

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 #8

*The City of God: Social Dimension of Beatitude*



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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](mailto:lfeingold@hebrewcatholic.org)*

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# *The City of God: Social Dimension of Beatitude*

Since beatitude essentially involves the perfect act of charity, it follows that beatitude includes a glorious social dimension. The self-donation of charity is primarily vertical in uniting oneself to God, but it necessarily also includes the horizontal dimension by which one loves all the sons and daughters of God, for God's sake.

Many adversaries of Christianity claim that the Catholic notion of beatitude is an individualistic escape from the world and from man's social and historical responsibility. Pope Benedict takes this objection seriously in his encyclical *Spe salvi*, and he returns to it again and again.<sup>1</sup>

He answers that Christian hope has an essential social dimension, for the redemption of man also concerns his essential social aspect. Every person naturally desires to be in a loving communion with others, and complete solitude is seen as the greatest of hardships. Heaven therefore cannot fail to superabundantly fulfill this social aspect of man's natural aspirations.

This social dimension of heaven is expressed in the doctrine of the *communion of saints*. It is symbolized in Scripture through the image of the heavenly Jerusalem. Heaven is not portrayed in the sources of Revelation as an individualist paradise, but as a holy *city*, in which *communion* in its two dimensions, vertical and horizontal, is perfectly realized. Vertical communion with God is the basis for a perfect horizontal communion among the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. In Revelation 21:2-4, heaven is described in this way:

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

Pope Benedict XVI has drawn attention to this social dimension of heaven in *Spe salvi*, 14:

Against this, drawing upon the vast range of patristic theology, de Lubac was able to demonstrate that salvation has always been considered a "social" reality. Indeed, the *Letter to the Hebrews* speaks of a "city" (cf. 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14) and therefore of communal salvation. Consistently with this view, sin is understood by the Fathers as the destruction of the unity of the human race, as fragmentation and division. Babel, the place where languages were confused, the place of separation, is seen to be an expression of what sin fundamen-

tally is. Hence "redemption" appears as the reestablishment of unity, in which we come together once more in a union that begins to take shape in the world community of believers. . . . This real life, towards which we try to reach out again and again, is linked to a lived union with a "people", and for each individual it can only be attained within this "we". It presupposes that we escape from the prison of our "I", because only in the openness of this universal subject does our gaze open out to the source of joy, to love itself—to God.

The Church on earth already begins to make this communion possible in embryo. It will be completed, however, only in the Church triumphant in heaven. The perfect vertical union with God perfects the horizontal communion of the children of God. However, in the Church militant, there is also a reciprocal effect, by which our striving to perfect the horizontal communion among men further perfects our communion with God. Thus Christ says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt 5:9). However, we can only be true peacemakers to the extent that we have supernatural charity, which establishes us as friends of God.

It follows that the great peacemakers in human history are the saints, imbued with charity through contemplation of God's mercy. Christian contemplatives therefore stand at the heart of society. Benedict quotes a patristic author (pseudo-Rufinus): "The human race lives thanks to a few; were it not for them, the world would perish." He then comments: "Are we not perhaps seeing once again, in the light of current history, that no positive world order can prosper where souls are overgrown?" (SS15).

## **St. Augustine's Theology of the Two Cities**

St. Augustine spoke of the social dimension of the Church in heaven and on earth using the expression, the "City of God," which he develops in his great work with that title. In *The City of God*, he traces the history of the communion of saints as it is realized on earth, and in the final book he speaks about its consummation in heaven. But side by side and intermingled with the city of God on earth there is another city or culture, the city of man. Today we often speak about that other culture with the phrase, the "culture of death," as opposed to the culture of life, which is life according to the Gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Spe salvi* 14, 28, 33, 48, etc.

## **The Presence or Absence of Charity Distinguishes the Two Cities**

The criterion that divides the two cities, both on earth and in heaven, is the presence or absence of supernatural charity. St. Augustine explains this in a famous phrase:

We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self. In fact, the earthly city glories in itself, the Heavenly City glories in the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

St. Augustine sees the tower of Babel as a perfect symbol of the “earthly city.” It represents man’s striving to make a name for himself on earth, to create a technological civilization that rivals God, reaching up to heaven. Such a society has no use for God or heaven. The City of God, on the contrary, is that civilization built on and unified by the love of God up to the point of contempt for self, building a pathway to heaven not through pride in man’s works, but through the divine condescension of the Incarnation and Passion of Christ.

It is fitting that the divine punishment for Babel and its cult of pride was the proliferation of tongues and the dispersal of peoples. By its very nature, the sin of pride divides individuals and societies from one another, because pride seeks self-aggrandizement at the expense of one’s neighbor. Thus Babel is the opposite of the Church, which, beginning with Pentecost, seeks to unite all men into one Body through the bond of supernatural charity, and which unites all tongues in praising God. The task of the Church is to reunite into the Kingdom of God what man has dispersed through pride.

St. Augustine writes:

Tongues became different through pride. If pride created differences of tongues, Christ’s humility has joined the differences of tongues together. Now what that tower had dispersed, the Church binds together. From one tongue came many; do not be amazed, pride did this. From many tongues comes one; do not be amazed, love did this. For, although there are different sounds of tongues, in the heart one God is invoked, one peace is kept intact.<sup>3</sup>

Pentecost represents the overcoming of Babel through the communication of charity in the Church. Although nations still speak different languages, and will doubtless continue to do so until the end of time, in the Church the original unity is reestablished in faith, hope, and charity. As the Apostles were understood in all languages, so the Church throughout the history of the world seeks to reestablish the primordial unity of mankind united under God in the unity of her worship. It is in this sense that the

2 St. Augustine, *City of God* 14.28, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 593.

3 St. Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* 6.10.3, trans. John W. Rettig, in St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 1–10 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 139.

Second Vatican Council, in *Lumen gentium* 1, speaks of the Church, in Christ, as “a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.” Babel has been overcome by Calvary and Pentecost. Babel, however, as the type of man’s culture of self-exaltation, continues to grow until the end. This age is marked by the ever-increasing warfare of Babel and the Church, the City of man and the City of God. We know, however, how the story ends and who has the last word. The unification which is begun in the Church militant is completed in the Church triumphant in heaven, where all divisive pride has been forever banished, and all are perfectly united in glorifying God in complementary ways.

## **St. Thomas on the Social Dimension of Beatitude**

In his sermons on the Apostles’ Creed, St. Thomas stresses the communitarian dimension of beatitude. He says that the beatitude gained from union with God consists also

in the pleasant companionship of all the blessed, a companionship that is replete with delight, since each one will possess all good things together with the blessed. They will all love one another as themselves, and therefore will rejoice in the happiness of others’ goods as their own. Consequently, the joy and gladness of one will be as great as the joy of all.<sup>4</sup>

The delight of friends is not a good in competition with God, but a good that enables the glory of God to shine more abundantly by extension to the whole society of the blessed. It also allows the infinite communion of the Trinity to be reflected in the communion of the saints.

Seneca was expressing the universal experience of mankind when he famously wrote: “No good thing is pleasant to possess, without friends to share it.”<sup>5</sup> We have a natural desire to share beauty, goodness, and truth with our friends, and the very sharing enters into the beauty of the experience, because the sharing enables the goodness to be more “diffusive of itself”<sup>6</sup> and to be more appreciated. If this is true of the beauties made by God, how much more true it will be of God Himself, seen face to face in the vision.

## **The Communion of Saints**

In the Creed we profess belief in the “communion of saints.” This communion has two aspects: the common sharing of the members of the Church in her treasures, and the communion of the saints with one another, whether they

4 Commentary on the Apostle’s Creed, 12. n. 1015, in *The Aquinas Catechism: A Simple Explanation of the Catholic Faith by the Church’s Greatest Theologian* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2000), 98.

5 Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, 3 vols., Vol. I, Epistle 6, trans. Richard M. Gummere (The Loeb Classical Library: Cambridge, MA, 1917-25).

6 See St. Thomas, *ST I*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 2, quoting Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names* 4.20.

are in the Church militant on earth, the Church in purgatory, and the Church triumphant in heaven. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: “The term ‘communion of saints’ therefore has two closely linked meanings: communion ‘in holy things (*sancta*)’ and ‘among holy persons (*sancti*).”<sup>7</sup> Here on earth the treasures of the Church are principally her sacraments and the Word of God, and the grace of God active in the lives of the saints. In heaven the treasures will be God present not under sacramental veils, but in face to face vision, and the glory of God perfectly indwelling in all the saints and throughout the new creation.

In his commentary on the Creed, St. Thomas explains the communion of saints on earth as follows:

Since all the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others.... We must therefore believe that there exists a communion of goods in the Church. But the most important member is Christ, since he is the head.... Therefore, the riches of Christ are communicated to all the members, through the sacraments.<sup>8</sup>

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 953 speaks of the communion of saints as follows:

If one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor 12:26–27). “Charity does not insist on its own way” (1 Cor 13:5). In this solidarity with all men, living or dead, which is founded on the communion of saints, the least of our acts done in charity redounds to the profit of all.

All possessions are shared by those in a relationship of love. This aspect of charity is beautifully witnessed in the early Church: “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common.”<sup>9</sup> The charity uniting the saints in heaven will create a perfect communion in which all treasures of each member of the mystical Body will be shared with all. This means that the particular glory and personal contribution of each member of the Church triumphant will be the glory of every other.

This common treasure is first of all God Himself, and the humanity of Christ and His work of salvation. All the saints in heaven will rejoice in common in the glory of God and the humanity of Christ. And the rejoicing of each one will add to the others. However, the treasure of the Church also includes all the cooperation with grace of all the members of the Church during their earthly life, and all the glories of heroic self-sacrifice in charity. First of all, the glory of Mary, the Mother of God will be the rejoicing of all. For she has been made our Mother by Christ on Calvary. Who will not rejoice to see the glories of Mary, our Mother, the Queen of Mother, the masterpiece of creation, the perfect response of creaturely free will to

God’s initiative. The same will be said of the glories of the Apostles, the patriarchs, the martyrs, the confessors, the Doctors, etc.

People often ask how the blessed will not feel badly about seeing others have a greater glory in heaven than they have. The answer is simple. Perfect charity unites all the members of the Church triumphant in perfect friendship and makes each one another self, as it were. Therefore the glory of the other members of the Body of Christ are not seen to be glories of rivals but of those whom one loves as oneself. And if we love our neighbor as another self, we will rejoice in their glory as in our own.

This principle has the most far-reaching consequences! It means that all the glory of all the heroically charitable acts of the saints in salvation history will be rejoiced in by all, just as much as if it were their own. For they will be our own, in the sense that all those beautiful acts will be acts of the entire City of God, united by the bonds of charity.

St. Augustine speaks of this principle already with regard to the languages and cultures of the Church on earth. Speaking of the miracle of the speaking in tongues on Pentecost, he says:

Today the whole body of Christ does speak in the languages of all peoples, or, rather, if there are any tongues in which it does not yet speak, it will. The church will grow until it claims all languages as its own.... I dare to say to you, “I speak in the tongues of all men and women. I am in Christ’s body, I am in Christ’s Church. If Christ’s body today speaks in the languages of all, I too speak in all languages. Greek is mine, Syriac is mine, Hebrew is mine. Mine is the tongue of every nation, because I am within the unity that embraces all nations.”<sup>10</sup>

In heaven, not only will be the treasures of the Mystical Body be in common, but we will rejoice in the complementarity of the members. The very fact that different gifts are given to each member makes the whole ensemble of the blessed into a glorious symphony in which each member adds something that no else could add. Or it can be likened a magnificent garden in which each kind of flower will add to the beauty of the others, and all will reflect the glory of God in different ways.

## St. Therese of Lisieux on the Complementarity of the Saints in Heaven

Perhaps the finest description of the beauty of the complementarity of the saints in heaven is contained in *The Story of a Soul* by St. Therese of Lisieux. This is in fact one of her great themes and a central part of her “little way.” She begins her first manuscript with a reflection on the saints as different flowers in God’s garden:

I often asked myself why God had preferences, why all

7 CCC 948.

8 Quoted in CCC 947. See also CCC 957.

9 Acts 4:32.

10 St. Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm 147*, n. 19, in *Expositions of the Psalms 121–150*, trans. Maria Boulding, *The Works of Saint Augustine*, part 3, vol. 20 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 464.

souls did not receive an equal measure of grace. I was filled with wonder when I saw extraordinary favours showered on great sinners like St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Mary Magdalen, and many others, whom He forced, so to speak, to receive His grace. In reading the lives of the Saints I was surprised to see that there were certain privileged souls, whom Our Lord favoured from the cradle to the grave, allowing no obstacle in their path which might keep them from mounting towards Him, permitting no sin to soil the spotless brightness of their baptismal robe. And again it puzzled me why so many poor savages should die without having even heard the name of God.

Our Lord has deigned to explain this mystery to me. He showed me the book of nature, and I understood that every flower created by Him is beautiful, that the brilliance of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not lessen the perfume of the violet or the sweet simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all the lowly flowers wished to be roses, nature would lose its springtime beauty, and the fields would no longer be enamelled with lovely hues. And so it is in the world of souls, Our Lord's living garden. He has been pleased to create great Saints who may be compared to the lily and the rose, but He has also created lesser ones, who must be content to be daisies or simple violets flowering at His Feet, and whose mission it is to gladden His Divine Eyes when He deigns to look down on them. And the more gladly they do His Will the greater is their perfection.

I understood this also, that God's Love is made manifest as well in a simple soul which does not resist His grace as in one more highly endowed. In fact, the characteristic of love being self-abasement, if all souls resembled the holy Doctors who have illuminated the Church, it seems that God in coming to them would not stoop low enough. But He has created the little child, who knows nothing and can but utter feeble cries, and the poor savage who has only the natural law to guide him, and it is to their hearts that He deigns to stoop. These are the field flowers whose simplicity charms Him; and by His condescension to them Our Saviour shows His infinite greatness. As the sun shines both on the cedar and on the floweret, so the Divine Sun illumines every soul, great and small, and all correspond to His care—just as in nature the seasons are so disposed that on the appointed day the humblest daisy shall unfold its petals.<sup>11</sup>

This theme of the complementary contribution of souls in the Church returns in various forms. It is present in St. Therese's "great desires." She desires to be every flower in the garden: missionary, martyr, teacher, as well as Carmelite nun. But even in any one area, such as martyrdom, only one kind of martyrdom would not be enough. She would like to be every kind of martyr, though that is impossible. Likewise, she would like to be a missionary to every land:

I feel the vocation of the Warrior, the Priest, the Apostle, the Doctor, the Martyr. . . I feel with my soul the courage of the Crusader, the Papal Guard, and I would want to die on the field of battle in defense of the Church. . . . Martyrdom

11 St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul* (London: Burns and Oates, 1912), 16–17.

was the dream of my youth and this dream has grown with me within Carmel's cloisters. But here again, I feel that my dream is a folly, for I cannot confine myself to desiring *one kind* of martyrdom. To satisfy me I need *all*.<sup>12</sup>

Such great desires are a characteristic trait of the soul in the highest unitive stage of the spiritual life. The force of love wants God to be glorified *in every way*. And one is afflicted by one's inability so to glorify Him. What is the solution? It is simple. Love makes everything common between those who love. The same love that desires God to be glorified makes the glorification of God done by the other members of the Mystical Body to be the common glory of all. St. Therese expresses in one of the most beautiful passages of her book. She was searching the Scriptures for insight into her particular vocation in the Church, and she opened the Scriptures to 1 Corinthians 12, which speaks of the various visible vocations, saying that all are necessary for the common good, and that each complements the others:

And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.<sup>13</sup>

St. Therese had not found what she was looking for, and so she proceeded to that "more excellent way" that is the theme of the following chapter—St. Paul's marvelous hymn on charity in 1 Corinthians 13, in which he speaks of charity as a "higher gift." Here St. Therese found the hidden and invisible vocation of the entire life of the Church, which is supernatural charity:

Considering the mystical body of the Church, I had not recognized myself in any of the members described by St. Paul, or rather I desired to see myself in them all. Charity gave me the key to my vocation. I understood that if the Church had a body composed of different members, the most necessary and most noble of all could not be lacking to it, and so I understood that the Church *had a Heart and that this Heart was BURNING WITH LOVE. I understood it was Love alone* that made the Church's members act, that if *Love* ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood. I understood that **LOVE COMPRISED ALL VOCATIONS, THAT LOVE WAS EVERYTHING, THAT IT EMBRACED ALL TIMES AND PLACES. . . . IN A WORD, THAT IT WAS ETERNAL!**<sup>14</sup>

12 St. Therese of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux*, trans. John Clarke (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1996), 192 (manuscript B).

13 1 Cor 12:28–31.

14 St. Therese of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul*, 194 (manuscript B).

Love unites all the members in a common mission of glorifying God; love motivates each member in their unique mission of glorying God, and love makes all the unique contributions of all the saints to be the common joy and glory of all.

### What Does the Communion of Saints Add to Beatitude?

St. Thomas holds, together with practically the entire Catholic theological tradition, that God alone is the sufficient object of our beatitude,<sup>15</sup> because He alone is the infinite Good.<sup>16</sup> In order to differentiate, however, between the role of created goods and the Uncreated Good in beatitude, St. Thomas makes an important distinction between essential and accidental aspects of supernatural and eternal beatitude. This could easily be misunderstood to imply a devaluing of created goods, including the communion of the blessed with each other.<sup>17</sup> I would like to try to defend St. Thomas's position from such an interpretation.

Essential beatitude is maximum union with that *personal object*—the Trinity—who is alone sufficient to put at rest the restless heart. This union is attained in the vision of God, and it is a perfect *communion*, or inter-personal union in knowledge and love, between man and the three Persons of the Trinity. It is already a social reality.

Everything else in heavenly beatitude falls into the second category of complementary elements of beatitude, which fill out, so to speak, the *subjects* of beatitude, by perfecting our own nature and bringing it into the fullest social union. The complementary objects of beatitude add to the well-being of beatitude by perfecting the *subjects* of beatitude—the blessed—with a possession of created

goods, such as the resurrected and glorified body,<sup>18</sup> the blessed society of the communion of saints, the beauty of the transfigured cosmos in the new heavens and earth, and an understanding of history and created things in God's providence. Furthermore, each of these created goods is ordered ultimately to the praise of God, as St. Augustine brings out in the final chapter of *The City of God*: "Every fiber and organ of our imperishable body will play its part in the praising of God."<sup>19</sup> This distinction is founded on the difference between possession of an infinite good—the Blessed Trinity—and possession of finite and created goods. Even though some of these finite goods—such as our own glorified bodies and our loved ones—are far nearer to us, the infinite Good takes immeasurable precedence in constituting beatitude. Indeed, the created goods that fill out the well-being of beatitude will be seen and loved precisely as beautiful participations of the glory of God.

This can be seen when St. Thomas discusses how the resurrection and glorification of the body increases the beatitude of the blessed. Instead of seeing the glorified body as another object of beatitude distinct from God, he sees its importance not with regard to the object of beatitude, but in regard to the *subject*, by way of extension so that God can be possessed by the entire person.<sup>20</sup> Thus the separated soul in heaven desires the resurrection of the body so that God can be glorified in the body as well as in the soul! It is beautiful to see how St. Thomas (following Augustine) consistently avoids placing God and created goods into competition, as it were, by setting them on the same level in constituting beatitude, without thereby losing sight of their dignity and importance as finite images or likenesses of God.

Something similar happens with regard to the question of how the communion of saints adds to the beatitude of heaven. The communion of saints allows God to be glorified not just by isolated individuals, but by the whole society of the blessed together, with all joining in the common praise, and all bound together precisely by their common love of God above all.

<sup>15</sup> See St. Thomas, *ST I*, q. 12, a. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Germain Grisez and Peter Ryan, S.J., have recently challenged this position. For an article arguing against Grisez's thesis on the basis of the philosophy of Dietrich von Hildebrand, see Ezra Sullivan, O.P., "Non Nisi Te, Domine: Dietrich von Hildebrand, Germain Grisez, and the Saints on Man's Ultimate End," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 16/2 (Spring 2013): 126-143.

<sup>17</sup> See the critique by Germain Grisez in "Natural Law, God, Religion, and Human Fulfillment," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 46 (2001): 134: "Aquinas's Christian ethics is seriously impaired in at least two ways by his view that the beatific vision fulfills the blessed precisely as human. First, that view downgrades most of the specifically human goods for which Christians hope. According to Aquinas's view, the true ultimate end is an instantiation after death of one substantive good, namely, the human good of knowledge. But if that were so, Christians could not rightly make the commitment of faith and organize their entire lives by it in hope of heavenly fulfillment not only with respect to knowing God but also with respect to other human goods. Of course, Aquinas never drew that conclusion; but his view of the beatific vision as a human good impoverished his account of the heavenly kingdom with respect to other human goods, leading him to hold, for example, that bodily resurrection and friends are not essential to heavenly beatitude but only contribute to its well-being."

<sup>18</sup> See *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 5: "Something may belong to a thing's perfection in two ways. First, as constituting the essence thereof; thus the soul is necessary for man's perfection. Secondly, as necessary for its well-being: thus, beauty of body and keenness of perception belong to man's perfection. Wherefore though the body does not belong in the first way to the perfection of human Happiness, yet it does in the second way."

<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God* 22.30: "Every fiber and organ of our imperishable body will play its part in the praising of God" (*The City of God, Books XVII-XXII* trans. G. G. Walsh & D. J. Honan, [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1954], 505).

<sup>20</sup> See *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 5, ad 5: "The desire of the separated soul is entirely at rest, as regards the thing desired; since, to wit, it has that which suffices its appetite. But it is not wholly at rest, as regards the desirer, since it does not possess that good in every way that it would wish to possess it. Consequently, after the body has been resumed, Happiness increases not in intensity, but in extent."

The Catholic tradition and the lives of the saints abundantly express the primacy of God in beatitude.<sup>21</sup> St. Thomas (following St. Augustine) cites Psalm 73:25–28 as a Scriptural authority:

“For what have I in heaven? and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth?” As though to say: “I desire nothing but this,—‘It is good for me to adhere to my God.’”<sup>22</sup>

St. Thomas holds that all natural desires will be satisfied in heavenly beatitude, but specifies that the attainment of but one object—the Trinity possessed in face-to-face vision—comprises the essence of beatitude, precisely because the triune God is the infinite Good, and the source and exemplar of every other Good. Thus in possessing God one possesses the source and exemplar of everything else that one naturally desires.<sup>23</sup>

St. Augustine expresses this beautifully at the conclusion of his great work, *The City of God*:

The promised reward of virtue will be the best and the greatest of all possible prizes—the very Giver of virtue Himself, for that is what the Prophet meant: “I will be your God and you shall be my people (Lev 26:12).” God will be the source of every satisfaction, more than any heart can rightly crave, more than life and health, food and wealth, glory and honor, peace and every good—so that God, as St. Paul said, “may be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).” He will be the consummation of all our desiring—the object of our unending vision, of our unlesening love, of our unwearying praise.<sup>24</sup>

21 See, for example, St. Teresa of Avila’s poem, “Self-Surrender,” in *Minor Works of St. Teresa*, trans. Benedictines of Stanbrook (London: Thomas Baker, 1913), 16: “How blessed is the heart with love fast bound / On God, the centre of its every thought! / Renouncing all created things as naught, / In Him its glory and its joy are found. / Even from self its cares are now set free; / T’wards God alone its aims, its actions tend—/ Joyful and swift it journeys to its end / O’er the wild waves of life’s tempestuous sea!”

22 *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 7, sed contra. Other Biblical texts cited by St. Thomas in this sense include Wisd. 7:11 (“All good things came to me together with her”) and Ps. 16:15 (“I shall be satisfied when Thy glory shall appear”). See *ST I-II*, q. 5, a. 4 and q. 4, a. 8, sed contra. See also Phil 3:8-9: “I count all that this world offers as worthless, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.— God is my strength and my portion for ever”; Ps 16: “I say to the Lord: ‘You are my God. My happiness lies in you alone’”; Song 8:7: “Were one to offer all he owns to purchase love, he would be roundly mocked.”; Isaiah 61:10: “I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul”.

23 Grisez opposes St. Thomas’s position here because he thinks that it would imply that heavenly beatitude satisfies our desire for only one fundamental human good, minimizing the importance of the others. See his “Natural Law, God, Religion, and Human Fulfillment.” *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 46 (2001): 34: “According to Aquinas’s view, the true ultimate end is an instantiation after death of one substantive good, namely, the human good of knowledge. But if that were so, Christians could not rightly make the commitment of faith and organize their entire lives by it in hope of heavenly fulfillment not only with respect to knowing God but also with respect to other human goods.”

24 St. Augustine, *The City of God* 22.30, in *The City of God, Books XVII–XXII*, trans. G. G. Walsh & D. J. Honan (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 506.

## Harmony of Supernatural and Natural Beatitude: Overflow from the Higher to the Lower

In discussing beatitude in the angels, St. Thomas picks up a distinction made by St. Augustine<sup>25</sup> between what he refers to as their “evening” and “morning” knowledge.<sup>26</sup> By the former they have a natural beatitude in knowing God and creation through their natural knowledge, whereas by the latter they have a supernatural beatitude in knowing God and creatures in the beatific vision. The latter does not annihilate the former. Similarly for us, I would like to suggest that in the vision of God, natural beatitude—and especially its social dimension—is not undermined or rendered superfluous, but is elevated and perfected, in accordance with the Thomistic principle that grace and glory do not destroy nature, but elevate and perfect them.<sup>27</sup>

Heavenly beatitude involves a change of order and direction, so to speak, from that which marks earthly life. In this life we advance from the lower to the higher, according to a law of organic growth. We use our body and our sense experience to serve as the precondition and point of departure for our intellectual life, for all our rational knowledge comes from abstraction from sense knowledge. All of the arts make use of the senses to lead us to higher things. Here too is the reason for the fittingness of a sacramental economy of grace, in which invisible realities are communicated through sensible signs. And even in the realm of intellectual life we advance from lower to higher things, such that natural theology is the highest and most arduous part of philosophy. The same law of growth also governs the spiritual life. And above all, it is social communion—in marriage, the family and other true friendships—that teaches about Trinity and the divine love.

In heaven, however, this law of ascent will be reversed. In the vision of God, the Blessed Trinity will be known directly without the mediation of finite images. Creatures and all our social relationships will be supremely known, but not as means to get to God. Rather they will be seen as magnificently varied participations of His glorious

25 St. Augustine, *City of God* 11.29.

26 See St. Thomas, *ST I*, q. 58, a. 6–7; q. 62, a. 1, 7c and ad 1: “The advent of a perfection removes the opposite imperfection. Now the imperfection of nature is not opposed to the perfection of beatitude, but underlies it; as the imperfection of the power underlies the perfection of the form, and the power is not taken away by the form, but the privation which is opposed to the form. In the same way, the imperfection of natural knowledge is not opposed to the perfection of the knowledge in glory; for nothing hinders us from knowing a thing through various mediums, as a thing may be known at the one time through a probable medium and through a demonstrative one. In like manner, an angel can know God by His essence, and this appertains to his knowledge of glory; and at the same time he can know God by his own essence, which belongs to his natural knowledge.”

27 See St. Thomas, *ST I*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

fullness. They will be seen *from* Him, as an overflow of His fullness.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, the will will love every created good according to the divine goodness and from the divine goodness.<sup>29</sup> Supernatural beatitude makes it impossible for the will, without losing its freedom, to make an idol of any created good (which is what happens in every mortal sin). Every created good and especially other persons will be loved in God.<sup>30</sup> In a similar way, the glory of the soul will overflow to the resurrected bodies of the blessed.<sup>31</sup> This means that heavenly beatitude will contain all the elements of natural happiness. However, here on earth the elements of this happiness are like arrows pointing to the hidden glory of God. Thus they do not satiate, but rather serve to manifest and enlarge a desire they cannot fill. In heaven, on the contrary, they will be experienced as an overflow of His fullness, given directly in the vision of His face.

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28 See A. Michel, *The Last Things*, trans. W. Miller (St. Louis: Herder Book, 1929), 114–115: “In Heaven, therefore, the order of our knowing will be a happy reversal of what it is on earth. Here, we rise from creatures to the Creator, his visible works leading us to some knowledge of his invisible perfections. But ‘when we leave the land of exile and become citizens of Heaven we shall have no more need of this ladder. . . . [A man] is no longer under the necessity of begging the works to give him some knowledge of the workman. Nay, more: in order to know the works he does not have to come down to their level, for he sees them in a light incomparably more brilliant than that radiated by them’ (St. Bernard).”

29 Grisez seems to approach this position in “The True Ultimate End of Human Beings: The Kingdom, Not God Alone,” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 61: “Therefore, while the created goods that pertain to fulfillment in the kingdom are and always will remain distinct from their Creator, those goods will not be things apart from God, and it seems to me reasonable to suppose that blessed creatures’ joy in created goods will somehow be within, although distinct from, their joyful intimacy with the divine Persons.”

30 See *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 4: “The will of him who sees the Essence of God, of necessity, loves, whatever he loves, in subordination to God; just as the will of him who sees not God’s Essence, of necessity, loves whatever he loves, under the common notion of good which he knows. And this is precisely what makes the will right.”

31 See *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 3, ad 3: “In perfect happiness the entire man is perfected, in the lower part of his nature, by an overflow from the higher. But in the imperfect happiness of this life, it is otherwise; we advance from the perfection of the lower part to the perfection of the higher part.” See also *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 6, where, with regard to heavenly beatitude, St. Thomas says: “Consequently, because from the Happiness of the soul there will be an overflow on to the body, so that this too will obtain its perfection. Hence Augustine says (*Ep. ad Dioscor.*) that ‘God gave the soul such a powerful nature that from its exceeding fullness of happiness the vigor of incorruption overflows into the lower nature.’”