Imago Dei–Imago Christi:
The Theological Foundations
of Christian Humanism[1]

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IT HAS BEEN widely recognized that the documents of the Second Vatican Council represent a notable reaffirmation of the theology of the *imago Dei*.[2] For a variety of reasons, in some traditions of Catholic theology after the Reformation and Enlightenment periods, this element of classical theological anthropology had not received the attention it properly deserved. But in the first half of the twentieth century, both in neo-Thomistic and *ressourcement* circles, the theology of the *imago Dei* enjoyed a significant revival. Inspired in part by this retrieval of classical theological anthropology, the Council Fathers sought to recover the Christological and eschatological contexts that had been essential in the theology of the *imago Dei* of the best patristic and scholastic authors. Among the conciliar documents, none was more complete in its articulation of the theology of the *imago Dei* than *Gaudium et Spes*.[3]

The importance of the connection between anthropology and Christology both for a correct interpretation of *Gaudium et Spes* and for an authentic Christian humanism was noted early on. Over thirty years ago,

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[1] Presented to the International Congress of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome, 21–25 September 2003.

[2] See Luis Ladaria, SJ, "Humanity in the Light of Christ in the Second Vatican Council," in René Latourelle, ed., *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives,* Vol. II (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 386–401.

[3] See the comprehensive treatment in George Karakunnel, *The Christian Vision of Man: A Study of the Theological Anthropology in "Gaudium et Spes" of Vatican II* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Association, 1984).

in one of the first theological commentaries on *Gaudium et Spes,* the now Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger argued that it is essential to take into account the intrinsic linking of anthropology with Christology (and thus with eschatology) that unfolds across the entire text and that in his view constitutes its crucial insight. Any properly comprehensive interpretation of the theology of the *imago Dei* in *Gaudium et Spes* would need to balance passages that speak of man as created in the image of God (such as no. 12) with those that speak of Christ as key to the mystery of man (such as no. 22). The perfect image of God is the incarnate Word who is both the exemplar of the created of God in man and the pattern for its graced transformation.[4] The concrete human person who is created in the image of God is always *in via*, always being drawn to the Father, but partly impeded by sin; he is redeemed by Christ, yet still undergoing a lifelong transformation in the power of the Holy Spirit, with a view to the final consummation of a life of communion with the Blessed Trinity and the saints. The image of God is always, as it were, a work in progress. From the moment of creation, the perfection of the image of God— more simply, holiness—is already intimated as the end of human life. A Christian theology of creation "is only intelligible in eschatology; the Alpha is only truly to be understood in the Omega."[5] Thus, according to Cardinal Ratzinger's early essay, *Gaudium et Spes* presents "Christ as the eschatological Adam to whom the first Adam already pointed; as the true image of God that transforms man once more into likeness to God."[6]

Subsequently, as is well-known, Pope John Paul II made this cluster of themes the hallmark of his pontificate. The dominant interest in anthropology, which had characterized his entire career as a philosopher and theologian, now in his papal Magisterium blossomed prodigiously into the full-blown reaffirmation of an authentic Christian humanism.[7] A distinctive element in Pope John Paul's teaching about the *imago Dei* has

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[4] Joseph Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," in Herbert Vorgrimler et al., eds., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II,* Vol. V (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 115–63.

[5] Ibid., 121.

[6] Ibid., 159. See the discussion of these issues in Walter Kasper, "The Theological Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes,*" and David L. Schindler, "Christology and the *imago Dei*: Interpreting *Gaudium et Spes,*" *Communio* 23 (1996), 129–41 and 156–84.

[7] See Kenneth Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyla/Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), and Jaroslav Kupczak, OP, *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000).

been his stress on the relational character of the image: Creation in the image of God is the basis for and is realized precisely in the communion of persons. In addition, the Holy Father has made his own the distinctive blend of anthropology and Christology, which is the mark of conciliar teaching. Pope John Paul II frequently invokes the words of *Gaudium et Spes* no. 22, which state that "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear." Beginning with his programmatic first encyclical, anthropology and Christology are always to be found interwoven in the relational theology of the *imago Dei* expounded by the Holy Father.

The juxtaposition of *imago Dei* and *imago Christi* in the title of my essay is meant to capsulize the Christocentric anthropology that is characteristic of patristic and scholastic theology of the image of God and that has been expressed anew by the Second Vatican Council, by Pope John Paul II, and by Cardinal Ratzinger and other theologians. It can truly be said that, according to this vision, the human person is created in the image of God *(imago Dei)* in order to grow into the image of Christ *(imago Christi)*. This Christocentric vision of the human person is the foundation of authentic Christian humanism. What is more, *Gaudium et Spes* and the Magisterium of Pope John Paul II testify to the immense relevance of this vision for the new evangelization and for theology today as the Church confronts a wide range of challenges in her proclamation of the truth about man.

The challenges to authentic Christian humanism today are of at least two kinds, though the first arises from within the Christian theological tradition itself and is represented by the lingering influence of nominalist patterns of thought in moral theology and in the anthropology that it implies. A second kind of challenge has sources largely external to the Christian tradition, and is represented by the variety of secular humanisms and anti-humanisms that advance alternative accounts of the meaning (or lack of it) in human existence. Another important kind of challenge arises from the distinctive religious visions of the human espoused by Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, but I shall not be considering it here. The two kinds of challenge I do want to consider can be seen to be convergent in their final outcomes, and I want to suggest that the theology of the *imago Dei* of St. Thomas Aquinas can be of particular assistance in facing them.

We have seen that the Christocentric anthropology of Pope John II and the Second Vatican Council highlights the intrinsic link between what human beings are as such and what they can hope to become. Implicit in this anthropology is the conviction that human fulfillment and religious consummation are themselves intimately connected. The

holiness (or religious consummation) that is Christ's gift in the Holy Spirit constitutes the perfection of the image of God (integral human fulfillment). Created in the image of God, human persons are meant to grow into the image of Christ. As they become increasingly conformed to the perfect man, Jesus Christ, the fullness of their humanity is realized. There is thus a finality built into human nature as such and, although its realization is possible only with the assistance of divine grace, this realization is in a real sense continuous with the tendencies and even aspirations essential to human nature as such. The cultivation and fulfillment of the human person through seeking the good in a graced moral life enables one to enjoy the Good that is beyond life.

It is precisely this identification of human fulfillment with religious perfection that is, in different ways, severed or negated by the lingering nominalism of some Catholic moral theology and by the competing secular humanisms and anti-humanisms of Western modernity. The result in both cases is a spiritual crisis in which the goods of human life are disengaged from the desire for transcendence. Nominalism divorces human moral fulfillment from the possibility of the enjoyment of a transcendent good, while secular humanisms and anti-humanisms declare the desire for this transcendence to be itself irrelevant and even injurious to integral human fulfillment. Let us consider these challenges in turn.

The features of nominalist thought that are crucial to my argument here will be familiar to students of the history of late medieval philosophy and theology.[8] Nominalist thinkers famously sought to preserve the divine freedom by stressing the unlimited possibilities available to the absolute power of God (the *potentia absoluta*) that cannot be regarded as in any way constrained by the existing order of things in creation and redemption established by the divine *potentia ordinata*. To a certain extent under the influence of Scotus, who had already made Aquinas the target of his criticism,[9] nominalists explicitly denied that which Aquinas had affirmed, namely, the

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[8] For details, see Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy,* vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1963), 43–122, and Paul Vincent Spade, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambrige University Press, 1999), especially the essays by Peter King, Marilyn McCord Adams, A. S. McGrade, and Alfred J. Freddoso.

[9] See Thomas Williams, "How Scotus Separates Morality from Happiness," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 69 (1995), 425–45. See Copleston, *A History of Philosophy,* vol. 2, 476–551, and Thomas Williams, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Scotus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially the essays by James Ross and Todd Bates, William E. Mann, Hans Möhle, Thomas Miller and Bonnie Kent. For the contrast between Scotus and Aquinas, and the links between nominalism and Scotus on these issues, see especially Anthony Levi, *Renaissance and Reformation: The Intellectual Genesis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 30–67.

existence of a rationally ordered universe reflecting the divine wisdom and accessible to human experience and knowledge. Whereas for Aquinas there is a congruence between the knowable divine law inscribed in human nature (natural law) and human aspirations for fulfillment, on the one hand, and the enjoyment of supernatural beatitude, on the other, for nominalism God is completely unconstrained in enjoining moral laws. The moral law imposes obligations that reflect neither the rational character of God's activity nor the inbuilt finalities of human nature. Moreover, since absolutely free, God's decision to save or damn particular individuals could not be in any way dependent on their fulfillment, or lack of it, of these obligations. Rather than being the intrinsic principle of the moral life, as in Aquinas, beatitude becomes an external reward whose enjoyment may or may not reflect the moral character of a particular human life. Since moral law is the expression of the divine will and thus ceases to depend upon the ontological constitution of human nature, moral theology is detached from theological anthropology and from any exemplary Christology. Yielding its place in theological anthropology and moral theology, Christocentrism in the form of intense devotion to Christ became a persistent feature of the spirituality of the *devotio moderna*, which was itself a religious strategy designed to bypass the troublesome philosophical and theological perplexities of nominalist *via moderna*. In an important recent book, Anthony Levi has argued that nominalist theology gave rise to an "intolerable spiritual tension, deriving from the separation of moral achievement from religious fulfillment," principally because individuals "could not know what unalterable fate God had decreed for them without reference to the exercise of autonomously self-determining powers during life."[10] With the divorce of moral achievement from religious perfection, religious practices and observances served to allay this tension independently of the moral state of the individual.

Father Servais Pinckaers has convincingly demonstrated that certain fundamental presuppositions of nominalist theology are embedded in the casuistic moral theology of the manuals in use from the seventeenth century to the eve of the Second Vatican Council.[11] Among these, perhaps the most important for our theme are the centrality accorded to obligation in the moral life and the eclipse of beatitude as an intrinsic principle

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[10] Levi, 64.

[11] Servais Pinckaers, OP, "La nature de la moralité: morale casuistique at morale thomiste," in *Somme theologique: Les actes humains*, vol. 2, trans. S. Pinckaers (Paris: Desclée & Cie, 1966), 215–76. See his *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 327–53. For a helpful summary of Pinckaers's argument, see Romanus Cessario, OP, *Introduction to Moral Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 229–42.

of moral action. In this tradition of moral theology, the categories of the obliged and the forbidden are prior to the categories of good and evil in actions. Actions are bad or wrong because they are forbidden, rather than vice versa. Actions that are bad or wrong merit punishment, while those that are good or right merit reward. But there is no intrinsic connection between these actions as such and the punishment or reward they merit. Since nominalist philosophical theology does not survive in the casuist worldview, the predestinating deity has vanished. God is now understood to confer reward or punishment in view of an individual's success or failure in meeting moral obligations. Under the influence of nominalism, casuist moral theology has no need for an account of how moral agents become good by seeking the good. It is significant, as Father Pinckaers has pointed out, that the treatise on beatitude disappeared from manualist moral theology while the treatise on the virtues was consigned to the realm of spiritual theology.

Although I cannot pursue the point here, the prevalence of this kind of moral theology gave rise to the intolerable tensions experienced by many Catholics in the face of the moral teaching of *Humanae Vitae*—and eventually the entirety of Christian teaching about human sexuality—which seemed to impose an outdated moral obligation whose connection with the human good was either denied or dismissed or, more commonly, simply not apparent. The proportionalist and consequentialist moral theories devised with a view to allaying these tensions failed to question, and indeed often presupposed, the very edifice of casuistic moral theology that had made these tensions almost inevitable.

The fundamental difficulty here—echoing Levi, one might speak of an "intolerable spiritual tension"—is that many people can no longer discern an intrinsic link between the moral law and their good, and, furthermore, no longer view religious achievement (the reward of happiness) as intrinsically connected with moral or human fulfillment. Religious practices—often in the form of eclectic spiritualities—are now often seen as unconnected from moral obligations, whose specific content is in any case exiguous. Morality, even when faithfully observed, is viewed as disengaged from, and indeed is often regarded as in conflict with, basic human aspirations for a good and happy life. In addition, a good and happy life here is not seen as continuous with the life of beatitude as such. Heaven is inevitable in any case, while hell is unthinkable and purgatory unintelligible.

In accounting for the revolution that came with modernity and saw the emergence of secular humanism and, more recently, of neo-Nietzschean anti-humanisms, one can certainly point to the spiritual mentality fostered

by casuist moral theology as among the likely contributing factors. Certainly, Charles Taylor is right in seeing affective and spiritual factors as crucial in fostering this revolution and maintaining the West in what he terms a "post-revolutionary" climate.[12] It is not simply the loss of belief in God and in other central Christian dogmas that contributed to this revolution, but possibly, in the terms of the argument of this essay, the long-term insupportability of the edifice of casuist moral theology with its divorce of human and moral fulfillment from religious perfection. Be that as it may, according to Taylor, secular humanisms and postmodern anti-humanisms agree in affirming a good to human life without the need to invoke any good beyond life. What distinguishes them is the anti-humanist insistence that a comprehensive affirmation of human life must embrace (and even celebrate) suffering and death. But both secular humanism and postmodern anti-humanism simply deny that religious aspirations have any relevance for human and moral fulfillment. The desire for transcendence is a kind of human and moral dead end. "Immortal longings," to use Fergus Kerr's felicitous phrase, may not be good for one's moral health nor, indeed, for one's humanity.[13] For Taylor, the "horizon of assumptions" that "shapes the pervasive outlook toward religion in our culture" includes the view that for us "life, flourishing, driving back the frontiers of death and suffering, are of supreme value" and that what prevented people from seeing this sooner and more widely was "precisely a sense, inculcated by religion, that there were higher goals," a good beyond life. In the post-revolutionary climate, "to speak of aiming beyond life is to appear to undermine the supreme concern with life in our humanitarian, 'civilized,' world."[14]

One can readily see, in the terms of Taylor's persuasive analysis of the rejection or marginalization of religion in Western modernity, that in order to seek the good of human life, one must give up pursuing a good beyond life or, at least, one must define the good beyond life in non-religious terms. Religious perfection is seen not only as irrelevant to human fulfillment but as an actual obstacle to it. We can also readily see, if we recall the fundamental features of the Christocentric anthropology of Pope John Paul II and the Second Vatican Council, how radical a challenge is posed both by moral theology in the nominalist-casuist vein and

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[12] Charles Taylor, "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy," in Maria Antonaccio and Michael Schweiker, eds., *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3–28.

[13] Fergus Kerr, OP, *Immortal Longings* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

[14] Taylor, 23.

in its current variants, and by the secular humanisms and anti-humanisms of Western modernity.

According to the Christocentric anthropology sketched earlier, there is an intrinsic link between what human beings are as such and what they can hope to become. There is a link, not a contradiction, between human fulfillment and religious consummation. Holiness (religious consummation) is the perfection of the created image of God (human fulfillment). The legacy of nominalism in casuistry and in the moral theories that sought to correct it is such as to make it very difficult to grasp the terms of an authentic Christian humanism even when they are forcefully presented. (Consider, in this connection, the cool reception still accorded to *Veritatis Splendor* in some quarters.) Without a moral theology that is thoroughly integrated with anthropology and Christology, it will be difficult to withstand the variety of secular humanisms and anti-humanisms of Western modernity. Indeed, in the climate of contemporary culture, there is a powerful temptation for some religious people, including Catholics, tacitly to accept the "horizon of assumptions" of Western modernity and to promote precisely (and sometimes chiefly) those aspects of their faith that can be seen as contributing to the good of human life. The documents of the Second Vatican Council have themselves sometimes been subjected to readings employing this strategy with an eye to well-meaning programs of renewal that, without denying the good beyond life, do not always leave much room for it in practice. It may well be that the divorce between human/moral fulfillment and religious perfection, embedded in prevailing forms of Catholic moral reflection, makes it difficult for Catholics influenced by them to respond to the challenges posed by non-religious or anti-religious humanisms for which the presumption of this divorce is axiomatic.

I am convinced that a recovery of Aquinas's theology of the *imago Dei* can and has already begun to make a significant contribution to the Catholic response to these challenges. Here I can only sketch briefly the possibilities as I see them. That Aquinas's theology affords such resources may not be obvious to everyone. Certainly, many will readily admit that, in linking anthropology, Christology, and eschatology in its theology of the *imago Dei*, *Gaudium et Spes* had recovered important strands in the patristic doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Perhaps less widely known is how thoroughly Christological and eschatological is the theology of the *imago Dei* advanced in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. One of the more refreshing aspects of recent scholarship on Aquinas is the emergence of a broad appreciation of this central element of his theology.[15]

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[15] For an orientation to the literature on this topic, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, OP, *St. Thomas Aquinas: Vol. II: Spiritual Master,* translated by Robert Royal (Washington,

A crucial feature of this more comprehensive appraisal of Aquinas's theology of the *imago Dei* has involved the recognition that his explicit consideration of the matter as part of the theology of creation in question 93 of the *prima pars* cannot be treated in isolation but must be located within the broader context of the overall argument of the *Summa theologiae*.[16] It is well-known that the structure of this argument is framed in terms of Aquinas's distinctive appropriation of the *exitus-reditus* scheme. This structure has immense significance for his theology of the *imago Dei*: The human being created in the image of God is by the very fact of his human nature and from the very first moment of his existence directed toward God as his ultimate end.[17] Contrary to a widespread

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DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003). See: Emile Bailleux, "A l'image du Fils premier-né," *Revue Thomiste* 76 (1976): 181–207; Romanus Cessario, OP, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 38–48; Michael A. Dauphinais, "Loving the Lord Your God: The imago Dei in St. Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 241–67; Ignatius Eschamnn, OP, "St. Thomas Aquinas, the Summary of Theology I–II: The Ethics of the Image of God," in Edward A. Synan, ed., *The Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas: Two Courses* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1997), 159–231; L.-B. Gillon, OP, *Cristo e la Teologia Morale* (Roma: Edizioni Romane Mame, 1961); Thomas Hibbs, "*Imitatio Christi* and the Foundation of Aquinas's Ethics," *Communio* 18 (1991): 556–73, and *Virtue's Splendor: Wisdom, Prudence and the Human Good* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001); Fergus Kerr, OP, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Matthew Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 83–107; D. Juvenal Merriell, *To the Image of the Trinity: A Study in the Development of Aquinas's Teaching* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990); Luc-Thomas Somme, *Fils adoptifs di Dieu par Jésus Christ* (Paris: Vrins, 1997); Batista Mondin, "Il bene morale come perfezione della persona," in Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas, *Atti della III Plenaria* 2002, 127–37.

[16] See G. Lafont, *Structures et méthode dans le Somme théologique de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: 1961), and, more recently, Servais Pinckaers, "Le thème de l'image de Dieu en l'homme et l'anthropologie," in P. Bühler, ed., *Humain à l'image de Dieu* (Geneva: 1989), 147–63. See Thomas S. Hibbs, "The Hierarchy of Moral Discourses in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64 (1990): 199–214; and A. N. Williams, "Mystical Theology Redux: The Pattern of Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*," *Modern Theology* 13 (1997): 53–74, and "Deification in the *Summa theologiae*: A Structural Interpretation of the Prima Pars," *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 219–55.

[17] In this essay, I have not dealt with the controversy that has surrounded the "nature and grace" of theological anthropology which originated in the work of Henri de Lubac and has been sharpened lately in the writings of David Schindler and others in the "communio" school. It will be evident to the careful reader that, with Aquinas and many other Thomists, I both hold for the description of a natural end for human nature *and* deny a double order of nature and grace extrinsically related to one another. A teleological understanding of human nature is crucial to maintaining the link between religious perfection and integral human

misrepresentation of his thought (which while losing much its currency
remains entrenched in certain quarters), for Aquinas the theology of the
imago Dei constitutes not a static and thus ahistorical conception of
human nature, but rather a fundamentally dynamic and active one.[18]

This is already explicit in question 93. The dynamism is that of the
exitus-reditus, a movement rooted in the divine purposes in creation and
redemption, and inscribed in the created order by the very finalities of
human nature. In addition, Aquinas's account of the *imago Dei* explicitly
asserts that it is primarily in acts of knowing and loving God through
faith, hope, and charity that the imaging of God is realized.[19] According
to Father Romanus Cessario, "Aquinas contends that we should look for
the image of God, not primarily in the intellectual capacities of the soul,
but in the very acts of those operative capacities or habits."[20]

Looking beyond question 93, to the *secunda* and *tertia pars*, we can see
that the theology of the *imago Dei* within the overall argument of the
Summa theologiae secures the intrinsic link between moral theology,
anthropology, and Christology, and thus the connection between
human/moral fulfillment and religious perfection, or beatitude. For one
thing, we find that the entirety of the *secunda pars*—Aquinas's expansive
treatise on the moral life—unfolds as an explication of what it means for
man to made in the image of God. Here the dynamic character of the
imago Dei is clear: Human beings must be active in the grace-enabled
actualization of the image of God within them. Coming from God, they
are active participants in the movement of their return to him. What
draws them is their pursuit of the good of human life that is continually

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fulfillment. For a perspective on this controversy touching on the issues raised in
this essay, see Romanus Cessario, OP, "On Bad Actions, Good Intentions and
Loving God: Three Much Misunderstood Issues about the Happy Life that St.
Thomas Aquinas Clarifies for Us," *Logos* 1 (1997): 100–22. On the broader issues,
see the comprehensive treatment of Schindler's position in Tracey Rowland,
Culture and the Thomist Tradition (London: Routledge, 2003). For a splendid survey
of the twentieth-century controversy, see Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire
to See God* (Rome: Appolinare Studi, 2000). See: Benedict Ashley, OP, "What is
the End of the Human Person? The Vision of God and Integral Human Fulfill-
ment," in Luke Gormally, ed., *Moral Truth and Moral Tradition* (Dublin: Four
Courts Press, 1994), 68–96; Steven A. Long, "On the Possibility of a Purely
Natural End for Man," *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 211–37; Peter A. Pagan-Aguilar,
"St. Thomas Aquinas and Human Finality: Paradox or *Mysterium Fidei*?" *The
Thomist* 64 (2000): 374–99.

[18] See Ian A. McFarland, "When Time Is of the Essence: Aquinas and the *Imago
Dei*," *New Blackfriars* 82 (2001): 208–23.

[19] *Summa theologiae,* I, q. 93, a. 4.

[20] Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life,* 43.

revealed as the Good beyond life. No one demonstrates better than Aquinas the continuity between the inbuilt desire for the good and the enjoyment of the Good beyond all limited goods, which is beatitude. Hence the capital importance of the meditation on the nature of beatitude, which begins Aquinas's treatise on moral theology: Only the supernatural beatitude of communion actualizes the movement of the human person toward his or her fulfillment.

In the *tertia pars*, Aquinas arrives at the culmination of the theology of the *imago Dei* when he shows how Christ, the perfect image of the Father, is the principle and pattern of the restoration and the perfection of the image of God in us.[21] All the mysteries of Christ's life, but especially his passion, death, and resurrection, bring about the work of transformation in us by which the image of God, damaged by original sin and by our own personal sins, can be restored and perfected. Configured and transfigured in the *imago Christi* by the power of the Holy Spirit, we return to the Father, and come to enjoy to the communion of Trinitarian life that is the essence of beatitude.

In the terms of the argument of this essay, and contrary to both nominalist moral theology and to the secular humanisms and anti-humanisms of Western modernity, Aquinas can be construed as advancing a theology of the *imago Dei* that shows how in the gracious plan of divine providence religious perfection is central to human and moral fulfillment. The human person is created in the image of God in order to grow into the image of Christ. This truth about man is the foundation of the authentic Christian humanism central to the teaching of Vatican Council II and John Paul II. A critical task of Christian anthropology in every age is precisely to supply an adequate basis for moral theology. Among the most significant of Pope John Paul's encyclicals, *Veritatis Splendor* corrects the unfortunate legacy of casuist moral theology and its contemporary progeny and, more important, presses upon us the profound links between anthropology and Christology that establish the basis of an authentic Christian humanism.

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[21] In addition to the works by Torrell, Gillon, Hibbs, Levering, Somme, and Williams cited in footnote 14 above, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, OP, "Le Christ dans la 'spiritualité' de saint Thomas," in Kent Emery and Joseph P. Wawrykow, eds., *Christ among the Medieval Dominicans* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1998), 197–219, and J. A. Di Noia, OP, "*Veritatis Splendor*: Moral Life as Transfigured Life," in J. A. Di Noia, OP and Romanus Cessario, OP, eds., *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Scepter, 1999), 1–10.