

Supernatural Life, And Its Destiny

A Map of Life – Part 4

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1. THE SUPERNATURAL LIFE. (A) HOW IT COMES TO THE SOUL.

THE ground of the map is now sketched in. The end of the road of life is Heaven, and death is a gateway on the road. God has given us means of knowing all that mass of Truth by which we know what God and man are, what life and death mean, what conduct will bring man to heaven. Yet truth and law by themselves do not say all. Man's destiny is above his nature and therefore nothing in his nature will fit him for it. Something must be added to his nature to elevate it. Since what he has to do is to live the life of heaven – a life, which his nature as such does not possess the power to live – he must receive the necessary powers from outside. And, as we have seen, he must receive them in this life. These powers, which enable the soul to live a life above its nature, flow from the possession of the Supernatural Life. In this chapter and the next, the Supernatural Life will be discussed. In this, the main question will be the way in which the soul receives it: in the next, the question will be what its effects are in the soul.

First, then, as to the way the soul receives it. In an earlier chapter in this series of booklets, our Lord's phrase "I am the Life" was worked out fully. Here I shall repeat the main points very briefly. If Christ is the Life, then He must live in us: and that He really does so, Saint Paul bears witness when He says, "I live, yet now not I, but Christ lives in me." The idea of one being living in another is already familiar to us in the case of the cells of the body: here the cells are living cells: yet they live not with some independent life of their own but with the life of the whole body. The cells of my body live with my life: it is I that live in them. This is shown to be more than a suggestive comparison by Saint Paul's clear working out of the idea of the Church as Christ's body. The Church is a body, a living thing, united to Christ as really as His natural body was upon this earth. He is the Head, the directing principle, union with which is a condition of life in the Body: and every member of the Church is a cell in the body and, as such, lives with the life of Christ, whose Body the Church is. This membership of Christ's Body – what we call incorporation with Christ – is the condition on which He can live in us. Only if we are members of a Church thus vitally united with Him does His life flow through us.

We are incorporated – built into the Mystical Body – by baptism. We speak of baptism as a re-birth, a being born again. And rightly. Birth means entry into life. By birth, we enter into the life of man. By re-birth, we enter into the life of Christ: equally, the life of Christ enters into us. Thus, Our Lord Himself says of baptism: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

1(a). PRAYER.

Now the very first condition of human life, whether in the Body or out of it, is prayer. Prayer is simply the directing of life to God. Of prayer, thus understood, the most direct form is the turning of the soul to God that it may speak to Him. This is not, as is sometimes thought, the whole of prayer, since every action of a life directed to God is a prayer. The proportion between this more direct form of prayer, which consists in speaking to God, and the less direct form which consists in work done for God's glory, is different for different men according to God's special will for each. At one end is the contemplative life, which is almost wholly direct prayer: at the other end is the active life, but this can and should be prayer also. In any case, if direct speaking to God is not the whole of prayer, it is prayer at its highest, and just underlies all the rest. What have men to say to God? Endless things. But they may be grouped under four headings.

There is first adoration. It is of the nature of an intelligent being to honour excellence. God is supreme excellence and man's intellect is therefore false to itself if it denies Him its homage. Second, there is thanksgiving: we owe all things whatsoever to God and the failure to acknowledge it is literally fraudulent. Third, there is sorrow for sin. Fourth, there is petition – asking for things – spiritual and material, for ourselves and for others. Mere petition, without the other three elements, is a poor shadow of prayer. With them, it is an act of real enrichment to the soul: since it expresses not only a right relation of man to God, but a right relation of our wishes to God's will: man is sufficiently certain of God's love to ask for what he wants: sufficiently certain, also, to be assured that God will not grant him what he wants if it would be against his truest interests.

Prayer, thus understood in its fourfold subject matter, may also be considered with regard to its mode. It must primarily be in the soul: if it is not an act of the knowledge and love of man's soul, then it is of no value at all. But, thus rooted and grounded in the soul, it will make a twofold use of the body. First, the body affects the soul; second, the soul expresses itself through the body. As an example of the body affecting the soul, a crucifix seen by the eye may help to fix the soul in meditation upon Calvary. As an example of the soul expressing itself through the body, a man meditating upon Calvary and so coming to see the horror of his own sinfulness in the light of the love of God, may find relief to the power of his soul's sorrow by falling on his knees or striking his breast. In a full life of prayer, then, the body will not be excluded. But there is a third thing. Man is not an isolated unit, but a being linked by his very nature to other men. He owes his coming into existence to a man and a woman: he owes his continuance in existence, the development of his powers of mind and body, the full life of his emotions, to a certain co-operation with others. If prayer is to be a directing of his life to God, this necessary social element in his nature must not be excluded: otherwise, there would be a whole side of his nature not consecrated to God. Therefore not only must he pray for his fellow-men, he must from time to time join with them in the worship of God. The man who never goes to church is not merely dispensing with a particular piece of ceremonial. He is refusing to join his fellows in God's worship.

This rough analysis of prayer – into the four kinds of things to be said to God and the three ways of saying them – does, as has already been noted, apply to all men, whether in the Church or out of it, whether aware or unaware of any revelation of God to man. It is an analysis based upon the very nature of God and man and is therefore of universal application. But it has special application to the Catholic. For his knowledge of God in Christ our Lord gives him all the more reason for adoration and thanksgiving and sorrow, all the more confidence in petition; and in every part of his prayer, a true ground of intimacy and personal contact. The use of the soul in prayer is the same for him as for all men; the use of the body is greater since he knows that God took to Himself not only a

human soul but a human body too; and the social element in prayer is inevitably stronger with men who realize that they are not only in a loose sense members of the human race, but in a strict sense cells of one living body, and so joined, not only to Christ but to all others, living and dead, who are likewise cells of the Mystical Body of Christ.

There is not only a prayer of the individual cell but a prayer of the whole body. And if for its own individual prayer the cell uses the life of the whole body, equally it joins in the prayer of the whole body and so makes it its own.

1(b). THE MASS.

What, then, is this prayer of the whole body? Obviously, it must be the prayer of the Head, of Him whose body it is: that is, it must be the prayer of Christ. Here again we come to something of quite vital importance for the understanding of the Catholic scheme of life. There is a powerful phrase in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which may serve as a starting point for thought, "Christ ever lives to make intercession for us." This involves several things: (1) Christ is in Heaven, at the right hand of the Father. (2) His intercession for us is not a thing done upon Calvary once and for all, but a continuous thing, a thing that never ceases. In other words, Christ in Heaven is unceasingly making intercession for us. (3) But the basis of Our Lord's intercession is Calvary. That is what He is offering to His Father on our behalf. Therefore, Christ in Heaven is continuously offering His own death upon Calvary to His Father on our behalf. That is the prayer of Christ Himself.

The prayer of His Body is an earthly participation in that. The smallest individual prayer of every member of the Body is joined with, flows into, Our Lord's continuous offering of Calvary: that, indeed, is the meaning of the phrase "through Jesus Christ our Lord," which is affixed in so many words to some of our prayers and belongs in idea to all of them. As with the individual prayer of the members, so with the prayer of the whole Body: it is a joining up with the continuous offering of Christ.

That being so, it is not surprising that it should find its highest point in the Mass, which is the exact projection here upon earth of the continuous offering in heaven. This truth is worth stating with some precision. In heaven, as we have seen, Our Lord unceasingly offers Himself, the Victim slain upon Calvary, for all men. In the Mass Our Lord offers Himself, the Victim slain upon Calvary, for all men.

First, it is Our Lord that makes the offering. He is acting through His Mystical Body as though through His natural body: it is therefore His offering, the Body simply being the instrument He uses: thus, every member of the Church is joined in the offering: but certain special members, the priests, have been given by God special powers enabling them to act for the Body. They are, in a sense, the immediate instrument. Thus, three truths must be kept in mind: (1) Christ is the chief priest, offering Himself by His own power; (2) the priest offers for the people by power granted him by Christ; (3) the people offer Christ's sacrifice through the priest.

Second. It is Himself that Our Lord is offering at Mass. On the night before His death, Our Lord, at supper with His apostles, took bread and consecrated it so that, while retaining the appearance of bread, it ceased to be bread and became His body, His real body, the body in which He walked the earth and was nailed upon the Cross. Likewise, He took wine and consecrated it so that, while retaining the appearance of wine, it ceased to be wine, and became His blood. He gave His body to the apostles to eat and His blood to drink. And all that He had done, He empowered them to do. The apostles passed on the power, and to this day, in the Mass, the priests of the Church consecrate

bread and wine so that they become the body and blood of Christ. And because the body is the body of the living Christ, where the body is, there is the living Christ in his totality – Man and God. And equally, where the blood is, there is the living Christ in His totality. At Mass, the priest (acting as an instrument in the hands of Christ) offers Christ thus totally present. In other words, at the altar Christ is offering Himself, the Victim slain upon Calvary, but now ever living: just as in Heaven He continuously offers Himself, the Victim slain upon Calvary, but now ever living. The Mass is really Heaven as it were breaking through to earth to be seen of men.

But the priest does not only consecrate: he consumes: he receives Our Lord, whole and living, into his body just as the apostles did. And the congregation likewise may receive Him. This is Communion, the Blessed Eucharist, and we who receives it 'receive Christ Himself into ourselves'. "He that eats Me, the same shall live by Me." (John 6:58) The members of Christ's Mystical Body have as their proper food nothing less than Christ Himself – "the Life." Other food gives life: this food is life.

Our situation as Catholics may be seen in its simplest elements. By baptism, we are built into the Body of Christ, and as cells in the Body, we are able to live with the life of the Body. The condition of all life in God is prayer: our prayer in the Body culminates in the supreme prayer of the Mass: and from the Mass we receive Christ Himself to be the food of our life in the Body. Communion, then, is God's supreme gift to us upon earth. Everything in our life is vitalized by it. Baptism leads up to it, everything else flows from it.

1(c). THE SACRAMENTS.

But there are other ways in which the life of Christ flows to the individual cell. Beside Baptism and the Blessed Eucharist Our Lord instituted five other sacraments.

First a word as to sacraments. These are material things, which are by God's power made to convey grace – or life – to the soul. We say of them that they are symbols, differing from other symbols in that they actually effect what they symbolize. Thus, baptism – with its pouring of water on the body – is a symbol of cleansing, and it does cleanse the soul. The other five sacraments are Confirmation, Penance (or Reconciliation), Holy Orders, Matrimony and Extreme Unction (or Anointing of the Sick).

A very brief word of these individually: Confirmation and Holy Orders are linked with Baptism in that they can only be received once, because, as it is phrased, they confer a character on the soul; which means that they confer some share in the priesthood of Our Lord. Baptism makes a man a member of Christ. Confirmation gives him the right and the duty to defend the Mystical Body of Christ. Holy Orders makes him a priest, confers upon him among other things the power to offer the sacrifice of the Mass, and to absolve from sin. The fullness of the priesthood is in the bishop, who has certain further powers, including those of confirming and ordaining.

But whether priest or bishop, the point to be held firmly is that the man is not acting of himself, but of his own will gives himself to be used as an instrument by Christ. What is done through him, Christ does and no other: so that his moral character, whatever effect it may have on his own salvation, has no effect at all on the sacramental work Christ uses him to do. To hold otherwise would actually be to place a man between us and God. If his moral character could affect the grace we receive, then it would be in some way derived from the priest and not wholly from God.

(Footnote: There are two truths that must be seen in proper relation: (1) the priest is simply an instrument in the hands of Christ: yet (2) as minister of the sacrament he must have the right intention. According to the first, the sacrament does not flow from the priest but from Christ and the sacrament is not affected in the faintest way by the priest's character – neither gaining from his holiness nor suffering loss from his sins. According to the second, the priest simply withholding his intention, can prevent the sacrament from taking place. The priest's character cannot affect the sacrament yet his intention can. At first sight, this may seem a contradiction. But it is not so. The priest is an instrument: that is, he gives certain of his human acts, and these are used by God as channels of grace. But for a complete human act, intention is necessary. The act a man does not intend cannot be called his act at all. Therefore, if a priest has the true intention, God uses him – as an instrument, God doing the work. But if the priest withholds his intention, God cannot use him as a sacramental instrument, and nothing happens at all.

The question "How can a bad priest administer a sacrament?" misses the point. In this sense, there is no such thing as a bad priest. There are priests who are bad men, just as there are doctors who are bad men. But as one only calls a man a bad doctor if he practises medicine badly, so one can only call a man a bad priest if he does his work badly. But, in the case in point, priestly work consists simply in giving certain of his acts which can be used by God sacramentally. Provided he does this, he does all that the holiest man can do. If he does not do this, there is no sacrament at all.)

Of the others, Penance (or Reconciliation) is the sacrament of the forgiveness of sins. A man receives the Supernatural Life at Baptism, he can lose it only by a deliberate act of rebellion against God, what is called a mortal sin: mortal because it brings death: for death is the loss of life and by mortal sin, the soul loses the Supernatural Life. The life thus lost is regained when we receive the sacrament of Penance, when, that is, with true sorrow for having offended God, we confess our sins to His priest, and from the priest, as God's instrument, receive God's forgiveness and the return of the Supernatural Life to the soul.

Matrimony is the sacrament of the entry upon the married state. When two people marry, they take each other as husband and wife for life – this, whether they are baptized or not. If they are baptized, then their marriage is a sacrament – a means whereby God's grace flows to their souls to give them the aids they need for the sanctification of their life together and the overcoming of such difficulties as may arise in it. It is to be noted that the priest does not administer this sacrament to the parties; they administer it to each other.

Extreme Unction, the Last Anointing (or Anointing of the Sick), is the sacrament for grievous illness and the danger of death.

But all these other Sacraments draw their efficacy from their relation to the central sacrament, the Blessed Eucharist. And this is not a mere chance. Prayer and the sacraments are both means of life. In prayer, man approaches God. In the sacraments, God approaches man. But both culminate in the same point. For the highest prayer is the Mass, and the highest sacrament is the Eucharist. Thus at the point where man's approach to God reaches its uttermost intensity, God's response is at its most measureless richness.

It is to be noted in the sacramental system how closely God has followed the lines of human life. First, observe that the very nature of the sacrament is a representation of the nature of man: man is the union of a body and soul, that is, of matter and spirit: God chooses to act upon him by means, which are likewise a union of matter and spirit.

Second, observe that the sacraments bear the same relation to life as a glove to the hand – they are made to fit it. The natural life of man has certain fixed points: he is born, grows to manhood, marries or becomes a priest, dies. Roughly corresponding to these five points are five sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony or Holy Orders, Extreme Unction (the Anointing of the Sick). Beyond these five points, there are two things to be considered: man sins, and for that there is the sacrament of Penance (or Reconciliation): and running through all is daily life – and for that there is the appropriate food, the Blessed Eucharist. Thus, provision is made for man's sanctification not only in his individual life, but also in his relation to the community – on its social side by Matrimony, on its religious side by Holy Orders.

Third, observe that the sacraments are built upon the natural life in still another way: they make use of four everyday things – bread, water, wine, oil – and two everyday situations – the exercise of authority and marriage. Now to these four common things and two common situations, the natural life might be reduced in its simplest elements.

Throughout, then, the sacramental system is a reminder of two things: (1) That matter and spirit are not eternally at enmity, but that matter may be the vehicle of spirit – a truth taught at its very highest in the fact of the Incarnation itself, when God took to Himself a human body and made it as His own; (See the footnote that follows.) (2) That the Supernatural Life does not abolish the natural life and take its place, but enters into the natural life and super-naturalizes it.

(Footnote: This consecration of matter, seen in the Incarnation and in the Church's Sacraments, is carried to its furthest conclusion in the Church's practice with regard to what is called Sacramentals. These, unlike the Sacraments, are not instituted by Our Lord, but by the Church. Yet they follow from Our Lord's own practice. As He blessed bread before He ate it, so the Church blesses the material things man uses in his daily life: and further attaches her blessing to material things (as in Holy Water) and material actions (as in the sign of the Cross) which man may use in his prayer. In all these cases, material things are brought into the full stream of the Church's prayer and so into a special relationship with God.)

Here then is man: a member of Christ's Mystical Body by baptism, open to the in-pouring of the Supernatural Life.

1(d). THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY GHOST.

But there is another great truth about man's membership of the Mystical Body. Our Lord, while constantly speaking of Himself, as the Life, also speaks of the Holy Ghost whom He is to send, and associates Him most intimately with the continuing work of man's salvation. Saint Paul speaks almost interchangeably of life in Christ and life in the Holy Spirit. When Christ promised to live in us, something more was involved than our sharing the life of His human nature. For He was God. And, therefore, since we are united organically with Christ as Head, we are indwelt by the Blessed Trinity. But we have already seen the principle of appropriation by which the works of sanctification are especially associated with the Holy Ghost. It is by the power of the Holy Ghost that God became man in His mother's womb: and it is by the power of the Holy Ghost that man is re-born into the Mystical Body – "unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." When He was giving his apostles the power to forgive sins, He breathed upon them and said: "Receive all you the Holy Ghost": the Holy Ghost came upon the Apostles in the Upper Room and sent them forth for the conversion of the world: by Christ's own word, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter was to abide with His Church. Everything the Church

does for the sanctification of its individual member, every step that a member takes in supernatural development, is attributed to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity.

2. THE SUPERNATURAL LIFE. (B) HOW IT WORKS IN THE SOUL.

IN the last chapter, the channels by which the Supernatural Life comes to the soul were dealt with. In this, we must consider the life itself and its effects upon the soul. It is to be observed how careful Scripture is to make clear that grace – the gift of the Supernatural Life – does not destroy Nature, but elevates it. "I make all things new," says Christ: not "I make all new things." (Revelation 21:5) What He said of the Law of Moses – "I come not to destroy but to fulfil" – He might have said of human nature. He took human nature and into it poured a new thing, thus renewing it, making it new. He did not give new faculties to the soul, but He gave the existing faculties of intellect and will new powers of action, powers to act above their natural level. Here again we must follow very closely if we are to grasp the real nature of our road.

Man by nature is a union of body and soul. The soul has two faculties – the intellect and the will. Now every faculty of man has first its own proper action; and second, its own proper object. Thus, the eye has its action – namely, to see: and its object – namely, coloured surface. So the intellect has its action which is to know or be aware of: and its object which is truth. Likewise, the will has its action, which is to love, and its object, which is goodness. In other words, the intellect knows things in so far as they appear to the soul true: and the will loves things in so far as they appear to the soul good. Now the supreme truth is – God: so that the intellect's highest task is to know God. And the supreme goodness is God, so that the will's highest task is to love God. The natural life of man's soul might be set out as follows:

FACULTY	ACTION	OBJECT	SUPREME OBJECT
Soul	Intellect	to know truth	God
Will	to love	goodness	God

Thus if we had no revelation from God as to His purpose in creating man, we might deduce from the study of man's nature that he was meant to know and to love God. And this answer would be, as a mere matter of words, correct. But it would be wrong in fact: for it would not rise above the knowing and loving proper to our nature, and God has revealed to us that our destiny is to know him directly, face to face, and to love Him according to that knowledge. For this, as we have seen, we need new powers, and God gives us these by grace.

When grace comes in, intellect and will are super-naturalized – that is, their nature is not destroyed but given the power of higher ACTION. The intellect retains its objects, namely, truth, but its action is elevated: in other words, it can get at truth in a higher way: it can now believe upon the word of God, that is, it has the supernatural virtue of faith. The will likewise retains its object – namely, goodness – but its action is elevated from love in the natural order to supernatural love, that is, it has the supernatural virtue of charity, by which it loves God and makes the love of God the root of all its other loves and therefore of all its other actions. And the will is rendered capable of another supernatural action – the action of hope: that is, of aspiring to God in reliance upon His power and His goodness. The Supernatural Life of man's soul might then be set out as follows:

FACULTY	VIRTUE	ACTION	OBJECT
(See the footnote.)	SOUL	Intellect	Faith to believe God
Will	Hope	to hope	God
Charity	to love	God	

(Footnote: It will be noted that God is not here shown as the Supreme Object of Faith, Hope and Charity, but as their Object. He is their Sole Object; they have no other. Hence their name – Theological Virtues.)

Yet the full activity of the Supernatural Life is not in this world. Its completion is in the next. The intellect will then see God direct: it will know him face to face. This direct seeing of God is by a double title supernatural. No created being – man or angel – could by his own powers have direct vision of God, the gulf between Creator and creature being measureless. And man cannot by his own powers have direct vision of anything at all. For man knows things by means of ideas: when I claim to know another person, I mean that a certain idea and image of him is present in my mind and not the man himself. It is by means of this idea and image that I know him. But in heaven, we shall know God direct, not by means of an idea in the mind. So that faith will disappear and direct knowledge will take its place. For the intellect of man there are three levels of action, all having truth as their object: first, natural knowledge: second (for the man in a state of grace here below), faith: third (for the soul in heaven), direct knowledge. To this, we shall return in the final chapter of this booklet. Here simply note that in heaven faith will be no more, for vision will be unclouded: hope will have yielded to possession: only charity will remain – the love binding man to God. But, since love and knowledge are closely connected, charity in heaven will have a newness of intensity proportioned to the new direct knowledge.

To return to this world: the soul in a state of grace that is, possessed of the Supernatural Life – has the three virtues of faith, hope and charity. But, as has already been said, it can lose the Supernatural Life. It does so by mortal sin – that is, by a deliberate and wilful rejection of God. It has to be remembered that man's nature is a damaged nature. The sin of Adam did not render human nature totally evil. But it did leave it with a tendency or bias towards evil – a tendency to seek its own interest rather than God's will, and a tendency to judge of its own interest by the vivid picturing of the imagination and not by the judgment of the reason. Grace does not of itself remove this unhappy bias. Man's nature is by grace given powers to act above its own level: yet it retains that uneasy pull towards self-interest and the too-dominant imagination. Grace helps it, principally, because these three new modes of action bring God closer and clearer. But the bias in the nature is cured only by steady striving to work with grace towards the will of God. And the striving may be marred by many a yielding – the lesser yielding of venial sin, the graver yielding of deliberate rejection of God for self. By such an act, the bond of love is broken, for one cannot at the same time love God and be in rebellion against Him: in technical language the soul loses the virtue of charity. The soul in mortal sin thus necessarily loses charity: it may retain hope and faith, (see the footnote) but without charity hope and faith are not supernaturally alive and cannot sanctify the soul.

(Footnote: Faith, hope and charity being habits are only destroyed by actions contrary to them. Mortal sin – being rejection of God – is contrary to love of God and therefore means the loss of Charity. But it is not necessarily contrary to Faith and Hope. Hope will be lost as a result of a mortal sin directly contrary to it – for example, despair – and Faith likewise by a mortal sin directly contrary to it – for example, unbelief.)

The Supernatural Life and the virtue of charity are inseparable: the one cannot be without the other.

Thus, the first result of the possession of the Supernatural Life is that in this life we have access to God by these three paths – faith, hope, charity – all of them totally above the natural powers of our soul.

A second result is that man is enabled to perform actions, which will merit a supernatural reward. The life of heaven, be it remembered, is a life above our nature. Therefore, we could never merit it by our own natural powers. Natural action could obviously never merit a supernatural reward. Only if we are super-naturalized and thus made capable of acting above our nature can we merit a reward above our nature. For a soul in a state of grace, this is simple enough. What of a soul, which lacks the Supernatural Life, either having lost it or never having had it? Such a soul has only the natural life and as such can make no step supernaturally. If it is to be enabled so to act as to gain – or regain – the Supernatural Life, it must receive a special "impulse" from God. Such an "impulse" is called Actual Grace. This must be distinguished from the Sanctifying Grace – or Supernatural Life – we have been treating of so far. Sanctifying Grace is really a quality given to the soul, elevating it from within, abiding with the soul till it is lost by sin. Actual grace does not abide with the soul, does not sanctify it. It is God moving the soul, giving it a kind of impetus, enabling it to perform some supernatural act – of faith, or trust, or fear – which by its own nature it could not perform. If the soul responds to actual grace and makes the appropriate supernatural act, it receives Sanctifying Grace. To put it in another way, if the soul responds to Supernatural Impulse it receives Supernatural Life.

A third result is, as has already been stated many times, that man's soul is fitted for the life of heaven.

A fourth result is that men by grace become sons of God. By birth, we are creatures of God, servants of God, but not sons. Once we receive the Supernatural Life, we have received that which will one day enable us to know Him directly. But it is proper to God's own Nature – and to no other – to know God directly. Thus, by a gift of God, we are enabled to do something, which belongs to God's own Nature; hence, there is a real similitude of nature, which is rightly expressed by the word "Sons." This is what Saint Peter means when he says that we shall be made partakers of the Divine Nature: and the Church expresses the same truth when she says that grace is a "created participation in the life of God."

Any man possessed of the Supernatural Life is of necessity possessed also of faith, hope and charity. There is no limit to the degree of intensity of the life. By baptism, we receive it. If by mortal sin we lose it, then by the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation we regain it. By the Blessed Eucharist principally, it receives addition. By prayer and by meritorious action of every kind man obtains from God increase of the Supernatural Life. And the whole purpose of man's life upon earth might be stated as the obtaining, preserving and increasing of this life of Grace in his soul.

We are now at last in a position to take stock of the life of the member of Christ's Church. The primary fact about him is that he is not an isolated unit, pursuing his own solitary path to his own private goal. He is a cell in a living Body, the Body of Christ. As such, he has a special relation to Christ: for Christ's life flows through every cell in Christ's Mystical Body. The cell – that is to say, the individual Catholic – may yield his will wholly to Christ, or partially, or not at all: and, according to which of these he chooses to do, he will have the Life flowing through him in plenitude, or less fully or not at all: for a man can be a dead cell in the Body, retaining faith, but not vivified by charity. But in so far as his will is right, then Christ lives in him; and because Christ, then the Holy Ghost likewise: the Spirit of God, proceeding from the Father and the Son, in His own adorable essence the bond of love between Father and Son and so ever known by the Church as the Giver of Life: for the Supernatural Life is inseparable from the virtue of charity, which is love.

Thus, the member of the Church, living supernaturally, is indwelt by the Holy Ghost, organically united to Christ who is God the Son, and by Him brought to the Father.

The relation of all the redeemed to Christ involves a relation of all to each other. The one life flows through them all: all are sharing in the divine life that pours out from the Head. So that whether in Heaven or in Purgatory or upon earth, all members of Christ are members one of another. And as in a body, one part can help another because of the life it has, so in the Church one person can help another because of the life that flows to him from the Head. Thus when our Lady obtains graces for us by her prayers, she is acting not by her own power, but by virtue of the life that is in her from Christ – a life which is also in us, though in her the life is a thousand-fold more intense because of the greater perfection of her love of God here upon earth.

This life in the Body is the first thing to be noted. Every member of the Body who is not in rebellion against God possesses it, as it were, automatically. Normally, also, though not automatically, he possesses two other things, only less important than the life: for, as a member of the Church, he has the means of knowing the laws God has made for right conduct: and all the truths, which will enable him to understand the meaning and purpose of his life. Thus, he knows all that mass of truth concerning God (who made him and who rules him and to whom he must come) which have already been indicated: and principally he knows that God is love – a piece of knowledge which is a most powerful stimulus to right action of every kind and which, as has been seen, marks the supreme difference between Christianity and all other religions whatsoever. He knows, further, all sorts of truths about himself: including the damage wrought in his nature by the sin of the first man, which makes of every man, be he ever so great a saint, a kind of convalescent – one, that is, on the road to health but weakened in constitution and not secure from relapse until he enters heaven. He knows how the original weakness of his nature (which he cannot help) and the damage caused by his own sins (which he can help) may be repaired. He knows the meaning of sin – both in its attraction for himself and in its ugliness before God. He knows something of the meaning of suffering, and knows, therefore, how it may be used for the eternal enrichment of his own soul and offered to God for the souls of others. He knows that in a world over-ruled by the providence of God nothing is of necessity evil, save only sin.

In the mere detail of his life, he has the supreme advantage of possessing a standard by which all things can be judged. His own career in life, his love of his neighbour, his duties to his neighbour, the entangled claims upon him of family, nation, humanity at large: in judging of all these he can apply principles, where other men can only be puzzled by a crowd of instincts or emotions. For in a tremendous number of instances, the law of God is quite explicit, so that no discussion arises: and where he cannot clearly hear the law of God, he knows what man is made for and can at any rate make the effort to judge by that: is this or that condition of things helpful to the saving of men's souls, or a hindrance? Once this primary matter is settled, other considerations – as to his own and his neighbour's temporal well-being – must receive attention. But urgent as such questions may be, they can never be his first concern.

For every man, the one really vital thing is that he should have the Supernatural Life in his soul, for one day he will die.

3. HELL.

MAN, we say, is a union of spirit and matter. The soul animates the body. But there comes a time when the body is no longer capable of responding to the soul's animating power. The soul is as

powerful as ever, but the body has deteriorated – whether by the sudden destruction of some essential part or by the gradual wearing down of age. When that moment comes, the body ceases to be vivified by the soul, and falls away into corruption. The soul, being a spirit, does not cease. It ceases to animate the body, but its other powers – of knowledge and will – are still in action. The soul lives on, awaiting the moment when, by God's act, the body is to be reunited to it and man thereby reconstituted in his complete humanity for all eternity.

Death is not at the end of life. Yet there is a finality about death. It closes the first period of man's life, and this period, though not in itself permanent, is decisive of all that is to come. It is not the end of life. But it is the end of the road. After it, man has arrived, and there is no further journeying for him. This life upon earth is a period of preparation. At the end of it, man has become something: the something he has become he will eternally remain.

The decisive factor is his will. From the beginning of his life upon earth, God is the supreme object of the love of man's will when this is rightly directed. Yet during life upon earth, there is in most men a good deal of fluctuation, and in all men at least the possibility of fluctuating. At one moment, the will is set towards God. Then comes mortal sin and the will is set towards self and away from God. With repentance and true sorrow, the will is turned again to God. And so it goes on. But with death, the fluctuations of the will are over: it has chosen finally, and will not change. This power of the will to make a final choice which it will not change – a power, which makes possible not only the eternity of hell but also the eternity of heaven – anyone might at least suspect from reflection upon the experiences of this life. Character tends to set into a mould, the way of life to become settled as the years go by. We might, as I say, suspect that at death the will has made final choice of its direction. From God's teaching, we know that it has done so. It is either fixed towards God or fixed away from God: that is to say man either loves God with a love that will abide forever or hates God with a hatred equally abiding. In the one case, he will spend eternity with God. In the other case, he will spend eternity apart from God.

It is easy to see how all this applies to the Catholic. By baptism he is incorporated with Christ – that is to say, he becomes a living cell in Christ's Mystical Body. As such, he is living with the Supernatural Life of Christ, just as in every man the cells of his body live with his life. But membership of Christ does not automatically mean living with the life of Christ. While the will of the individual remains united with the will of God, the life of Christ pours into his soul, and he remains supernaturally alive. But if the individual sets his will against God, he cuts off the flow of the life of Christ. He remains (during his life upon earth) a member of the Body: but he is not sharing in the life of the Body. He lives with his natural life as a man: but supernaturally he is not alive.

The ending of our life upon earth will then find us either with the Supernatural Life, with our wills united to God: or without the Supernatural Life, with our wills set away from God. The one state means heaven, the other hell.

It is necessary to be very clear about hell. I have said that if a man dies hating God, then he must be separated from God. But it may be urged that hatred of God is rare. Explicit hatred of God may be rare, but there is a form of self-love, which is equivalent to it. Thus, a man might go through life ignoring God – and therefore not hating Him – but building up such a love of self that he has only to be confronted with God to hate him. After death, God cannot be ignored: and then love of self

will bring to the surface that hate of God that has always been implicit in it, and of which the only possible consequence is separation from God.

This separation is everlasting. Enough has already been said to show why: it is everlasting because the state of will that produces it is everlasting. A man goes on through all eternity hating God. Therefore, through all eternity he remains separated from God. There is only one barrier between himself and God – his own hatred of God: but that barrier he will not tear down. Thus since his will is fixed in hatred of God, there is nothing to be done. Obviously, he cannot be united to God, whom he hates: he must therefore remain separated.

Here, then, is a man with his will fixed irrevocably against God. What follows? In the first place, he has sinned and has not repented: justice demands – what? – then that he be punished. In hell he receives punishment from God: that there is punishment, and that it is great, we know: but how great and whether or not it is un-relaxing, we do not know.

But there is a second, more terrible consideration. He is, as we have seen, eternally separated from God. But he needs God; his nature was made for God. Whenever we are deprived of something that our nature needs, we suffer. From that rule, there is no escape. If we are deprived of food, we suffer the agonies of hunger. If we are deprived of drink, we suffer the far worse agonies of thirst. But our whole nature needs God far more than our bodies need food and drink. If, then, a man is deprived of God, he must, inescapably, suffer, and this with the greatest suffering possible to man. And whereas death comes to end the agonies of hunger and thirst, the man in hell cannot die. He is deprived for all eternity of what his nature needs, and deprived by the inflexible choice of his own will. If any soul in hell would turn to God and ask for mercy, God would grant his prayer. But the souls in hell will not ask. They hate their suffering: but they hate God more. With their love of evil and their hatred of God, heaven would be a fiercer torment than hell. It is the tragedy of final impenitence that it puts the sinner beyond the reach of help. There is nothing that can be done for him. He has perverted his own nature and there is therefore no possible condition of happiness for him. Hell is bad. Heaven would be worse. What keeps him in hell is not the insatiable vengeance of God, but the unchanging direction of his own will towards evil.

The will of man is free to make its choice: God does not interfere with that freedom. Those who have hoped that the souls in hell might one day be saved have assumed that those souls would one day turn from evil to good. We know, because God has told us, that they will never do so. They have become something – their will has fixed itself, for ever, in the hatred of God. Given the purpose of man's life, these men have failed.

It is worth noting that Our Lord is very insistent upon the reality of hell. In the best-known passage of all He describes Himself as saying to sinners at the Last Day: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels." In this passage are contained the three truths about hell, which have already been set down: that it involves separation from God ("Depart from me"); that it involves punishment ("fire"); that it is everlasting fire. And there is the further assertion that the souls of the damned in hell will be in the company of those angels who, like them, fixed their wills in eternal enmity with God.

Apart from this passage, however, Our Lord is constantly referring to it. In the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, He reminds sinners of Hell six separate times. And this fact is worth weighing by those who would dismiss the doctrine as contradicting the Divine love. For no one would question Christ's love for men: yet the doctrine is undoubtedly His. There is, it is true, a mystery in

the fact of Hell: but it is not a mystery of God's cruelty: it is a mystery of the human will with its possibility of fixing itself in evil.

4A. PURGATORY: HEAVEN.

THOSE who thus die with their wills fixed against God find their eternal abiding-place instantly. What of those whose wills are united to Him? It will be remembered that here a distinction must be made. The Life of Christ does not vivify every living cell in His Body with equal intensity. A living Member of the Mystical Body may have his will either totally united or partially united with God's will. In the first case, he is totally living with the life of Christ, totally possessed by Him and at death passes instantly into heaven. In the second, there still remains something of self un-subjected to God. He loves God and his soul is indwelt by His Spirit. Yet imperfections remain. God holds the centre of the soul, but there are, as it were, outlying regions still not completely subject to Him. Upon such a man, sin still has a certain hold: and this usually in one of two ways: either there is venial sin not repented of: or there is mortal sin, repented of yet not sufficiently.

Venial sin, of course, does not destroy the Supernatural Life of the soul, and therefore does not send a soul to hell: yet it remains a breach of God's law. As such, justice demands that it shall be punished like any other breach of God's law. Repentance of course would wipe out the debt of punishment. But venial sin is often slight enough, does not stir the soul, is forgotten almost at once: so that frequently there is no repentance, and at death the debt of justice stands.

The second condition is more delicate. When a man commits a mortal sin, he loses the Supernatural Life: when he is truly contrite, he regains it. Now contrition is to be measured in two different ways. As to its motive, and as to the degree of its intensity. If a man is truly contrite (that is, sorry, for the right motive) and sufficiently contrite (that is, as sorry as the gravity of the sin demands) then all is forgiven, guilt and punishment alike. But what of a man whose sorrow, while true and sincere, falls short of the necessary degree of intensity? The guilt of his sin is forgiven: the Supernatural Life is restored to his soul, and God allows him to make up by suffering for what is lacking in his sorrow: in other words, some punishment still remains, even after the guilt is forgiven.

If a man die in either of these states – with venial sin not repented of, or mortal sin repented of but not sufficiently – there is still the debt of justice to be satisfied and the soul to be brought altogether to freedom from sin, and union with God: and in Purgatory, by God's mercy, this cleansing and compensating suffering is undergone. The souls in purgatory suffer: but the strife is over. They know that heaven is theirs.

It now only remains to consider the state of those who enter heaven: whether they enter it immediately upon death or after a space in Purgatory.

4B. HEAVEN.

Of heaven, there is no need to speak at great length here, because heaven is the end of the road and was therefore treated in some fullness at the beginning of the map – in the third chapter of the first booklet.

Scripture tells us three things very clearly:

(1) The happiness of heaven is perfect – broken by no present sorrow and no fear of future ceasing. It is happiness of the whole being; the soul's every power acting at its very highest.

(2) The happiness of heaven is indescribable and unimaginable. "Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what things God has prepared for them that love Him." The language made by man from his experiences of this life has no power to convey the experiences of the next. The pictures of joy built by our imagination, fed upon the joys of this life, are poor shadows of the joy of heaven.

(3) But if by imagination, we can take no grip on heaven's happiness, by the higher faculty of intellect – acting upon the revelation of God – we can know something of it. In heaven we shall see God "face to face": we shall "know as we are known": so says Scripture. Which means that we shall know God, not, as we know things here below, by an idea in the mind, but direct, God Himself present in our very soul and realized by us as present, realized at the very highest point of intensity. This is what theology calls the Beatific Vision. "We shall be made like to Him," said Saint John, "for we shall see Him as He is."

Our soul, then, will have laid hold on God. God is supreme truth, so that our intellect, with no barrier between itself and its supreme object, will be eternally enriched in eternal activity, for God is infinite and our intellect will never exhaust the truth that is its supreme beatitude. But God, too, is supreme goodness: so that our will equally will find no barrier between itself and its supreme object, and will come to rest in eternal love. Not all souls will be equal in heaven. The soul grows naturally by development of intellect and will. Supernaturally – which is what matters here – it grows by the possession of the Supernatural Life. But this it must receive upon earth, for after death it cannot merit. Therefore, souls united with God have not all reached the same degree of development when they come to die. But, greater or smaller, all souls are functioning in heaven with intellect and will at their highest intensity upon their highest object: therefore, every soul will know perfect happiness. To summarize what has been said earlier: those very various qualities in the things of earth which cause us happiness are all caused by God, the creator of all things: they are therefore already present in Him, not in the shadowy and imperfect way in which we find them in created things, but complete and perfect in their highest form. Finding Him, then, we find at an infinitely higher level all things whatsoever which have caused us happiness upon earth.

So much for the essential of heaven – the direct apprehension of the Blessed Trinity.

Bound up with that is a fellowship with all the other citizens of Heaven: fellowship with Christ our Lord – the second Person of the Trinity made man – with His mother, with the angels and saints. So that Heaven is not only our relationship with God come to maturity, but also our relationship with all the lovers of God – with all created beings, that is, who have achieved the purpose for which God made them.

Here then, in the very briefest space, we have seen something of the world into which death ushers us. Yet if death ushers us into the next life, it does not choose our place: that is decided by the state of our soul in relation to God. That is what we call the "particular judgment" – the decision made at each man's death of the place to which each belongs. Till the world ends, we shall live in heaven simply as souls, separated from the bodies which once were ours. In Heaven Christ our Lord is bodily present, that the whole of human nature (not soul only, but the union of soul and body) in its perfection should be present at the right hand of the Father. His body is His natural body, yet glorified: without suffering, or deformity, no longer a cloak to the soul, but as it were translucent, so that the soul is only the brighter for the body it indwells. And similarly, our Lady is bodily present too – so says the doctrine of the Assumption.

But in the normal course of God's providence, the souls in Heaven must wait for the Last Day to be reunited to their bodies.

For there is a Last Day. As there is an end to every man's term upon earth, so there will one day be an end to the term upon earth of the human race. When the Mystical Body of Christ shall have grown to its full stature – "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13) – the human race will have achieved its purpose as a race. All the men who are to be incorporated with Christ – built into His body – will have been thus incorporated, and all will be completely at one with Him. Then will come the end of the world and the General Judgment. Christ will judge the whole world – all men will be in their place for all men to see – and the whole immense plan of God will be seen as a thing perfectly achieved. The bodies of men – glorified, as Christ's is – will be reunited with their souls: and every man – body and soul – will be for ever established in joy or woe.

There roughly is the map. If it is a good map, a well-drawn map, then one should be able to find one's bearings by it – to find where one stands in relation to all other things, to find the end of the road and the way to it. So much a good map can do. The best map cannot do more. A map is concerned with the surface and cannot tell you in detail of the treasures that lie beneath. On the field here mapped, there is no point at which one may not dig with immeasurable profit: or to abandon the metaphor, every single truth mentioned is but a single name for a whole world of truth. The Blessed Trinity will yield truth for our meditation for all eternity, and even here below we shall not exhaust what here below may be known. Or if, leaving the intricacies of the map we concentrate on any one point of it – the excellence of our Lady, for instance, or the life of prayer – we shall come upon a mine of truth by comparison with which the bare outlines of a map may seem poor colourless things. But even for the appreciation of any one doctrine, the map is necessary. No truth is merely itself: something pours into it from all other truth: and for a study of any one point of revealed truth, there is no better equipment than a general view of the whole.

[The full text of A Map of Life, from which this booklet is taken, (Chapters 11, 12, 13 and 14) 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".]
