

PART TWO

COMPLETION IN CHRIST AND HUMAN FULFILLMENT

Bless the Lord, O my soul! Alleluia.

How manifold are your works, O Lord!
In wisdom you have wrought them all--
the earth is full of your creatures.

Bless the Lord, O my soul! Alleluia.

If you hide your face, they are dismayed;
if you take away their breath,
they perish and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.

Bless the Lord, O my soul! Alleluia.

May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord be glad in his works!
I will sing to the Lord all my life;
I will sing praise to my God while I live,
Pleasing to him be my theme;
I will be glad in the Lord.

Bless the Lord, O my soul! Alleluia.

Psalm 104.24, 29-30, 31, 33-34

CHAPTER FOUR: COMPLETION: PERFECT FELLOWSHIP AMONG DIVINE AND HUMAN PERSONS

A. Introduction

5 In treating a subject which is a large and very complicated whole, one can begin by examining its more important parts one by one and then complete the treatment with a synthesis, or one can begin by viewing the whole in its unity and then proceed to look more closely at its parts. I have chosen the second approach. Thus in this part, "Completion in Christ and Human Fulfillment," I treat the entire subject of Christian moral principles; in subsequent parts I will treat various aspects of the whole in more detail.

10 Similarly, the present chapter is concerned with the heavenly kingdom in which the Father, the Son, and the Spirit will dwell in perfect fellowship with created persons. To this fellowship, They contribute Their divine goods, Their perfect life, and we contribute our human goods, our fulfillment. So chapter five will treat human goods, and chapter six will treat the divine life of love. Of course, the Christian moral life whose principles we are studying must be lived here and now, in this world. Therefore, chapter seven will treat the relationship between the heavenly kingdom and this world.

B. The problem of human fulfillment -- this-worldly approaches

20 There are many theories as to how men and women can find their fulfillment. It is more properly the business of ethical theory than of moral theology to survey and criticize these theories.[1] Here I give only a brief summary.

25 Many people think they would be fulfilled if they could have everything they want, if they could have all the enjoyment they wish. Hedonism is the theory which defends this view. But although frustration and misery cannot be part of human fulfillment, mere satisfaction is not enough. For satisfaction can be realized in merely passive, conscious experience, while human persons also are capable of action and fulfillment in aspects of reality which lie outside their individual conscious experiences. Human persons can care about living creatively, about friendship, about holiness, and about other things which are not simply objects to be desired, obtained, and enjoyed. The fulfillment of a human person is greater than a hedonist imagines.

30 Some people, not as many today as at certain other times, think they would be fulfilled if they could achieve greatness, if they could undertake some very difficult project and by extraordinary effort and creative ability carry it through to admirable completion. The classic ideal of the hero belongs here; in recent times, Nietzsche articulated the theory of this conception of human fulfillment. But although slobbishness and dull conformism contribute nothing to human fulfillment, the attainment of excellence by itself is not enough. For excellence can coexist with frustration and misery; nobility can coexist even with tragic failure. Moreover, the pursuit of excellence is inherently individualistic, since it separates the superior person from the crowd. Human fulfillment requires friendship; loneliness, not other people, is hell. And friendship is joy in shared goods, not merely company in misery and comfort in failure.

45 Some very influential people today think that human fulfillment is in an ideal community, in which men and women will live together in friendship, rejoice in abundant goods, and have ample opportunity for each individual to achieve his or her own personal excellence, according to the different capacities and interests individuals have. This conception of human fulfillment obviously is more comprehensive and attractive than either of the preceding ones.[2] Marxism articulates this theory and builds its political program on it. Liberal democracy--with its ideal of welfare, liberty, and justice for all--also presupposes a similar view.

50 But although the perfect human community projected by these theories is attractive and certainly somehow essential to human fulfillment, the various forms of secular humanism fail to take account of all the aspects of the problem of fulfillment. The ideal society requires ideal people; actual people are more or less recalcitrant. Either they must be compelled to contribute to the goal by totalitarian methods or they must be allowed to live more individualistically, with the result that the ideal remains unreal. Moreover, if human fulfillment is to be realized only in a future society, people living here and now are doomed to unfulfillment. The widespread adoption of killing as a method of solving social problems makes clear what this means. For secular humanism, there is no such thing as human fulfillment; there is only the fulfillment of those elected to live and to take part in the ideal community when it comes--if it ever does come.

65 C. The problem of human fulfillment -- other-worldly views

In view of the unsatisfactoriness of other theories, someone might suggest--with some support from Freud and from others who look at human life from a biological perspective--that the only human fulfillment is in death. Must we not admit realistically that the only completion of human life is death, for not only each individual but every society and eventually the whole species will die out? But this theory is no more acceptable than the others. Death completes life by terminating it, but nothing is fulfilled by its own destruction. Death can be sought for others as a means to one's own ends; death even can be sought for oneself as a means of escape. The wicked considered death "a friend, and pined for it, and made a covenant with it, because they deserve to be in its possession" (Wis 1.16).

75 Death's only appeal is that it offers an apparent way to escape from evil. No one loves death for its own sake; rather, everyone sees it as the ultimate enemy of human fulfillment. Moreover, even the finality of death, which seems so obvious a fact, is not accepted by the greater part of humankind.

80 People of virtually every time and place believe that those who die somehow live on in another world and that the human relationships disrupted at death are not simply dissolved, as they would be if death meant annihilation. In being aware of their own ability to understand and to make free choices, persons dimly know that although they

are bodies they are not merely bodies, and that as there are bodily remains at death, so there also must be nonbodily remains--something of the person's life which somehow continues. The capacity of a person such as Socrates to lay down his life on a matter of principle bears witness to the irreducibility of a person to his or her bodily life.

5 Today, apart from those who live in the Jewish and Christian hope of resurrection and everlasting life, fewer and fewer people think human fulfillment is to be found outside the here and now, the world of everyday experience. However, large segments of the human race have believed that fulfillment is by escape from the desires, the ambitions, the miseries, and the conflicts of this world. Through death the bodily condition is
10 escaped and the spiritual person fulfilled in the greater and permanent reality of the invisible world. Much Eastern religion looks forward to the eventual reabsorption of individuals into the divine, the only ultimate reality; ancient Stoicism proposed a somewhat similar view. The thought of Plato himself perhaps points toward a permanent conscious existence for individuals, but existence in a life whose only function would be
15 to contemplate and enjoy the beauty of the intelligible, unchanging principles underlying the meaning and value of this passing world.

All of these other-worldly views of human fulfillment, although they have the merit of rejecting the absoluteness of death as a limit, suffer from two serious limitations. First, none of them describes the fulfillment of human persons such as we know
20 ourselves to be. The projected fulfillment is of disembodied spirits, whose very individuality is likely to be lost or drastically altered, and whose life is expected to be either merged in a featureless whole or spent in the self-enclosed ecstasy of wrapt gazing upon beauty. There is no place here for fellowship, for persons conversing, giving, receiving. Second, all of these approaches deprive human life in this world of
25 inherent value. Life here and now either is nothing more than a challenge to escape from this world, or is at best an occasion to prepare oneself for and find one's way to the other world, in which alone true human fulfillment is expected.

D. The problem of human fulfillment -- a more plausible approach

30 A final approach to the problem of human fulfillment--and the one which seems most plausible--locates the fulfillment of persons in the orderly and ever-expanding realization of their potentialities. To be unfulfilled is not to be what one can be--to fall short of being all that one ideally might be. Aristotle's Ethics proposes a theory
35 along these lines, but one which is defective to the extent that Aristotle had too narrow a view of the possibilities of human persons, for he thought that nature sets men and women the narrow goal of exercising fully the specific human capacity to think.

This approach can be developed more plausibly if one holds that every ability of human persons is personal, that nature does not assign persons any definite goal, that
40 human persons have the capacity to make free choices which within the limits of their abilities and opportunities constitute their own identities, and thus that human persons can find fulfillment in faithfully living out the commitments they have undertaken, commitments which make up their own personal identities.[3]

A person could adopt the general theory just sketched out and develop it in a way
45 which would leave his or her concrete notion of fulfillment open to many of the criticisms previously suggested against alternative approaches. But the difficulty to a great extent would be in the execution, not in the approach itself. To seek one's fulfillment by living to realize one's potentialities in an orderly and ever-expanding way within the framework of one's commitments (which constitute one's personal identity)
50 need not be narrow as the hedonistic and heroic lives are, need not be utopian as contemporary ideologies are, need not misrepresent death as a good, need not be other-worldly, and need not exclude fellowship.

The last point is especially important. Someone might think that the approach under discussion is too individualistic, inasmuch as it locates fulfillment in the
55 living out of a personal identity established by one's own commitments. But the goods to which persons can commit themselves usually can be realized and enjoyed only in shared actions, and one who recognizes this fact can include in his or her own self-identity participation in many communities.[4] For example, persons who love justice and friendship know that such goods can be realized only with others; they can constitute their own identity by committing themselves to cooperate faithfully with others in
60 efforts to share together in these goods.

It seems to me that there are only two theoretical difficulties and one practical difficulty with this last approach.

65 First, this conception of human fulfillment, in realistically accepting both the open and boundless character of human potentialities and the limits of human ability to fulfill them, projects a fulfillment which always is limited. Although such a fulfillment can be open and growing, it never can be absolute; the best life will mix frustration, misery, and failure with fulfillment. Can such a life truly be called "fulfillment?" Second, the fulfillment which is realizable always is fragile, for it depends
70 upon other persons and upon many conditions outside one's own control. Especially, fulfillment seems to be limited by death, unless there is some way to continue life undertaken in this way in this world into another one, so that in some way the personal fulfillment which enriches the present life can be perfected after death.

The practical difficulty with this approach is that it is one thing to make commitments and another to keep them. One who establishes his or her own identity by
75 choices still has other inclinations. One still is subject to the temptation to follow feelings rather than prior commitments, and so to blur the identity established and thus to abandon the principle which defines even limited fulfillment.

To put the matter another way, there is in practice a tendency to set aside one's
80 own reasonable life-plan in favor of one of the other, less defensible ways of pursuing fulfillment. If limitations must be accepted in any case, what difference does it make? Even the most reasonable view of human life, unless it is introduced into the larger context of faith, is likely to end in despair: "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!'" (2 Cor 15.32). The tendency to despair is nourished

by the fact that people who try to keep their commitments often experience the terrible disappointment of betrayal by others on whom they were counting. Virtue is its own punishment. Hence, it is not surprising that in the condition of fallen humankind, it is a practical impossibility for a person without special help of God to avoid sin indefinitely, even though nobody sins except by a free act (cf. Rom 7.14-25; DS 225-227/103-105; 1541/806).

E. The Christian promise of fulfillment

10 The Christian promise is of a fulfillment which includes the satisfaction of a great desire, unending joy, a noble life of individual excellence, a perfect community with interpersonal intimacy and personal liberty, and everlasting life after death. And this promise excludes--except during the brief span of this life--frustration, misery, failure, and loneliness. Moreover, the Christian promise is open not only to an elite and not only to future generations, but to every human person. What is more, the fulfillment which is promised is for flesh and blood persons, not for disembodied spirits; 15 for persons who share a common life, not for souls merged into the One or isolated in ecstasy; for persons whose present lives in this world can make lasting contributions to the promised fulfillment, not for mystics and philosophers who consider life here and now a necessary evil which offers nothing of true human fulfillment: 20

The Christian promise of fulfillment calls upon individuals to establish their own identities by free commitments: by the commitments of faith and of personal vocation. The Christian is to live a rich life in which potentialities are realized in an orderly and ever-expanding way. Even the frustration, misery, and failure which are inevitable 25 in this life can be made to contribute to fulfillment, and whatever contributes to fulfillment here and now is treasure which will last forever, since Christian life in this world will be continued and perfected after death. Most important, the Christian promise carries with it the assurance of its practicability, for it includes the guarantee of the power of the Holy Spirit, gained by the liberating death and resurrection of the 30 Lord Jesus. By this power, one can faithfully fulfill one's commitments; despair is overcome.

So much for the Christian promise as a promise of human fulfillment. As such, it seems almost too good to be true; it combines the good features and excludes the bad ones of every other conception of human fulfillment. Yet there is more. For the Christian 35 promise is of a fulfillment which is more than human: intimate, personal sharing in the inner life of God Himself. Of itself the human heart can desire peace with God and His favor, but no human heart of itself desires to enjoy the goods which are proper to the divine Persons. This hope is a gift, a gift which springs from the love of God "poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5.5).

40 One might fear that the hope of a more than human fulfillment will necessarily detract from human fulfillment. But the Christian promise removes this fear, because the promise is given in and by our Lord Jesus, who by His Incarnation shows that divine life is not at odds with human perfection. Christ "fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear" (GS 22; cf. GS 34). God creates us with the power of 45 free choice; He does not fix our hearts upon any of the limited goods which naturally contribute to our fulfillment. Therefore, the divine Word and we human persons can share one another's natures and lives without conflict. No trimming, no pushing out of shape, is required to fit together human and divine life.

The most basic and common experience in human life is that of undependability. 50 What seems certainly true turns out to be partially mistaken; the perfectly beautiful turns out to be defective; a just constitution shelters corruption; friends disappoint; character carefully cultivated gives way in a moment of weakness; health fails, and death awaits. The Gospel does not ignore or deny any of these facts; it tells us that experience is limited, and that one ought not to make any absolute generalizations from 55 it. The power and faithfulness of God provide ground for hope despite all the evidence to the contrary.

Someone might urge that faith in the Gospel can only be wishful thinking. After all, most of humanity does not accept the finality of death; perhaps this stance is based only on subconscious motivations. However, it should be noticed that a Christian's 60 hope is not merely for survival after death. Moreover, the nonfinality of death could be a fact; perhaps the denial of survival after death is mere wishful thinking. If death were final, how could human persons even imagine it not to be so? Why should biologically grounded unconscious motives make them wish for survival with a wish that has no effect upon biological survival?

65 The Christian promise occurred to no one apart from the Gospel. As a promise of a fulfillment which satisfies and goes beyond every human wish, the Gospel astounds anyone who reads it with fresh eyes. The subconscious never projected so wild a dream: human happiness plus a share in divine joy, which takes nothing from but rather ensures the human happiness it crowns.

70 Clearly, any conception of human fulfillment, if it is adopted and consistently followed, will shape the whole of a person's life. One who seeks fulfillment in excellence cannot live a life of escapist pleasure-seeking; a dedicated Marxist cannot live the life of an Eastern mystic; and so forth. One who believes the Gospel likewise ought to live a life wholly shaped by the unique hope of Christians.

75 If the lives of nonbelievers of good will and the lives of many Christians differ but little from one another, this fact does not show that there is no specifically Christian morality. Rather, it shows that Christians are not living in a way which is wholly consistent with the hope that is in them. Becoming forgetful, they either seek fulfillment exclusively in this world or despise this world and expect fulfillment only after 80 death.

F. Christian fulfillment: both already and not yet realized

According to Christian faith, the original goodness in which humankind was constituted was spoiled by sin. Sin essentially is a rupture in the personal relationship

between the divine Persons and the human family with which They wish to share Their life. The Incarnation of the Word is a bridge, thrown by God over troubled waters across the chasm created by the cataclysm of sin. Thus the Incarnation is redemptive, restorative:

5 For Jesus Christ was sent into the world as a real Mediator between God and men. Since He is God, all divine fullness dwells bodily in Him (Col. 2.9). According to His human nature, He is the new Adam, made head of a renewed humanity, and full of grace and truth (Jn 1.14). Therefore the Son of God walked the ways of a true Incarnation that He might make men sharers in the divine nature (AG 3).

10 From this point of view, Christian fulfillment already was accomplished at the very beginning of the life of Jesus. Early in the Gospel we read: "Jesus appeared in Galilee proclaiming the good news of God: 'This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand!'" (Mk 1.14-15).

15 Jesus already reigns in heaven (cf. Phil 2.9-11; Eph 1.20-22). From there He sends His Spirit (cf. Eph 3.16; Acts 2.33), and continually builds up the Church (cf. Eph 4.11-13):

20 Therefore, the promised restoration which we are awaiting has already begun in Christ, is carried forward in the mission of the Holy Spirit, and through Him continues in the Church. There we learn through faith the meaning, too, of our temporal life, as we perform, with hope of good things to come, the task committed to us in this world by the Father, and work out our salvation (cf. Phil 2.12) (LG 48). In this way Vatican II passes smoothly from fulfillment already accomplished in Christ to fulfillment yet to be realized by the performance of our task in this world. Already redeemed, we still must work out our salvation (cf. 1 Thes 5.9; 1 Pt 2.2). The kingdom of God already realized in heaven must be established on earth (cf. Mt 6.10).

25 The establishment of God's kingdom on earth thus will be a revelation of something which already exists (cf. Rom 8.18; 1 Tm 6.14-15). As the Creed says, Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead (DS 150/86). This judgment will be part of a cosmic transformation whose outcome will be the ultimate, lasting situation which God planned from the very beginning (cf. Eph 1.9-10).[5]

30 The coming judgment will apply to everyone and to all that everyone has done (cf. 2 Cor 5.10). Judgment will be according to the quality of one's works (cf. Rom 2.5-6). Nothing will remain obscure; everything will come to light (cf. 1 Cor 4.4-5). This judgment will involve no uncertain estimation and no arbitrary sentence. Rather, it will discriminate with impartial objectivity:

35 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels of heaven, he will sit upon his royal throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. Then he will separate them into two groups, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The sheep he will place on his right hand, the goats on his left. The king will say to those on his right: 'Come. You have my Father's blessing! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, I was ill and you comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the just will say to him: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or see you thirsty and give you drink? When did we welcome you away from home or clothe you in your nakedness? When did we visit you when you were ill or in prison?' The king will answer them: 'I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me.'

40 "Then he will say to those on his left: 'Out of my sight, you condemned, into that everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was away from home and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing. I was ill and in prison and you did not come to comfort me.' Then they in turn will ask: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or away from home or naked or ill or in prison and not attend to your needs?' He will answer them: 'I assure you, as often as you neglected to do it to one of these least ones, you neglected to do it to me.' These will go off to eternal punishment and the just to eternal life" (Mt 25.31-46).

50 Christians cannot ignore the significance of their lives in this world. What they are doing not only will affect their own eternal fulfillment; it also, in a mysterious way, even now affects our Lord Jesus. The other world in which fulfillment already is realized and this world in which it is being realized are not separate. The kingdom is here although we cannot see it.

65 The coming of Christ will be unmistakable; the reign of God already begun in Jesus will become apparent in the world as He reveals Himself in the glory and power of His resurrection (cf. Lk 17.20-35; Mt 24.27). The universe as a whole will be transformed, and a new heavens and new earth brought into being (cf. 2 Pt 3.3-13). The prayer of ages that God reign on earth as in heaven will be fulfilled; a new and beautiful community will be formed on earth, in which God will dwell with His people in lasting fellowship. "He shall wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, crying out or pain, for the former world has passed away" (Rv 21.4). "He who wins the victory shall inherit these gifts; I will be his God and he shall be my son" (Rv 21.7). The treasures and wealth of nations will be found in the new community, and it will be illumined with the light of God Himself (cf. Rv 21.23-26). The whole created world will share in this wonderful transformation (cf. Rom 8.19-22). The Church, the human race, and the entire world will be perfectly fulfilled in Christ (cf. LG 48).

G. The glory of God as His purpose in creating

80 Vatican Council I teaches that the world is made for the glory of God; it solemnly condemns anyone who denies this (DS 3025/1805). The glory of God is His outward manifestation, like the light which streams from the sun (cf. Rv 18.1). God's glory is realized in the minds of intelligent creatures, who recognize, appreciate, and praise Him for what He does (cf. Eph 1.12; Phil 1.11). Are we then to suppose that God creates to

acquire praise and honor for Himself, that he is using us and the whole created world for His own fulfillment? [6]

The question is important. Its answer deeply affects our attitude toward God and shapes the spirit in which we live our lives for His glory. If we have any sense that we are being used, we will be resentful; only if we understand correctly the proposition that the world is made for God's glory will we feel the wonder and gratitude which we ought to feel toward Him, and so be able to live with the dedication and joy of true followers of the Lord Jesus.

Vatican I is anxious to exclude the idea that human happiness is the be-all and end-all of creation. That idea would leave God out of the final purpose of creation or would reduce Him to the condition of a servant of the fulfillment of creatures. But the Council also explicitly asserts that God creates "to manifest his perfection through the benefits which he bestows on creatures--not to intensify his happiness nor to acquire any perfection" (DS 3002/1783). To suppose that God might gain anything whatsoever by creating and redeeming us would be to suppose that God needed us, which would be to suppose that He is not God.

Because God in no way depends upon anything else, His actions always must be understood ultimately as motivated by His love of the good He Himself is. God rejoices in, not desires, the good He is. But fully understanding His own boundless and fully actual perfection, He knows it can be manifested, expressed, communicated, shared by creatures. His free choice to create these creatures, including ourselves, is an act of sheer exuberance and generosity. The expression of God's goodness in the total perfection of the whole created universe is the greatest created good--simply because this expression is the whole which God creates. The happiness of humankind is a part of this whole. As part of a greater whole, human fulfillment is not ultimate. But human happiness is not something God uses for some ulterior purpose. Rather, we and our fulfillment are important parts of the total self-expression God intends in creating.

The purpose of the whole of creation therefore is the divine goodness, insofar as created things and persons share in this goodness. Our fulfillment is to be like God, to manifest His goodness in and by our being and action. We are called into existence and called upon to act for the glory of God, not merely for our own happiness. But this is not because God uses us as a means to some ulterior good for Himself; rather it is because our happiness is only part of the larger expression of God's goodness, which is the whole of creation. We obviously ought to love the whole which includes our fulfillment (and much more) more than we love our fulfillment considered by itself; equally obviously, we ought to love the divine goodness itself, which includes in a higher way and gives rise to every created perfection, more than we love the whole of creation which expresses God's goodness.

God's glory and human fulfillment are in no way at odds. Whatever takes away from human dignity detracts from God's glory, because it detracts from the expression of His goodness He intends. This point must be remembered if one is to understand correctly a statement such as the following one of Vatican II:

The purpose, therefore, which priests pursue by their ministry and life is the glory of God the Father as it is to be achieved in Christ. That glory consists in this: that men knowingly, freely, and gratefully accept what God has achieved perfectly through Christ, and manifest it in their whole lives. Hence, whether engaged in prayer and adoration, preaching the Word, offering the Eucharistic sacrifice, ministering the other sacraments, or performing any of the works of the ministry for men, priests are contributing to the extension of God's glory as well as to the development of divine life in men. Since all of these activities result from Christ's Passover, they will be crowned in the glorious return of the same Lord when He Himself hands over the kingdom to His God and Father (PO 2).

By serving the true good of human persons, a priest contributes to God's glory--that is, to the total expression of His goodness God has chosen to bring about.

H. Completion in Christ as the glory of God

God's glory, the whole expression He has chosen to bring about, is not merely a multiplicity of disparate creatures. The whole has unity, the unity of the Lord Jesus, in whose completion everything else will find its proper place. [7] Because Christ is both God and man, the completion of all things in Christ unites God's uncreated perfection with His created glory. All who are receptive will be given their own perfect fulfillment in the fellowship of everlasting life in the Lord Jesus.

In the Old Testament it is frequently said that God fills the earth, Jerusalem, and the temple. Without becoming mixed with His creation, God's glory, name, and presence fill and fulfill His creatures. St. Paul points out that with the Incarnation, God is present in a new way: "In Christ the fullness of deity resides in bodily form" (Col 2.9). Because He is both God and man, the Lord Jesus can integrate all of reality (cf. AG 3).

The fullness which is in Christ is poured out by Him to His extended body, the Church (cf. Eph 1.22-23). Thus in the Church we share in the fullness of our Lord Jesus (cf. Col 2.9-13). The intimate communion with God initiated in Christ transcends the rich interpersonal relationship between God and His people of the Old Covenant: "Of his [Christ's] fullness we have all had a share--love following upon love. For while the law was given through Moses, enduring love came through Jesus Christ" (Jn 1.16-17). The good which God communicates in Jesus is Himself; the Son unites His fellowmen with the Father: "I have given them the glory you gave me that they may be one as we are one--I living in them, you living in me--that their unity may be complete" (Jn 17.22-23).

The fullness of Christ extends not only to humankind; the rest of creation also shares in it. The world will share in the fulfillment in Christ of humankind, because the world is "intimately related to man and achieves its purpose through him" (LG 48). That is why "the whole created world eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God" (Rom 8.19). The Lord Jesus is the universal redeemer: "It pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him and, by means of him, to reconcile everything in his person,

making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1.19-20). Thus the fullness of Christ extends to all things: "all these are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3.22-23). The fullness of deity which is in Christ will be universally communicated, "so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15.28).

5 If deity is to be universally communicated, still the created reality of human persons and other creatures will not be swallowed up, as pantheists suppose. Heaven is a community, a city (cf. Heb 12.22-24). Creatures remain creatures; they adore their creator (cf. Rv 4.6-11). Moreover, Christians hope for resurrection from the dead, and resurrection pertains to those who can die--that is, to creatures. Jesus is risen according to His created humanity; according to His divine nature, He could not rise for He could not die (cf. 1 Cor 15.21).

10 Moreover, other creatures contribute to the fullness of Christ. Members of the Church build up His body (cf. Eph 4.11-16), and in this sense the Church is part of Christ's own fullness (cf. Eph 1.23). Christ communicates the fullness of deity insofar as He is God; insofar as He is man He is completed by "all things in heavens and on earth" under His headship (cf. Eph 1.10; LG 7). Thus the whole reality of creator and of creation comes to harmonious, not homogeneous, unity in the Lord Jesus, and absolute fullness resides in Him (cf. Col 1.19).[8]

20 Subpersonal creation can be regarded as an extension of the human body. From the beginning, God made humankind lord over creation (cf. Ps 8.6-7); the heavens which declare God's glory declare it to men and women on earth (cf. Ps 19.2-5). In the Mass, the Church offers God gifts made by human hands from the fruit of the earth. Thus, although it is not clear to us exactly how all of material creation will be incorporated in Christ, the kind of relationship involved is not altogether mysterious. Much more mysterious--and more important for moral theology--is the unity between the Lord Jesus and those joined with Him in the Church.

Vatican II makes clear that the principal bond of unity is the Holy Spirit:

30 In the human nature which He united to Himself, the Son of God redeemed man and transformed him into a new creation (cf. Gal 6.15; 2 Cor 5.17) by overcoming death through His own death and resurrection. By communicating His Spirit to His brothers, called together from all peoples, Christ made them mystically into His own body.

35 In order that we may be unceasingly renewed in Him (cf. Eph 4.23), He has shared with us His Spirit who, existing as one and the same being in the head and in the members, vivifies, unifies, and moves the whole body. This He does in such a way that His work could be compared by the holy Fathers with the function which the soul fulfills in the human body, whose principle of life the soul is (LG 7). The fullness of deity which resides in Christ in bodily form is communicated to the members of the Church by the Holy Spirit.

40 Another aspect of the unity between the Lord Jesus and those joined with Him in the Church is the bond of community formed by human acts. Jesus revealed God's kingdom by human words and deeds; He sought acceptance in faith: obedience and cooperation (cf. LG 6; Mt 28.18-20). The gift of the Spirit is conditional upon this human bond, but distinct from it and far transcends it (cf. Jn 14.10-21).

45 But there is another deep and mysterious aspect of the unity between the Lord Jesus and those joined with Him in the Church: a bodily union, a union no less physically real because it is sacramental. The bodies of Christians are members of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6.15). Baptism and the gift of the Spirit forges this bodily unity (cf. 1 Cor 12.12-27). The unity is in Christ, based upon His individual, resurrected body (cf. Rom 12.4-5). Real unity with the bodily death and resurrection of Jesus is brought about in baptism; this bodily unity of the Christian with the individual body of the Lord Jesus makes of the Church a physical whole (cf. Col 1.22; 2.12, 17; 3.1-4, 15). The maintenance of this bodily communion depends upon the sacrament of the Eucharist (cf. Jn 6.53-57).[9]

60 When Jesus Himself compares His relationship with His disciples to that of a vine to its branches (cf. Jn 15.1-8), one might suppose that the organic unity is only a metaphor for the unity of the Spirit and for existential solidarity by faith and love. But St. Paul's development of the thesis that Christians are members of Christ's body goes far beyond the metaphorical.[10] There is a tendency to take this difficult thesis as a figure of speech. The difficulty is: If Christians really are united with Christ in bodily unity, how can His and their organic individuality be maintained?

65 It seems to me that modern individualism blocks understanding here. We tend to think that persons are in all respects units completely separate and isolated from one another, that each hidden self-consciousness demarcates a self-enclosed entity, which can send signals to others but can never really commune (become one) with another. We assume that if there really were communing, individuality necessarily would be forfeited.

70 In fact, this is not so. Biologically, individuals of a species share concretely in common life; their independence is relative and a matter of degree. Not individuals but only species evolve. In species which reproduce sexually, the one act of generating a new individual involves the dynamic unity of a male and female which, in this function, form a single organism. Such real unity takes nothing away from the individuality of each male and female; they exercise other functions separately, and play distinct roles even in the unity of the sexual act.

75 Now, it seems to me that the bodily unity of Christ with His members in the Church is not unlike this real, physiological unity. Moreover, if I am not mistaken, St. Paul himself is suggesting precisely this view when he compares the unity of wife and husband with that of the Church and Christ (cf. Eph 5.22-33). The one-flesh union of marriage, which is most perfectly actualized in fruitful sexual intercourse, illuminates the bodily unity of Christ with the Church. Like husband and wife, Christ and His members do not lose their individuality, and each plays a distinct role. Because of this bodily unity, members of Christ already share in His resurrection life (cf. Col 3.1-4), and yet can contribute to His fulfillment by suffering for the Church (cf. Col 1.24).

Created persons are fulfilled, not absorbed, by incorporation into the body of

Christ. In Him we are to become one perfect man (cf. Eph 4.13), able to commune with God without ceasing to be the distinct human persons we are. Thus the purpose God had in creating is achieved; His perfection is manifested in man fulfilled, which is the glory of God.[11]

5

I. Completion in Christ: the family of God

Vatican II speaks often of the Church as the "People of God" (cf. LG 9-17). This expression, rooted in the Old Testament in which Israel is God's chosen People, can be helpful, but it also suggests the limitation of intimate communion which obtained before the fullness of God's revelation in our Lord Jesus. Another expression, which the Council also uses, is more suggestive of intimacy: "family of God."

Divisions obstruct the unity of the family of God (cf. LG 28); the work of the hierarchy nourishes the family of God in the Church (cf. LG 32; UR 2). The supreme exemplar of the unity of the Church is the divine Family, the Trinity (cf. UR 2). Priests "gather God's family together as a brotherhood of living unity, and lead it through Christ and in the Spirit to God the Father" (PO 6). In Christ Jesus the human family is called to be the family of God (cf. GS 40 and 92). The unity of the family of God's children strengthens and perfects the unity of the human family (cf. GS 40, 42, and 43).

The new People of God enjoy familial intimacy with the Father because through our Lord Jesus and in His Spirit human persons receive the power to commune in divine life, "to become children of God" (Jn 1.12). The loving kindness and faithfulness which are characteristic of God are manifested in Jesus, for those who believe in Him are begotten by God (cf. Jn 1.12-17). This begetting is very real; the Christian is a child of God, truly is of God's stock (cf. 1 Jn 2.29-3.1; 3.9). The word of God, which gives rebirth, is His semen (cf. 1 Pt 1.23); God gives His gifts so that we "might become sharers of the divine nature" (2 Pt 1.4).

Because human persons are not naturally children of God, their becoming so requires a second birth of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 3.3-8). This rebirth can be considered adoptive incorporation into the divine family, without at all lessening the realism of the relationship; by it we share the image of the eternal Son, and He becomes the first-born of many brothers (cf. Rom 8.14-15, 29). God's adopted children share in His Spirit, a pledge of all the divine good to which they together with Jesus are heirs (cf. Rom 8.16-17; Gal 4.6-7; Eph 1.13-14).

All of these texts indicate clearly enough that Christians are children of God in this life and are destined to enjoy the fulfillment of divine family members forever. Insofar as the Church is the family of God, it also is destined to last, although in a perfected condition. This point is made clear by Vatican II. The Church will achieve her fulfillment at the end of time, when she will include every just person (cf. LG 2). The Church is identified with the kingdom of Christ already present in mystery (cf. LG 3). The Church is the initial budding forth of the kingdom on earth (cf. LG 5). The fullness of the life of the Church is now hidden with Christ; she will appear with her Spouse in glory (cf. LG 6).

This is not to say that the Church and the kingdom are entirely identical. There is at least a difference in focus, since the Church is fully visible in the world, working toward fulfillment yet to be realized, while the kingdom is hidden and already realized in Jesus. But this distinction should not be exaggerated. Some of the parables of the kingdom indicate that at present it includes both the good and the bad (cf. Mt 13.24-50), and many others show that the kingdom is growing slowly to maturity by divine power (cf. Mt 13.31-33; Mk 4.26-32). Also, in the statement investing Peter with his unique role, "church" and "kingdom" seem to be used with the same reference (cf. Mt 16.18-19).

The heavenly Church or kingdom in its perfection includes all created persons, angels as well as human persons, who enjoy eternal life with God (cf. Mt 25.31; Col 1.16; Heb 1.14; Rv 5.8; DS 1000/530). We acknowledge in the Preface of every Mass the inclusion of angels. But as the communion of the adopted children of God, the heavenly Church does not include the divine Persons themselves, the cosmos which is the environment of human persons, or those created persons who do not willingly cooperate in the divine plan. Absolute fullness somehow includes all these, but they are not part of the extended family of God; they are related to this family in diverse ways.[12]

J. The vision of God -- human sharing in divine life

At death a new mode of exercising one's status as a member of the divine family will begin. One travels in this world as a pilgrim; at death one comes home to the house of the Father (cf. Jn 14.2), a house Jesus prepared by dying for His followers, a house where He longs for His own to be with Him (cf. Jn 17.24). St. Paul often expresses his own longing to be with Christ (cf. Phil 1.23; 1 Thess 4.18; 2 Cor 12.4). Someone might suppose that literally being with our Lord Jesus is not terribly significant, if even now we share in various ways in His life. However, if one takes seriously the human reality of our relationship with Jesus, then the more we love Him the more we wish to be with Him, not only sacramentally, but in an experienced way, just as a wife separated from her husband wishes to rejoin him. Jesus also wants to be with His own. This concern is evident throughout His last conversation with His disciples (cf. especially Jn 16.20-28).

Moreover, by being with Jesus His followers will share in a mature way in the divine life which naturally belongs to the Word of God:

Dearly beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall later be has not yet come to light. We know that when it comes to light we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 Jn 3.2).

Jesus Himself promises that the pure of heart will see God (cf. Mt 5.8). St. Paul parallels the statement of St. John, emphasizing the difference between present immaturity and heavenly maturity:

When I was a child I used to talk like a child, think like a child, reason like a child. When I became a man I put childish ways aside. Now we see indistinctly as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. My knowledge is imperfect now; then I shall know even as I am known (1 Cor 13.11-12).

5 In 1336, Pope Benedict XII defined that this heavenly knowledge of God will be intuitive and face to face vision, without the mediation of any creature as what is seen; rather, what is seen will be the divine essence--God in Himself--showing Himself nakedly, clearly, and openly; and the blessed will take great joy in this experience of God, and thereby possess eternal life and rest (cf. DS 1000/530).

10 This doctrine sometimes is understood in a way which would make heaven be nothing more than fulfillment along the lines of the platonic conception mentioned in section C above--that is, an endless gazing upon the divine source of all beauty and truth, an ecstatic and individual act of contemplation. For several reasons, I do not think this narrow view of the beatific vision is correct. Furthermore, if a wider view is not
15 articulated, the attractiveness of heaven is likely to be diminished for many persons whose conceptions of a life of rich fulfillment are more varied and earthy.

The first point to note is that Scripture insists upon the mysteriousness of the vision of God. "What we shall later be has not yet come to light" (1 Jn 3.2). "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2.9). In the present life we live, as it were, an embryonic divine life in the womb of the Church, nurtured through the placenta of the sacraments. We are no more capable of fathoming heavenly experience than the embryo is of comprehending mature human relationships.

25 A second point is that the platonic conception of vision is limited by a philosophical conception of the ultimate principles of reality, and by the assumption that human capacities as such, once liberated from the barrier of bodiliness, can grasp these principles. In other words, that conception of beatific vision assumes finitude which precludes the infinite richness of intimacy with God. But since God is the source of everything beautiful, delightful, and satisfying, a human experience of Him in Himself
30 will fulfill every good desire and more. Nor need such an experience be purely static and passive, for God's life is not simply the being of an intelligible object, such as a platonic idea.

A third point is that in Scripture "see" and "know" usually have a richer connotation of total personal experience than these words have when they are used to state a
35 narrow view of heavenly beatitude. In John, "to see" often means to experience or to participate in (cf. Jn 3.3; 3.36; 8.51; 3 Jn 11). The desire to see God is not peculiar to the New Testament (cf. Ex 33.18-23); in the Old Testament context, one can hardly suppose that the experience sought was a platonic vision. "Know" often is used to mean experience (cf. 1 Sm 14.12; Is 47.8; Ezk 25.14). A husband knows his wife in having sexual intercourse with her (cf. Gn 4.1, 17, 25). To know God often means to recognize His status and authority, to adhere to Him (Hos 4.1-2; Jer 31.33). Similarly, for God to know someone is for Him to establish a special relationship with that person (cf. Gn 18.19; Hos 13.5; Jer 1.5). Eternal life, even here and now, consists in knowing God and Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 17.3).

45 A fourth point is that 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 (cf. Mt 11.25-27; Lk 10.22; Jn 10.14-15). This knowing will involve likeness to God; it is God's own knowing shared by His adopted children (cf. 1 Jn 3.2; 1 Cor 13.11-12). To enjoy this intimate, active communing with God, one must share
50 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 own knowing, we do not know what it is in itself, since--as I already explained in chapter one, section E--concepts drawn from anything else do not yield understanding of God in Himself.

55 To suppose that the beatific vision is properly a fruit of the divine nature in which created persons are made to share is not to exclude from eternal life an appropriate and fulfilling exercise of human capacities. Our Lord Jesus as God certainly lived fully His divine life throughout His earthly life. The Church teaches that during Christ's earthly life His human soul also enjoyed the knowledge the blessed will enjoy
60 in heaven (cf. DS 3645/2183). If we think of the beatific vision essentially as an exercise of human capacities, it becomes difficult to understand how Jesus lived the human life He did. [13] Of course, the inner life of Jesus must remain mysterious to us.

65 K. Other aspects of heavenly fellowship

If the idea that human capacities will be totally wrapt in the beatific vision is set aside, one can begin to take rather more seriously other aspects of what is revealed about heaven.

70 Jesus went to His Father's house, where there are many places to dwell, to prepare a place for His disciples (cf. Jn 14.2-3). The family of God on pilgrimage is traveling home, to live at peace in the family dwelling (cf. Is 11.6-16; Heb 3.1-6; 4.1-11; 11.8-16). The family of God is to enjoy an endless sabbath rest (cf. Rv 14.13). This eternal rest need not be conceived of as inactivity; rather it is like a vacation after
75 labor. Life will be communal, a fulfilling dwelling together (cf. Rv 21.3-4). In parable Jesus speaks of heaven as a wedding feast (cf. Mt 25.1-13; 22.1-14; Lk 14.15-24). This figure is developed beautifully in the last, visionary book of the New Testament (cf. Rv 19.7-9).

80 The Last Supper clearly is carried out in anticipation of a heavenly banquet: "I tell you, I will not drink this fruit of the vine from now until the day when I drink it new with you in my Father's reign" (Mt 26.29; cf. Mk 14.25; Lk 22.15-17). Like the Passover, the Eucharist is an act of familial communing. It joins Christians with one another in the unity of the redemptive death and resurrection life of Jesus. For this very reason, the Eucharist is in some real way not only a symbol but even a participation in the communal life of heaven.

The blessed in the presence of God are envisioned as sharing in an endless liturgy (cf. Rv 7.15; 21.5; 22.5). This conception surely is appropriate, just as during His earthly life our Lord Jesus prayed frequently to His Father in private and participated in the Jewish liturgy. However, the intimacy suggested by the image of the banquet precludes a liturgy in which God Himself is silent. Rather, as the host of a feast mingles with his guests, so God will converse with His family.

L. The resurrection of the dead

10 If one thinks of heaven as a merely intellectual gazing upon God, then the resurrection of the dead might seem superfluous. However, if one thinks of heaven as complete human fulfillment--including an endless social life like that of a wonderful, unending party--then the importance of resurrection is clearer. As St. Thomas Aquinas points out, even if one's soul were to enjoy salvation in another life, still such a
15 disembodied existence would hardly amount to the salvation of a human person, for the human person is bodily. The soul is only a part of the bodily person; "my soul is not I."^[14]

The question about resurrection and marriage which Jesus deals with (cf. Mk 12.18-27; Mt 22.22-23; Lk 20.27-40) makes clear that resurrection will occur, and that future
20 life will not be merely a continuation of present life. Since God will transform the conditions of life, people will be immortal; generation will no longer be appropriate. Jesus promises resurrection to those who share in the Eucharist (cf. Jn 5.24-30; 6.54-57). But the resurrection includes all humankind, not only those living in Christ (cf. Acts 24.15; 1 Cor 15.22; Mt 13.41). The Creeds make the doctrine of general resurrection
25 very clear, and the Church is at pains to exclude any doubt whether it is a realistic renewal of individual life in one's own body (cf. DS 76/40; 684/387; 801/464).

In his teaching, St. Paul clarifies the close relationship between the resurrection of Jesus and that of those who live and die in Him. The Father "who raised up the
30 Lord Jesus will raise us up along with Jesus and place both you and us in his presence" (2 Cor 4.14). "If we died with [Jesus] we shall also live with him" (2 Tm 2.11). The resurrection of Christians to share the life of Christ follows from their present relationship to Him (cf. 1 Thes 4.13-17). Christ is the first fruits in a heavenly harvest of life (cf. 1 Cor 15.20-23). Because the bodily relationship between the Christian and Christ is so real, St. Paul sometimes regards the resurrection of the Christian as a
35 fact already accomplished (cf. Eph 2.5-6; Col 3.1-4). The baptized are one flesh with the risen Lord; His accomplished resurrection somehow is shared in by those joined to Him. This is somewhat like the way in which the journey of two men meant that human-kind as a whole had visited the moon. But the solidarity of Christians with Christ is greater.

40 In his richest synthesis of doctrine on the resurrection, St. Paul makes clear that the new life of the resurrection, although different from and superior to our present life, will be really physical, not merely ghostly (cf. 1 Cor 15.12-56). A key point is that persons now and then will have two things in common: they are bodily and they are not dead. Resurrection life is far superior to present life: The new life is
45 immortal, glorious, and spiritual--that is, heavenly and suited to persons sharing in divine life. Paul did not receive an enthusiastic welcome for the doctrine of the resurrection, since it seemed foolish to those Greek thinkers who regarded the body as an obstacle to fulfillment (cf. Acts 17.31-32; 1 Cor 1.18-25; 15.35).

As I mentioned previously, the whole of the created world is related to humankind
50 and will be involved in the fulfillment of Christians (cf. Rom 8.19-22). On the one hand, some passages of Scripture seem to suggest that the physical universe will be utterly destroyed (cf. Mk 13-31; 2 Pt 3.7-12). On the other hand, God created things good and to last (cf. Wis 1.14). The close relationship of the cosmos with human persons suggests that the new heavens and new earth which will replace the present ones
55 (cf. Rv 21.1), will have been transformed along with human bodily life. The whole cosmos, it seems reasonable to suppose, is destined to share in the same sort of total renewal initiated in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Certain texts in the New Testament seem to suggest that the coming of the Lord, the resurrection, the transformation of the universe, and the final judgment would come
60 very soon. Some of these are sayings on the lips of Jesus Himself (cf. Mk 9.1; 13.30; Mt 24.34; Lk 21.32-33). Others are not (cf. 1 Thes 4.15-17; 1 Pt 4.7; Rv 3.11; 22.20). At the same time, Jesus is said to have stated that not even He knew the time of the end, for this knowledge was reserved to the heavenly Father (cf. Mk 13.32; Mt 24.36; Acts 1.7). A passage in the Second Epistle of Peter (3.3-10) often is taken to be an
65 attempt to square the delay in the coming of Jesus with a previous common expectation that it would occur shortly. However, no one could have supposed that the project of spreading the Gospel to the whole world could be carried out quickly (cf. Mt 24.14; Mk 13.10; 16.15-18). Paul also suggests a long period of activity for the Church (cf. Rom 11.25).

70 It seems to me that this difficulty could be resolved if we took the relativity of time much more seriously than it usually is taken. There is a strong tendency to think of time as absolute. But the statement: "In the Lord's eyes, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years are as a day" (2 Pt 3.8), can be understood as expressing a more precise truth than that time is not ultimately significant for the eternal God.
75 Time actually is a relative measure which depends upon a definite physical system and also upon various factors within the system. Time is not an absolute precondition of all existence, uniform for all things and all conditions.

With this point in mind, we might ask how the present age and the new age of Christ can possibly be related within the same temporal scheme. In some ways, the new
80 age already has begun--using "already" to refer to it from within our present temporal framework. In other ways, the new age will not arrive until the end of the world--again using "will not arrive" and "end" to refer from within our present temporal framework to a reality of a different order.

If this speculation has validity, it might be true both that the coming of Christ

is imminent and that it remains distant. In any case, from a practical perspective the most important point--and the one constantly stressed in the Gospel--is that Christ will come unexpectedly and we must always be prepared (cf. Mt 24.36-51; 25.1-30; Lk 12.35-48; and so on). For each individual, the end of the world is as near as his or her own death; it can come as suddenly as an automobile crash or a heart attack.

M. The enduring reality of human actions

Very often Christians have assumed that their day to day actions pass away. They certainly do not think these actions will continue to exist forever in heaven. This view of matters tends to reduce the whole of present life to the status of a mere means destined to fall away. One thinks of life in this world as though it were a rocket which puts one in heavenly orbit, a rocket no longer needed and allowed to fall and burn away when heaven is attained.

When I was a child, each spring my parents bought each of the bigger children a kite to fly. The first year I received one for myself, I took it at once and eagerly unwrapped it, only to discover that when I had torn away the wrapping, only the sticks remained. I learned then that it can be a mistake to think that something is a mere means, when it might be an important part of the reality with which one is concerned. The point I wish to make now is that human actions done in this life are destined to be an important constituent part of eternal life.

Prior to Vatican II, it might have been far more difficult to maintain this thesis. However, the Council teaches:

Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom. Nevertheless, 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. This will be so 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." [Preface of the Feast of Christ the King]. On this earth that kingdom is already present in mystery. When the Lord returns, it will be brought into full flower (GS 39).

In this passage, the Council asserts that what Christians do here and now on this earth contributes in some mysterious way to the coming completion in Jesus. Heaven and earth are not separated; the kingdom is here, although hidden, and present human achievements are being preserved and built into it. In the immediately preceding article, the Council says that one of the roles assigned by the Spirit is that He summons some to "dedicate themselves to the earthly service of men and to make ready the material of the celestial realm by this ministry of theirs" (GS 38).

The question is: How can activity which belongs to this world, which is passing away, contribute to the building of the eternal kingdom? No amount of explanation will altogether eliminate the mystery, but the following considerations might be helpful.

To begin with, there is an aspect of human action which is not of itself transitory. I will explain this point at length in part three. But some examples can establish the fact. Jesus offers His body once for all, yet His sacrificial act of obedience and mediation lasts forever (cf. Heb 7.25-28; 10.7-12). Mary becomes the mother of God by her assent; this act of acceptance does not cease, and is now the principle of her maternal relationship to those united with Christ (cf. LG 63). The act of the person who dies in mortal sin is never left behind. Likewise, the works of those who die in the Lord accompany them (cf. Rv 14.13). At the wedding of the Lamb, His bride wears a dress, of finest linen and brilliant white; this dress "is the virtuous deeds of God's saints" (Rv 19.8). Similar linen clothes the heavenly army in its ultimate struggle (cf. Rv 19.14).

The lastingness of human acts and goods in heaven is the other side of the hidden but real presence of heaven to us as we live this life. Actions done to others affect Christ; actions done in His name contribute to His completion. The union of Christian marriage not only symbolizes but in some real way shares in and contributes to the growing bodily union of Christ and the Church; there will be no marrying in heaven, not because the communion marriage realizes will be no more, but because the limitations of this good--its exclusivity and functional relationship to procreation--will be transcended.

No one doubts that children raised by Christian married couples for our Lord will be good works present in heaven, nor that the spiritual children begotten by priests can last forever. Even now, our relationship with Jesus and with Mary and the other saints continues; if this were not so, prayer to them would be pointless. All the more so, personal relationships initiated in this world will remain in heaven. Real relationships with others are built of a fabric of actions--of commitments and understandings. If heaven is to be the reunion for which we hope, then such actions must last.

Of course, there also are transient aspects of our actions and their good effects. But I believe we must understand the teaching of Vatican II as an extension of our belief in the resurrection. The new heaven and new earth will include the whole community of those risen in Christ. Their bodily lives did not stop at the surface of their skins. Rather, they embodied themselves in a humanized world. So this world too must in some way be reconstituted, for otherwise resurrection would be incomplete.

The prospect remains mysterious, and it seems to me useless to ask here too many detailed questions. The important point is that as life proceeds, the good works of Christians which seem to come and go, even those which fail in their worldly effect, are contributing to the building up of the mysterious world of completion in Christ. The goods of human nature and the fruits of human work, gathered from all times and places, provide the material of the heavenly kingdom.

If human actions initiated in this world have enduring reality in heaven, the reality of the bodily resurrection also argues for continuing and expanded expressions of

the selves formed by these enduring actions. Scripture suggests a continuing heavenly liturgy (cf. Rv 4); the whole Christian tradition reinforces this idea.[15] Such acts will be human ones involving multitudes in social expression. Moreover, if each person gains a unique insight from his or her experience of divine intimacy, there will be occasion for endless conversation and constant growth of insight. Conversation is a characteristic human action. And while one can only speculate, there seems no reason to exclude various forms of artistic work and of play, and other experiences which now are innocently enjoyed in Christ.

10 N. The mutuality of the sharing of goods in heaven

In section G I pointed out that one should not suppose creation is for God's glory as if He acquired anything for Himself from this work. One cannot give God anything which is not already His; one cannot enrich Him from whom all goods come (cf. Jas 1.17; Acts 17.25). Yet in some sense human goods can be shared with the divine Persons, so that the communal life of heaven involves a certain mutuality.

The very notion of sacrifice, which is central to all religion, is the concept of a gift offered to God; God's acceptance of the gift is important to the one who offers sacrifice. The Old Testament knew an elaborate ritual of sacrifices; the prophets criticized the displacement of love, faithfulness, and good works by mere ritual (cf. Hos 6.6; Jer 7.21-23). A spirit of willing obedience and a contrite spirit, however, are gifts which God will not reject (cf. Ps 40.7-9; 51.19). By virtue of His obedience Christ "gave himself for us as an offering to God, a gift of pleasing fragrance" (Eph 5.2; cf. Heb 9-10).

The conception of sacrifice is implicit in the institution by Jesus of the Eucharist, and the Church solemnly teaches that in the Mass a real sacrifice is offered to God (DS 1751/848). As the very prayers of the Mass itself make clear, Catholics who participate in the Mass offer the sacrifice of Jesus with Him and join with it the offering of their own lives (cf. SC 48). Moreover, throughout the Bible and Christian liturgy runs the theme of praise and thanks; these are due to God for His goodness and greatness, and they are true gifts to Him. Christian life is a living, spiritual sacrifice (cf. 1 Pt 2.5; Rom 12.1). Thus, human goods, immanent in a Christian life, can be given to God, and the sharing of goods in heaven can involve a certain mutuality between divine Persons and human persons.

From one point of view, the gift of human goods to God can be understood as the contribution of these goods to the complete reality God intends in creating. Obedient service fulfills the providential plan of the Father, builds up the body of Christ toward the ultimate fulfillment of the mission given Him by the Father, and cooperates with the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. In the accomplishment of His mission, Christ "will hand over the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Cor 15.24), not that His own reign will end (cf. 2 Pt 1.11; and the Credo, DS 150/86), but that His mission will in all respects be complete, and the Father's will done on earth as in heaven.

But beyond this, in wishing to do God's will and to please Him, we must believe that our effort is received by Him with satisfaction (cf. Ps 104.34) and that we somehow return good to the Lord for the good He has given us (cf. Ps 116.12-15). According to St. John of the Cross, the bride and the Bridegroom, the soul and the Son of God, show one another their riches "in order to celebrate the feast of this espousal, and they mutually communicate their goods and delights with a wine of savory love in the Holy Spirit." [16]

While it is wrong to suppose that God needs anything or that we can in any way enrich Him, it also is wrong to imagine that God cannot be given anything by us if this supposition is based upon characteristics which make human beings unreceptive to gifts. Whatever the assumed characteristics might be, they cannot be attributed to God in the same sense that they are to anyone else. God is not like the person who has everything for whom it is impossible to find a suitable present, and He is not like the person who is so important that any gift we offer will never reach him. Thinking we know what God is can render this problem insoluble. We must remember His absolute mysteriousness. Whatever God is like in Himself, which we do not understand, He is such that He wants and rejoices in our free gift to Him of our own lives in the submission of faith and of love. This gift is not an empty package; it must be filled with the spiritual sacrifice of good deeds.

The situation of the child who gives to a parent, while only an analogy, throws some light on this matter. The child has nothing of its own. But a child can take something which its parents allow it to use and bring this as an offering. The child's gift somehow expresses what is the child's own: a loving and obedient heart. In sharing human goods with the divine Persons, we give Them what is Theirs with a heart which also belongs to Them and with love They first give us. Nevertheless, the free giving itself is truly ours; we can withhold it, and the choice not to withhold this gift is pleasing to our heavenly Father.

70 O. Hell -- the alternative to willing cooperation toward completion

The account of the judgment and many other passages in Scripture make clear that some do persistently refuse to offer the only gift God wants (cf. Mt 25.31-46; Jn 5.28-29; 2 Thes 1.9; and so on). Moreover, the teaching of the Church is that some are separated from God forever (cf. DS 76/40; 801/429; 1705/915; and so on). Running through the story of salvation is a thread of opposition by personal forces of evil: Satan and his cohort (cf. Is 14.12-14; Rv 12.1-17; GS 37). "Christ has freed us from the power of Satan" (SC 6). Nevertheless, if we fail to live as we ought, we may be sent away into the everlasting fire prepared for Satan and his adherents (cf. Mt 25.41).

In the Gospel of John, it is explained that Jesus comes to save, not to condemn (cf. Jn 3.17; 12.47). His teaching discriminates because it compels everyone to take a stand (cf. Jn 5.22; 9.39). But the principle of discrimination is the truth of Jesus, and the agent of condemnation is the individual himself or herself who rejects it

(cf. Jn 12.47-48). These truths about sin and punishment already are suggested by the first nine chapters of Genesis, which make clear that God creates everything good, that evil arises from creaturely freedom, and that only persistent refusal of salvation--not some arbitrary imposition by God--brings about an inevitable consequence, which is called "punishment" only by analogy.

What is most central in the misery of hell is the natural consequence of refusing to maintain and grow in friendship with God, namely, loss of any share in heavenly fellowship (cf. 1 Cor 6.10; Gal 5.19-21). In contrast to the life which is communicated to those who accept Jesus as Lord, hell is eternal death (cf. Jn 5.29; 8.24; 10.28; 11.25-26). Hell is being excluded from the heavenly banquet (cf. Mt 22.11-14).

Because their own wills are set against it, some will not share in the Body of Christ, will not enjoy the fellowship of the divine Persons and of the blessed. Yet even these, despite themselves, somehow have a place in the ultimate completion; in a peculiar fashion they are united to Christ. Not united in life and friendship, but linked to Him as opponents who hated Him despite His love for them; His love triumphs eternally by forever respecting their refusal to respond to it.

If those who are eternally opposed to Christ are in this state by their own choice, why can they not alter their choice? Is this fixation, at least, not a punishment arbitrarily imposed by divine power? The answer is: No. As I shall explain more fully in part three, freedom of choice is a capacity of self-determination. As such, one's free choices of themselves are constitutive of a self and are permanent. The present possibility of changing one's mind depends upon the present complexity and variability of human nature. A person completely at one with his or her freely chosen self would have reason to continue in it and no reason to alter it. Presumably, after death persons are in this situation; therefore, they can no longer change their minds.

Besides the loss of fellowship in the heavenly kingdom, those in hell also are said to suffer from "fire." Apart from the fact that "fire" connotes painful experience, the Church's teaching leaves open the precise nature of this suffering.[17] As a possibility worth considering, I suggest that the fire of hell can be understood as the way in which heavenly fellowship, and the new heavens and new earth, suited to the blessed who share in divine life, are experienced by those who remain alienated from this life. If one refused to go to a party but found oneself in the midst of it, yet still maintained one's stubborn refusal to share in the celebration, then the party itself and everything which pleased participants would be an irritant. The situation of those in hell, I think, will be somewhat like this. Everything will be suited to the joy of the blessed; everything will bespeak the triumph of Christ. Those who are pilgrims now, often in a painful and hostile world, will be at home. But one perfectly comfortable with the world as it now is will not find the home of the blessed, eternally bursting with their joy, in any way satisfactory and to his or her taste.

Notes to chapter four

1. A very useful work to study as background is Jacques Maritain, Moral Philosophy: An Historical and Critical Survey of the Great Systems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964). Indispensable for the history of ethics is Vernon J. Bourke, History of Ethics (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1968).

2. Although defective in certain important respects, a powerful critique of the utopianism of all such ideal communities is John Passmore, The Perfectibility of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), pp. 190-259.

3. See Germain Grisez and Russell Shaw, Beyond the New Morality: The Responsibilities of Freedom (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), pp. 150-157, 201-207.

4. See *ibid.*, pp. 42-75. In developing my own views of the relationships between individuals and communities, I learned a good deal from Gabriel Marcel; Josiah Royce's philosophy also is illuminating. See Gabriel Marcel, Creative Fidelity, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1964); Josiah Royce, The Philosophy of Loyalty (New York: Macmillan, 1908).

5. The present section and much of the remainder of this chapter deals with topics treated in contemplative systematic theology under the heading "eschatology"--the treatise on the last things. A good, recent treatment of the standard topics in this area is E. J. Fortman, S.J., Everlasting Life After Death (New York: Alba House, 1976). Another helpful work is Michael Schmaus, Dogma, vol. 6, Justification and the Last Things (Kansas City and London: Sheed and Ward, 1977), pp. 151-274.

6. Two important articles by one author clarify many of the points considered in the present section: Philip J. Donnelly, S.J., "Saint Thomas and the Ultimate Purpose of Creation," Theological Studies, 2 (1941), pp. 53-83; "The Doctrine of the Vatican Council on the End of Creation," Theological Studies, 4 (1943), pp. 3-33.

7. A helpful, simple introduction to the idea of completion (*pleroma*) in Christ, as the idea is developed in the later epistles of St. Paul, is in George T. Montague, S.M., The Living Thought of St. Paul: An Introduction to Pauline Theology (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1966), pp. 182-203.

8. See Pierre Benoît, O.P., Jesus and the Gospel, vol. 2, trans. Benet Weatherhead (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), pp. 84-87. The entire chapter, "Body, Head and *Pleroma* in the Epistles of the Captivity," pp. 51-92, is very rich in content, clearly developed, and well argued; it will repay close study.

9. Many aspects of the point stated here are developed at length by Gustave Martelet, S.J., The Risen Christ and the Eucharistic World, trans. René Hague (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), pp. 117-179.

10. See Benoît, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-67.

11. Cf. St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, 20, 7.

12. See Benoît, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-92.

13. In current theology, even among faithful Catholics, questions are being raised about the common, received view of the beatific knowledge of Jesus as man during His earthly life. For an introduction to some of this discussion, see E. L. Mascall,

Theology and the Gospel of Christ: An Essay in Reorientation (London: SPCK, 1977), pp. 121-194, especially pp. 160-169. The position I am suggesting--namely, that in no case is the beatific vision an operation of properly human capacities--is not one considered (so far as I know) by others, but it is a possible solution to some of the difficulties

5 with which they are concerned.

14. St. Thomas, Super primam epistolam ad Corinthios lectura, cap. XV, lect. II: ". . . now since the soul is part of the body of man, it is not the whole man, and my soul is not I; and so even though the soul should reach salvation in another life, still not I, nor any man."

10 15. See St. Augustine, City of God, XXII, 30.

16. St. John of the Cross, The Spiritual Canticle, Stanza 30, 1, in The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 527.

15 17. To say that the Church's teaching leaves open the nature of the fire of hell is not to say that there is no such thing. Scripture and the Fathers of the Church are too constant in using the language of "fire" to permit us to dispense with it when we admittedly do not know precisely what the experience of hell is like. For all we know, the pain of ordinary burning might be mild by comparison with the experience of hell; pain is not merely a sensation, but a complex psychological experience. See Roger Trigg,

20 Pain and Emotion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

Questions for study and review

25 1. Compare other views on the question of human fulfillment with the Christian promise of fulfillment in Christ. Show how the latter combines the good features and excludes the bad ones of every other conception of human fulfillment.

2. Explain what is meant by the coincidence of "already" and "not yet" during the present era--that is, the time between the resurrection and the return in glory of our Lord Jesus.

30 3. What does it mean to say that God creates for His own glory? That the purpose of priestly ministry and life is the glory of God?

4. What is meant by completion in Christ? In what ways can human persons be united to Christ? How is the bodily aspect of this unity to be explained?

35 5. Distinguish and relate the following expressions: "completion in Christ," "Body of Christ," "Church," "kingdom of God," "People of God," and "family of God."

6. What does the Church teach concerning the beatific vision? Why must this teaching not be understood narrowly? How can the notion of a banquet be used to convey a broad and inclusive conception of the beatific vision?

40 7. Exactly what is Christian faith concerning the resurrection of the dead? Why is bodily resurrection so important, if the soul survives and can commune with God even prior to the resurrection?

8. What ground is there in Scripture and in the Church's teaching for thinking that human actions done now will endure forever?

45 9. How can we think of heaven as a mutual sharing between divine and human persons without supposing that God needs us as much as we need Him?

10. Give a balanced and accurate statement of Catholic teaching concerning hell. How would you reply to someone who said: "You shouldn't preach about hell today. People are no longer going to be motivated by terror of God; hell just turns them off."