metaphysics* with a book on the nature of wisdom. To define the highest kind of knowledge, Aristotle investigates the various levels of knowledge, of which wisdom will be the summit. He begins his *Metaphysics* with the famous phrase: “All men naturally desire to know.” All men have a natural desire to understand the world, and such understanding is sought as an end in itself. Every man can verify this for himself, and we see it in the incessant questioning of young children. The fullest satisfaction of this natural desire will constitute wisdom, it would seem. Wisdom, therefore, will be a type of knowledge or understanding of the world capable of satisfying our natural desire to know, fulfilling our minds with the *meaning and intelligibility* of things.

Knowledge has a hierarchy. Not all types of knowledge equally satisfy our natural desire to know. Therefore, not all knowledge is directly related to wisdom. Knowing the names in a phonebook, or the entries in a municipal registrar, or all the data in a scientific experiment, does not quench our thirst for knowledge.

To understand the hierarchy of knowledge, we have to look at the progression of human knowledge and the dynamics of our natural desire to know. It is a commonplace of perennial philosophy and human experience that *all our*

knowledge has its beginning in sense experience. Sense experience gives us knowledge of particulars, which are the particular conditions of individual material things. However, animals also have this kind of knowledge, and thus it cannot constitute wisdom. Furthermore, knowledge of particular things does not satisfy our desire for knowledge nor quench our hunger to understand. This can be seen vividly in young children, who are never satisfied with knowing merely that something is the case, but who always wish to know *why*.

Human knowledge does not remain with individual things. Experience shows that we are capable of grasping the nature of a thing, the nature that is found in all the members of a given species. And once we have grasped the nature of a thing (which is the form of the thing, or its formal cause), we can then seek to know other fundamental causes of the thing, such as what it is made of (material cause), how it came into being (efficient cause) and its purpose or end (final cause).

For example, if we see a strange beast, we want to know its species (*formal cause*), the structure and materials of its body (*material cause*), and we may wish to know how it came into being (that is, by reproduction, evolution or creation: *efficient cause*), and what does it do and strive for (*final cause*). If we see an instrument, we wonder what it is (formal cause), what is it made of (material cause), who made it (efficient cause), and for what purpose (final cause). That is, our desire to understand things has four aspects, which Aristotle codified in the famous distinction of *four types of causes: material, formal, efficient, and final*.

If we don’t know these causes of things, our natural desire for knowledge remains unsatisfied. In other words, our natural desire to know is above all concerned with knowing the *causes* of things (the “why” of things), taking “cause” here in the broad sense in which Aristotle uses the word, so as to include four types of causes.

We can now establish the following thesis: wisdom is not merely knowledge of facts and individual things, but it will be *knowledge of things through their causes*: their nature, their matter, their maker, and their end or finality.

Aristotle notes a progression of five ways of knowing: external senses, memory, experience, the practical arts and sciences, and the theoretical sciences. If we simply know a collection of individual facts about things, we have experience, but we do not have wisdom. Nor do we even have science. The classical philosophers defined science as knowledge *through causes*: an ordered or systematic body of knowledge *through its proper causes*. Without knowledge of causes there is no science, in the proper sense of the word.

Is science identical with philosophy and wisdom? Is all science wisdom, or are there sciences that do not constitute wisdom? To judge by our common use of language not all

sciences are thought to be wisdom, simply speaking. We distinguish between the empirical sciences and wisdom.

Just as science is superior to mere experience, so the science of wisdom ought to be superior to all other sciences. It must be the most noble of sciences, if it is to satisfy the natural desire to know. For not all science equally satisfies the mind. Our mind is not satisfied by knowing some secondary causes of phenomena, for it can still ask another question: *What caused that particular cause?* If we understand some causes of an object, the mind wishes to understand the *causes of those causes*. The quest for knowledge leads us into *chains of causes*.

And in these chains of causes, we find that the more primary causes are more profound, fundamental, and universal. Again, this can be seen in children. They tend to ask “why” again and again, often to the exasperation of adults, until we reach the very first cause: God. Only then are they satisfied.¹¹ Very often we have to break off their chain of questions with the pat response: “just because.” This, of course, leaves them unsatisfied, for even children naturally seek wisdom.

The human mind naturally thirsts for *knowledge of the fundamental questions of human life*. This *metaphysical thirst is built into man*, and he cannot rest unless it is fulfilled or on the way to fulfillment. St. Augustine expresses this truth in an unforgettable way at the beginning of his *Confessions*: “For thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee.”¹² Although he is here speaking about the heart, what he says is also true of the mind. The human mind cannot come to rest until it reaches and comes to know the First Cause and Final End or Purpose of all things. Only then can we speak of wisdom in the proper sense of the word.

Although all men thirst for knowledge of the most fundamental causes of things, we do not naturally thirst in the same way for knowledge of the particular questions of the particular sciences, however interesting they may be. We do not naturally and universally thirst to know the formula for the law of gravitation, although such knowledge is a beautiful thing in itself.

Wisdom, therefore, will be a type of scientific knowledge in which we grasp the *natures of things*, and their most fundamental and universal causes. However, it is especially concerned with knowledge about *human nature* and the Creator, our purpose in life, the end to which our life is ordered, the nature of happiness, and the path to it. It must also include knowledge of our relation to

¹¹ For this reason, children are comfortable speaking about God. They readily understand the idea of a first cause behind every other “why,” supporting the whole chain. It is not a foreign notion to them, for the natural thirst of the mind naturally leads us to a final or first cause. The loss of the notion of God is not natural, but the result of a deviation from or blockage of the mind’s natural course and inclination.

¹² St. Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.1.

the whole of being and to the cosmos in which we live, and most particularly to the first cause of our being, God. The Greek oracle to Apollo at Delphi had the inscription: “Know thyself!” This knowledge will not be complete unless we know who we are in relation to our Maker. It is this fundamental knowledge which is wisdom, and which metaphysics seeks, in its search to satisfy the metaphysical thirst that is built into our rational nature.

John Paul II speaks of this innate metaphysical thirst in *Fides et ratio* 83:

Wherever men and women discover a call to the absolute and transcendent, the metaphysical dimension of reality opens up before them: in truth, in beauty, in moral values, in other persons, in being itself, in God. We face a great challenge at the end of this millennium to move from *phenomenon* to *foundation*, a step as necessary as it is urgent. We cannot stop short at experience alone; even if experience does reveal the human being’s interiority and spirituality, speculative thinking must penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises.

Wisdom seeks this ground and foundation of all that we encounter in human experience, and then seeks to order everything in the light of that foundation, which is God. Aristotle says that “the wise man is he who can order all things,” and he can do this seeing them in the light of God and His goodness and love.

Supernatural Wisdom

There is a higher wisdom than that of the philosophers and sages. This is the wisdom revealed by God Himself, who is Himself the eternal Wisdom. This supernatural has two forms: the wisdom gained by a knowledge of Revelation, and the higher wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit. Let us look first at sacred theology.

Sacred theology is a *supernatural or revealed wisdom* that penetrates more profoundly into the First Cause and final end. It is a much higher wisdom than metaphysics, for it knows mysteries concerning God and His salvific will for mankind that reason alone could never know. Thus sacred theology knows far more about God than the greatest minds, such as Plato or Aristotle, could know through metaphysics alone. In the light of divine Revelation it can also judge and order all things more profoundly. As St. Thomas wrote in his commentary on the Apostles’ Creed: “Before the coming of Christ none of the philosophers was able, however great his effort, to know as much about God or about the means necessary for obtaining eternal life, as any old woman knows by faith since Christ came down upon earth.”¹³ Our knowledge of the catechism gives us a wisdom immeasurably greater than that of Aristotle, and which he doubtless would have valued more than all his

¹³ *The Aquinas Catechism: A Simple Explanation of the Catholic Faith by the Church’s Greatest Theologian* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2000), 6.

philosophy if he had but known that gift of God. Aristotle knew that the end of man must lie in a contemplation of God, but he could not know, for God had not yet revealed it, that it is a supernatural contemplation face to face for all eternity, which we attain by knowing God, loving Him, and serving Him on this earth through His grace.

St. Thomas returns to this theme in *ST I*, q. 1, a. 6, in which he asks whether sacred theology qualifies as wisdom. In support of the identification of wisdom and theology, he cites Deuteronomy 4:6, in which God says of His Revelation in the Torah: “That will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples.” Aquinas then explains that all wisdom enables the wise man to order and judge things, but there are also grades of wisdom, according to the height and universality of the principles by which one judges and orders. Both metaphysics and sacred theology judge all things in the light of God. However, metaphysics knows God only as First Cause and Final End, whereas sacred theology knows God in a far higher way through Revelation. Thus it can judge and order all things according to God in a far more perfect way than metaphysics. St. Thomas writes:

I answer that this doctrine is most especially wisdom among all forms of human wisdom, and not just in any one order, but absolutely. Since it belongs to the wise man to order and judge, and since judgment of a lower matter is taken from a higher cause, he who considers the highest cause in any order is said to be wise in that order. Thus in the order of building, the one who determines the form of the house is said to be wise and an architect with respect to inferior artisans who trim the wood and prepare the stones. Thus in 1 Corinthians [3:10] it is said: “As a wise architect I have laid the foundations.” Again, in the whole order of human life, the prudent person is said to be wise, insofar as he orders human acts to their due end. . . . Therefore he who considers absolutely the highest cause of the entire universe, which is God, is said to be supremely wise. Thus wisdom is said to be knowledge of divine things, as is clear from St. Augustine’s *De Trinitate* [12.14]. Now sacred theology most properly considers God insofar as He is the highest cause, because it considers Him not only insofar as He can be known through creatures . . . but also with regard to what He alone knows about Himself and has communicated to others through revelation. Thus sacred theology is especially called wisdom.¹⁴

¹⁴ *ST I*, q. 1, a. 6. See also St. Thomas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, bk. 1, prologue, a. 3, sol. 1. Moses Maimonides ends his *Guide for the Perplexed* with a praise of wisdom as man’s perfection: “The perfection in which man can truly glory, is attained by him when he has acquired—as far as this is possible for man—the knowledge of God, the knowledge of His Providence, and of the manner in which it influences His creatures in their production and continued existence. Having acquired this knowledge he will then be determined always to seek loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, and thus to imitate the ways of God” (*The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedländer [New York: Dover Publications, 1956], 397).

The Wisdom from Above

There is a third level of wisdom that produces a still deeper happiness and joy. This wisdom is the highest gift of the Holy Spirit, mentioned in Isaiah 11:2. Metaphysics and sacred theology are levels of wisdom acquired by study. The gift of wisdom from the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is an ability to judge all things in the light of God that works not through learning, but through the force of the person’s inclination of supernatural love for God. Supernatural charity establishes friendship with God. Since the friend is like another self, all true friendship gives one a connatural knowledge of the interior dispositions of the friend, and enables one to see the world through the eyes of the friend. Supernatural charity, therefore, confers on the one who loves God an ability to see the world, as it were, through the eyes of the Beloved. Charity thus gives us a connaturality with God, through which the gift of wisdom can more deeply grasp the Divine plan.¹⁵ The greater our charity and union with God, the better we are able to judge according to the mind of God.

The science of theology is not enough to attain the heights of supernatural wisdom. The gift of wisdom is the highest of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and gives a quasi-experiential knowledge of divine things, through the perfection of charity.¹⁶ Theologians are called to elevate their knowledge through the gift of wisdom. The greatness of St. Thomas Aquinas and the other Doctors

¹⁵ See *ST II-II*, q. 45, a. 2: “Wisdom denotes a certain rectitude of judgment according to the Eternal Law. Now rectitude of judgment is twofold: first, on account of perfect use of reason, secondly, on account of a certain connaturality with the matter about which one has to judge. Thus, about matters of chastity, a man after inquiring with his reason forms a right judgment, if he has learnt the science of morals, while he who has the habit of chastity judges of such matters by a kind of connaturality. Accordingly it belongs to the wisdom that is an intellectual virtue to pronounce right judgment about Divine things after reason has made its inquiry, but it belongs to wisdom as a gift of the Holy Ghost to judge aright about them on account of connaturality with them: thus Dionysius says, in chapter 2 of *De divinis nominibus*, ‘Hierotheus is taught not merely by learning, but by experiencing divine things.’ Now this sympathy or connaturality for Divine things is the result of charity, which unites us to God, according to 1 Corinthians 6:17: ‘He who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit.’ Consequently wisdom which is a gift, has its cause in the will, which cause is charity, but it has its essence in the intellect, whose act is to judge aright.”

¹⁶ See *ST I*, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3: “Since judgment pertains to wisdom, wisdom can be taken in two ways according to two modes of judgment. One can judge another in one way by mode of inclination, as he who has the habit of virtue rightly judges about virtuous actions insofar as he is inclined to them. Thus it is said in the tenth book of the *Ethics* that the virtuous person is the measure and rule of human acts. Another way is by mode of knowledge, as when someone who is instructed in moral science can judge of virtuous acts, even if he does not have virtue. The first way of judging divine things pertains to the wisdom which is counted as a gift of the Holy Spirit, according to 1 Corinthians [2:15], ‘The spiritual man judges all things.’ . . . The second mode of judging pertains to this doctrine, insofar as it is obtained by study, even though its principles are received by revelation.”

of the Church is that they *combined to an eminent degree all three types of wisdom*: metaphysics, theology, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷

In the beginning of his earlier great systematic work called the *Summa contra Gentiles*, St. Thomas praises supernatural wisdom as follows:

Among all human pursuits, the pursuit of wisdom is the most perfect, noble, useful, and full of joy. It is most perfect because, insofar as a man gives himself to the pursuit of wisdom, to that extent does he even now have some share in true beatitude. And so the wise man has said: “Blessed is the man that shall continue in wisdom” (Sir 14:22).¹⁸ It is most noble because through this pursuit man especially approaches to a likeness to God, Who “made all things in wisdom” (Ps 103:24). And since likeness is the cause of love, the pursuit of wisdom especially joins man to God in friendship. That is why it is said of wisdom that “she is an infinite treasure to men, by which they that use her become the friends of God” (Wis 7:14). It is most useful because through wisdom we arrive at the kingdom of immortality. For “the desire of wisdom brings one to the everlasting kingdom” (Wis 6:21). It is most full of joy because “her conversation has no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness, but joy and gladness” (Wis 7:16).¹⁹

This wisdom that is from above is magnificently set forth in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. One great text in praise of wisdom is Wisdom 7:7–14:

Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me. I preferred her to scepters and thrones, and I accounted wealth as nothing in comparison with her. Neither did I liken to her any priceless gem, because all gold is but a little sand in her sight, and silver will be accounted as clay before her. I loved her more than health and beauty, and I chose to have her rather than light, because her radiance never ceases. All good things came to me along with her, and in her hands uncounted wealth. I rejoiced in them all, because wisdom leads them; but I did not know that she was their mother. I

17 See St. John Paul II, *Fides et ratio* 44: “Another of the great insights of Saint Thomas was his perception of the role of the Holy Spirit in the process by which knowledge matures into wisdom. From the first pages of his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas was keen to show the primacy of the wisdom which is the gift of the Holy Spirit and which opens the way to a knowledge of divine realities. His theology allows us to understand what is distinctive of wisdom in its close link with faith and knowledge of the divine. This wisdom comes to know by way of connaturality; it presupposes faith and eventually formulates its right judgment on the basis of the truth of faith itself. . . . Yet the priority accorded this wisdom does not lead the Angelic Doctor to overlook the presence of two other complementary forms of wisdom—*philosophical wisdom*, which is based upon the capacity of the intellect, for all its natural limitations, to explore reality, and *theological wisdom*, which is based upon Revelation and which explores the contents of faith, entering the very mystery of God.”

18 Douay-Rheims version.

19 *Summa contra Gentiles* [SCG], bk. 1, ch. 2, no. 1, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 1:61–62. I have slightly modified the translation.

learned without guile and I impart without grudging; I do not hide her wealth, for it is an unfailing treasure for men; those who get it *obtain friendship with God*.

The New Testament also speaks of this infused wisdom. James 3:17 speaks of “the wisdom from above [which] is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits.” 1 John 2:27 speaks of this wisdom that is from above as an anointing that we have received sacramentally: “The anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him.” Through wisdom and charity God abides in us and we in Him.

The Wisdom of the Beatific Vision

There is a fourth level of wisdom that immeasurably transcends these three levels of wisdom that we can receive in this life. That wisdom is the beatific vision in which we shall see God face to face. This alone is perfect beatitude, and it will be the subject of our following talks.