

ANGELIC
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*Aquinas's Practical Principles for
Reaching Heaven and Avoiding Hell*

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“And therefore we also having so great a cloud of witnesses over our head, laying aside every weight and sin which surrounds us, let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us: Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who having joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and now sitteth on the right hand of the throne of God.”

—Hebrews 12:1–2

Introduction

It has been often said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. That is, people aim to live a good life, but they fail to live a truly devout life. Or in the words of Saint Paul, “For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19). If given a choice, most people would rather experience eternal bliss than eternal damnation. The problem is that few people know themselves, let alone their enemies. In the spiritual life, ignorance is not bliss. That is why a study of the capital vices and their daughters is essential for understanding the virtues necessary to reach heaven and the vices that can drag you to hell.

To aid the Christian on his or her earthly pilgrimage, the Church’s social teaching offers clear guidance for every state of life. The general principle that guides moral action is “pursue the good and avoid evil.”¹ The problem is that often one pursues an apparent good or avoids a true good because the latter is understood falsely as an apparent evil. Virtue theory must include both virtue and the capital vice analysis because the latter is the enemy of growing in virtues. Therefore, it is necessary for each person to become spiritually and

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (ST), trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Brothers, 1947), I-II 94, 2; cf. Ps. 37. 27–29. Unless otherwise noted, this edition is used for all citation of the *Summa Theologica*.

morally fortified against what traditionally has been called the concupiscence of the flesh, the spirit, and the eyes; this in addition to practicing the ascetical life.

The capital vices—especially their queen, pride—reveal why grave institutional injustices exist in society; the vices that corrupt individual persons and society are principally the effects of personal disordered desires, loves, and sorrows that arise from illusory feelings unchecked by reason and faith that are first acquired in the home and then brought to the marketplace. Knowledge of the capital vices also provides an excellent examination of conscience for individuals and families striving for the perfection of charity and the moral virtues, which contain the great commandment to love God with one's whole being and love one's neighbor as ordered under God's precepts. Ignorance of the capital vices and their daughters then makes it difficult to understand the social chaos that the popes and the *Catechism* have urgently tried to address.

While Baptism takes away original sin and forgives personal sin to adult converts, it does not eradicate all the effects of this inherited sin. Rather, a residue remains that is called concupiscence. The Christian life, especially in its beginnings, is a reasoned battle against capital vices and the devil and his instigations. And the battle is never over until death. In this struggle for sanctity, no one achieves impeccability, because our wills are weakened and inclined to pleasure and disinclined from hardship. Humans face inordinate emotions daily, and their attraction toward sin, a false good, must always be tempered with virtue.

This book attempts to show how various vices and their daughter vices influence one another by a kind of cross pollination (accompanying, indirect or direct causes). In addition to the major capital vices, the daughters can become segues (or colluding causes) to one another as a particular capital vice is like a brother to another one, and their differing daughters may become like cousins and cross pollinate them.

The teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas on the capital vices comes from his defense of Pope Saint Gregory the Great, who relied somewhat on the writings of two Eastern monks: Cassian and Evagrius. At the same time, Saint Thomas makes distinctions concerning Saint Gregory's works, differing from the likes of Augustine, Jerome, John Damascene, Anselm, John Chrysostom, Isidore of Seville, the gloss of Peter Lombard, and others. While Saint Thomas defends the teaching of Gregory's *Moralia*, he does so with one important distinction: calling pride the queen of the vices.

Studying vice is not the end of this work, although it comprises the first part and more than half of this book. Therefore, before we examine the particular vices, it necessary to explore the desire for happiness or the fulfillment of human desire, which is the fundamental inclination. By clarifying that our ultimate end is "the beatific vision," we can better obtain the means to reach it with greater care and conviction.

After exploring the demonic vices² in part I, this book will show how non-sacramental actions, such as prayer, penance,

² When I use the terms *angelic* virtues and *demonic* vices, I am speaking figuratively since angels and demons are pure spirits without bodies. And therefore, they do not struggle with lust, gluttony, avarice, vainglory, and

and the works of mercy, can dispose one to receive the many graces needed to do battle with the capital vices even though they seem to be remote from my themes in part I. The major moral evils to be avoided are in the heart of the human person. But thanks to God's grace and man's cooperation, we can overcome vice and replace it with virtue, angelic virtue, as seen in part II. But progress against them can be found in many helpful simple "tools" given to us by Christ and His Church, as we shall see. May Saint Thomas Aquinas guide you on your journey to reach heaven and to avoid hell.

acedia like humans do, because they are fixed in their original choices. The only truly demonic vices are pride and envy. Likewise, the good angels have a certain fullness of divine love and humility, among many other virtues, excluding the ones associated with the body.

PART I

Demonic Vices

CHAPTER 1

Ultimate Bliss: “Heaven”

In order to battle against vice and cultivate virtue, it is essential to understand the final goal of man’s existence. Man’s natural inclination for happiness becomes fulfilled when he desires to not only know the cause of the material universe but also experience the ultimate cause of such goodness and beauty that surrounds him. Reason alone cannot show him if the sight of this ultimate cause is possible. Or, reason alone does not know if he can have an intimate blissful vision of the Triune God who is the cause of all reality. He can only dream about its possibility. Even Aristotle himself wondered why humans did not achieve their ultimate end in this life rather than simply dying.

On the other hand, God revealed the truth about Himself and man that transcends our experience and reason’s ability to demonstrate the existence of the supernatural truth—namely, that God wants us to be with Him forever. This is perfect happiness. God also revealed other truths that wise human thinkers could discover by profound experiential reflection on human nature. Theologians called the first-mentioned truth a great mystery of faith, strictly speaking, because the human person must give up the possibility of firsthand evidence and believe an unseen God who,

through the instrumentality of Christ and His Church, proposes His teaching about a personal relationship with the creator and redeemer in this life which lasts forever in a bliss unfathomable by the human mind. As philosopher Germain Grisez has written from a different context: “Scripture offers a far richer prospect of heaven than this [meaning only an intellectual vision]. Perhaps most important, it insists upon the mysteriousness of the vision of God. . . . ‘It does not yet appear what we shall be’ (1 John 3:2); it is ‘what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived’ (1 Cor. 2:9). In this life we live in the Church’s womb, as it were, no more able to fathom heavenly experience than an embryo is to anticipate mature human relationships.”³

Notwithstanding the infinite distance we have from the beatific vision in this life, by analogies with the help of Saint Thomas, humans can have small glimpses of what is in store for those who live and die in Christ. If preachers and teachers of the faith completely ignore heaven in their pulpits or classrooms, they implicitly detract in some way from God’s love for His human creatures. The more one appreciates how deep God’s love is on a personal level, the more likely he will want to return that love to the full extent of his ability, especially by avoiding personal sin and disobedience to God. All Church dogmas become atrophied intellectually and affectionately if priests and professors do not try to clarify the deepest expression of God’s love for the human race—namely, giving Himself “face to face” forever in complete happiness beyond our present desires and aspirations.

³ Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus, General Moral Principles*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 464.

The Problem

Imagine attending a going away party for a friend. Your friend has kept his final destination a secret: Rome. You naturally inquire about his future whereabouts. If your friend were to answer that he is not going to Olasvavik, Iceland, and ranted about its chilly weather, you might be concerned about his sanity. Whereas if he were normal, he would explain to everyone that he is going to Rome and why. He might even explain his itinerary with pictures of the eternal city.

The above metaphor illustrates the thinking of many Catholics and Protestants. Many live to avoid hell rather than reach heaven. For these people, hell is fire, torture by evil angels, anguish, a deep rooted sense of total failure without end, and eternal death without actually dying or returning to nothingness, which is another revelation from God. When it comes to motivating souls about striving for heaven, they often do not have a clear picture of where they are headed. This is because heaven is often explained in vague concepts or abstractions, void of any content, such as total happiness. In other words, many practicing Christians know more about what they are avoiding in this life (damnation) rather than what they will ultimately gain from their lifelong relationship with Christ. Few Christians seem to appreciate that their ultimate happiness consists in gazing upon God's face for all eternity because at first blush, it seems boring. As professor Grisez has noted: "Sometimes this doctrine of the beatific vision is understood in a way that would make our sharing in the divine life a limited sort of activity, appealing perhaps to intellectuals but not to many others. Heaven is thought of as consisting in

an endless gazing upon the divine essence, an individual and ecstatic act of contemplating a magnificent object.”⁴

On the other hand, many ordinary Catholics view heaven as a distant place where one lives in a perpetual dream—a state of peace away from pain and heartache—because many theologians have not speculated adequately concerning this reality. Consequently, many Catholics treat this world as simply a giant testing ground, a valley of tears, to see if we are worthy of such a wonderful playland of sweetness and peace. Hence the reasons why much of the moral teaching in the past was legalistic or rule driven—that is, a “what you can get away with” before committing a mortal sin which will potentially send one to hell.

Heaven in Sacred Scripture

The word “heaven” came from the Hebrew word *shamayim* and was translated into the Greek word *ouranous*. It meant some inaccessible region above this earth inhabited by God and His sovereignty ruling the earth together with His angels. In fact, “heaven” became one of His names. Our Lord uses another word from the Old Testament to describe heaven, called “paradise,” a garden where someone would live with God forever. “Living” is more than contemplating an object forever. One major text that refers specifically to heaven is: “My dear people, we are already the children of God but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed; all we know is, that when it is revealed we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is” (1 John

⁴ Grisez, 464.

3:2). Another is in the letters of Saint Paul: "Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror; but then we shall be seeing face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). It seems peculiar that the Old Testament and Jesus give us a very graphic picture of hell (darkness, torment, the worm turning, corruption, weeping and gnashing of teeth, a pool of fire, etc.). In contrast, heaven is only briefly alluded to as an image of joyful celebration or a banquet at a wedding (Matt. 1:1–4; 25:1–13). Apparently, Jesus wanted His Church to ponder the significance of heaven, which is precisely what the sacred and living tradition has done throughout the ages, except our own.

The Problem of Happiness

Although the theology of heaven is not as straightforward and penetrating theologically as other teachings, it is rooted in the whole question of happiness as mankind's quest *par excellence*. Saint Thomas writes: "The general notion of happiness, of goodness perfect and sufficient implies that every ill is banished and every desire is fulfilled. Neither is possible in this life. We are subject to many unavoidable ills." Augustine carefully sets them out: ignorance in our mind, inordinate loves in our affections, and pains exacted of our body. Nor can our desire for good be satisfied. By nature we crave for security, yet how transitory are our blessings, life itself fades away, although our nature is always to hold onto it and shrink from death.⁵

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Purpose and Happiness*, vol. 16, ed. Thomas Gilby (London: McGraw-Hill Co., 1969), I-II 1, 4.

Thus mankind has an unquenchable thirst that is unable to be satisfied in this life. Jesus reveals that this thirst will only be satisfied by seeing the Triune God Himself in all His splendor.

The Problem of Understanding God in This Life

Faith knowledge of the beatific vision of God may not conceptually satisfy us as the answer to our heart's yearning because we do not have direct knowledge of God's being; rather, we *deny any limitation of God's perfections when we use words like infinite, incorporeal, immutable, ineffable, and lacking nothing to describe God.*

Once the existence of a thing has been ascertained, there remains the further question of the manner of its existence in order that we may know its essence. Now because we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather what He is not.

Why do we not know experientially what God is in Himself? God, pure existence, is supremely unchangeable because His essence is His existence, and therefore His mind and loving will are identical with His very being. By deduction and other reasoning processes, we can understand somewhat divine realities, although imperfectly.⁶ God, then, who is infinitely above all that He has created, cannot be grasped by simply the light of created reason. Or in other words, to know God directly requires that we in some way know Him as He knows Himself.⁷ This suggests why it is also difficult

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Anton Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), I, 3, prolog.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica (ST)*, trans. Fathers of the En-

for the human mind to see the gravity of any sin. Complete knowledge of why certain acts are sins cannot be acquired in this life. Perfect knowledge of sin would require that we see a particular sin, even the smallest ones, and God simultaneously, thereby knowing the infinite chasm between the two.

Hence it was necessary for Saint Thomas and others to develop a deep negative knowledge of God, or what He is not, such as not limited, not changeable: "That the mind is found to be most perfect in possessing knowledge of God when it is recognized that his essence is above everything that the mind capable of apprehending in this life."⁸

Coming from a different direction, Saint Thomas is also quite correct to emphasize:

Beatific knowledge of God cannot be restricted by our experience of the limits of our human capacities. The beatific vision is a sharing in the intimacy of the Trinity (see Mt 11:25–27; Lk 10:22; Jn 10:14–15). To enjoy this intimate active communion with God, one must share in his own nature. How then can we be on the right track if we think of the beatific vision as the exercise of capacities which belong to human nature? To the extent that the measure of this beatific knowing is God's knowing, we do not know what it is in itself,

glish Dominican Province (Benziger Brothers, 1947), I, 3, 1–5. Commentary on the *De Anima*, I, 1 15, "The essential principles of things are unknown to us; see also *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, 11, ad 3.

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Boethius, in The Trinity and the Unicity of the Intellect*, trans. Rose E. Brennan (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1946), 1, 2 ad 3.

since concepts drawn from anything else do not yield understanding of God in himself.⁹

However, one should not exaggerate the transcendence of heaven or of God so as to render all knowledge of its joys and of Himself unintelligible simply because it is so feeble and incomplete. Humankind is created in the image and likeness of God; the rest of creation we see around us is created with affinities to God even though God is not like us.¹⁰ There can exist some minute and positive knowledge about God (what He is), provided we understand the limitations of our concepts and language expressing them. Otherwise, we will make the same heretical mistake attributed to Meister Eckhart, who wildly exaggerated when he declared “that God is not good nor better nor best; so I speak badly whenever I call God good, as if I should call white black.”¹¹

While the preachers of the Thomistic school sometimes have appealed more to the intellectual side of heaven, it is clear that Saint Thomas’s understanding of the beatific vision does not mean the fulfillment of the human intellect alone apart from the human will and eventually the whole bodily person at the final coming. Rather, since the human will is blind of itself (there being no other faculties of the soul but the intellect and will), it needs the intellect to feed it, as it

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, trans. Laurence Shapcote (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1933), 7, 5 ad 14.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *On Truth*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co.), 2, 11 ad 1.

¹¹ Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds: Defomotopms and Declarations on Matter of Father and Morals*, eds. Peter Hunermann, Robert Fastiggi, and Anee Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 978.

were, with a gaze on supreme goodness and beauty. According to Saint Thomas, heaven does the following for the separated souls and eventually for the whole human person of body and soul: "But the blessed have this triple gift in God. They see him, and seeing him they possess him, holding him forever in their sight and holding him, they enjoy him as their ultimate goal fulfilling all their desires."¹²

It is also something social, a community of friends, as well: "The perfection of charity is essential to happiness, as to the love of God but not as to the love of neighbor. Wherefore, if there were but one soul enjoying God, it would be happy, though having no neighbor to love. But supposing one neighbor to be there, love of him results from perfect love of God. Consequently, friendship is, as it were, concomitant with perfect happiness."¹³

From these and other future citations from Saint Thomas, heaven is both very personal and communal. At the same time, each instant has new and indescribable delights from the infinite depths of the Triune God. In a hidden way, we find here the basis for making a distinction between essential happiness and accidental (but real) happiness.

The Beatific Vision Itself

Some Greek philosophers were convinced that if one saw God, he would have to become God and so lose his personhood. And Saint Thomas and others tried to grapple with this philosophical tradition—that is, to maintain complete

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Herbert McCabe (London: McGraw-Hill Co.), I 12, 7 ad 1.

¹³ *ST I-II* 4, 8 ad 13.

happiness in the beatific vision without merging into the godhead. It took many centuries before and after the medieval theologians for the Church to define her teaching on these mysteries of faith. The Church began in a negative way by condemning the errors of the Beguines and Beghards at the Council of Vienna (1311–12). In a more positive way, Pope Benedict XII defined and clarified the teaching in response to the controversy between the Dominicans and Pope John XII, who had maintained as a private theologian that after death, heaven consisted in seeing Christ's humanity only, but at the end of time, the just would see the Blessed Trinity. Naturally, this dispute existed side by side with the pope and brought with it a battle with some Franciscans, who were closely allied with the papacy, in an internal dispute over the interpretation of the vow of poverty. And so the next pontiff, Benedict XII, settled the major controversy regarding the reward of heaven when he defined exactly the nature of heaven in the following manner: "Since the passion and death of the Lord Jesus, these souls have seen and see the divine essence with an intuitive vision and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature by way of object of vision; rather the divine essence immediately manifests itself to them, plainly, clearly and openly, and in this vision and enjoyment the souls of those who have already died are truly blessed and have eternal life and rest."¹⁴

Because this knowledge and fulfillment are beyond the grasp of any human person's power, the Church likewise taught earlier, by condemning the errors of Beghards and Beguines on this question, that the intellects of the blessed

¹⁴ *DH* 1000.

need a special illumination which enables them to see God.¹⁵ This is called the light of glory, the consummation of the light of faith, and is in no way a created likeness through which someone sees God. It is a strengthening of the intellect by God's omnipotence to give His friends that quenching of their thirst for integral human and divine fulfillment, or ultimate happiness. Since humans do not comprehend God in heaven, their happiness is limited by their nature. But to think that his act is something purely passive seems to deny the very nature of the mind and will. As Bartholome de Madina, OP, once said commenting on Saint Thomas,¹⁶ "If sight were given to a blind man he would nevertheless see with his own sense of sight."¹⁷ And if Saint Thomas is right in saying, "Even God himself would not be happy if he did not know and love,"¹⁸ then human beings must receive God actively and exercise something proper to themselves that gives essential fulfillment, enjoyment, and peace. This, then, is mysterious, but it is radically different from saying heavenly bliss is unintelligible.

Implications on This life

If contemplating God face to face will essentially fulfill our capacities for happiness with unimaginable joys, then contemplating God in this life can imperfectly be part of our own limited happiness. Paraphrasing Aristotle, Saint Thomas

¹⁵ *DH* 895.

¹⁶ *ST I-II* 3, 2.

¹⁷ Cited by Joseph Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation* (Pantheon, 1958), 53.

¹⁸ Aquinas, *On Truth*, 29, 1.

says, “The slenderest acquaintance we can form with heavenly things is more desirable than a thorough grasp of mundane things.”¹⁹ Therefore, contemplating the mystery of God and things of God from time to time is the best usage of our time. But in no way does this activity exclude other virtues and the happiness that flows from these virtues. Charity, the greatest of the supernatural virtues, is meant to order, mold, and form the moral virtues so that one’s neighbors are loved in God,²⁰ and one of its major properties is joy.²¹ That is also why theologians since the medieval period have always made the important distinction between essential, or primary, beatitude (vision of God) and secondary, or accidental, beatitude. These virtues of charity, the cardinal virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit will remain in heaven and the new earth. And since there will still be friends in heaven, there will be joys associated with their companionship.

Preaching Heaven

We know from the Council of Trent that everyone’s share in the vision of God will be in proportion to his or her charity and merits at death: “If anyone says that the good works of the justified are gifts of God in such a way that they are not also the good merits of the justified man himself, or that the good works he performs through the grace of God and the merits of Jesus Christ (of whom he is a living member), the justified man does not truly merit an increase of

¹⁹ Aquinas, *On Truth*, 14, 2.

²⁰ See especially Thomas Aquinas, *On Charity*, trans. Kottie Kendzierski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1960), a. 2.

²¹ *ST II-II* 28, 1–4.

Grace, eternal life, as well as an increase of glory, let him be condemned."²²

In other words, good works need to be under grace, and when that is the case, the person in the state of grace truly merits an increase of grace, eternal life, and glory. In other words, everyone has a thirst to know their faith and do good works to enter heaven. Some enjoy learning philosophy, physics, or mathematics. Others find languages, fixing cars, or building a car to be their great delight. The love of knowledge attuned to reality is relatively limitless. Still, most people are somewhat unfulfilled on the level of truth because they focus on certain disciplines of study and cannot remember everything. In addition, there are certain puzzling questions that plague even believers and skeptics: why we have to suffer, why we met certain people, and why certain favors are never granted to us. For believers, their spiritual thirst may lead them to ask how the one God can be three persons, why He became man, why He did not choose women to be priests, etc.

Once someone sees God, all the answers become abundantly clear since He is seen as the origin of all possible truth, together with His all-loving providence and governance. All created things will be understood in Him as well. Secondarily, one can see other things about self, the world, and God Himself from a new perspective, with new appreciation forever, since one can choose to contemplate anything and any known truth in God's infinite depths.

Likewise, in this life, we have a legitimate need for beauty. Hence, we enjoy the sight of sunsets, cloud formations, flowers, and the stars. Then there's the giant realm of the fine

²² DH 1582.

arts, poetry, and music. Whether it be Beethoven's music, jazz, or flamenco dancing, the statues of a Bernini or the paintings of a Michelangelo or Blessed Angelico, the writings of Shakespeare or Chaucer, or the beauty of the Golden Gate Bridge or of the Cathedral of Chartres, all inundate our hearts and minds with created beauty. The trouble is that we eventually become bored with beautiful things after gazing on them for a few hours; other more physical needs like fatigue or hunger impinge upon us. But when we see God, who is infinite integrity, proportion, and brightness, all the beauties of this life will seem meager drops of water in contrast to the infinite ocean of eternal beauty. As a secondary delight, we will be able to make beautiful objects after the glorious resurrection in the new heavens and in the new earth, and even prior to that, as separated souls already in heaven, our minds can make poetry.

Turning to another profound need, we have a tremendous desire to love and be loved. Hence the natural desire for friendship, marriage, family life, and affirmation of our own goodness or to be understood, honored, and the like. But as is known from experience, friends might try, misunderstand, and even betray us. As we examine our conscience, we fail to love our dear ones with the best kind of love and sometimes even violate their rights with the seemingly best of intentions. So in the presence of infinite love, affirming us with an endless sea of loving affection, we will be totally enveloped by this love showering us with gifts upon gifts flowing from the total gift of Himself to us. We will know we are perfectly understood, honored, and esteemed. And we will give ourselves back to God, fully harmonizing ourselves with the

give-and-take that goes on among the three persons of the Blessed Trinity. As mentioned earlier, we will love all those present with us in heaven by the same love with differing intensities. This is why so many virtues will remain with us for our relationships with others in heaven, which are only dimly understood now.²³

The Final Resurrection of the Body

From the Old Testament times (see 2 Mach. 7:14; Dan. 12:1–3) to the New Testament itself (see John 6:3ff; 1 Jn. 3:14; 1 Cor. 15:35–53) to the various general councils of the church, it has been her constant teaching that our very bodies will become reanimated at the end of time when the final triumph of Christ’s death and resurrection becomes perfectly manifest. The body will be saved from death (imperfectly anticipated by the developments of modern medicine). Thus the whole human person will enjoy ultimate happiness in heaven, not simply the joy of a disembodied soul at the end of time. If God can create human beings out of nothing, it is certain He can put people back together again. But as indicated by Sacred Tradition, people do not receive worn-out bodies but perfect ones. Saint Thomas witnesses to this explanation: “Further if anything belonging to the truth of human nature in a man be taken from his body, this will not be the perfect body of a man. Now all imperfection of a man will be removed at the resurrection especially in the elect, to whom it was promised (Lk 21:18) that not a hair of their head would perish. Therefore whatever belonged to

²³ ST I-II 67, 1.

the truth of human nature in a man will rise again.”²⁴ “Man will rise again without any defect of human nature because as God founded human nature without a defect, even so he will restore it without defect.”²⁵

Since human nature will come back perfectly formed, Saint Thomas, among others, concluded that people will be young and beautiful again. This would explain why Jesus was not always recognized after His resurrection: He simply looked younger. The ancient churches in Ravenna witness to this, for the mosaics portray the risen Lord youthful and without His beard. Likewise, in the Church approved Marian apparitions, Mary frequently appears as a young woman.

Using reason to explain the deposit of faith, Saint Thomas develops the idea that the non-risen body is vulnerable to pain, lumpish, stiff, and dull.²⁶ So the overflow of the beatific vision will mean that the new human persons will be impassable (free of suffering), subtle (body as subjected to the spiritualized soul), agile (obeying the soul’s speed of movement), and clear (free of every blemish and ugliness). Since there will be a new earth, the communion of all the blessed with Jesus will be situated in some kind of bodily fashion.

The Second Vatican Council, in *Gaudium et Spes*, gave one of the best descriptions of heaven that summarizes both aspects of heaven (individual and collective) into a unity by asserting:

²⁴ *ST* Suppl. 80, 4 sed contra.

²⁵ *ST* Suppl. 80, 1.

²⁶ *ST* I-II 12, 1–12; 13, 1–13.

We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity, nor do we know how all things will be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away; but we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide, and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart. Then, with death overcome, the sons of God will be raised up in Christ, and what was sown in weakness and corruption will be invested with incorruptibility. Enduring with charity and its fruits, all that creation which God made on man's account will be unchained from the bondage of vanity.

Therefore, while we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gains the whole world and lose himself, the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age.

Hence, while earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God.

For after we have obeyed the Lord, and in His Spirit nurtured on earth the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom, and indeed all the good fruits of our nature and enterprise, we will find them again, but freed of stain, burnished and transfigured, when

Christ hands over to the Father: “a kingdom eternal and universal, a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace.” On this earth that Kingdom is already present in mystery. When the Lord returns it will be brought into full flower.²⁷

At the end of Saint Thomas’s life, he had a mystical experience on December 6, 1273, which led him to cease writing. He told his assistant, “Reginald, I cannot, because all that I have written seems like straw to me.” Nothing on earth we achieve or experience can come close to the beatific vision. Everything is straw compared to seeing God face-to-face. And yet, the Church’s teachings and the writings of the saints like Thomas Aquinas are necessary to show us who we really are, where we are going, and why.

²⁷ *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), no. 39.