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*The Beatific Vision*



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# The Beatific Vision

In this talk we take up the easy task of seeking to “understand” or shed light on the beatific vision, insofar as possible for us pilgrims in exile in this life who cannot have any experience of it. Of all mysteries, after the Trinity and the Incarnation, the beatific vision is the most awesome and seemingly contradictory, putting together the infinite God and our finite minds in a most intimate union, which is Biblically expressed as a “face to face vision.” By vision, as will be explained more fully below, we do not mean a seeing with the eyes of the body, but rather with the mind’s eye.

One of the problems facing the New Evangelization is the loss of interest and excitement about the prospect of seeing God. Pope Benedict XVI gives a classic expression to this crisis of Christian hope in his great encyclical of 2007, *Spe salvi* (*Saved in Hope*).

But then the question arises: do we really want this — to live eternally? Perhaps many people reject the faith today simply because they do not find the prospect of eternal life attractive. What they desire is not eternal life at all, but this present life, for which faith in eternal life seems something of an impediment. To continue living for ever — endlessly — appears more like a curse than a gift. Death, admittedly, one would wish to postpone for as long as possible. But to live always, without end — this, all things considered, can only be monotonous and ultimately unbearable.<sup>1</sup>

The vision of God will not be monotonous!!! This is because God is not monotonous but infinite life and love. But to make it clear that seeing God is immeasurably desirable we need to think and pray more deeply about what it is, and how it differs from all our human experience and knowledge.

How are we to understand the vision? Here the task of the theologian is principally negative. We can show what the vision of God is not, and by way of elimination say something positive. The vision cannot consist in knowing God through a created concept (whether gained by abstraction or infused knowledge) informing the human intellect, for no created concept can be an adequate image of the infinite God.

## **In the Beatific Vision, the Divine Word Takes the Place of a Created Concept**

If God is to be grasped in His essence, the only possibility is for the divine Word to take the place of a created concept or image. If we are to see God with the eye of the mind, it cannot be through any created idea, but only through the uncreated Word/Logos, the second Person of

the Trinity. This therefore is how St. Thomas understands the vision of God. The Word will directly and immediately “inform” our intellect.

In every act of knowing, the knowing faculty interiorly receives the form of that which it knows. We can know exterior reality because we possess a true likeness of the exterior reality within our minds.

In sense knowledge, we receive a likeness of the exterior reality by receiving its sensible form through color, sound, smell, taste or touch, while leaving its matter outside.

With intellectual knowing we likewise receive the form of the thing. But here it is not the sensible form, but the substantial or essential form, without its individualizing characteristics. We know the essences of things by interiorly possessing their essential form in our intellect. This intelligible form is also known as the concept.

If we apply this to knowledge of God, we can see immediately that there is a great difficulty. In our natural knowledge of God we know Him by possessing some concept of His effects in the world. However, no created concept drawn from God’s effects will enable us to know God as He is, because the created form by which we know God will be infinitely less than the infinite God, and thus will fail to adequately represent Him. He will be more unknown to us than known by such concept. Thus to say that the only possible knowledge that we can have of God, even in heaven, is through created concepts drawn from God’s effects, would be to deny that we shall see Him as He is. But that would be contrary to the faith.

St. Thomas explains:

First, because, as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. 1), “by the similitudes of the inferior order of things, the superior can in no way be known”; as by the likeness of a body the essence of an incorporeal thing cannot be known. Much less therefore can the essence of God be seen by any created likeness whatever. Secondly, because the essence of God is His own very existence, as was shown above, which cannot be said of any created form; and so no created form can be the similitude representing the essence of God to the seer. Thirdly, because the divine essence is uncircumscribed, and contains in itself super-eminently whatever can be signified or understood by the created intellect. Now this cannot in any way be represented by any created likeness; for every created form is determined according to some aspect of wisdom, or of power, or of being itself, or of some like thing. Hence to say that God is seen by some similitude, is to say that the divine essence is not seen at all; which is false.<sup>2</sup>

1 *Spe Salvi* 10.

2 *ST I*, q. 12, a. 2.

This means that all metaphysical or mystical knowledge of God inevitably falls infinitely short of the mind's natural desire to know God face to face. Therefore, God will be seen not through any created and finite concept.

But is there an uncreated and infinite concept? Yes, indeed. The Second Person of the Trinity is the divine Word. The divine Word is an uncreated infinite interior Word or Concept of God the Father, eternally begotten (conceived), the perfect "Image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15). In order to see God, therefore, the divine Word must be united to our intellect by taking the place of any concept, so as to become our intellect's "intelligible form." We shall see God through and in His own Word, which will be graciously given to us in heaven as the form of our mind.

Is this possible? Yes, because God has promised that we shall see Him as He is. We cannot prove that it is possible, but nor can anyone prove that it is not possible.

### The Light of Glory

However, our intellect needs to be strengthened immensely above its nature to be rendered capable of seeing the Trinity through the divine Word. The Christian tradition speaks of this strengthening through the analogy of light. Our intellect needs to receive a new and divinizing light through which to see God. We call this the light of glory, *lumen gloriae*. This analogy comes from Psalm 36:9: "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure. For with thee is the fountain of life; and *in thy light we shall see light*."<sup>3</sup>

St. Thomas explains that two conditions are required for knowledge: an intelligible form that is the form or "image" of the thing known, and an intelligible *light* that gives the intellect the power to understand reality through the intelligible form or concept.<sup>4</sup> To see God we need the *light of glory*. How should we understand this?

### The Analogy of Light and the Light of Glory

To understand this analogy it is helpful to look at the different senses in which we speak of "light." *Light* is a great example of an analogical term. Analogy is present when one and the same term is used in different yet profoundly related senses.

The most basic sense of the word "light" is sensible light. When we see a physical thing, we receive the form of an object which has been made visible to our eyes by sensible light. Light is that which enables the color of the object to become visible to us.

However, we also speak of a higher kind of light when we speak of the "light of reason." The light of reason

is what enables our intellect to grasp those truths that it can naturally know through philosophy. We can know natural truths because God has endowed us with the intellectual "light" to "see" first principles of reason: non-contradiction, the whole is greater than the part, every change has a cause, good is to be sought and evil avoided, the Golden Rule, God is to be loved above all, etc. The "light" of reason consists in the natural ability to see these first principles, and to see other truths in their "light." It is interesting that even cartoonists use this analogy of a light bulb in someone's mind to indicate that someone has understand something.

Above the light of reason, we also speak of the "light of faith." In fact, this is the title of the first encyclical by Pope Francis: *Lumen fidei*. The light of faith is a higher light that enables us to see God's revealed Word as worthy of belief and as true. Without the light of faith, we would not see the truth of doctrines like the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, grace, the Church, and the grace-giving power of the sacraments. But with the gift of that marvelous light, the assent of our mind to those truths is ready, sure, and sweet. Within the light of faith, there can be additional supernatural illuminations by which the saints penetrate more deeply into the truths of faith. We speak of these as "lights" or illuminations that we receive in prayer.

Above the light of faith there is one more light: the light of glory that allows the blessed to see God face to face in heaven.

Thus we have four fundamental levels of light: sensible, rational, of faith, and of glory. Together with these four levels of light we have four corresponding levels of sight: eyesight, the sight of the mind when naturally grasp truth, the vision of faith when we assent to the Word of God, and the beatific vision, when we shall see God as He is.

Therefore, light and vision are analogical terms in these four senses. They do not have the same definition in each case, but nor is it by chance that we apply the same word in these cases. The same word is used in proportion to four different capacities or grades of perceiving or knowing.

Sensible light is to the eyes as the light of reason is to the natural intellect, as the light of faith is to the believing intellect, and as the light of glory is to the glorified intellect in heaven. In each case, the light in question enables us to "see" a certain type of object, which is only visible with the help of that light. Without sensible light, no object, even if it is right in front of us, is visible to our eyes. Secondly, our nature gives our minds a certain natural light (capacity) to grasp first principles, to abstract concepts, and to understand judgments and syllogisms. The brute animals lack that light of the intellect, and thus they cannot grasp those things. Third, supernatural grace gives us the supernatural light of faith to believe God's revelation. And the

<sup>3</sup> Douay-Rheims version, in which it is numbered Ps 35:9–10.

<sup>4</sup> See St. Thomas, *STI*, q. 12, a. 5; a. 2; and *Supplementum*, q. 92, a. 1.

light of glory gives the blessed the supernatural power to see God as He is.

Given this analogy of light, we can understand more easily why one must receive a new light—the light of glory—to see God. St. Thomas explains:

Everything which is raised up to what exceeds its nature, must be prepared by some disposition above its nature. . . . But when any created intellect sees the essence of God, the essence of God itself becomes the intelligible form of the intellect. Hence it is necessary that some supernatural disposition should be added to the intellect in order that it may be raised up to such a great and sublime height. Now since the natural power of the created intellect does not avail to enable it to see the essence of God, as was shown in the preceding article, it is necessary that the power of understanding should be added by divine grace. Now this increase of the intellectual powers is called the illumination of the intellect, as we also call the intelligible object itself by the name of light of illumination. And this is the light spoken of in the Apocalypse (21:23): ‘The glory of God hath enlightened it’—that is, the society of the blessed who see God. By this light the blessed are made deiform—that is, like to God, according to the saying: ‘When He shall appear we shall be like to Him, and we shall see Him as He is’ (1 John 2:2).<sup>5</sup>

The light of glory “deifies” the soul by giving it a higher and most mysterious participation in God’s own knowing power. The human soul and the human intellect remain human, created, and finite in this deification. We do not cease to have a human intellect in the vision of God. Our human intellect is elevated immeasurably by the light of glory (which itself is a finite supernatural disposition), becoming godlike. In the words of 1 John 2:2, we shall “see Him as He is,” because our intellects will be made “like to Him” through the light of glory.

### **The Difference between Knowledge of God by Reason, by Faith, and by Glory**

Let us look now at the different kinds of knowledge of God that we can have through these four kinds of sight. The sight of the eyes cannot know God at all, for except through the humanity of Christ, He is not sensibly visible.

When we know God through reason (without the aid of Revelation), God is known in three ways. First, He is known as the first cause of all good things that we experience. Secondly, He is known negatively as being unlike all the things of our experience. We know what He is not. God is not limited in any way; He is not material, corruptible, changeable, etc.

Third, we can put the first two together to know that whatever perfections there are in creation, God is that, but in an infinitely higher and preeminent way. Since there is goodness in creatures, God is super-good with a goodness that infinitely exceeds any created goodness. Likewise,

since there is beauty in creatures, God is super-beauty (or simply *Beauty* with a capital B), infinitely exceeding any created beauty. Since there is love in creatures, God is Love with a capital L, infinitely transcending all created love. Likewise God has a Paternity that infinitely transcends all paternity on earth. Since power is a perfection in creation, God is omnipotent.

In these three ways we can say many truths about God, but we cannot know Him *as He is*. We can only know Him as being infinitely more than we can grasp because He remains infinitely above the creatures that He has made. Thus since we naturally know Him only through them, He remains more unknown than known, even though He is truly known.

### **Knowledge of God by Faith**

In the knowledge of God by the light of faith, we can come to know God not only as He is reflected in the things He has made, but in the mysteries of His own inner life. Thus through the light of faith we come to know that God is a Trinity of Persons, and that the Second Person eternally proceeds as the Word and Image of the Father, and Holy Spirit is breathed forth by the eternal love of the Father and Son, as their eternal Gift of love.

This is true knowledge of God as He is, but we still have to receive this knowledge of God through created categories that fall infinitely short of making known to us how God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We know that He is Father, but not quite as earthly fathers are fathers. We know that He is Son, but not quite as earthly sons are sons. We know through the light of faith that God is Love to such a point that He became man for our sake and shed all His blood for us. This gives us true and tremendous knowledge of God’s inner life. However, through faith we still know God’s love through created categories that do not do justice to its infinite magnitude. We now know Him as a Bridegroom who dies for his bride. But we are still knowing Him through created concepts and analogies that, as powerful as they are, still fall infinitely short.

All the mystical knowledge of the saints that is exercised within faith, still uses the analogy of created things to know the infinite God. Thus all mystical knowledge that can be gained in prayer and contemplation, as precious as it is, still falls infinitely short. To all of this knowledge we can apply St. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 13:12 “For now we see in a mirror dimly.” He goes on to speak of the beatific vision: “but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.”

### **Knowledge of God by Vision**

In the vision of God, as we said above, God will not be known through creatures or through any created likeness,

<sup>5</sup> ST I, q. 12, a. 5.

but through Himself alone, without any mediation of creatures. Only in that way can He be seen *as He is*.

In all our other knowledge, both the created light and the intelligible species are finite. In the beatific vision, the intelligible *light* remains finite—although it is immensely elevated and strengthened, but the intelligible *form* is the divine Word Himself, through whom we shall see Him as He is, even though not with the same infinite clarity with which God knows Himself. Thus there is a mixture of finite and infinite in the beatific vision. The finite nature of the light of glory (as a supernatural disposition of the created intellect) enables there to be different participations of the vision, as many as there are blessed. But the infinite Word that is the species through whom the blessed see God enables all to see Him as He is, even though in different grades of clarity.

### Grades of Glory in the Beatific Vision

In his discussion of the general resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:41–42, St. Paul makes a comparison between the different radiance of celestial bodies and the differences in glory of the saints in heaven: “There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead.” The scholastic tradition understands St. Paul’s words to imply that the blessed in heaven differ in their grade of glory. Just as each human face is different from every other, and still more so, each moral character differs from all others, so too the blessed in heaven will differ in the degree of glory, according to the level of supernatural charity possessed at the moment of death.

St. Thomas explains the different grades of glory:

Of those who see the essence of God, one sees Him more perfectly than another. This, indeed, does not take place as if one had a more perfect similitude of God than another, since that vision will not spring from any similitude; but it will take place because one intellect will have a greater power or faculty to see God than another. The faculty of seeing God, however, does not belong to the created intellect naturally, but is given to it by the light of glory, which establishes the intellect in a kind of *deiformity*, as appears from what is said above, in the preceding article.

Hence the intellect which has more of the light of glory will see God the more perfectly; and he will have a fuller participation of the light of glory who has more charity; because where there is the greater charity, there is the more desire; and desire in a certain degree makes the one desiring apt and prepared to receive the object desired. Hence he who possesses the more charity, will see God the more perfectly, and will be the more beatified.<sup>6</sup>

### In the Beatific Vision We Will Not “Comprehend” God

Since there are grades of clarity with which the blessed see God, it is clear that none will see Him in such a way as to know Him *as well as He can be known*, since He is infinite. God Himself knows Himself with an infinitely perfect knowledge, but none of the blessed can know Him with an infinitely perfect knowledge, since that knowledge is still the act of our finite intellect, enriched with a certain grade of the light of glory. St. Thomas explains:

God, whose being is infinite, as was shown above, is infinitely knowable. Now no created intellect can know God infinitely. For the created intellect knows the divine essence more or less perfectly in proportion as it receives a greater or lesser light of glory. Since therefore the created light of glory received into any created intellect cannot be infinite, it is clearly impossible for any created intellect to know God in an infinite degree. Hence it is impossible that it should comprehend God.<sup>7</sup>

### What Will We Know in the Beatific Vision?

In addition to knowing God in the beatific vision, what else will we know? The blessed will not absolutely all that God can do, because that is infinite. In addition to knowing God, the blessed will know the natural order of things in creation, God’s plan and work in salvation history, and everything that pertains to them in history.<sup>8</sup> We shall return to this point in our next talk.

### The Vision of God and Eternal Life

In *Spe salvi* 12, Pope Benedict speaks about the aspect of eternity in the vision of God. He begins by expressing the difficulty of conceiving eternity in a positive way. To us, at first sight, it seems like eternity would be simply the lack of an ending. But eternity as an endless succession of days would not be desirable. However, that understanding of eternity is the exact opposite of eternal life, and a more proper description of hell. The beatific vision is not the lack of an ending, but the attainment of the end and a resting in the end without ever departing from it. Pope Benedict writes:

The term “eternal life” is intended to give a name to this known “unknown”. Inevitably it is an inadequate term that creates confusion. “Eternal”, in fact, suggests to us the idea of something interminable, and this frightens us; “life” makes us think of the life that we know and love and do not want to lose, even though very often it brings more toil than satisfaction, so that while on the one hand we desire it, on the other hand we do not want it. To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace

<sup>6</sup> *ST I*, q. 12, a. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *ST I*, q. 12, a. 7.

<sup>8</sup> See *ST I*, q. 12, a. 8.

totality—this we can only attempt. It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time—the before and after—no longer exists. We can only attempt to grasp the idea that such a moment is life in the full sense, a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy. This is how Jesus expresses it in Saint John’s Gospel: “I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (16:22). We must think along these lines if we want to understand the object of Christian hope, to understand what it is that our faith, our being with Christ, leads us to expect.

There is a famous definition of eternity given by the philosopher Boethius: “Eternity is the simultaneously whole and perfect possession of interminable life.”<sup>9</sup> Eternity in the proper sense of the word must involve simultaneity and totality. It is the simultaneous possession of the totality of goodness and being, and it is proper to HE WHO IS.

In the beatific vision the blessed share in God’s eternity. This is because in the beatific vision God will be known not through successive images and forms, which only very partially represent Him. If that were the case, then there would be simultaneous possession of the totality of God. But since we will know Him through His own one Word, which is the perfect Image of the totality of God, we shall see the whole of Him in one simultaneous whole. St. Thomas explains:

What is seen in the Word is seen not successively, but at the same time. In proof of this, we ourselves cannot know many things all at once, for we understand many things by means of many ideas. But our intellect cannot be actually informed by many diverse ideas at the same time, so as to understand by them; as one body cannot bear different shapes simultaneously. Hence, when many things can be understood by one idea, they are understood at the same time; as the parts of a whole are understood successively, and not all at the same time, if each one is understood by its own idea; whereas if all are understood under the one idea of the whole, they are understood simultaneously. Now it was shown above that things seen in God, are not seen singly by their own similitude; but all are seen by the one essence of God. Hence they are seen simultaneously, and not successively.<sup>10</sup>

And since in the beatific vision, God will be seen not through successive images, but through His one Word, it will truly be according to the image used by Benedict XVI: “totality embraces us and we embrace totality.”

### **The Beatific Vision Cannot Be Lost**

Those who attain to the beatitude of seeing God cannot ever lose that beatitude. For when God is seen face to face, one sees that He is the whole Good and that all Goodness lies in Him. Seeing God in the Vision makes it impossible to imagine that happiness can be found in anything other than or opposed to Him. Thus those who see God

<sup>9</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* 5, prosa 6 (PL 63:858). See St. Thomas, *STI*, 10, a. 1, in which he approves and explains this definition.  
<sup>10</sup> *STI*, q. 12, a. 10.

can never sin by freely choosing something contrary to God, which is mortal sin, or even by choosing something that is incoherent through departing from the divine order in any way, as happens in venial sins.

Here on earth it is possible to imagine that we can find happiness better through doing something contrary to the divine will as made known through conscience and the commandments. We can imagine that a created satisfaction will satisfy us better than God. For one who sees that God is all goodness, such a tragic illusion will be forever impossible. By the same token, not only all sin but also temptation will no longer trouble us.

In other words, the wills of the blessed who see God are indefectibly attracted to Him, without losing their freedom. They see that He is all their good and thus they freely give themselves to Him without end, and freely choose fitting means to glorify Him that are coherent with the divine plan. Theologians call this beatific love. The beatific vision enables the love of the blessed to be eternally ordered to God above all.

### **The Beatific Vision Is an Act of the Human Intellect, Elevated by Glory**

In his analysis of the beatific vision, St. Thomas Aquinas takes it for granted that the vision must be an act of the human intellect, superabundantly satisfying (while infinitely transcending) the natural desire of intellectual nature to know the ultimate causes of everything. For if we do not see God with our own intellect, elevated by the light of glory, it would not be our act, nor could it fulfill our natural desire. And St. Thomas has already shown that beatitude must lie in the highest act of man’s highest faculty, with regard to its most exalted object.

Some Catholic theologians<sup>11</sup> have recently proposed that the beatific vision will be an act not of the human intellect, elevated by the light of glory, but an act directly of the divine intellect, to which we shall be joined by the union of divinization (conceived in a way similar but not identical to the hypostatic union). Furthermore, they hold that the

<sup>11</sup> Germain Grisez develops this thesis above all in his article, “Natural Law, God, Religion, and Human Fulfillment,” *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 46 (2001): 3–36, esp. 23–36. On p. 27 he writes: “But I disagree with Aquinas. He held that human persons, precisely as human, can be fulfilled in divine goodness. He maintained that the blessed attain divine goodness in the beatific vision, which he regarded as a human intellectual act of knowing what God is.” See also Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 590, 592–94; Grisez, “The Doctrine of God and the Ultimate Meaning of Human Life,” in *The Doctrine of God and Theological Ethics*, ed. Alan J. Torrance and Michael Banner (London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2006), 125–137, esp. 128. A similar position is defended by Peter F. Ryan, S.J., “Fulfillment as Human in the Beatific Vision? Problems of Fittingness and Gratuity,” *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 46 (2001): 153–163. See also Patrick Lee, “Grisez’s Christian Humanism,” *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 46 (2001): 142–145.

beatific vision will not be the ultimate fulfillment of human nature but of the divine nature in which we share by grace.

With regard to the first point, we can pose a dilemma. For an act—such as seeing God—to be a person’s own act, it must be the act of some *part* of the person<sup>12</sup> (a faculty of our nature). If the beatific vision is not the act of the human intellect (elevated most mysteriously by the light of glory), it seems that there only two possibilities, both unacceptable from the point of view of faith. Either we ourselves will not see God, which is contrary to faith, or we will see Him not through our intellect, but through God’s. However, the latter would seem to attribute to the blessed what is the unique prerogative of the hypostatic union, by holding that the proper action of the divine nature can be attributed to human beings as their own act, without the participation of a human faculty.<sup>13</sup> The fact that we participate in the divine nature through sanctifying grace does not mean that a properly divine act, such as the divine omniscience (or creation, for that matter), can be attributed to us. Rather, participation in the divine nature in glory enables our own faculties of intellect and will to be elevated to work immeasurably above their own level so as to attain to God as He is. Even in the case of Jesus Christ, classical Christology holds that His human intellect was elevated by the light of glory to the vision of God<sup>14</sup> which is *in* His human intellect but not *from* it.<sup>15</sup>

12 St. Thomas makes this point vigorously in his polemic against Averroes and the Averroists, who held that our intellectual knowledge is the act of a separate intellect that is numerically one for all men. St. Thomas counters this theory by observing that if that were the case, we could not say that intellectual knowledge is *our* act. See *ST I*, q. 76, a. 1 and *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas*.

13 A more complete discussion of this point cannot be made here. For a colorful critique of Grisez on this point, see William Marshner, “Implausible Diagnosis: A Response to Germain Grisez,” *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 46 (2001): 107–108.

14 For Aquinas and the scholastic tradition, Christ also saw God with His *human* intellect, and not merely with the divine. Among other reasons, this enabled Him to communicate that ineffable knowledge through His human speech, so that He could say things like Mt 11:27: “No one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” See St. Thomas, *ST III*, q. 9, a. 1–2; q. 10, a. 1–4; St. Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, IV, 6, 1–2, pp. 160–61. It seems that Grisez’s proposal regarding the beatific vision would conflate these two distinct kinds of knowledge possessed by Christ: His divine omniscience and beatific vision, of which the latter is a participation of the former. See *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 473 which speaks of the vision of God in Christ’s human soul as a “human knowledge”: “But at the same time, this truly human knowledge of God’s Son expressed the divine life of his person.” For other Magisterial texts, see Pius XII’s encyclical *Mystici Corporis* 48 and 75. See Lawrence Feingold, “Vision of God In Christ: ‘Who Loved Me and Gave Himself for Me,’” in *Love and Friendship: Maritain and the Tradition*, ed. Montague Brown (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 218–232.

15 See Gregory the Great, Letter *Sicut aqua* to Patriarch Eulogius of Alexandria, August 600, DS 475: “The only begotten Son incarnate, made perfect man for us, knew the day and the hour of judgment *in* his human nature but did not know it *from* his human nature. What he

With regard to the second question as to whether the beatific vision fulfills human nature, I hold that this is a case of both/and rather than either/or. St. Thomas has demonstrated, in many texts, a natural desire to know the essence of God. Thus seeing God will satisfy that most exalted desire of human nature. However, the presence of sanctifying grace and the theological virtues greatly transforms and elevates that desire. Thus the vision of God also fulfills the desires of grace, which immeasurably transcend the desires of nature. Through grace we become sons of God, and a son or daughter desires to see the face of his father with a far different desire than one not so related.<sup>16</sup> It is with regard to the desires of grace that we should understand the aspiration of the Psalmist to see the face of God.<sup>17</sup> One and the same vision simultaneously fulfills both the desires of human nature<sup>18</sup> and the far more exalted desires of grace.<sup>19</sup>

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knew, therefore, *in* his humanity he did not know *from* it, because it is by the power of his divinity that God-made-man knew the day and the hour of judgment. Thus it is that he denied having the knowledge that he did not have from the human nature by which he was a creature as the angels are.”

16 See Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 442.

17 See Psalm 17:15; Psalm 27:8; Psalm 42:1–2; Psalm 63:1.

18 By the term “desires of human nature,” I am referring to elicited natural desires, such as the desire to know the First Cause, in its essence, and, in more Platonic language, to see Beauty and Goodness itself. These qualify as natural desires because they are naturally or spontaneously elicited when one thinks of the hidden first cause, or the hidden exemplar/source of all beauty and goodness. See Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 4–44.

19 Grisez, on the contrary, sees the beatific vision as satisfying only man’s supernatural desires, and not his natural desires, which are fulfilled by other goods, such as the social communion of heaven and the resurrected body. This position thus would make man’s supernatural beatitude extrinsic to the desires of human nature. St. Thomas Aquinas, on the contrary, has hit the perfect balance by distinguishing a natural and supernatural beatitude, while holding that the vision of God satisfies both man’s highest natural and supernatural desires.