

Chapter 2

The Goal of Our Striving

Because spiritual theology treats of the perfection of the Christian life and the means to attain it, and is therefore at once both eminently speculative and eminently practical, the first question proposed for investigation concerns the goal or end of the Christian life. Such is the procedure in any art or applied science, according to the axiom that the end or goal is the first thing in intention and the last thing in execution or achievement.

Whether a person is setting out on a journey, writing a book, or preparing for a career or profession, the first thing necessary is to know the goal or end, then to select the proper means to that end, and finally to utilize the means for attaining the end. That is why St. Thomas Aquinas begins his treatise on moral theology with the question of man's ultimate end and beatitude, for it is only in view of the ultimate end that one can establish the principles of morality governing human acts and then discern which acts will advance one toward the goal.

The Son of God came into this world that we might have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). Indeed, "the ultimate purpose of all things is that, in Christ, all persons made by God's creative love might freely come to him and share the abundant life of the Blessed Trinity."[\(1\)](#)

This mysterious evolution by which Christ himself is formed in us is the principal purpose of divine revelation and the basis for all growth and development. To this evolution is ordained the divine light of faith, to it the entire gospel, to it the institution' of the Church and even the incarnation of the divine Word. For faith is ordained to charity, which is the bond of perfection; and the dogmas of our faith ... are not so much for finding intellectual satisfaction as for motivating us to seek the gift of God, the living water of the Holy Ghost, and the power of his vivifying grace. The Gospel was written that "believing, you may have life in his name" (John 20:31), and the purpose of the Church is the sanctification of souls.[\(2\)](#)

Consequently, the justified Christian lives by the same life that animated Jesus Christ, according to the statement of St. Augustine: "One becomes a Christian by the same grace by which Christ was made. He is reborn of the same Spirit of whom Christ was born."[\(3\)](#) The life received from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit respects our human condition at the same time that it elevates us to the supernatural order and makes us capable of performing actions that are likewise supernatural. "We receive, together with this life, a copious array of potencies and proportionate energies by which we can live, grow, and work as true sons of God, called from the kingdom of darkness to the participation of his eternal light. By means of these new powers we can discover the road to true life and thus arrive at the enjoyment of God's delightful presence."[\(4\)](#)

It is evident, therefore, that the supernatural life received through Jesus Christ is, like all life, meant to increase and expand through our efforts and cooperation. The spiritual life is not a treasure to be buried in a safe place; it is a seed that must be watered and cared for until it reaches full growth and maturity. But in order that we may understand more perfectly the nature

of the supernatural life, its potencies or powers, and the phases through which it passes to full maturity, it is necessary to know what is the goal of our striving.

The spiritual life has three distinct goals or, if one prefers, it has one ultimate goal and two relative or proximate goals. The ultimate goal of the spiritual life, as of all things in creation, is the glory of God; the proximate goals are our sanctification and salvation.

The Glory of God

Theologians generally attribute to God a twofold glory: the intrinsic glory of the inner life of the Trinity and the extrinsic glory that redounds to God through his external works. By intrinsic glory we mean the splendor of the infinite beauty, goodness, and truth of the Trinity. God the Father, knowing himself perfectly, eternally reproduces a perfect likeness of himself by the intellectual generation of the Word, who is the only-begotten Son of the Father. As a result of their mutual contemplation, there is eternally exchanged between these two Persons a current of divine love, which is the Holy Spirit. The knowledge and love that God has for himself in the ineffable mystery of his infinite beauty constitute his intrinsic glory, to which nothing is lacking and to which nothing can be added.

God is infinitely perfect and has no need of anything outside himself. Therefore the reason for creation must somehow be found in God's goodness and love. God is love, says St. John (4:16), and love by its very nature is communicable. God is infinite goodness and, as the philosophers say, goodness tends to diffuse itself. But it is a philosophical principle that every agent acts for an end, especially an intellectual agent, and therefore God, the first and supreme intellect, must likewise act for an end. However, it is impossible that in creating the universe God could have done so for some end distinct from himself, since that would mean acting for a good outside himself, a good he did not yet possess. Moreover, if God had acted for an end other than himself, he would have subordinated himself to that end and that is incompatible with his infinity and supremacy.

"I am the Lord, this is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols" (Isa. 42:8). It follows, therefore, that God created all things for himself; all created things exist in and for God.

At first glance this may seem to suggest a consummate egoism in God, as if he had created all things for his own selfish pleasure and utility. But it should be noted, as St. Thomas observes, that God does not work -for an end as we do, desiring and striving for a good we do not yet possess. God is infinite goodness, and therefore he cannot desire any good or end distinct from himself; but out of love of the infinite goodness that he is, God wills to communicate the good that he already possesses. Not only that, but all things that exist outside of God are to a lesser or greater degree a reflection of the goodness and glory that are intrinsic to the Trinity. Hence, St. Thomas states: "The entire universe with all its parts is ordained to God as to its ultimate end, in the sense that in all its parts it reflects the divine goodness by a certain limitation and for the glory of God."[\(5\)](#)

The extrinsic glory of God should be understood first of all as a sharing in the beauty, truth, and goodness that constitute God's intrinsic glory. Thus the statement of St. Paul: "Since the creation of the world, invisible realities, God's eternal power and divinity, have become visible, recognized through the things he has made" (Rom. 1:20). In other words, whatever there is of goodness, truth, and beauty in God's creation is there as a reflection of the infinite goodness, truth, and beauty of God; and in the case of creatures endowed with intellect and will, they are called to share in the glory of the inner life of the Trinity. **By a process that the Fathers of the Church did not hesitate to describe as "deification" and "divinization," God's own glory shines forth resplendently in the souls of the just.**

If we had remained in the purely natural state and had not been raised to supernatural life, knowledge, and love, we could never possess formally and physically anything divine; not even divine faculties, powers, and energies. Our knowledge and love could never attain to God as he is in himself, and we could not embrace him with these two acts, which are the arms by which it is given to us now to unite ourselves with him **But by a prodigy of love that we can never sufficiently admire, much less worthily acknowledge, he condescended to supernaturalize us from the beginning by elevating us to nothing less than his own status, to make us share in his life, his infinite power, his own operations, and his eternal happiness.**⁽⁶⁾

So the entire created universe exists in order to manifest the goodness, truth, and beauty of God; that is extrinsic glory seen from the viewpoint of the Creator. From the creature's side, however, the glory of God is seen as a striving for greater perfection whereby God is praised and glorified. In fact, in spiritual writing the phrase "glory of God" usually signifies the adoration and praise that are stimulated by the recognition of God's perfections as reflected in the beauties of the universe or the good deeds of individual persons. God is the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 22:13), the beginning and the end, and therefore **God's extrinsic glory is at once something received from God and something returned to God. And while every creature of whatever kind manifests some perfection of God, the rational creature manifests much more: the capacity to share in the very nature and life of God himself and the ability to give back to God, through praise and loving service, all that has been received.**

Everything in creation, and especially the human person, is ordained to the same ultimate end: the glory of God. Hence, St. Paul reminds the Christians of Corinth: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). **As Christian souls make progress along the road to perfection, they come to an ever clearer realization that their personal sanctification and even their perfect happiness in heaven are not the ultimate goal of the spiritual life; rather, one's sanctification and salvation are the most excellent and efficacious means of giving glory to the Trinity.** Thus, when drawing his map of the journey to the mount of perfection, St. John of the Cross printed these words on the summit: "Here on this mount, dwell only the honor and glory of God."

Salvation --The Life of Glory

"But trailing clouds of glory do we come from God, who is our home." The words of the poet Wordsworth serve as a succinct description of the intimate relationship, between the ultimate end of the Christian life -the glory of God -and the proximate or secondary ends: salvation and sanctification. Since the secondary ends are more immediate, Christians are usually much more

aware of them, especially the salvation of one's soul. As a result, the secondary ends normally have a greater influence on one's daily life and actions than does the concept of the glory of God. In fact, the glory of God does not seem to be a dominating motive in the lives of Christians until they have advanced rather far on the road to perfection. This, however, is readily understood when we realize how difficult it is to achieve total abandonment to God's will, which comes only at the cost of a profound and painful purgation of self-love.

As we use the term here, salvation is synonymous with the expressions "man's ultimate happiness," "eternal life," and "life in glory." We have stated that as a proximate goal of the spiritual life, salvation is intimately related to the ultimate goal: the glory of God. It could not be otherwise because man's ultimate and perfect happiness in heaven will be the result of the full flowering of the life of grace received through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. And that life, both in time and in eternity, is at once a sharing in the life of the Trinity (God's intrinsic glory) and the source of man's justification and supernatural perfection (God's extrinsic glory).

Beatitude or perfect happiness, says St. Thomas, constitutes Man's ultimate perfection.⁽⁷⁾ It cannot be realized in this life, which is a time of pilgrimage and vigil, because St. John writes: "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 Our love is brought to perfection in this, that we should have confidence on the day of judgment" (1 John 3:2; 4:17). Man's ultimate happiness and definitive perfection will be attained only in the life after death, in glory, where the blessed enjoy forever the beauty of the triune God.

St. Paul experienced such a profound yearning for heaven that he wrote to the Philippians: "I long to be freed from this life and to be with Christ, for that is the far better thing; yet it is more urgent that I remain alive for your sakes" (Phil. 1:23). Many of the saints and mystics throughout the centuries have echoed the same sentiment, as we see in the statements made by St. Teresa of Avila: "I want to see God, and to see him we must die," and St. Augustine: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that man's final beatitude in glory depends on two conditions: the total perfection of the individual and a knowledge of the good possessed in glory.⁽⁸⁾ The first condition is verified as soon as the just soul reaches heaven, for nothing imperfect or stained can enter into glory. Moreover, it has been divinized to the full extent of its capacity because the supernatural life received through Christ comes to its full development in glory. "Those he called he justified, and with those he justified he shared his glory" (Rom. 8:30). Therefore all the souls of the blessed are perfect, and every soul in glory is a saint, whether canonized or not, since each soul in heaven enjoys the most intimate union with God that is possible to it.

Does this mean that only those souls can enter glory that have reached a high degree of grace and spiritual perfection? To answer this question it is necessary to make a distinction between salvation as being saved, and salvation as the state of glory or the actual enjoyment of perfect happiness in heaven. Salvation is achieved by all those who die in the state of grace, even in a minimal degree,⁽⁹⁾ but this does not mean that all the souls of the just enter immediately into the beatitude of glory. It is explicitly defined by the Church that those who die in the state of grace

and are in no need of further purification will enter glory immediately after death, but those who still need to be purified will enter heaven only when their purification is completed.⁽¹⁰⁾

Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance explains the matter as follows:

The dogma of purgatory, then, throws a new light on the present question. Purgatory is a punishment that supposes a sin that could have been avoided and an insufficient satisfaction that could have been complete if we had better accepted the trials of the present life. It is certain that no one will be detained in purgatory except for sins that could have been avoided or for negligence in making reparation for them. Therefore normally we should, like the saints, undergo our purgatory in this life while meriting, while growing in love, instead of after death without meriting.

Therefore sanctifying grace, which is of itself ordained to eternal life, is also ordained to such perfection that the soul may receive the light of glory immediately after death without passing through purgatory. This disposition to enter heaven immediately after death supposes a complete purification, analogous at least to that of souls that are about to leave purgatory and have a very ardent desire for God. According to St. John of the Cross, this complete purification is normally found on earth only in those who have courageously endured the passive purifications of the senses and the spirit, which prepare the soul for intimate union with God (*The Dark Night*, Book II, Chap. 20).⁽¹¹⁾

The second condition postulated by St. Thomas for man's perfect happiness in glory is a knowledge of the good possessed. Now St. John states that in the life to come we shall see God as he is (1 John 3:2), and St. Paul says: "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. 13:12). Because of this teaching, theologians use the phrase "beatific vision" to describe the intimate and joyful union of the souls of the blessed with God in glory. "The activity of eternal life," says Arintero, "consists in knowing and loving God the Father and Jesus Christ whom he sent; that is, in contemplating clearly the most august and most profound secrets of the divinity and the ineffable mysteries of our redemption and deification. Such is the everlasting activity of the blessed who enjoy the infinite treasures of the paternal heritage, contemplate the bottomless abyss of uncreated Beauty, and love the absolute Goodness."⁽¹²⁾

Two official ecclesiastical statements concerning the beatific vision are of special importance in the theology of man's life in glory. The first is a declaration by Pope Benedict XII: "The souls of the just see the divine essence by an intuitive, face-to-face vision, with no creature as a medium of vision, but with the divine essence immediately manifesting itself to them, clearly and openly."⁽¹³⁾ The second statement is found in a decree issued by the Council of Florence: "Souls immediately upon entrance into heaven see clearly the one and triune God as he is, one more perfectly than another, depending on their merits."⁽¹⁴⁾

The necessity of postulating a "face-to-face vision, with no creature as a medium of vision" follows from the assertion by St. Thomas: "To say that God is seen through some likeness is to say that God is not seen at all."⁽¹⁵⁾ And since the human intellect cannot know anything without

an intellectual species or idea, it must be said that the divine essence itself is the intelligible species.

However, for the human intellect in glory to receive the divine essence as an intelligible species, its capacity must be vastly extended. Otherwise, according to the axiom that whatever is received is received according to the capacity or mode of the recipient, the knowledge or vision of God in glory would not be substantially different from that of the soul as a wayfarer. As a result, the divine essence would be brought down to the capacity of the human intellect. St. Thomas, therefore, argues to the necessity of an elevation of the human intellect by some kind of supernatural gift:

Nothing can receive a higher form unless it be disposed thereto by raising and enlarging its capacity, because every act is limited to its proper power. Now the divine essence is a higher form than any created intellect. Therefore, in order that the divine essence become the intelligible species for a created intellect, which is required in order that the divine substance be seen, the created intellect must be raised and enlarged for that purpose by some supernatural disposition. [\(16\)](#)

When any created intellect sees the essence of God, the essence of God itself becomes the intelligible form of the intellect. Hence it is necessary ... that the power of understanding should be aided by divine grace. Now this increase of the intellectual powers is called the illumination of the intellect And this is the light spoken of in Revelation 21:23: "It (the society of the blessed who see God) was lit by the radiant glory of God." [\(17\)](#)

The illumination of the intellect described by St. Thomas is known in theology as the light of glory (*lumen gloriae*), and while the Church has never defined its precise nature, the Council of Vienne (1311-12) did condemn the opinion that denies the necessity of a special illumination of the intellect in glory. [\(18\)](#) Some theologians, however, have attempted to probe more deeply into the nature and function of the light of glory. Thus, St. Thomas states that the beatific vision replaces the faith of the wayfarer and is a perfection of the gift of understanding. [\(19\)](#) The function of this gift on earth is to apprehend spiritual things, but in heaven it attains to the divine essence through facial vision. He explains his teaching as follows:

The vision of God is twofold. One is perfect, whereby God's essence is seen; the other is imperfect, whereby, though we see not what God is, yet we see what he is not Each of these visions of God belongs to the gift of understanding: the first to the gift of understanding in its state of perfection, as possessed in heaven; the second to the gift of understanding in its incipient state, as possessed by wayfarers. [\(20\)](#)

Other theologians have discussed the beatific vision in terms of the divine essence as the intelligible species of the intellect of the blessed, perhaps taking their cue from the same passage from Revelation just cited: "The city had no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23). So St. Augustine writes: "Thou art that light in which we must see the light; that is, we must see thee in thyself with the splendor of thy countenance." [\(21\)](#)

The Fathers of the Church never spoke of the beatific vision in terms of any created light; rather, the intelligible species in which the blessed see the divine essence is the Word, and the interior

power by which they see the divine essence is the power of the Holy Spirit. Arintero follows this line of thought:

What, objectively, is this divine idea, this faithful expression of the divine essence, but the very Word of God? What is the Word but the most perfect and adequate image, the eternal idea, the living word, the very face of God and his substantial manifestation? He is the eternal splendor of the Father and the figure of his substance; light of light, light of glory on whom the angels love to gaze, the sole luminary in the city of God where none other is needed.

Hence the Word, to whose image souls are configured and who is immediately united to their intellects, is the eternal light that objectively enlightens them, the true lumen gloriae in whom they see the face of God. He is the absolute and adequate idea in whom they see the divine essence faithfully and without any intermediary. But that we may see the divine essence and receive such an idea, it is necessary, we repeat, that our intellects be strengthened subjectively and their capacity enlarged ... This cannot be effected through any created power that would be of the same condition or incapacity as the soul itself. It can be done only through divine power; that is, through the loving Spirit who strengthens us from within and fortifies our weakness.(22)

What has been said about man's eternal beatitude in glory as a proximate end of the spiritual life should suffice to give a basic understanding of that beatitude as the perfect fulfillment of the life of the spirit. But it was not God's will simply to bestow on us the gift of grace and then bring it to its full flowering without our cooperation. Rather, he has commanded all men to love and serve him in this life in order to attain the ultimate happiness of heaven.

For God did not make men simply for heaven, but for coming to heaven through generous and good acts that his grace enables us to perform here and now. God's gift was not to be only the blessed life of heaven, but the further gift of letting men gain blessedness as a merited reward ... We live now a pilgrim life, among sacraments and symbols. But one who believes and hopes and loves possesses-already the living seeds of that life which is beyond signs. It is our joy to have received the life God gives now, and freely to serve him now, making his kingdom present even now on earth among men.(23)

Sanctification

After the glory of God and the beatific vision in heaven, the spiritual life has for its end or goal the sanctification of one's own soul. This means that all Christians should strive for the perfection of their spiritual life, in accordance with the teaching of Scripture: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48); "To all ..., who are called to be saints" (Rom. 1:7); "It is God's will that you grow in holiness" (1 Thess. 4:3).

The perfection of the spiritual life likewise follows from the very nature of life itself, since every living thing naturally seeks and tends to its perfection. Thus, St. Paul admonished the Ephesians to strive to "form that perfect man who is Christ come to full stature" (Eph. 4:13). More recently, Vatican Council II reminded contemporary Christians of their lofty vocation to holiness in the following words:

The Lord Jesus, divine teacher and model of all perfection, preached holiness of life (of which he is the author and maker) to each and every one of his disciples without distinction, "You must be made perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). For he sent the Holy Spirit to all to move them interiorly to love God with their whole heart, their whole soul, with their whole understanding, and with their whole strength (cf. Mark 12:30), and to love one another as Christ loved them (cf. John 13:34; 15:12). **The followers of Christ, called by God not in virtue of their works but by his design and grace, and justified in the Lord Jesus, have been made sons of God in the baptism of faith and partakers of the divine nature, and so are truly sanctified. They must therefore hold on to and perfect in their lives that sanctification which they have received from God**

It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society. In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that, following in his footsteps and conformed to his image, doing the will of God in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the people of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the lives of so many saints.[\(24\)](#)

When we speak of perfection or sanctification as a goal of the spiritual life, we must distinguish a twofold state or level of that life: life in glory and life on earth, life before death and life after death. The measure of the perfection or holiness of the spiritual life is the degree of participation by the individual Christian in the sanctity and perfection of God.

But **sanctifying grace is a sharing in the nature and life of God** (cf. 1 Pet. 1:23) and by its very nature tends to increase to perfection. Therefore, the degree of union with God and of perfection in the spiritual life will depend on the extent to which the soul is permeated with grace.

Perfect union, however, will be realized only in glory, only in life after death, according to the dictum of St. Thomas that man's ultimate beatitude or life in glory in his supreme perfection.[\(25\)](#) Consequently, in the strictest sense of the word, the Christian will attain his full and complete perfection only in glory, where, through the beatific vision, he possesses for all eternity the beauty, goodness, and truth of the triune God. Faith then yields to vision, hope to possession, and charity is forever satisfied but never satiated.

To speak of perfection here on earth, in man as a wayfarer, is to use the term in a relative sense, because grace and charity have no terminus or limit so long as we are capable of cooperating with grace and thus meriting an increase. St. Augustine states: "O God, you give us the grace to love you, and when we love you, you give us the grace to love you more." Only death puts a definitive limit to our growth in grace and charity, and therefore our growth in perfection.

Nevertheless, we may truly use the word perfection to describe the state of the just souls on earth, since even the minimal degree of sanctifying grace constitutes a basic perfection. St. Thomas calls grace "the beginning of glory," and St. Irenaeus designates it as "the seed of the Father." Therefore when we speak of perfection or sanctification as a proximate goal of the

spiritual life, we are referring not to any specific degree of perfection at a given moment, but to the ideal placed before all Christians by Christ himself: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). This is the goal of our spiritual life as wayfarers: the perfection of the supernatural life received through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is likewise the field of our study in spiritual theology.

CHAPTER NOTES

1. Ronald Lawler, et al., *The Teaching of Christ* (Huntington, Ind.; Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1975), p. 265.
 2. John G. Arintero, *The Mystical Evolution in the Development and Vitality of the Church*, trans. Jordan Aumann (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1949), Vol. I, p. 2. This work has been reprinted by TAN Books of Rockford, 111.
 3. St. Augustine, *De praedestinatione*, 31.
 4. Arintero, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 47.
 5. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 44, a. 4; q. 65, a. 2.
 6. Arintero, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 61.
 7. See *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 3, a. 2 and ad 4.
 8. *Ibid.*, I, q. 26, a. 1.
 9. *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 109, a. 5; q. 111, a. 5; q. 114, aa. 2-3.
 10. See H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Freiburg: Herder, 1963), 857; 925; 990; 1000; 1067; 1305. Hereafter this reference will be given as Denz.-Schön., together with the number of the pertinent passage.
 11. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, the *Three Ages of the Interior Life*, trans. Timothea Doyle (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1948), p. 649.
 12. Arintero, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 121.
 13. Denz.-Schön. 1000-02.
 14. *Ibid.*, 1304-06.
 15. *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 12, a. 2.
 16. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Book III, Chap. 53.
 17. *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 12, a. 5.
 18. Denz.-Schön. 895.
 19. St. Thomas Aquinas, *III Sent.*, dist. 23, q. 1, a. 3, ad 6.
 20. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 8, a. 7.
 21. St. Augustine, *Soliloquies*, Chap. 36.
 22. Arintero, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 126-27.
 23. R. Lawler, et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.
 24. Vatican Council II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, n. 40.
 25. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 3, a. 2 and ad 4.
-
-