

A Map Of Life

Part 1 - An Outline

By Frank J. Sheed.

London Catholic Truth Society No.do111a (1933)

INTRODUCTION.

THE traveller through a strange country usually gets vivid impressions of individual things, but only a confused impression of the country in its totality. He remembers this mountain and that stream and the other village; but how one is related to the other, and the general winding of roads that he has barely glimpsed, cannot in the nature of things stand clear in his mind: and a map of the whole country seen at the end of his travels, may very well be full of surprises and is, in any case, a totally new view. In very much the same way a traveller through life gets vivid – sometimes extremely vivid – impressions of things near at hand: confused impressions of things seen at a distance or only heard of: but of the whole plan of life, no idea at all. In his mind will be a jumble of facts, tossed about in any order – God, sin, church-going, disease, sacraments, suffering, the treason of friends, hostilities, death and the fear of death, money and the loss of it, God-made-man – and so on without end. But which of these things are big things and which of them are little, he will not know with certainty: the things that have come nearest to himself will seem big things: the remoter things will seem small.

And of the relations of these things one to another – how one thing agrees with, or conflicts with, another – of all this, merely by dint of living, he will have only the most confused and uncertain impression. In fact it may easily happen that a man who merely lives, and neither reflects nor is taught, does not even suspect relationships, but thinks of all things as accidents with no reason in themselves save that they happened, and no connection with each other save that one came earlier and one came later. Because of this confusion, I propose to try to make what may roughly be called a map of life – a scale map in which the principal "natural features" will be shown in their right proportions and the roads between them drawn in. This map will not be of my own drawing, fruit of my own experience of life. Nor will it be of any man's drawing. It will be a transcript of what God, the Author of life, has revealed as to the meaning of the whole and the relations of the parts.

Nor will it be a demonstration. Maps do not prove, but only state. There are only two reasons for trusting a map: one is the authority of the mapmaker: the other is one's own experience, when one has travelled the road with its guidance. The second is normally of less practical value. We need to be assured of a map's trustworthiness at the beginning of a journey. A map, therefore, must be accepted or rejected according to the confidence the map-maker deserves. In this instance, fortunately, the map-maker is God. In this effort to set out the plan of life, there will be no attempt anywhere to prove the truth of what is said, but only to state what, according to the Church He founded, God has said.

1. THE PROBLEM OF LIFE'S PURPOSE.

TO the detached observer man is something of a curiosity. He lives in two worlds at once, and this not as a being who belongs to one world and has simply got tangled up in another, but as a being who belongs essentially to both of them. God, who alone exists in His own right, who is all-knowing and all-powerful, who exists without the shadow of limitation, made all things. Considering the beings God has made, we find two broad categories, spirit and matter.

Spirit is being which has the power of knowing and willing. Matter is being which has not these powers. There is a more obvious but less important distinction between them: matter can be perceived by the senses, spirit cannot.

Of God's creatures, there are some that are pure spirits – angels – with no material part. There are some that are purely material – animals, plants, stones and the rest – with no spiritual part. Between them is man. In him alone, spirit and matter are united: by his soul, he is a spirit as the angels are: by his body, he is part of the material universe.

And, as has already been said, he belongs to both worlds by his essence. He is not simply a spirit who is for the moment tied down to, or tied up in, a body. It is of his very nature to be a union of matter and spirit.

The soul of man is not more essentially a partner in the human compound than his body: but it is the more important partner.

For in the first place it is the principle of life in the body: it remains with the body so long as the body is capable of being animated by it: the body corrupts whereas the soul continues in existence; and in the second place it knows and wills: that is, it has the two faculties of intellect and will by which it can enter into conscious and determined relationship with all that is.

Such a being, then, is man. It is life as it concerns man that is the business of this map.

We shall understand the map better if we grasp its universal necessity. A man may very well say that whether there is or is not a divine revelation as to the meaning of human life, it is at any rate only of academic interest, desired by none save the dwindling number who like things cut and dried and take comfort in the voice of authority.

For a man who reasons thus we must show that an acceptance of the revelation of God as to the meaning of life has a bearing not only upon holy living, but even upon sane living; that only those who believe in such a revelation can shape their own lives correctly or help their fellow-men. Those who do not accept the revelation, even if they have the best will in the world (which not all men have), can neither direct their own lives aright nor help other men – save accidentally and within a very narrow field. From such men the world has little to hope and an immense amount to fear. And into their hands, the world is tending more and more to fall.

In one word, the reason for their helplessness, both in relation to themselves and in relation to others, is that they do not know what a man is.

You do not truly know what anything is until you know what it is for. Knowing what a thing is made of, even knowing whom a thing is made by, these things are but scanty knowledge, impotent of themselves to lead to fruitful action. The complete knowledge demands a knowledge of purpose. A very crude instance may make this sufficiently obvious truth still more obvious. Suppose a man who has never shaved: and suppose that he suddenly discovers a razor. He does not know what it is, but he discovers that it cuts. Whereupon he uses it for cutting wood. He does not cut a great deal of

wood and he ruins the razor, leaving it fit only for the scrap-heap. The point is that he has used it without knowing its purpose; and save by accident such use must always be misuse. And in the face of the general proposition that nothing can be used aright until its purpose is known, the man who uses anything at all without such knowledge is acting blindly. He may mean well, but well-meaningness is not a substitute for knowledge of purpose.

Obviously, the perfect way to know the purpose of the thing is to find out from its maker: any other method leaves too many loopholes for error.

Apply this principle to man himself: we cannot use ourselves aright nor help any other man till we know what man is for: we can meddle with him, tinker with him, mean well to him, but, save in a limited way, we cannot help him.

Here we must make a short digression. There are only two ways in which anything can come to be. Either it is intentional or accidental: that is, either someone intended it or it merely chanced. The thing that is intentional has a purpose: accidents have no purpose. Humanity, like other things, must be either an accident and so purposeless, or else have been made with intent. Catholics know that man was made, and made by an intelligent Being who knew the purpose of His own action. Further, God, who made us and knew what He made us for, has told us what He made us for. Accepting His Word, we know the purpose of our existence, and we can proceed to live intelligently according to it. Short of this knowledge, intelligent living is not possible for us.

For apart from God's own statement as to what He had in mind when He made us, we have no way of knowing. We cannot tell ourselves: the scientist can tell us what we are made of, or rather what our bodies are made of, but he cannot tell us what we are made for: and by comparison with this altogether vital matter, what he has to say, interesting as it is, is but trivial.

In other words, short of God telling us, we cannot be told; and short of being told, we cannot know. We can of course theorize – or in plain English, guess. There is one, and only one, colourable alternative to a revelation from God as a means of knowing the purpose of man's existence. We might simply take human nature as it is, study it, come to a full and accurate knowledge of it: we could then reason from man's nature as to the particular purpose for which a being of that nature must have been made: or, avoiding the idea of purpose altogether, we might reason as to the best use to which a being of those powers could be put.

This, I say, is a colourable alternative. Indeed, for one who is unaware of the revelation of God, it is the highest exercise of the intellect. With this method, had God not told us what was in His mind, we should have had to rest content. Yet we may be glad that He did not so leave us, since it is liable to error in many ways, of which two are of capital importance:

(1) There may be error in the reading of human nature. Most of men's efforts to read human nature, and frame a system of life in accord with it, err by inability to seize the whole. One part of human nature is isolated, the rest ignored. Further, as between various uses to which powers might be put, there can be no deciding which is higher and which is lower, save in the light of the purpose of the whole being: those uses that serve the purpose are good; those that hinder it are bad.

(2) The second objection is far more important and is, indeed, fundamental to the understanding of the whole of what is to come. Even if human nature were fully understood with no shadow of error, the purpose of man's life could be deduced from it only if the purpose of man's life were contained in it – that is, if man's purpose simply meant the highest activity possible to his own nature. But

supposing the purpose of human life is some activity or state higher than man's nature. Then we cannot find it simply by studying his nature. And God has in fact taught that He destines us not for something of which our nature is in itself capable (and which might, therefore, as I have said, be deduced from our nature) but for something to which He in His generosity chose to lift us; and this obviously cannot be deduced from any study of us: one may deduce the incidence of justice, but not of generosity.

Given, then, that apart from the revelation of God we cannot know with certainty what is the purpose of our existence as man, the only thing left for the one who does not believe in such a revelation is to choose an object of life: to decide for himself what he will use his life for. But given the myriad possibilities before every man, the chances are that he will choose the wrong one and so spoil his life: and if he is in a position to control the destinies of others, whether as a king or a dictator or simply as the father of a family, the disaster will be very great: and the more zealous and energetic he is, the greater will the disaster be. In no case is intelligent living – that is, living consciously for the true purpose of our being – possible to us unless we are told by God what the purpose is.

It is, therefore, the very highest act of our intellect thus to grasp the revelation of God, since this is knowledge that we must have, and knowledge that we must either be told or do without. It is foolish to stigmatize this acceptance as a denial of freedom or a form of intellectual suicide. The object of thought is truth: if a particular piece of truth is necessary, can be known with certainty by the teaching of another, and cannot be known otherwise, then a man is really acting suicidally in rejecting the truth merely because he did not find it for himself. He is preferring the exercise of the means to the attainment of the end. If a man knows what knowing means, he cannot even think he knows man's true purpose save through the revelation of God. And so he cannot direct his own life rightly. Nor can he help others.

Here the philanthropist might say: "I am a practical man doing the immediate job. Whether there is a God or not, here is a man suffering, here is a wrong to be righted": but this is not practical, this dashing at the job without the necessary preliminary theorizing. For if you do not know what men are – that is, are for – how do you know what is good for them? That thing is good for any being, which helps it to achieve the true purpose of its nature. How can you help men to that, if you do not know what their true purpose is?

Nor should we be misled by the fact that there are certain obvious things that such a man can do. Principally he can relieve bodily suffering. But all his aid is "first aid": of profound, permanent, certain help to man he can do nothing. In fact, the general effort of those who thus would help their fellow men with no thought of God is almost exclusively confined to bodily well-being, or the relief of bodily suffering.

And when they approach such questions as birth-control, divorce, the killing of the incurable, and a dozen others, it is beyond their power really to answer the question raised. For these things are right or wrong according as they help or hinder a man in the achievement of the purpose of his being: and it is not so much as possible to express an intelligent opinion on them save in the light of a sure knowledge of what the purpose of life is. When the philanthropist is not merely unaware of God's revelation, but definitely convinced that man is only the matter of his body, his position is easier. If he has to decide upon the question of divorce, for instance, then for him the only problem is whether an accidental collection of electrons and protons – called for convenience a man – will

function more harmoniously with that second collection of electrons and protons which it is at present living with, or with some third collection of electrons and protons. Such a question is simple enough. Simple because it really does not matter. But if man is more than that – a being with a true purpose in life – then all that is said in ignorance of his purpose is quite irrelevant.

On all the moral teaching of those who have not the Catholic revelation, there lies this mark of superficiality: the only rule that appears to be of universal application is that suffering must always be relieved. But even this, one dare not call a principle, since it is not related to any true view of life. By good fortune, it is a rule that often works to the advantage of the sufferer; and in the one who exercises it, it bears witness to a true virtue: indeed the relief of suffering is one of the highest rules of the Christian life. But, apart from a right view of the purpose of human life, it is a blind rule, and there is no virtue in blindness. Carried too far, as our age is tending more and more to carry it, the rule can work immeasurable evil. For there are things that are worse than suffering.

Two questions, then, are to be asked of any religious or social teacher who offers some system of life for the acceptance of men: The first is: What, according to you, is the purpose of man's life?

The second is: How do you know?

When he answers the second, be very insistent. Unless he says, "God has revealed it," then he is wasting time. If he says God has revealed it, then he must be prepared to show that God has done so. To both questions, the Catholic Church has an answer. In this booklet, I am concerned only with the first and with certain things that flow from it. Life, and all the things of life, have a meaning in relation to man, in themselves, in relation to one another. What the meaning is, God has told us: we need to know it: there is no other way of knowing. This booklet is simply an attempt to transcribe what God has said.

2. THE PROBLEM OF LIFE'S LAWS.

THE argument of the first chapter went to show that the very minimum required for intelligent living – namely, the knowledge of the purpose of our life – is dependent upon a revelation from God: that without such a revelation we cannot know our purpose, and so cannot have any means of testing the value or the significance of anything that we do. As I have said, this is a minimum, and reflection on experience is sufficient to show that something more is needed from God than a bare revelation of what He made us for.

Very early in life, man becomes aware that he is living in a world of laws: the series of happenings which lead him to the conclusion are nearly all unpleasant: but whether he ever formulates the idea or crystallizes it in a word, or whether he remains merely the practical man – in the usual sense of the unreflective man – he acquires the certainty that there is a whole series of conditions and results in the world which may fairly well be counted upon. This certainty becomes part of the very texture of his mind. Thus he discovers that fire burns, that hunger weakens, that rain wets, that bodies fall towards the earth and not towards the sky; and so with a myriad other things. If he reflects at all upon these laws, he realizes that they are not of his choosing – in fact that, in many cases, they are the reverse of what he would have chosen – but that their power is in no way affected by his disapproval. There is no way in which he can get free of them. He can act as though they did not exist, in which case they damage or even destroy him. If he is a sane man he may dislike them, but he accepts them, and does his best to live in accordance with them. In any case, there is no such thing as freedom from them: but only freedom within them. And freedom within them can be

attained only by one who knows them. This knowing them is always a matter of discovery and not invention: in other words, one finds out what they are, one cannot in any way make them to be.

All this is obvious enough as applied to the body. Men, however, do not always make the application of precisely the same truths to the soul: yet the parallel is exact. As there are laws that govern the body, so there are laws – in particular the moral law – which govern the soul. The moral law is no more made by man, or dependent on the approval of man, or in any way escapable by man than the material law. Man can ignore the moral law as he can ignore the material law, but the result in both cases is his own diminution or destruction. There is no freedom from the moral law: but as with the material law, there is freedom within it, the only freedom possible to man. And a condition of this freedom is the same as in the other case – namely, knowledge of what the law is.

In the light of all this, it is possible to judge the extent of folly of those who talk of emancipation from the moral law, or from any particular article of the moral law: and because this talk has folly at its root, it runs to folly in every leaf and flower. To take only one instance: one hears the phrase that the modern man is no longer to be bound by the two-thousand-year-old law of marriage. It is as though one were to say that it was beneath the dignity of modern man to be bound by the even older law of gravity. For the question is not whether the law is old, but whether it is a law.

A man might very well say that he would not be bound by the law of gravity: yet he would be well advised to keep his affirmation within the sphere of words. Let him push it to act, and he will no longer be a modern man but a corpse, part of that history which, in his newness, he so heartily despises.

Another category of this folly is the not uncommon assumption that this or that human authority may abrogate the law, even if the individual would be a little reckless in declaring it not binding upon himself. But the State – to take the most obvious example of all – cannot in any way affect the moral law. (Footnote: Nor can the Church. See ‘Law and Suffering’, chapter 10 of my book, *A Map of Life*. It is the second half of the third booklet in this series.)

The State declares that a man may – in certain circumstances – leave his wife and marry another. But this is adultery. To assume that therefore adultery is no longer harmful to the soul is unduly optimistic. State action can no more make adultery harmless to the soul than it can make prussic acid harmless to the body. Men have come into a collision with the law of God: the law of God does not suffer from the collision.

The conclusion, then, is that we are living in a world of law, material law and spiritual law, and that successful living involves obedience to this law which, in its turn, supposes a knowledge of it. If it is asked how we are to know what the law is, experience suggests an answer. Since men were men, they have had their own bodies and the world of matter under their eyes, and they have been at work discovering what the laws are that govern matter. Yet on this most obvious ground, men are constantly changing their views, learning laws that till yesterday were not so much as suspected, discarding what all men before them had held to be laws, certain and irrevocable. So that it is clear enough that, left to themselves, men will make no more than a tolerably successful job of this discovering of the laws of matter.

Much more, then, it is evident that left to themselves, men will fail to discover, with any fixity or certainty, the laws that govern the soul – since the soul is so much less obvious to man, so very much more inaccessible in its essential being. And failure in this sphere is far more serious than in the other. For disaster to the body is the lesser evil, and is only an anticipation of the disaster that

awaits all bodies inevitably. But disaster to the soul—because it is the nobler part of man, because disaster is not its inevitable destiny, because it is not only the nobler part but the decisive part—is a thing not to be faced. And, in fact, given that no one but the law-maker can know with certainty the text of the laws he has made, there is immense food for thought in this: that God, the author alike of the laws that govern matter and the laws that govern spirit, has left man very largely to discover—with an endless accompaniment of disaster—the laws that govern matter, as though the discovery of these were a trivial thing, not vital; but has revealed to man the laws that govern spirit because they are essential laws, whose breach is fraught with eternal catastrophe.

Thus, not only that man may know the purpose of his life, but also that he may know the nature of the life through which he must strive to his goal, a teaching from God is something vitally necessary. It does not follow that even with this knowledge a man will always act rightly. The will of man is capable of choosing a course of action contrary to what he knows to be right. And even if the will is right, the intellect may err in applying its knowledge of purpose and law to a particular set of circumstances. Where the law of God applies explicitly, there is no problem. But in a situation to which the law has not been applied by God in express terms and it is a question of men applying a principle, then they may easily go astray, misled by custom or environment or inclination. Thus, for example, a Catholic might, with excellent intentions, support a bad social or economic or judicial system. But for all that, he possesses the true principles and with these, there is always the possibility of rectification. Without them, there is none. So that right living, though not guaranteed by, is yet totally dependent upon, knowledge of purpose and law, and therefore upon God.

It may be well at this point, to say one thing further about freedom and about the dependence of man upon God. Freedom is usually defined as the power to do what one likes. Accepting the definition, one sees instantly that the power to do what one likes may be the goal, but doing what one likes is not necessarily the road to the goal. In the bodily order, eating what one likes, for instance, may very well be the very solidest hindrance to doing what one likes, and a certain prelude to suffering what one very much dislikes. It is only by doing as one ought, that one attains a condition in which one has true physical freedom, the uttermost freedom possible to the body. And the same truth applies exactly to the soul. Freedom, then, is not to be attained by doing what we like unless by chance we like what we ought: which brings us back to the true purpose of our being and the laws by which our being may progress towards it. Apart from that is only loss.

It is true that this argues a very extreme degree of dependence upon God, a dependence to which not all men resign themselves easily. Yet no view of life will work—because no view of life is intelligent—which does not accept both the fact of our dependence upon God and the rightfulness of it—that God has no duty whatever to us, and we have no rights whatever against God. If a carpenter makes a chair, the carpenter owes nothing to the chair. The chair has no rights against him, and he may do as he pleases—sit upon it or set a match to it. But God made us and He made us more fully, so to speak, than any carpenter ever makes a chair. For the carpenter, at any rate, does not make the wood: and there is always the possibility that his rights over the chair may, to some extent, be limited by an unpaid bill for the wood. But God made us, using no material at all. Therefore, we have no more rights against him than the chair has against the carpenter.

Occasionally it seems to us that the fact that we have intelligence and free will does, in some way, make a difference, giving us some claim that the chair has not. But God gave us these gifts too: they are as much His creatures as we: and, therefore, they give us no claim against Him. God could not contract a duty towards us by giving us more. But though God has no duties towards us, yet He has

a duty towards Himself, the duty of acting intelligently. Intelligent action means action with a purpose, and God who gave us intelligence and gave us free will, thereby put Himself under obligation so to speak, to treat us in accordance with that which He had given us. Our dependence, therefore, upon God, though total, absolute, and without any shadow of exception, is not the dependence of machines upon a mad mechanic or of slaves upon a mad king. It is the dependence of free men upon an All-Wise and All-Loving Creator, who knows their being more intimately than they know it themselves – who knows wherein the fulfilment of their being lies, and whose will it is that the fulfilment should actually be achieved. As we shall see, His will for them is even more than that – a fulfilment immeasurably beyond anything that the mere powers of their being would lead men to dare to hope, or even to conceive.

3A. HEAVEN.

IN this third chapter, we come at last to the map itself, or rather to a first general outline of it. We must begin at the end. For this map is the map of a road, and it is only in the light of its end that any road makes sense. If you ask why it turns this way or that, the answer will always lie in a consideration of the place it is going to: till you know that, you cannot even know that it is a road, but only that it looks like one; still less can you know whether it is a good road or a bad road. Therefore, if this map is to be drawn rightly, we must begin at the end.

What is the right end of the life of man? In other words, what should the road of life lead to? Faced with this primary question, men have tried various ways of arriving at the answer. The atheist makes an effort to place the end of the road at death: the road of every man's life runs inevitably to earth in a newly opened grave. But atheists, at any time in the world's history, are exceptional, almost freakish. And for the generality of men, the question of what is the end of life, is simply the question of what comes after death. In this at any rate, the generality of men are right. But after this initial correctness, there is every variety of error. Some men have decided to work out for themselves what they think lies on the other side of the door of death, with the ill-success that must always attend any effort to arrive theoretically at a true idea of an unvisited country. Some have decided that whatever lies on the other side of the door, there is no need to worry about it, but merely to await death and hope for the best with a fair certainty that things will turn out well enough. A small number – even smaller than the number of atheists perhaps – have, in all ages, tried to find out by consulting the souls of the dead – which, logically, is at any rate a far better method than merely theorizing about the life after death. For all that, the method is fraught with endless danger of deception, and for all the thousands of years of its history, the results are so meagre that spiritualism can hardly be conceived as anything more worthy than a kind of peeping through the keyhole.

The Catholic has always realized that as to what comes after death, the only way of finding out is to be told by someone who has personal knowledge of the other world. No other way could possibly be right. So far, the spiritualist has hold of a truth. But of all the beings who may have such personal knowledge, one has it supremely – God. And God, the author of this life and the next, has told us of the future that He has prepared for us. The road of life runs through this life to heaven. Heaven, then, is the end of the road, and we can only understand the road if we have some knowledge of heaven, the place to which it leads, and for which it was made.

At this stage, no more will be said of heaven than is necessary for the mapping of the road. A slightly fuller treatment of heaven, in its own right and not simply as something that makes this life

on earth comprehensible, must be reserved for the final chapter of my book *A Map of Life*. (It is the last section of the fourth booklet in this series.)

Outside the Catholic Church, the idea of heaven has suffered because the only section of Protestants who talk very much about it – Protestants of the Nonconformist type – having no theology on the subject, have been forced more and more to use the imagery of Scripture. For centuries, they have talked, preached and sung of heaven as a place of harps, hymns, crowns of gold, streets of jasper. These, of course, are symbols intended to convey a vivid impression of endless happiness. In themselves, they give no notion of the life of heaven any more than pictures of men with wings give a notion of the being of angels. As symbols, they are made only as ornaments to a great body of teaching, in which the life of heaven is expressed in its true relation to the nature of God and the nature of man. Lacking this true teaching – owing to its suspicion of "theology" – Protestantism has for centuries had no food for its mind save the symbols; and symbols, while an admirable stimulus to the imagination, are not food for the intellect. The result is that for the average man, heaven, thought of in terms of endless hymn-singing, is not attractive.

For the moment, then, we must neglect the symbols altogether. Heaven consists in the knowledge of God and in the love of God flowing from and proportioned to, that knowledge. As such, it means perfect happiness. If we consider what brings happiness to man, in this life, we shall find certain very clear principles. Happiness is always in the soul: it may be caused by some condition of the body, but the body as such is neither happy nor unhappy. It is the soul that knows of the good or ill condition of the body, and rejoices in the good or suffers in the ill. In that happiness of the soul, which comes from some condition of the body, the condition always is that the bodily organs are functioning properly. Let them cease to do so, and the state of the soul, which we call "unhappiness", is nearly certain to result in some measure: not quite certain, be it noted: the soul can triumph even over the body's agony. This fact, that the soul is the seat of happiness, is further shown when we consider a situation in which the body is functioning properly, but the soul itself is perturbed. In such a situation, the state of the soul is decisive: the man is unhappy. A very simple instance is where the man has all, not only that he needs, but even that he wants to drink and eat and wear and entertain himself with. The death of a friend is instantly sufficient to plunge him into the deepest unhappiness. That being so, it is necessary to consider in what lies the happiness that comes from the soul itself.

Like that which comes from the body, it always results from a proper functioning of a faculty. The intellect knows truth and is happy in the knowledge: the will loves goodness and is happy in the love. The soul of man sees and rejoices in beauty – beauty of sound, beauty of colour, beauty of form, – above all, beauty of spirit. In heaven all this is carried to its very highest point. The intellect, whose property it is to possess the knowledge of truth, now knows God Himself, who is supreme Truth. The will, whose property it is to love goodness, is now in immediate contact with God Himself, who is supreme Goodness. The whole soul is therefore functioning at its very highest, and happiness is the inevitable result.

Our imagination may find in this statement – that the happiness of heaven consists in the direct knowledge and direct love of God – a doctrine that it feels to be deeply unsatisfying. To the ordinary man, such a description of heaven seems far too spiritual, too remote from the kind of happiness that springs to his mind the moment he starts to think of happiness at all. It is, therefore, well to analyze just one stage further what happiness involves. In looking at a sunset or in listening to a piece of music, the soul of man may be lifted, if only for the moment, to an absolute ecstasy of

happiness. Yet no man can go on endlessly looking at the same sunset, and an endless repetition of the same piece of music might very easily lead to madness. Both these effects, the original joy and the too rapid fatigue, come from the same source. The beauty that man enjoys in the sunset and the music, is a beauty that God Himself has created, and it is to this that the soul of man responds. But, because God has created it, it is only a shadow or a reflection of that beauty which, immeasurably, is in God Himself, or more truly is God Himself. Man, therefore, who has rejoiced in the beauty that God has placed in the sunset, will rejoice immeasurably more in God Himself, the Author and Source of all beauty.

And whereas he grew weary of the sunset – which was not the beauty of God Himself, but only a created reflection of it – of the infinite beauty of God Himself he will never grow weary.

3B. THE SUPERNATURAL LIFE.

THIS, then, is some idea of the end of the road: what bearing has it on the road? To many, the connection is obscured by a truth, which is only one truth, and not the most important. Heaven is thought of as the reward of a good life. As such, it has only a kind of accidental connection with this life. It is better to think of heaven, not only as a reward, but also as the result of a good life. A simple comparison may make clear the distinction. If a student passes an examination he may be rewarded in one of two ways: he may either get a mere prize – a tennis racquet say, or a volume of Browning – or he may be admitted to a further course of study for which his success in the examination has proved him to be fitted. The tennis racquet has no real relation to the examination he has passed: but the further course of study has; it is a true result of it. To an immense number of people, heaven is rather like the tennis racquet, and, as such, is not really understood at all. But think of it as the further course, resulting from a life well lived, and instantly the connection is seen. This life is not only a test which a man must pass in order to obtain the reward of heaven, it is a preparation which man must successfully undergo in order to live the life of heaven.

From this it follows that whatever is necessary to enable a man to live the life of heaven must, in some way or other, be acquired by man in this life: otherwise, this life would not be a preparation for heaven. And this consideration brings us to the most important point in the whole of Catholic teaching, the doctrine to which all others whatsoever are related, an understanding of which is necessary if Catholicism is to be understood at all. We may approach it in this way. If we were offered a journey to another planet, we should be wise to refuse, because the breathing apparatus, which we have by nature, was made for the atmosphere of this world. In our atmosphere it works: in a totally different atmosphere, it would not work, and we should die of suffocation. This illustration points the way to the truth, namely, that the equipment, which is adequate to life in one world, may not be at all adequate to life in another. And God has told us that our human nature, while adequate to the ordinary life of this world, is not adequate to the life of the world to come. If we were to enter heaven with only the powers of our human nature, we should no more be able to live there than, in the illustration I have given, we should be able to live on another planet with no powers beyond those of our nature.

And just as we should need some extra powers of breathing, not contained in our nature, to live on another planet, so we need extra powers in our soul, not contained in our nature, in order that we may live the life of heaven. These powers, which are not ours by nature, which are necessary in order that we may live a life totally above our nature, are what is called in Catholic teaching, the Supernatural Life. (Footnote: Not, be it noted the spiritual life, though in Scripture this term is often

used for the Supernatural Life. It seems better here to keep the terms distinct. Man's soul is by nature spiritual. The Supernatural Life is something that elevates spirit.)

All that has just been said of man applies equally to those purely spiritual beings, the angels. Heaven consists in such a relationship with God that no created nature, by its own powers, could be adequate to it. Just as men must receive powers above their nature if they are to live the life of heaven, so must angels. Angels had their testing. Those who remained in the love of God were granted the powers and admitted to heaven. Those who rejected God were fixed in eternal separation from Him.

But as we have already seen that our life upon earth is to be a preparation for the life of heaven, and that heaven is to be the logical conclusion of this life, and that, therefore, whatever is necessary to the life of heaven must be acquired by us here – because of all these things, it follows that in this life we must obtain from God the Supernatural Life.

Our life will be a success if, at the moment of death, we have in our soul the life above our nature, the Supernatural Life. It will be a failure if, at death, we have not the Supernatural Life. For if we have it, then we have in our soul the powers that would enable us to live the life of heaven; if we have it not, we lack these powers and therefore will be totally unable to live the life of heaven.

The road of our life, then, will lead us to heaven only if on it we have acquired the Supernatural Life, and at the end of it, have retained the Supernatural Life.

This, then, is the first general outline of our map. There is a road, which leads man to that ineffable intimacy with God, which we call heaven. The condition of walking the road aright, is the Supernatural Life. It will be seen how every single thing that happens to man has its bearing on this Supernatural Life, and is a good thing or a bad thing according as it helps it or hinders it.

Every single doctrine of the Catholic Church is bound up with this, and every single practice of the Catholic Church is concerned with this and with nothing else, and apart from this, has no meaning.

4. THE CREATION AND FALL.

WE have now seen the right road in its simplest elements. Our entry into life is at one end: heaven is at the other: death lies between. To understand the map, we need a knowledge of the purpose of life and a knowledge of the laws to be obeyed; to put our understanding to fruitful use – that is, to attain the end for which we are made – we need the Supernatural Life.

These three things would be necessary, given a supernatural destiny, in any condition of the human race. And all of them must come as a free gift of God or not at all. For us, then, the question simply is: How does God give these gifts – the Life and the twofold Truth – to man here and now? The answer to this question is the actual road of to-day – life as it must actually be lived by ourselves. But we cannot understand the strange, winding, arduous, almost incomprehensible road of to-day, unless we realize that it is not the first road God laid down for us: that in the beginning there was a simpler, less puzzling road; and that by sin man dynamited it; or from another point of view man so damaged himself by sin that he could no longer walk it. A study of the first road and its ruin will make the road of to-day considerably more comprehensible.

From the first man, Adam, we all are sprung; in him, the whole human race was incorporated, since there is no one of us that does not come from him; he was the whole human race when God made him. He gave him, along with many other gifts, the three things necessary. He gave him the twofold

Truth – the knowledge, that is, of the purpose of the human race and of the laws by which it must be governed if it is to avoid disaster. He gave him the Supernatural Life. Adam, then, had the natural life that made him man – the union of spiritual soul and material body which constituted his nature as man, without which he would not have been man: and this natural life he had in a state of perfection, all his powers and faculties rightly ordered, body subordinate to soul, soul ruled by reason. He also had the Supernatural Life – the life above nature – that whereby he would be able to live the life of Heaven hereafter, whereby even in this life his whole soul was "super-naturalized," capable of a relationship with God altogether higher and holier than anything that could take its rise in man's merely natural endowments. The highest and holiest point of this relationship and the very condition of the Supernatural Life was for Adam, as it is for all men, the union of the soul to God by love. And while he had the Supernatural Life, God also exempted his nature from the law of death – from the separation of soul and body which is the natural termination of man's life on this earth.

Now Adam is not to be thought of simply as an individual: he was the human race. God, then – in the very beginning, and, so to speak, as a matter of course – had conferred upon the human race the three gifts necessary. For Adam the simplest elements of the road of human life were two, not three – his entry into life was at one end and Heaven was at the other: death did not lie in between. That, simply and directly, was God's scheme: man had knowledge of the end of his existence, knowledge of the laws by which he might attain the end, plus the Supernatural Life, which put the end within his power. And man wrecked the scheme. Adam sinned, rebelled against God; and thereby lost the Supernatural Life, for this life cannot exist where the love of God is not, and love of God cannot exist where there is rebellion against Him.

Scripture represents the sinful action as the eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree. There is some mystery here. But two things about it we know. The first is that it was a sin of disobedience to God. The second is that the devil played a part in it. It has already been said that among the creatures of God were certain purely spiritual beings, the angels; and that these angels had the same purpose as man – to attain to Heaven – and like man, they had a period of testing.

Some succeeded and are now in Heaven. Some failed in the test, chose their own will rather than God's, and so lost Heaven eternally. In the affairs of the human race, angels, good and bad, are mysteriously concerned. The good angels exercise a certain guardianship over men: the fallen angels – devils – are concerned to lead men into sin and so cause them to fail to reach Heaven. The devil, then, tempted man to commit his first sin.

It is important to understand Adam's new condition. He had lost the Supernatural Life: he retained the natural life or the union of body and soul; the soul retained the natural powers of intellect and will. Supernaturally he was dead, for the loss of life is death; naturally he still lived. But even his nature did not emerge from the disaster unimpaired: it lost the privilege of exemption from death; henceforth man must pass through the gateway of death to reach his eternal destiny. More serious still was that man's nature lost its direction. Adam had sinned because he had chosen his own will instead of God's – he had swung his nature out of its true God-ward direction, and had introduced war into the very inmost part of his nature, into the union of body and spirit – body warring against spirit, spirit torn by war in its own powers.

Thus then stood Adam, the individual man – the Supernatural Life lost, the natural life impaired because given a wrong direction; but still knowing the purpose of his being and the laws set by God for the governance of his life. But Adam was also, by God's dispensation, the representative man,

and the effect of this original catastrophe upon the whole human race is measureless. As a mere physical consequence, the nature he had to hand on to his descendants was an impaired nature, strongly attracted to sin. Worse than that: the right relationship between God and the human race was broken and Heaven was closed to men.

In him the race lost the Supernatural Life: so that men thereafter (with one glorious exception) entered this world with the natural life of soul and body (so much was necessary that they should be of the human race), but without the Supernatural Life, which but for Adam's fall they would have had. This is what we call Original Sin: which is thus to be thought of not as a wrong done by us personally, not as corruption of the soul in its essence, but as the absence of that Life which makes us sons of God and will hereafter open Heaven to us.

(Footnote: The exception referred to earlier in the paragraph was Mary, the Mother of Christ. From the first moment of her existence in her mother's womb, her soul possessed the Supernatural Life. This is called technically her Immaculate Conception.)

Thus then through the spoiling of God's plan one of the three elementary things was lost – and lost instantly.

The other two were not lost so quickly. Adam, we may assume, passed on his knowledge of God's purpose and God's laws to his children and they to their children. But as the slow centuries passed and men became farther removed in time and space from the first revelation, that happened to it, which must always happen to a tradition of men unguarded by God: error crept into it, passion distorted it violently and self-interest less violently, but no less certainly; mere forgetfulness was deadlier than all.

The nature of man still bore witness to God's purpose and God's law – but a witness that grew ever fainter; the fragments remained of the first revelation – but ever more broken and shapeless; the little company of the Chosen People clung to certain fundamental truths – the oneness of God, for instance, and the certainty of a Saviour to come – but only under pressure of endless reminders from God and with heaven knows how much weariness and backsliding. And there came a time when the whole of the threefold gift almost seemed to have perished from the earth. The Life man had lost in one great catastrophe; the Truth man had frittered away. Men were born into the world without the Supernatural Life: with a nature hopelessly at war within itself. They could still, from the universe about them, reason to the existence of God. But even in this, their reasoning was accompanied by a horde of errors, and they could have no certain knowledge of God's purpose or God's law. Chaos was upon them: their foot was upon a road whose end they did not know – a road, which could only be travelled with aids, which they did not possess and could not for themselves obtain.

And, be it repeated, Heaven was closed to man. This is something different from having lost the Supernatural Life. For an individual might, by God's grace, regain the Supernatural Life: and yet because he was a member of a fallen race, he could not enter Heaven. Man is not simply an individual; he is a member of a community. And while the only great human community in existence was Fallen Humanity – to which as a race Heaven was closed – the individual, however holy, was debarred from Heaven. Not till the right relation between God and the Human Race was re-established (as God had promised Adam it would one day be) could the individual member of the race enter Heaven. There was no question of course of a holy man being eternally debarred from Heaven.

But till Heaven was re-opened, he must be in a place of waiting. (Footnote: This place is referred to in various terms. Our Lord spoke of it as "Abraham's bosom" (in the parable of Dives – the rich man – and Lazarus), and "Paradise" (in His promise to the Good Thief). Saint Peter calls it "prison" (1 Peter 3:19), theologians "Limbo", or "Limbo of the Ancients", and in the English version of the Apostles' Creed it is called "hell.")

At last, God did for man what man could not do for himself: He made the threefold restoration and so built a new road for the human race; but consider what man had by his own act become, and it will be small wonder if the new road lacks some of the simplicity of the old.

The first road had been planned for man as he came, all perfect from the hand of God; the second had to be planned for man as he was, with the wounds and stains that were upon him after countless ages of bearing the assaults of the world, the temptations of the devil, the warfare within himself. For the first road, God had made man; for the building of the second road, God became man.

[The full text of A Map of Life, from which this outline is taken, can be found on line at:
<http://www.ewtn.com/library/SPIRIT/MAPLIF.TXT>

It is considered one of Frank Sheed's best books. A Map of Life is also regarded as one of the best and most popular short summaries of the Catholic faith ever written. Focusing on the major truths of our existence and purpose in life, Sheed draws on God's revelation to show what the divine master plan is for us and how each part of the plan is related.

Beginning with "The Problem of Life's Purpose" and "The Problem of Life's Laws", he covers such important parts of the map of life as "The Creation and the Fall", "The Incarnation", "The Mystical Body", "The Trinity", "Law and Sin", "The Supernatural Life", and "Heaven, Purgatory, Hell".]
