

*The Doctrine of God and the
Ultimate Meaning of Human Life*

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reprinted from

The Doctrine of God and
Theological Ethics

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T & T CLARK INTERNATIONAL
A Continuum Imprint
LONDON • NEW YORK

2006

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1. Introduction

This chapter is a sketch that could well be a tentative plan for research toward a book. Others' views, I realize, would turn out to be more complex and nuanced than they now seem to me; the theological ideas I propose also would require much working out. I would especially try to remedy my ignorance of theologies outside my own ecclesial tradition. So, those who read this sketch are likely to notice inadequacies. I trust they nevertheless will consider open-mindedly what I propose and pray that their doing so will lead to mutually beneficial dialogue.

Insofar as I criticize the views of others, my concern will not be with them but with their ideas.

I work theologically in a monotheistic perspective, according to which God revealed himself by words and miraculous events to Abraham, Moses and others; and in a Christian perspective according to which he revealed himself definitively by and in Jesus' words and deeds. Like all monotheists to around 1800 and many even now, I hold that God inspired certain writers to record revelation, so that their books contain it. How? Being a Catholic, I hold that the books the Catholic Church recognizes as canonical contain revelation in the sense that all the propositions unqualifiedly asserted by the sacred writers also are asserted by the Holy Spirit, with the result that those propositions are certainly true.¹

By *doctrine of God* I mean, not the creeds and teachings that all faithful church members believe, but theological teachings that the faithful need not and, I think, should not believe but only consider on their merits.

One intends a good in making a choice when it is the reason or one of the reasons for choosing as one does. For example, if John chooses fruit, bran and skimmed milk for breakfast rather than bacon and eggs so as to reduce the likelihood of a heart attack, he intends the good of staying alive and healthy. Perhaps John has no ulterior reason for being interested in staying alive and healthy; if so, that is what – or, more likely, part of what – gives ultimate meaning to his life. But perhaps John would not care about staying alive and healthy if his children were grown and he were retired but wishes to stay alive and healthy so as

to raise his children and practise the profession to which he is committed. In that case, staying alive and healthy does not contribute to the ultimate meaning of John's life, but perhaps raising his children and practising his profession do. Thus, by *the ultimate meaning of human life* I mean an overarching purpose or set of purposes for whose sake one makes all the choices one makes, a good or set of goods that are intended in intending anything else for whose sake one makes a choice.

One's life can take its ultimate meaning in this sense from the fulfilment of God's saving work in his coming kingdom, for one can intend the kingdom as the ultimate purpose for whose sake one chooses whatever one chooses, and thus seek it first and in seeking everything else. But one's notions of what the kingdom is and how it is to be sought depend on one's notions of God and of a right relationship with God.

2. Coming to Know God and God's Utter Mysteriousness

Everyone exercising normal human intelligence can come to know about God in at least two ways.

First, the heavens declare the glory of God.² Since knowing what things are *does not include* knowing that they are, people easily conclude that experienced realities are not self-existent and might possibly not exist. So, they wonder why they themselves and other things exist. Realizing that an endless regress could explain nothing, most people reasonably acknowledge an ultimate, self-existent source of the existence of experienced realities.³

Second, God's law is written on human hearts.⁴ Knowing the first principles of practical reasoning – human life is a good to be preserved and respected, harmony with others is a good to be fostered, and so on – people are aware of being directed toward what is good for them and their communities, and so are aware of a quasi-intelligent director. Aware too that their own efforts never suffice to realize intelligible benefits such as survival and offspring, people pursuing such benefits find themselves depending on an unseen, powerful agent. Recognizing their dependence, they wish to be on good terms with that agent. God is identified and worshipped.⁵

Despite the availability of these starting-points, rationalizations of unreasonable choices can veil their conclusions and generate idols. But if not, people will consider it reasonable, because parsimonious, to identify the directing and helping power with the source of being, and so will regard God as a quasi-personal reality who gives being to realities, including ourselves, that need not exist, directs us toward goods, and helps us attain them.

Having reached this point, one should realize something that many people overlook, and that no one can easily keep in mind: God is utterly mysterious. God is self-existent; whatever we understand is not self-existent; so, we do not understand what God is, and whatever we do understand must be denied of God. Therefore, not only is it false to say that God is bodily, changing, and subpersonal; it also is false to say that God is a person, spiritual, and changeless in the

sense that we say *person* of ourselves, and *spiritual* and *changeless* of our knowledge of true propositions.⁶

How, then, can we even say that God is real and causes other things to exist? *Real* and *causes* ordinarily connote the definiteness of something we understand; used with that connotation, neither is true of God. Still, neither of these schematic notions includes the intelligibility it connotes, and both adapt to all sorts of things. So, they can be adapted and used in coming to know God.

Moreover, *cause* said of God is a relational predicate. To know that God causes is not to know what God is or how divine causality works. It is only to know that, whatever God and divine causality are, they are an adequate term of other things' real relationship of dependence in being. For that reason, divine causality cannot be an alternative to any causality we understand.⁷

Like *cause*, other predicates that seem to say what God is must also be understood relationally. As I said before, in practical reasoning and in pursuing benefits, we are aware of being directed and dependent, and this awareness points to a quasi-intelligent agent. Yet, identified with the self-existent source of being, that unseen, guiding and helping power cannot share anything we understand and know ourselves to be as intelligent agents. So, that power is an intelligent agent in a unique sense, and we cannot rightly draw any inferences about what it is in itself from what we know about our own intelligent agency.

Though what the writers of the biblical books assert about God is certainly true, their statements also must be understood relationally. Those statements are misunderstood if they are read as saying anything whatever in the same sense of a creature and of God – even of Jesus *as* God. However, the sacred writers tell about people hearing words and experiencing events that could reasonably be attributed only to God. In narrating those words and events, the sacred writers build up a set of relational predicates – a quasi-description that excludes many mistakes about God and provides rich indications about how we should and should not attempt to relate to him. I say, 'to *him*', for though God can be neither male nor female, Scripture makes it clear that we should relate to him as to a father.

3. Some Past Views of God and the Ultimate Meaning of Human Life

I consider St Thomas Aquinas the best representative of Catholic theology. He affirms that we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not and how other things are related to him.⁸ Yet, not always keeping in mind how limited our knowledge of God is, Thomas does not deny of God every positive intelligibility found in creatures. Insofar as we are spiritual subjects of intellectual knowing, we understand our minds as immaterial and transcendent to temporal process, and Thomas follows Aristotle and St Augustine, whose Neoplatonism in this matter coincides with Aristotle's thought, in treating these intelligible perfections as if they provided a privileged access to what God is.⁹ This line of thought makes God seem comprehensible by constructing the notion of an unchanging and all-knowing mind to which the human spirit is *naturally* akin.

According to the New Testament, the kingdom of God that Christians are to hope for and seek will come in its fullness at the end of time. The foremost blessing of the kingdom will be seeing God.¹⁰

Used in this eschatological context, the expression *seeing God* suggests immediate access and intimate relationship, somehow like that with one's spouse or best friends, but does not even hint at the character of the communion to be enjoyed. However, Thomas's reflections – which proceeded from his conception of God, the human mind's natural kinship with him, and other elements of the Greek philosophy he employed – transformed Scripture's mysterious seeing of God into the beatific vision, a theological construct according to which supreme human good and fulfilment is in God *attained by an act of the human intellect gazing steadily forever at mind's perfect object: divine truth.*

With hope focused on the beatific vision, other aspects of the heavenly kingdom became incidental. Images such as the wedding feast came to be regarded as metaphors for the beatific vision as theologians understood it. Bodily resurrection was not explained away, but it became peripheral, because the body is not necessary for the beatific vision, and resurrection is in prospect even for those who have done evil.¹¹ Accordingly, the ideal for Christian life in this world was to set aside all other goods as much as possible and concentrate on religious activity with the goal of nurturing union with God and, as it were, somehow seeing him even now.

However, neither living according to that ideal nor anything else one can do in this world can contribute to or bring about the eschatological beatific vision. Moreover, even receiving it as a gift presupposes being in friendship with God, a relationship sinful human beings can do nothing to bring about, but can only receive by grace.¹² Still, since those who love keep the commandments,¹³ those who do not keep them do not love.¹⁴ So, while abiding in the love that is indispensable for seeing God ideally calls for more, it strictly requires only that one not be the sort of wrongdoer who will be excluded from the kingdom of God – in other words, that one not commit mortal sin and die in it.¹⁵ Therefore, if the blessings of the kingdom are reduced to the beatific vision, the way the kingdom gives ultimate meaning to most people's lives is by being a strong reason to avoid mortal sin or, if one commits it, to repent and seek forgiveness. That reason is reinforced by the only alternative to heaven – hell – which repels many people more intensely than the beatific vision attracts them.

Since Thomas's view intelligibly linked the commandments with both charity and the well-being of human persons and communities, it did not of itself encourage legalism – that is, regarding the commandments, which convey necessary moral truths, as if they were positive laws, to be obeyed only insofar as necessary. However, in the centuries between Thomas and the Reformation, William of Ockham and others denied those intelligible links.¹⁶ Thinking that they knew God to be absolutely free, they took the voluntaristic position that the commandments are arbitrary rules. Misunderstanding human free choice along the same lines, they downplayed both the role of human goods as reasons for acting and the formation of character by the self-determination involved in

choosing. Many subsequent Catholic theologians and pastors accepted this misunderstanding of human free choices, overlooked or failed to emphasize the intelligible links voluntarism denied and, without embracing that extreme theory, adopted a simple scheme: the commandments are almighty God's law, and they constitute a test; those who obey pass the test and go to heaven; those who disobey fail it and go to hell.

Though I have no real knowledge of theologies outside my own ecclesial tradition, this sketch requires me to summarize what I recall having heard and read about some of them.

The great Reformers, Luther and Calvin, stressed God's incomprehensibility and dismissed much of the philosophy-based theological doctrine about him proposed by the schoolmen. Nevertheless, the Reformers worked with unacknowledged and uncriticized philosophical assumptions, at least partly drawn from the movement in which Ockham figured, and they sometimes read Scripture as if it straightforwardly tells us what God is in himself. So, they thought they understood God well enough to assert his absolute and sovereign freedom, a freedom whose exclusive efficacy precluded the dependence of human salvation on human free choices. Indeed, sinful human beings, they held, are incapable of free choices for good, though their bad choices are imputable inasmuch as they are spontaneous manifestations of fallen human nature, which even justifying grace does not restore. On this view, one can do absolutely nothing to bring about the kingdom or one's own entry into it. So, one cannot seek the kingdom in the sense of intending it in intending every other good for whose sake one makes a choice.

The Reformers' followers, not regarding the kingdom as an intended end, had to shape their lives toward worldly ends. That encouraged them to take human goods seriously and pursue them energetically with a view to this-worldly benefits. Though that position sometimes occasioned antinomianism and licence, it usually did not. As a good tree bears good fruit, those justified by faith are moved by the Spirit to do good works: to worship God and serve others. So, for many who followed the Reformers, the kingdom in a different but real way gave meaning to life: it provided a reason to bear witness to God's saving work in Jesus and to live with humble gratitude. At the same time, the Reformers' view inevitably led those who accepted it to a rather anxious self-consciousness about upright behaviour and moral failings as possible signs that they were or, perhaps, after all were not among the elect.¹⁷

As they developed, both the Catholic and the Reformation theologies, coloured by voluntarism, nurtured resentment: the Catholic, at the seeming arbitrariness of God's commands; the Reformers' theologies, at the seeming arbitrariness of damnation. Moreover, the Reformers' approach led people to organize their entire lives toward this-worldly goals; and the Catholic approach encouraged most people to do as they please whenever mortal sin was not at issue. So, despite their differences, both led to the same bad result: many people unthinkingly formed attachments to their concrete goals in life, human relationships, and possessions that led to very strong temptations, obduracy in sin, and loss of faith.

At the same time, all Christians' forgetfulness of God's incomprehensibility made them vulnerable to non-believers' arguments against a provident God based on human suffering. Such arguments require notions of goodness, knowledge, power and causality that Scripture's expressions about God, understood relationally, do not convey. But these fallacious arguments could not be answered cogently by Christians who had imported into their faith elements of overly ambitious theologies of the divine nature and attributes.

Ideas have consequences; defective theologies facilitate rationalization and self-deception. I believe that the foregoing and other defects in both Catholic and Reformation theologies contributed between 1600 and 1900 to the development of secularism in three stages: first, the rejection of faith in favour of deism; then, the rejection of obedience to transcendent authority in favour of human autonomy; and, finally, the emergence of various forms of so-called secular humanism.

To suppose that there is no provident God, however, requires one to forgo hope both for God's care in this life and his blessings in the next. Moreover, though some people who did not believe in a provident God purported to ground human rights in 'the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God',¹⁸ clearer-headed and more forthright people who abandoned Christian faith grasped and articulated the awful groundlessness of human rights among people whose interactions are shaped only by two things: human plans to satisfy human desires, and the diverse capacities of individuals and groups to carry out their plans by getting others to conform to them. Consequently, for people from a Christian background, an appealing secularism must have some residue of faith and hope in providence. Some theologies propose to meet this need by amputating parts of the body of faith – always including hell – that seem ugly. When the publicly accessible word of God rejects the surgery as lethal, it is impeached and replaced by a word that accepts it as merely cosmetic, the word of religious feeling or experience – perhaps 'the transcendental experience of the absolutely merciful closeness of God'.¹⁹ The result is a recently defunct Christian body temporarily prevented from decomposing by sophisticated artificial support systems.

Faith having departed, one supposes that everyone will enter the kingdom no matter what anyone does. With heaven inevitable for everyone, its prospect no longer has any practical relevance except to mitigate suffering, particularly in the face of death, and to relativize difficult moral norms that safeguard the fundamental goods of every person and require justice for the poor at serious cost to oneself. Grace becomes so cheap that discipleship is subsidized: one may affirm oneself, evade one's cross, and follow the crowd in pursuing comfort: 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die – and go straight to heaven.' At the same time, whenever one's own immoralities are not in question and one can support a good cause without significant self-sacrifice, one can take moral high ground, invoke God as the source of human rights, condemn injustices, and urge others to bear the costs of bringing about a just, peaceful and prosperous world with a constantly improving environment.

4. Another View of God and the Ultimate Meaning of Human Life

One might suppose that, just as the behaviours of human beings and animals manifest their natures, so God's mighty deeds manifest what he is in himself. However, the miraculous events that pertain to revelation are not divine actions; these so-called deeds actually are created states of affairs that point to God and tell us, not what he is, but only that he caused them and that the accompanying message is from him. Thus, faith does not tell us what God is; rather, it enables us to become personally acquainted with him.

This point is clarified by considering Jesus' words and deeds. Insofar as they are human, they are intelligible to us in the same way as those of human persons we know. They manifest Jesus' humanity rather than tell us what God is. But speech and action always are some *person's* self-expression and self-realization, and so they reveal who the unique person is. Jesus is a divine person. Therefore, his human words and deeds reveal God in a unique way. Without making known to us what God is, Jesus makes immediately available the ineffable reality of the Holy Trinity: 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"?'²⁰

Bearing in mind that revelation does not eliminate God's incomprehensibility would have forestalled divisive controversies over grace and human freedom. Is the grace that justifies irresistible?²¹ The question assumes that we understand God's causality, and that assumption makes grace an alternative to free choice. Set aside the false assumption, and one sees that the question, being unanswerable, should be replaced with two other questions. Can one make any salvific free choice without God's grace? No, a person making a free choice is not a self-existent reality; so, like all other experienced realities, that reality is divinely caused. When that reality is a sinful person making a free choice that is pleasing to God, God's causality is grace. Does God's grace therefore determine one to make the morally significant choices one makes? No, such choices are free. In causing people to make free choices, God cannot be causing them to make unfree choices, and only one's choosing determines what one freely chooses. So, grace cannot determine a person to make the salvific choices he or she makes.²²

If this explanation is accepted, we can see how one can do something about the fulfilment of God's saving work in his coming kingdom – how one can make the commitment of faith and choices to implement it with that ultimate good in view – and so how one can seek the kingdom before seeking anything else and in seeking everything else.

Accepting that no one can enter the kingdom without being born of water and Spirit, the catechumen chooses to seek faith and, in baptism, freely commits himself or herself to it precisely so as to enter into the kingdom. But, believing that not only his or her commitment of faith and the faith itself but his or her prospective entry into the kingdom are divine gifts, the catechumen intends in becoming Christian, not to bring about the kingdom, but to share in receiving it as God's gift. Hence, hope in God for the kingdom is the intention in making the

commitment of Christian faith. Moreover, because that commitment makes one a member of the Church – God’s new people constituted by his new covenant in Jesus’ blood – and because that covenant’s stipulations shape Christian life, Christians implicitly intend the kingdom whenever they choose to do the truth of faith in love.

The preceding, I believe, explains how, despite all theological differences, everyone who enjoys the gift of authentic Christian faith and abides in love has the kingdom as the ultimate end of his or her life by at least implicitly seeking it before anything else and in everything else. No theological reflection is needed for this essential structuring of Christian life by faith and hope, and no reflection can change it. Still, reflection might help clarify and intensify the intention that is hope.

The deeds of those who die in the Lord follow them, and the brilliant dress of finest linen worn by the Lamb’s bride at their wedding is the righteous deeds of the saints.²³ How can this be? Are not deeds, once done, finished and gone forever?

Morally significant human deeds carry out free choices. Like acts of intellectual knowing, choices are spiritual entities, not events or processes in the natural world. Outward performances come and go, but one’s choices remain as determinations of oneself unless and until one makes incompatible choices. Making choices and carrying them out also engage and affect not only will and mind but senses and feelings, capacities for bodily movement and skills. Thus, deeds last and constitute character. Moreover, deeds also affect other people and things; actions establish and shape interpersonal relationships, and transform the natural environment into a cultural environment.

Those who die in the Lord will also rise with him. Though they will be a new creation, they will not lose their personal identities. And though their mortal and perishable bodies will have put on the immortality and imperishability of our risen Lord Jesus, their bodiliness will remain. So, the character of the saints, at least insofar as it resulted from grace that frees from sin and death, will remain. Moreover, those who rise in Jesus will not be living bodies without an environment. ‘The whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now’ and it will share in ‘the freedom of the glory of the children of God’.²⁴ So, there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Yet that environment, like the bodies of the saints, will not have lost its past reality. Thus, the relationships and even the cultural effects of the saints’ deeds also will somehow remain.²⁵

However, what remains will be transformed. In the Lord’s Supper, bread and wine become his body and blood. Whoever ‘eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner is answerable for the body and blood of the Lord’.²⁶ But the many who eat and drink as the Lord intended become one body by sharing in his body and blood;²⁷ abiding in the Lord and the Lord in them, they are enlivened by his life.²⁸ Moreover, not only they, but all things in heaven and on earth will be gathered up in the Lord Jesus.²⁹ Yet this gathering up is not homogenization and loss of identity. Since all the elements of everyone’s and everything’s identity and goodness are from God’s creative causality and redeeming grace, nobody and nothing will lose any of those elements; only the distor-

tions and imperfections resulting from sin will be left behind. Thus, the members of the Lord Jesus will be a social body, joined in communion with him somewhat as wife is joined with husband in marriage – that is, in such a way that their complementary differences and individuality are fulfilled, not despite their one-flesh communion, but in and by it.³⁰ Living in this communion, the blessed will worship God, who will dwell among them.³¹

But what about *seeing* God? Should one hope to see God and so attain ultimate fulfilment in God himself? On the one hand, it would seem not. Fulfilment in God himself is beyond human capacities, which are for human goods.³² And if such an ultimate fulfilment were possible, it would seem to evacuate the significance of fulfilment in the other goods of the kingdom. On the other hand, Jesus prays that those who believe in him will enjoy communion in him and the Father similar to his and the Father's mutual indwelling, and St Paul looks forward to knowing God fully even as God fully knows Paul.³³ Moreover, according to Paul, the ultimate consummation does not end with the gathering of all things in the Lord Jesus, for when he has subjected all creation to himself, he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father 'so that God may be all in all'.³⁴

I think this problem requires a radical solution. The ultimate fulfilment of the blessed will be in God himself. But while seeing God will be the consummation of friendship with him, which *is* a sublime human good, seeing God will not be an act of the human intellect or, indeed, a human act of any sort.³⁵ Instead, it will be unimaginably intimate communion with the divine persons, a sharing in their own incomprehensible family life, enjoyed by human persons not by any capacity or elevation of their human nature, but by the very uncreated divine love, poured forth at baptism by the Holy Spirit into their hearts in such a way that it really is their own. And so the blessed, having been born again (or having been adopted) and having mysteriously matured in divine love,³⁶ will enjoy that gift as a real second nature that will enable them to be true participants in the life of the divine family: 'Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when it is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.'³⁷ Just as Jesus remained and remains in the intimate communion with his Father and the Holy Spirit that is natural to him as God while he lived his human life on earth and now lives as man in glory, so, I believe, the blessed together with Jesus will enjoy a life of rich and ever-increasing human fulfilment in glory while, at the same time, literally entering into the joy of their divine Master.³⁸ And so, with subpersonal creation bodying out the interpersonal communion of created persons with one another and with the three divine persons, divine love will permeate everything, and God will be all in all.

How can this theology of grace and the coming kingdom be put into practice, so that hope for it will be the ultimate intention in every choice one makes? As I said above, since the commitment of Christian faith makes one a member of the church, which is the new covenant community, living a Christian life simply is fulfilling the covenant's stipulations. The stipulations are to love God and neighbour – indeed, to love one another as Jesus loves us. That requires keeping the commandments and meeting others' genuine needs, even forgiving enemies and

preferring others' well-being to one's own whenever morally free to do so. These are the good works that God provides to be the way of life of those who, in being justified by his grace through faith, have been recreated in the Lord Jesus.³⁹

But how can each Christian find out which are the particular good works God has prepared for him or her to do? God provides individuals with appropriate personal gifts and other resources; they need only consider, and regularly reconsider, how they can use those gifts and resources to meet genuine needs of others as well as of their dependants and themselves. Genuine human needs, which are marked out by intelligible human goods, include not only the necessities of life but such things as hearing the Gospel, sharing in worship, education and recreation. Bearing in mind the stipulations of the new covenant and prayerfully discerning, not once but repeatedly throughout life, how to use gifts and resources to meet genuine needs, each Christian can find the particular life of good deeds to which God calls him or her. Thus, by committing themselves firmly to their personal vocations and faithfully fulfilling those commitments, Christians implement their faith and fulfil their responsibilities in the new covenant.⁴⁰

In choosing to fulfil their covenantal responsibilities, Christians can and should intend the kingdom as ultimate good in at least three ways. First, they should intend it by intending to let others see their good works for the Father's glory – in other words, by intending to bear credible witness to the faith in their hearts so as to occasion others' accepting the grace of faith and entering the kingdom.⁴¹ Second, they should intend the kingdom by intending their salvation – that is, their own participation in it – for though justified by grace through faith, they cannot become the glorified members of the risen Jesus into which God plans to transform them unless they accept and do the good works he gives them so as to prepare them as stuff to be transformed.⁴² Third, they should intend the kingdom by intending in all they do to prepare their small part of the living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to the Father, that Jesus' disciples join with him in offering each time they gather as his Church to do the Lord's Supper as he commanded. For though life in this world will go on waxing and waning, wandering and wobbling, that sacrifice will grow steadily until the day of the Lord, when all will be transformed and gathered into him, he will hand over the kingdom to the Father, and God will be all in all.⁴³

Notes

1. See Second Vatican Council, *Dei verbum* 11, in the context of 1–13.
2. *Without* speech or words (see Ps. 19.3), 'The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork' (Ps. 19.1); cf. Rom. 1.19–20.
3. For a philosophical articulation of this line of argument and dialectic with alternative philosophies: Germain Grisez, *Beyond the New Theism: A Philosophy of Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 36–91 and 94–225.
4. See Rom. 2.14–15; so, the revealed law is not alien: Ps. 19.7–13.
5. For more on this, see Germain Grisez, Joseph Boyle and John Finnis, 'Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends', *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 32 (1987), pp. 141–5.
6. See Grisez, *Beyond the New Theism*, pp. 241–7.

7. See *ibid.*, pp. 256–68.
8. See *Summa contra gentiles*, bk 1, ch. 30.
9. See, e.g., *ST I*, q. 14, a. 1, c., where Thomas argues that since God is supremely immaterial, he is supremely knowing. The argument is valid only if *immaterial* signifies a positive intelligibility drawn from human self-knowledge. Again, see *De potentia* q. 1, a. 2, c., where he uses God's self-existence as a middle term to demonstrate his infinite power. The argument would be valid only if God's self-existence were intelligible to us, which would be so only if we understood what God is.
10. See Mt. 5.8, 1 Cor. 13.12, 1 Jn 3.2, Rev. 22.4. Kenneth E. Kirk, *The Vision of God: The Christian Doctrine of the Summum Bonum*, 2nd edn (London: Longmans, Green, 1932), pp. 55–110, treats the vision of God in the New Testament with scholarly care and insight; however, his topic here and throughout this still-useful volume is different from mine, for he mainly deals with knowledge of God possible in this life; his ethical theory also is quite different from mine, for he thinks (xii–xiii) the *summum bonum* is 'best defined in terms of . . . "virtue" (duty)' and that the first practical question of Christian ethics is: 'How is disinterestedness, unselfishness, to be attained?' Kirk, p. 453, criticizes the Council of Trent, sess. 6, *Decree on Justification*, for wrongly appealing to self-interest in teaching that life eternal is to be proposed as a reward (Trent, ch. 16, says: 'both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus, and [quoting Augustine] "as a reward" ' (DS 1545/809)). In my view, nobody can act without seeking his or her own good or apparent good; but one can act for benefits to others, be fair to others, and even lay down one's life for others, as Jesus did, 'for the sake of the joy that was set before him' (Heb. 12.2) – that is, for the sake of the kingdom and one's role in it.
11. See 2 Cor. 5.6–8, Phil. 1.20–4; and Jn 5.25–9, Acts 24.15.
12. See Rom. 3.22–4, 5.1–5, 11.6; cf. Council of Trent, sess. 6, *Decree on Justification*, chs 7–8 (DS 1528–32/799–801).
13. See Jn 14.15, Rom. 13.8–10.
14. Once one has received the gift of love at baptism, one can, with God's grace, keep the commandments, without which no one can enter into eternal life; and by keeping them, one can pursue the peace with others and holiness without which nobody can see God (see Mt. 19.16–19 and Heb. 12.14).
15. See 1 Cor. 6.9–10; St Thomas, *ST I-II*, q. 88, a. 2.
16. On moral theology in the late Middle Ages, see Servais Pinckaers, OP, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 3rd edn, trans. Sr Mary Thomas Noble, OP (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), pp. 240–53.
17. Kirk, *Vision of God*, pp. 414–31, criticizes the Reformers' theology more severely than I do.
18. The United States of America, *Declaration of Independence*.
19. Karl Rahner, SJ, 'Revelation', in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner, SJ (New York: Seabury, 1975), 1461, though his view, of course, has additional elements.
20. Jn 14.9. A fuller articulation of the line of thought in this paragraph: Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1: *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), pp. 517–20.
21. Since justification requires repenting and believing the Gospel, it necessarily involves a free choice. But every free choice presupposes live options which are not freely chosen and whose initial coming to mind cannot be resisted. So, the justification of the sinner necessarily begins with a grace that is irresistible: see Council of Trent, sess. 6, *Decree on Justification*, ch. 5 (DS 1525/797).
22. See St Thomas Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 10, a. 4; Joseph M. Boyle, Jr, Germain Grisez and Olaf Tollefsen, *Free Choice: A Self-Referential Argument* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), pp. 97–103; Grisez, *Beyond the New Theism*, pp. 276–81. Kirk, *Vision of God*, p. 546, criticizes the Council of Trent, sess. 6, *Decree on Justification*, canon 4 (DS 1554/814), as coming very near Pelagianism and leaving the door open for it inasmuch as

- 'the Council evaded our fundamental question: "Is the first step in salvation taken by grace or by man's unaided will?"' But canon 3 (DS 1553/813) teaches: 'If anyone says that, without preceding (*praeveniente*) inspiration of the Holy Spirit and without his help, a person can believe, hope, love and repent as he ought, so that the grace of justification may be granted to him, let him be anathema.'
23. See Rev. 14.13, 19.8.
 24. Rom. 8.22 and 8.21.
 25. In explaining how human activity can be fulfilled in Jesus' redemptive work, the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes* 38–9, holds out the prospect of heaven as the fulfilment of a morally upright Christian life and clearly articulates a beautiful, fresh description of 'a new home and new earth where justice abides, one whose happiness will fulfil to overflowing all the desires for peace that mount up in human hearts'. When death is conquered and the dead raised, charity and its works remaining, the rest of subhuman creation will be transformed. Though the new earth will not be continuous with this one, good works that make this world better also are important for God's kingdom, because they somehow will be material for it. So, those who during this life promote human goods in God's Spirit and in accord with his command will find them again in heaven – purified, completed and transformed.
 26. 1 Cor. 11.27. The implication that the Lord's Supper is bodily, not merely spiritual or symbolic, communion with him coincides with the similar implication of Jn 6.54–8.
 27. See 1 Cor. 10.16–17.
 28. See Jn 6.25–59.
 29. See Eph. 1.9–10, Col. 1.15–20.
 30. See 2 Cor. 11.2; Eph. 5.25–32; Rev. 19.7–9, 21.2, 22.17.
 31. See Rev. 19.1–6, 21.3.
 32. See Grisez, Boyle and Finnis, 'Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends', pp. 133–5.
 33. See Jn 17.20–4, 1 Cor. 13.12.
 34. 1 Cor. 15.28, with vv. 20–7 as context.
 35. This position does not contradict Catholic dogma, defined 29 Jan. 1336 by Benedict XII in his Apostolic Constitution *Benedictus Deus* (DS 1000/530), regarding the beatific vision. For while Pope Benedict no doubt shared the assumption common to Catholic theologians that beatific vision is a human act, he nowhere asserts that it is, much less that this face-to-face vision is an act of the human intellect. Moreover, whether the vision is a human act or not is irrelevant to the point of Benedict's definitive teaching, which is to exclude the view that the souls of the saints, though otherwise ready to see God, must wait for the resurrection of the dead and the last judgement.
 36. By doing the works of neighbour-love; see Mt. 19.21, Eph. 4.12, Jas 1.25.
 37. 1 Jn 3.2. Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, Anchor Bible, 30 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), pp. 392–6, 422–7, provides an exegesis of the passage which is consistent with my interpretation though not, of course, offering what is novel in it any direct support.
 38. See Mt. 25.21, 23. What I am saying does not contradict the Catholic Church's dogma, defined by the Council of Trent, sess. 6, *Decree on Justification*, ch. 7 and can. 11 (DS 1530/800, 1561/821), that justification is not only by the attribution of Christ's justice and the good-will of God but also involves the inherence in the justified of God's love poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Trent does not ask the question: Is this love created or not? Before St Thomas, it was suggested that the grace by which a Christian shares in divine life is the Holy Spirit himself. Thomas holds that there must be something inherent in the Christian, assumes that everything other than the Trinity is created, and concludes that grace is a created quality inherent in the Christian's soul (see *In Sent.* 2, d. 26, q. 1, a. 1; *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 1; *ST I-II*, q. 110, aa. 1–2). I fully accept Trent's definition and Thomas's argument that this grace inheres in the soul. But because I do not see how a created quality can make one a reborn (or adopted) child of God (see Jn 1.12, 3.1–10; Rom.

- 8.14–17; 1 Jn 3.1), sharing in his very nature (see 2 Pet. 1.4), I propose that the love of God in the justified by which they are his children is neither the creator (the Trinity) nor a mere creature (something other than divine life); it is uncreated (a true sharing in divine life) and yet inherent in the justified by the free gift of the Trinity (and so a sharing by grace, not by nature). That sounds absurd, but I do not think it is. The doctrine that the justified are children of God, it seems to me, is very like the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity. Is Jesus God or not? If he is God, must he not be the Father; if he is not the Father, must he not be other than God? In the sense in which this question first arose, in the minds of the Jews who listened to Jesus, he neither is God (the Father) nor not-God (a created person). Is Jesus a man or not? If he is a man, must he not be a human person; if he is not a human person, must he not be God in merely human form? In the sense in which this question first arose, in the minds of many early Christians, Jesus is neither a man (a human person) nor not a man (God veiled in flesh not his own). In all three cases, a unity and multiplicity that seem irreconcilable are reconciled.
39. See Mt. 5.43–8, 7.12, 22.36–40, 25.31–46; Mk 12.28–31; Lk. 6.27–36, 10.25–37; Jn 13.34, 15.9–14; Rom. 12.14–21, 13.10; 1 Cor. 13; Gal. 5.13–14, 6.2; Phil. 2.2–8; Col. 3.13; Jas 2.8–13; 1 Jn 2.3–6, 3.14–17, 4.7–12, 5.1.
40. For more on personal vocation: Germain Grisez, *Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 2: *Living a Christian Life* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993), pp. 113–29.
41. See Mt. 5.13–16; Rom. 10.8–15; 1 Pet. 2.12.
42. So, in choosing to do the good works God has given them to do, Christians can intend the kingdom while hoping in God, who alone will bring it about, to make them part of it *as a reward for their good deeds* (see Rom. 2.6–7; 1 Cor. 3.8; 2 Tim. 4.8). To deny this is not to glorify God but to fail fully to acknowledge his graciousness, which is so great that his many gifts include meriting, not the justification by grace accepted through faith, but its heavenly fulfilment: see the Council of Trent, sess. 6, *Decree on Justification*, ch. 16 (DS 1546–8/809–10).
43. If it is genuine, a prayer of aspiring toward heaven, attributed to St Thomas Aquinas, *Opuscula theologica*, vol. 2: *De re spirituali*, ed. Raymundi P. Spiazzi, OP (Turin: Marietti, 1954), p. 288, shows that, while he longed for a heaven centred on the beatific vision, he still hoped it would be rich in human goods. But the prayer also manifests a spirituality centred on an individual's hope rather than an ecclesial one, and hope in the one God rather hope in the Father, the Lord Jesus, and their Spirit: 'O God of every consolation, I call upon you, who see in me nothing but what you have given me: May you be pleased to give me, after this life's end, the gift of knowing the first truth, of rejoicing in your divine majesty. Most lavish rewarder: Give, also, to my body the beauty of spiritual radiance, the mobility of matter subject to mind, the responsiveness suited to its perfection, and the bold assurance of flesh free of all vulnerability. And please add to these riches pouring over, delights pouring in, and goods pouring together: so that I may rejoice in your comfort above me, in your land's loveliness beneath me, in body and soul's glorification within me, and in the fellowship of friends and angels delightfully around me. Most merciful Father, with you let my capacities be fulfilled: of reasoning, by reaching the light of wisdom, of desiring, by possessing true goods, and of striving, by attaining the honour of triumph; in your presence, where there is freedom from threats, variety of dwellings, and harmony of wills; spring's pleasantness, summer's brightness, fall's plenty, and winter's rest. Lord God, give me life without death, joy without sorrow; in your presence, where there is supreme freedom, freedom from all care, carefree tranquillity, joyful happiness, happy endlessness, endless blessedness, the sight and praise of truth, my God. Amen.'