

Natural Law and the Transcendent Source of Human Fulfillment

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John Finnis points out that, although the basic aspects of human well-being are really and unquestionably good, further practical questions arise, including ones “about the possibility of a deeper explanation of obligation” and “the point of living according to the requirements of practical reasonableness.”¹ I shall not deal in this essay with what Finnis has written about those questions. Instead, I will first summarize the view Finnis and I share about the emergence of the moral *ought* and explain its inherent normative force. Second, I will sketch out my own view of what that *ought* gains in normative force from what one can know by philosophical reflection about the Creator and about the ultimate end for which human beings should act. Third, I will sketch out my view of what the moral *ought* can gain in normative force—for people who live by the light of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—by theological reflection on the Kingdom of God.

I. The Moral *Ought*: Its Emergence and Inherent Force

Moral norms are often confused with positive laws or with informal sociocultural norms—rules that depend on the choices of societies’ law-makers or opinion leaders. Young children, unable to understand the reasons behind any of the norms they are taught, inevitably consider all of them binding inasmuch as adults enforce conformity. Some passages of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) are easily misunderstood as implying that moral obligations depend on God’s will and might well be different. Both those who entirely reject many of the moral norms included in those sacred writings and people who violate those norms while regarding them as binding are likely to conveniently regard them as arbitrary rules.

Finnis, Joseph Boyle, and I explained that moral norms are truths underlying sound moral judgments and are one kind of practical truth. We argued that there are self-evident practical truths, which take the form: X is a basic human good to be promoted and protected. These self-evident practical principles direct human beings toward various intelligible aspects of the well-being and flourishing of individual persons and of communities. The basic human goods are: life, including health and bodily integrity; skillful work and play; knowledge and esthetic experience; harmony among a person’s own judgments, choices, feelings, and behavior; harmony with other human

¹ *CEJF* V, 26–9, 31–3, 56–79, 135–8, 179–88, 193–202, 370–1; *FoE*, 136–53; *Aquinas*, 294–334; *NLNR* 371–413, 424–5, 477–9.

beings; harmony with the transcendent source of meaning and value, which we call *God*; and marriage, including parenthood.²

While the first principle of practical reasoning—*Good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided*—demands one to be reasonable enough to avoid pointless behavior, the first principle of morality makes a stronger demand: to be entirely reasonable. “*Right reason* is nothing but *unfettered reason*, working throughout deliberation and receiving full attention.”³ When one’s feelings incline one to make a choice on grounds one knows to be less than fully reasonable, the directiveness of practical knowledge becomes moral normativity: *is-to-be* becomes *ought-to-be*. “The ought-to-be which calls for morally right choice represents the full directiveness of practical knowledge, while the is-to-be which commends the morally wrong choice represents a fragment of that directiveness operating in isolation from the whole.”⁴

We proposed a rather complex formulation of the first principle of morality.⁵ I now think that the self-evident truth underlying intermediate moral principles is simpler. In its contest with feelings, reason of course rules in favor of itself: *When one’s feelings incline one to choose what reasons indicate is not to be chosen or not to choose what reasons indicate is to be chosen, one ought to choose in accord with reasons.*

Being self-evident, that principle cannot be demonstrated. But it can be explained. Since every option for choice has the support of some feelings (without such support nothing becomes an option for choice⁶), choosing in accord with reasons involves subordinating one’s feelings, not disregarding them. Moreover, since all the principles of practical reasoning together direct actions toward the fulfillment of every aspect of a human being as a whole person, no part of oneself would be neglected if one consistently chose in accord with reasons, whereas some part of oneself is neglected or ill-treated whenever one chooses in accord with insubordinate feelings.

In our works, Finnis, Boyle, and I call intermediate moral principles *requirements of practical reasonableness* or *modes of responsibility*.⁷ Like the first principle of morality, these intermediate principles do not refer to specific kinds of acts. So, philosophers sometimes mistakenly regard one or another of them as the first principle of morality.

Perhaps the most widely recognized intermediate moral principle is fairness: In the absence of a *reason* for treating different people differently, one ought not treat them differently according to one’s special feelings toward them.⁸ Another intermediate moral principle forbids taking revenge and otherwise intentionally harming others: One ought not implement feelings of anger and hatred by choosing to harm another (reason always forbids intentionally violating anyone’s good). Again, desire, fear, and lethargy unintegrated with reason ought to give way to reasons: someone dieting for

² Grisez et al., “Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends” (1987f), 102–20.

³ Grisez et al., “Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends” (1987f), 121.

⁴ Grisez et al., “Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends” (1987f), 125.

⁵ Grisez et al., “Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends” (1987f), 127–9.

⁶ Grisez et al., “Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends” (1987f), 122–5.

⁷ Grisez et al., “Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends” (1987f), 127–8. Russell Shaw and I introduced the expression *modes of responsibility* in Grisez and Shaw, *Beyond the New Morality*, 108, where they also were called *guidelines for love*.

⁸ Of course, one sometimes does have a reason for treating different people differently according to one’s special feelings for them.

health's sake ought not gorge on rich foods; someone fearing cancer ought not avoid a checkup that might find it; and someone who has undertaken a difficult job ought not delay setting to work. Then too: One ought not follow feelings that incline one to destroy, damage, or impede an instance of a basic good so as to attain a purportedly greater good or prevent a purportedly greater evil (the alleged reasons for doing so are always rationalizations).⁹

Even without any sophisticated philosophical or theological reflection, mature and thoughtful people notice that a person's free choices and the actions that carry them out not only have or fail to have their intended effects but also affect the agent himself or herself. "You will know them by their fruits" (Mt 7:16) is a common-sense saying. People who regularly make morally good choices are morally good people, and people who make morally bad choices are morally bad people. Morally good people have an integrity that morally bad people lack. That integrity, although likely to be more or less misconceived due to morally defective sociocultural structures, is recognized and valued by those who strive to be good.

Quite often, one cannot act for a good without cooperating with another or others. Those cooperating ought, of course, to be fair to one another. Whatever good all the cooperating parties intend is their common good, and the parties, in fairness, should intend not only benefit to themselves but to the others. If some parties fail to carry out their fair part in the cooperation, they deprive the others of their fair share of benefit. Thus the moral *ought* of fairness in cooperating constitutes a moral bond between the parties. What each party ought to do is a moral obligation and duty, and corresponding to that moral obligation and duty is the other parties' right to their fair share of benefits.¹⁰

St. Thomas Aquinas thought that the first morally significant act of unbaptized children is either to direct themselves to God as their true, ultimate end or to sinfully fail to do that.¹¹ However, the Second Vatican Council teaches that people can faultlessly lack explicit knowledge of God who nevertheless strive—with the help of divine grace, which, however, they need not be aware of—to live upright lives, and so can be saved.¹² As St. Paul observed, people naturally understand moral requirements and can apply them to their own actions (see Rom 2:12–16).

Aquinas also held that, in making choices and acting, one must intend as one's ultimate end something that one expects will so completely satisfy that it will leave one nothing else to desire, and that one therefore cannot intend two different ultimate ends at the same time.¹³ In this matter, both his premise and his conclusion seem unsound.

Anything that is not a person tends toward a fulfillment fixed by its nature and environment. But although the basic human goods are unchanging, the ways of realizing them are not fixed. Rather, we human beings develop new ways of being fulfilled. Therefore, we never need to be satisfied with the fulfillment we already have,

⁹ See Finnis, et al. "The Futility of Consequentialist Arguments," Ch. 9, *NDRM*, 238–72.

¹⁰ While not everything one ought and ought not to do is an obligation of the sort explained here, there is a general moral obligation of a different sort, which will be explained in the next part of this essay.

¹¹ See *ST* 1–2 q. 89 a. 6 c. and ad 3.

¹² *Lumen gentium*, 16.

¹³ See *ST* 1–2 q. 1 a. 5 c.

and we can intend something as our ultimate end without supposing that it ever will be realized in a way that will leave nothing more to be desired. In fact, not all those making morally significant choices, and perhaps very few of those doing so, suppose that anything they can hope to realize in and by their actions and can intend as an ultimate end promises such complete satisfaction that its attainment would leave nothing to be desired.¹⁴

Aquinas himself holds that infidels—that is, people who sinfully refuse to accept the gift of faith—need not sin in everything they do, because their unbelief does not completely destroy the good of human nature. So, infidels can do good deeds that they do not order to the end of their unbelief but intend for some natural good.¹⁵ According to Aquinas, one always must be acting for *some* ultimate end.¹⁶ So, infidels must intend as an ultimate end distinct from that of their unbelief either the natural good they intend in their good acts or some other good ulterior to it. *Pace* Aquinas, such infidels must, therefore, have at least two ultimate ends at the same time.

Many people simultaneously pursue for their own sakes—and therefore for no other ultimate end—two or more different goods, such as their marriage and family, their career, their favorite form of recreation, and their eventual life after death in heaven. Even those who engage in religious activities and avoid mortal sins for the sake of the last of these may find it impossible to see how pursuing the first three can contribute anything to the last and how pursuing the last can contribute anything to the first three. With loose life plans, such people juggle diverse interests rather than coordinate them, much less subordinate them to some single ultimate end.

From the preceding points it follows that some people know and live in accord with a good deal of moral truth, even if not all of it, without knowing God and/or without acting for a single ultimate end. For such people, the moral *ought* not only has the inherent appeal of its reasonableness and of the acting person's own integrity but the essentially related appeal of the specific human goods that moral norms promote and safeguard.

Fairness toward others and abstaining from intentionally harming them make for harmony among people, not just the unstable harmony that is sometimes brought about by manipulation and/or domination, but the more stable harmony of transparency and mutuality. While doing evil to achieve good is likely to seem promising in the short run, it often proves disastrous in the long run. Subordinating desires and fears and lethargic feelings to reason promotes and protects real goods likely to be damaged if insubordinate feelings have their way.

The benefits of morally good choices and actions generally are so real and so obvious that most moral norms bearing on one's own good may seem to be plain good sense. Of course, habitual conformity to some moral norms, especially those subordinating sexual feelings, yields less obvious intelligible goods—for example, the ability to say no that is essential for a fully meaningful yes, friendships in which unsatisfied erotic

¹⁴ See Ryan, "Must the Acting Person Have a Single Ultimate End?"

¹⁵ See *ST* 2–2 q. 10 a. 4 c. and ad 2; cf. q. 23 a. 7 ad 1; *Sent*, II d. 41 q. 1 a. 2; *De malo* q. 2 a. 5 ad 7.

¹⁶ See *ST* 1–2 q. 1 a. 4.

attraction is fully integrated with mutual good will, and the wonder of intimacy first experienced by a couple who have made an unbreakable commitment to each other.

Nevertheless, immoral people often seem to win out and prosper while virtue seems to be its own punishment. Many large organizations proclaim ethical ideals that they do not practice. When people who lead upright private lives assume the responsibilities of office in a government, a business, a university, or a church, they generally seem to think that to protect and promote the organization's interests it is necessary to do evil—especially but not only to lie and to cooperate with evildoers.

II. How the Creator and the Ultimate End Enhance the Normative Force of the Moral *Ought*

The existence of anything we experience or can imagine is contingent upon the fulfillment of conditions outside the thing.¹⁷ The fact that each contingent thing exists is not included in what the thing is. Finding oneself in a universe of things that do not exist of themselves and seeking to account for the existence of these contingent things, one reasonably posits an ultimate cause that depends on nothing else. I will call that ultimate cause *the Creator*. The Creator exists of itself: what it is includes that it is. But nothing can lack anything included in what it is. So, the Creator of contingent things cannot lack existence. It *necessarily* is.

Reflecting on this argument makes it clear that the Creator is utterly mysterious. The argument shows that the Creator's existence is included in what it is. By contrast, the existence of creatures neither is included in nor flows from what they are or from any characteristic they have. It follows that whatever the Creator is cannot be what any creature is. And whatever any creature is, the Creator is not. Thus, whenever one uses a word in the same sense it is used to say something true about a creature, what one says about the creature must be denied of the Creator.

Thus, the Creator is not a body, matter, or energy; is not spatial or temporal; does not evolve or change in any way. But the Creator's changelessness does not imply fixity or rigidity, for those also are intelligible characteristics of creatures. If the Creator is not a body, neither is it a mind or conscious subject—using *mind* and *conscious subject* in the same sense we use them about ourselves. By experiencing ourselves and one another, we learn what it is to know, to choose, to be a person. But using words with the same sense they have when we talk about ourselves, we must say: the Creator does not know, does not choose, is not a person. Indeed, using words in the same sense they have when we talk about creatures, we must say that the Creator is not a substance and has no nature.

Can we even say the Creator causes? Not in any of the senses in which we say a creature causes. However, while we cannot know what the Creator is, we can know something about it by considering how creatures are related to it. To adapt a saying of

¹⁷ The treatment of God here is adapted from Grisez, "Natural Law, God, Religion, and Human Fulfillment," 11–14. The argument is articulated more fully and defended against philosophical objections in Grisez, *Beyond the New Theism*, 19–272.

Aquinas: We cannot grasp what the Creator is, but what it is not, and how other things are related to it.¹⁸

The question about contingent realities that initiates the argument leading to the existence of the Creator poses a problem unlike any other: Why do such things exist? That why leads to a unique because; it leads to the Creator as the source of the being of everything else.

Various sorts of things within our experience are called “causes” in diverse senses. For instance, the fact that these words are on a printed page is caused in diverse ways by the author’s choice of them, the typesetter’s work, and the physical-chemical properties of paper and ink. Though accounting in diverse ways for the fact that the words are on the page, all those causes are called “causes” because they answer why questions. So, when we ask, “Why do contingent things exist?” whatever answers that why question also is said to be their cause, using *cause* in a unique sense.

Where did that unique sense of *cause* come from? It developed in the argument and emerged from it, along with a unique sense of *is*, when one concluded that there is a cause of contingent things. That instance of fresh meaning emerging is like other instances that occurred when people asked other why questions and answered them by discovering other sorts of causes.

In sum, our knowledge about the relationship of created things to the Creator enables us to say, with a sense that is definite but unique, that the Creator causes. So, without understanding what the Creator is, we know that the Creator has what it takes to account for the actual being of the universe.

Something of what we know about human knowing and willing also can be attributed by analogy to the Creator. Since creatures need not be, they need not have been created. So, the Creator need not have created anything. Its creating, therefore, must have been free. On this basis, it is reasonable in thinking about the Creator to use the model of human agency through deliberation and free choice.¹⁹ Of course, such predications must be not only based on the relationships that authorize them but limited to what those relationships authorize.

When we consider other things and ourselves as creatures of an intelligent and free Creator, we naturally attribute to him the order we find in the world around us and in ourselves. Included in that order is the directiveness of the principles of practical reason. Just as the truth that a universe of contingent things exists is obvious but points to the Creator, so the truth that our human goods are to be realized is evident but points to the directive intelligence of the Creator, who is in and of himself completely real and so not like us, who must *act* to realize (*real-ize*) ourselves.

This account of the transcendent source of the prescriptivity of practical principles is unlike a moral argument for God’s existence that regards conscience as consciousness of divine commands. Some versions of that view claim that God could make anything morally obligatory by commanding us to do it. More plausible is the idea that human goods can be known theoretically, and that divine commands, which presuppose that

¹⁸ “Non enim de Deo capere possumus quid est, sed quid non est, et qualiter alia se habeant ad ipsum” Aquinas, *ScG I c. 30*.

¹⁹ See Grisez, *Beyond the New Theism*, 255, 268–72.

theoretical knowledge, supply the *ought*. But even that notion fails to recognize the truth of self-evident practical principles.

As I explained in the first part of this essay, moral normativity arises from the prescriptivity of the principles of practical reason, when that prescriptivity is confronted by feelings that incline one to behavior inconsistent with what reasons prescribe. Consequently, the rational cogency of any moral guidance we receive from others presupposes our own insight into basic human goods, just as everything we learn from others about the natural world presupposes our own experience and basic understanding of that world. Thus, the commands of others—even commandments taken to be God's—can make a *moral* claim on us only by appealing to the full directiveness of the principles of practical reason.

When we understand that directiveness as guidance provided by our Creator, our sense of its dependability deepens, and with that the normative force of the moral *ought* which it generates increases, and general moral obligation emerges. This emergence can be explained.

Children who follow their parents' guidance cooperate with their parents. Similarly, if one thinks that the Creator has provided the principles of practical reason to guide us to our fulfillment, one will suppose that one is cooperating with the Creator when one follows the direction of practical reason in promoting and protecting basic human goods. By the same token, following emotions against reasons will be failing to cooperate with the Creator and disobeying his guidance.

Like parents interested in their children, the Creator obviously is interested both in the realization of the goods toward which he directs human beings, by providing them with the principles of practical reason, and in the moral integrity of human agents. So, disobeying the Creator's guidance deprives him of what he wished to realize in and through the cooperation. Therefore, whenever one is aware of a moral *ought*, one is aware not only of practical reason's moral demand but of moral obligation, of being bound to obey the Creator.

Still, one first knows the prescriptivity of practical reason's principles; only then does one become aware both of the moral norms to which that prescriptivity gives rise and of its transcendent source. And only with that twofold awareness can one become aware of moral obligation, of being bound by the source of practical reason's prescriptivity to follow it integrally rather than to follow feelings at odds with the Creator's integral guidance.

There are two ways in which people in cooperative relationships can fulfill their responsibilities to one another.

In one way, they can treat each other fairly, each intending that the other receive his or her fair share in the common good they intend to realize by cooperating. For example, if I buy a new car and sell my old one to a teenage girl who responds to my ad, she and I cooperate for the common good of a mutually beneficial exchange. I fulfill my responsibility by being honest and asking a fair price—not, for instance, taking advantage of her inexperience or urgent need to make a deal—thus willing that she obtain her fair share of the common good.

In another way, the parties in a cooperative relationship can treat each other lovingly, each intending to benefit the other for his or her own sake, and thus intending

that the other receive, not only his or her fair share of the common good they intend by cooperating, but that and more, as a contribution to his or her overall good. For example, two men who are true friends go golfing together. Each not only wills the other to receive his fair share of the common good of the morning's golfing but, loving the other, wills the other's overall good for his own sake, and so wills the share of the common good of that morning's golfing as a contribution to his friend's overall good. As a result, each will strive to make the morning's play beneficial and enjoyable for the other, and along the way they will chat about their families, their work, and so on.

Aware that they are created, people should acknowledge that they owe their very being and everything they have to the Creator. So, they should be grateful to him. Harmony with this transcendent source of meaning and value is one of the basic human goods. As children grateful to their parents love them for their own sakes, people grateful to the Creator can and should will the Creator's overall good for his own sake. If they do, they will fulfill their moral obligations as their contribution to that overall good. In this way, they will seek not only the harmony of submission to the Creator but the harmony of what can only be thought of as friendship.

If one is aware of cooperating with the Creator and fulfilling obligations to him, one also is aware that different people's capacities to act for their own and others' benefits differ and that different people can be benefited in different ways. So, it is reasonable to assume that the Creator intends the particular benefits to which the principles of practical reason direct each individual, given his or her unique set of capacities and opportunities.

Since the principles of practical reason direct all present and future created persons to all the particular benefits available to them according to their particular gifts and opportunities, the Creator is interested in the realization of all those goods. To will the Creator's overall good for his own sake, therefore, is to will all of those goods. One can do that only by intending all of the benefits to oneself and anyone else that one rightly chooses to bring about as contributions to that ulterior end—namely, all of those goods for the Creator's own sake—which thus will be the single ultimate end of every morally good act one does.

Someone intending that ultimate end regards the Creator and all created persons together as, potentially, a single, universal community. Insofar as created persons and particular communities reject moral obligation, they set themselves outside that community. Still, inasmuch as the principles of practical reason direct action to the realization of the goods of such people, the Creator remains interested in them, and the goods that will truly fulfill them continue to pertain to the common good that is the ultimate end. As the all-inclusive common good of a potentially universal community, that ultimate end can be called *integral communal fulfillment*.²⁰

²⁰ Integral human fulfillment (IHF) was mentioned in many of my earlier works. I regarded it as an ideal that rectifies the will. In Grisez et al., "Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends" (1987f), 131, we define IHF thus: "The ideal of integral human fulfillment is that of the realization, so far as possible, of all the basic goods in all persons, living together in complete harmony." I now propose that human persons and groups can and should take integral communal fulfillment (ICF) as their ultimate end. IHF and ICF differ in several ways. (1) In IHF, "all persons" referred to all human beings, past, present, and future; in ICF, the potential community includes the Creator and all present and future created persons.

In sum, when we take into account that we are creatures and that the Creator directs us by the principles of practical reason to our own fulfillment and that of others, the moral *ought* becomes moral obligation. And if we will for the Creator's own sake the satisfaction of his interest in the goods to which he directs created persons, we will intend integral communal fulfillment as our ultimate end and contribute to its realization by gratefully fulfilling our moral obligations.

Even if some philosopher without faith in divine revelation not only concluded that the universe is created—something I do not think has ever happened—but worked out the entire view sketched out above, living according to that view would not be easy. Many people and groups seem to ignore moral norms, making life difficult for those who conform to them. Moreover, even the finest life ends with death, and eventually the entire world will pass away. That transience makes one wonder whether anything one does or fails to do finally matters.

III. How the Kingdom of God Further Enhances and Transforms the Moral Ought

"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God," Jesus says, "for I was sent for this purpose" (Lk 4:43; cf. Mk 1:38). He proclaims the kingdom's *imminent* coming: "Now after John [the Baptist] was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel'" (Mk 1:15; cf. Mt 4:12–17).

People understood Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom's coming in light of the psalms they prayed and the Scripture readings they heard in their synagogues.²¹ The only true God had created the universe, and it manifests his kingly wisdom and power. In choosing Israel, freeing her from Egypt, and making a covenant with her, God acted as her king. Sinful Israel is dominated by pagans, but when the time is right, God will rescue her, restore the broken world, and raise the dead. Even the pagans will recognize God as their Lord. Perfectly manifesting his righteousness, the renewed creation will be God's everlasting kingdom.²² He will bring about *shalom*—completeness, wholeness, health, peace, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony.²³ Divine sovereignty on earth will be exercised by the Son of Man, who may be the Davidic messiah.²⁴

(2) By wishing for (not intending) IHF, morally good will was specified by it; by intending ICF, morally good will is specified by it. (3) Ideally, the fruit of morally good will would be IHF; the actual fruit of taking ICF as their ultimate end by all the persons who do so is whatever well-being and flourishing their actions bring about in their community and in each of them. (4) With their wills specified by wishing for IHF, morally good persons settled for the happiness they had in benefiting themselves and others as they lived their good lives; with their wills specified by intending ICF, morally good persons hope for the realization of the Creator's purpose in creating, friendship with him, and the happiness of increasing well-being and flourishing in themselves and other created persons.

²¹ See Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, 557 and 154–9.

²² Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 147–338.

²³ See Strong's *Concordance*, 7965.

²⁴ See Dan 7:13–14; Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History*, 17.

It could be prophesied of Jesus: “The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David . . . and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1:32–33). Anticipating Jesus’ birth, some faithful Jews expected God to scatter the proud, put down the mighty from their thrones, exalt the lowly, fill the hungry with good things (see Lk 1:51–53), save God’s people from their enemies, free them to serve him without fear, remove them from death’s shadow, and guide them to *shalom* (see Lk 1:71, 73–75, 79).

Thus, when Jesus proclaimed that the time was fulfilled and the kingdom of God was at hand, and established his credibility by “healing every disease and every infirmity among the people” (Mt 4:23), many of the common people understood his message, believed him, and were electrified by the prospect of the kingdom’s imminent coming.

The kingdom was incipient in Jesus’ healing of illnesses and casting out of demons—“If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Mt 12:28; cf. Lk 11:20)—for in these healings and exorcisms the complete conquest of evil had begun. Jesus himself made the kingdom present—“The kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Lk 17:21)—for in Jesus’ perfect obedience the Father’s will was already being done on earth.²⁵

Nevertheless, the definitive kingdom remained, and still remains, an object of hope for the future: “According to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pt 3:13). Jesus taught his disciples to pray: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, *on earth* as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). That prayer implies that the kingdom will not be a spiritual realm apart from this world.²⁶ It also implies that the kingdom is not yet fully realized.²⁷ The kingdom will fully come only when the glorious Son of Man—Jesus risen from the dead—comes again, the dead are raised,²⁸ and the whole world renewed.²⁹ Then it will be true to say: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev 11:15). The new Jerusalem will come down out of heaven from God, and he will dwell in the midst of his people in an entirely renovated world (see Rev 21:1–5).

Jesus teaches his disciples to seek first the Father’s kingdom and his righteousness and assures them that all the goods about which people in general are anxious will be theirs as well (see Mt 6:33; Lk 12:31). The kingdom is so precious that one reasonably gives everything one has to possess it (see Mt 13:44–45). Entering the kingdom will be difficult for the wealthy (see Mt 19:23). It will be far easier for the poor: “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Lk 6:20). Childlike humility also is necessary (see Mt 18:1–4). The moral commandments given the Israelites are still in full effect, and meeting the socially accepted standard of rectitude will be insufficient to enter the kingdom (see Mt 5:19–48, 19:16–22, 22:37–40). Doing the Father’s will, not mere lip service, is necessary (see Mt 7:21). The Son of Man, identified with the King, will discern which people are fit to enter the kingdom prepared *from the foundation of the*

²⁵ Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 398–506, especially 450–4.

²⁶ Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History*, 19, explains that Jesus did not say “My kingship is not of this world” but “My kingship is not *from* this world” (Jn 18:36).

²⁷ See Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 289–302.

²⁸ Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 309–17.

²⁹ See O’Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope*, 39–73.

world on the basis of their serving or failing to serve the needy, with whom the King/Son of Man identifies himself (see Mt 25:31–46).

When asked whether only few will be saved, Jesus earnestly replies: “Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Lk 13:24).³⁰ And Jesus makes it clear that failing to enter the kingdom will mean unending misery. The King/Son of man will say to those who do not serve the needy: “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41). It is better to give up whatever one must to enter the kingdom than “be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mk 9:47–48; cf. Is. 66:24). “And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever” (Rev 14:11). St. Paul teaches that anyone who commits certain sorts of sins will not “inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:10, Gal 5:21) and, having disobeyed the gospel, “shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess 1:9).

While the vivid expressions used in that teaching are symbolical language,³¹ the common Christian tradition maintained the realism of scriptural teaching about hell more firmly than it did the realism of scriptural teaching about the kingdom. Taking for granted the received understanding of the kingdom, Jesus did not need to describe it in detail. Still, he mentions people reclining “at table in the kingdom of God” (Lk 13:29), says “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God” (Lk 14:15), and tells his apostles that he has arranged a kingdom “for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom” (Lk 22:29–30). Jesus thus leads his disciples to expect the good things of human life in the kingdom.

After Jesus’ resurrection, the kingdom of God was the topic of his conversation with his disciples (see Acts 1:3). They were still expecting him to “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6). After the Holy Spirit came, Philip’s message—and thus the infant Church’s initial creed—is summarized by saying that he “preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:20). Paul’s great work of evangelization could likewise be summarized as “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31; cf. 14:22, 17:7, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23).

While the kingdom preached by the infant Church retained all the down-to-earth realism of Israel’s hoped for kingdom, Jesus introduced an entirely new requirement for entry and a new conception of the sublimity of membership in the kingdom. Jesus is the Word who was with the Father in the beginning—the Word through whom all created things came to be—and he became man to enable those who welcomed him to become children of God (see Jn 1:1–3, 12–14). Entry into the kingdom requires that one be born again by the water of baptism and the Holy Spirit (see Jn 3:5), and thus share in the Word’s divine nature (see 2 Pt 1:4), as the Word shares in our human nature.

St. Paul likewise explains that the Spirit makes those who are in Christ share in Jesus’ sonship. By adoption (see Rom 8:15, 23), they become “children of God, and if

³⁰ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, 1025, comments: “many . . . will not be able. So Jesus answers indirectly the question put to him. Many may crowd before the narrow door, but not all of them will succeed in passing through it.”

³¹ See John Paul II, General Audience, 7.

children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:16–17; cf. Gal 4:4–7). They are therefore entitled to enjoy not only human *shalom* but the *shalom* that properly belongs to the divine persons—the “peace of God, which passes all understanding” (Phil 4:7). At the same time, Paul makes it clear that those who are in Christ will enjoy that more-than-human fulfillment while also sharing in Jesus’ resurrection life (see Rom 8:11, 23).

To reach fulfillment *as children of God*, Christians must be united with Jesus. He teaches: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him” (Jn 6:56). Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father, and Jesus tells him that, having seen him, they have already seen the Father (see Jn 14:8–9). Jesus then explains that he and the Father are in each other (see Jn 14:10–11), and that after his death they will again see him, and “in that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me and I in you” (Jn 14:20). Again, Jesus prays for all his disciples “that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may be one in us” (Jn 17:21). Paul similarly teaches that the hope of Christians depends on their oneness with Jesus. All of them are baptized by the Spirit into the one body of Christ (see 1 Cor 12:13). And, since the Eucharist is a participation in the blood and body of Christ, “we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). Those who “belong to Christ” will be raised to glory with him (see 1 Cor 15:18, 23).

The disciple who keeps Jesus’ commandments loves him and will be loved by the Father, and Jesus promises: “I will love him and will manifest myself to him” (Jn 14:21). What form will Jesus’ self-manifestation ultimately take? “We are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2). “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). Paul similarly speaks of the perfect knowledge to which Christians can look forward: “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood” (1 Cor 13:11–12). In the new Jerusalem, the blessed will worship God and the Lamb, and “they shall see his face” (Rev 22:4). From a present immature and childlike relationship with God, the blessed, having died in Christ, will advance to such intimacy with him that they will know God on the basis of mutuality—“we shall be like him” and “understand fully, even as I have been fully understood”—and thus share fully in the *shalom* of God.

As Jesus himself lived a full human life while also sharing fully in the *shalom* of God, those who die in him will share fully in the *shalom* of God while also sharing fully in the human *shalom* of the definitive kingdom. During the first two centuries, Christian writers retained the New Testament’s realistic understanding of the definitive kingdom. Unfortunately, however, Church Fathers formed by the mold of Greco-Roman classicism—beginning with Origen (c.185–254) and culminating with St. Augustine (354–430)—reduced human sharing in the *shalom* of God to human intellectual contemplation of God, an activity essentially like, though far more perfect than, Christian mystics enjoy briefly in this world. Those same Fathers reduced the human *shalom* of the definitive kingdom to one or more of the following: the individual’s interior and spiritual

perfection, Jesus himself, the earthly Christian empire, the Church in this world and in heaven, the group of those seeing God.³²

The resurrection of the blessed will be a renewal of their own bodies so that they will be like Jesus' body, and imperishable as his is.³³ That resurrection will be part of the transformation of the entire created universe (see Rom 8:19–24). God's plan is to gather up all things in Christ, "things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10; cf. Col 1:20). Moreover, the good deeds of those who die in the Lord accompany them (see Rev 14:13). Good human works will survive (see 1 Cor 3:12–14). So, after stressing the realism of resurrection, Paul exhorts: "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor 15:58).³⁴ In a remarkable passage, the Second Vatican Council goes considerably further:

After we have promoted on earth, in the Spirit of the Lord and in accord with his command, the goods of human dignity, familial communion, and freedom—that is to say, all the good fruits of our nature and effort—then we shall find them once more, but cleansed of all dirt, lit up, and transformed, when Christ gives back to the Father an eternal and universal kingdom: "a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace." On this earth the kingdom is present in mystery even now; with the Lord's coming, however, it will be consummated.³⁵

The Council apparently takes for granted that the good deeds of the blessed will accompany them. It asserts that all the good *results* both of their good works and of natural human functioning will somehow be salvaged, freed of any residue of sin, glorified, and worked into the entirely renovated heavens and earth. Nothing, it seems, will be excluded but evil.

Think what that means. Jesus advises: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Mt 6:20). But the Council's understanding of a kingdom rich in human goods goes far beyond what most Christians have previously imagined they could lay up for themselves by taking up their crosses and following him. And if all these human goods are to be found again in the kingdom, they, like the vastly improved bodies of the blessed, plainly will not be there as trophies in a heavenly museum.

Human life will go on in the kingdom. One will find again every good relationship begun, without any of its defects and obstacles, ready to be taken up and joyously carried on, forever becoming better and deeper. Those one knows when one arrives in the kingdom will introduce one to others, and they to still others. One will find again every good interest and skill, again freed of defects, ready to be taken up and pursued. One can remember the very best days, the very best moments in one's life, and hope to find again whatever it was that made them so good, not so as to recapture them, but so as to live a life that will be at every moment as good as those best moments, and growing ever better.

³² See Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History*, 30–56.

³³ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 154–56, explains why 1 Cor 15:44 should not be translated "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body."

³⁴ Some recent non-Catholic authors cite this text to make precisely this point; see Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 192–205; Alcorn, *Heaven*, 133–9.

³⁵ See *Gaudium et spes*, 39; the internal quotation is from *Roman Missal*, Preface of the Feast of Christ the King.

With that hope, the normative force of the moral *ought* increases tremendously. One is less tempted to do evil to achieve and/or protect human goods. Moreover, one is motivated not only to avoid sin, but to do good in dealing with others. One is freed to make worthwhile efforts that may well fail, knowing that anything good begun well will somehow be stored up in the kingdom, so that failure in the present age will not be lasting loss. Indeed, one is freed from living for what the present age's future might bring. For nothing one does—nothing hard one must do and no suffering one must undergo—is merely for the present age's future. Rather, all of it is for the far more important future of the age to come. And in that age, the real meaning and value of everything one did, in the Spirit of the Lord and in accord with his command, to promote and protect human goods in the present age will be gloriously manifest.

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