

A TRIPTYCH ARTICLE

At the End of Every Why

On the End for Which the Creature Was Made

The Creature Before God — Part III

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1 The Question That Survives Its Answers

Every parent knows the game, and every parent loses it. *Why do I have to go to bed?* Because you need sleep. *Why do I need sleep?* So you'll grow. *Why do I have to grow?* The game is not impertinence, though it is usually ended as if it were. The child has discovered, before knowing any word for it, that answers come in two sizes: the kind that closes a question and the kind that merely moves it. *Because you need sleep* is the second kind. It explains bedtime by pointing at something else—health, growth, a flourishing that has not yet been explained but only named—and whatever explains by pointing invites the finger to be followed. The chain of whys is not a trick of grammar. It is the structure of wanting, laid bare by someone too young to be embarrassed by it.

Follow the chain honestly and there are only three ways it can end. It can stop at a wall: *because I said so*—an answer that terminates the conversation without terminating the question, since a wall is not a reason but the place reasons were refused. It can circle: sleep for the sake of work, work for the sake of rest, rest for the sake of work again—a loop that distributes the question evenly around itself and answers it nowhere. Or it can arrive: reach something wanted not for what it leads to but for what it is, a good that closes the question because there is nothing further to point at—not because pointing was forbidden, but because pointing has come home.

The tradition examined this structure with complete seriousness, and its verdict is that the third ending is not one option among three but the hidden condition of the other two ever getting started. Aquinas, opening the moral part of the *Summa*, argues that in the order of intention there must be a last end, on pain of nothing ever being wanted at all: “if there were no last end, nothing would be desired, nor would any action have its term, nor would the intention of the agent be at rest.”¹ A series of things each wanted for the next is like the chain of borrowers Part I followed in the order of being: defer the ownership forever and no one owns anything; defer the point forever and nothing has one. Desire that is all corridor and no room never starts walking. Since it manifestly does start—the child is out of bed again—something, however dimly conceived, is playing the part of the room. Aquinas adds the quiet companion truth: “whatever man desires, he desires it under the aspect of good.”² Every why in the chain was always a variant of one question—*what is good about that?*—and the chain ends where that question runs out of room to be asked.

This series has been climbing such a chain from its beginning, and the present essay is its last step. Part I asked what holds the creature in being and found the answer was not a mechanism but a gift: existence received now, sustained now, from a source that gains nothing—the arrest this series named *ontological vertigo*, and the honest reading of it, *consent*. Part II asked what the consenting creature owes and found a debt that cannot be settled and was never meant to be: the due return, rendered in adoration and sacrifice, leaving the account open—open, the essay concluded, the way a window is open, not the way a wound is. But Part II ended with an arrow it declined to follow. The limitless debt of gratitude, Aquinas had said, *flows from charity*; the exchange of gift exceeding gift behaves less like accounting than like friendship; what the giver wants, the whole tradition ventures, is not the payment but the payer.³

Follow the arrow, then. The question of this essay is the child's question asked at the scale of a life: not *what must I do*—Part II answered that in the only way it can be answered—but *what is it all for*; what stands at the end of every why; what the creature that consented to be held, and answered with its due return, is finally *for*. The tradition's reply will turn out to be the most extravagant sentence in this series, and the discipline of the three essays exists so that the sentence can be heard as sober truth rather than uplift. But it cannot be said yet. In an essay about ends, of all places, the end must be earned in order; and the path to it starts where the child starts—with wanting, and what wanting is actually aimed at.

2 What Everyone Wants

Begin with the one point on which the whole quarrelsome species agrees. Aquinas states it without irony: “all agree in desiring the last end: since all desire the fulfilment of their perfection.”⁴ Nobody wants to be miserable on purpose; nobody wants fulfilment as a means to something further; everyone, in everything, is reaching through the immediate object toward a completeness of which the object is expected to be an installment. The agreement is formal—it concerns what the last end must *be like*, not where it is—and precisely for that reason it is universal. The miser and the martyr are not divided about whether to seek the perfect good. They are divided about its address.

So the tradition conducts an audit, and the audit is worth walking through at speed, because its verdicts are structural, not sniffy. Wealth: exists to be spent, which is to say, exists for something else; a pile of means cannot be the end,

and the man who treats it as one has framed the corridor and hung it where the room should be.⁵ Honor: paid *to* excellence and therefore evidence of it, the way a shadow is evidence of a body; no one is completed by the shadow. Fame: honor's rumor—the opinion of others, many of them wrong, most of them strangers. Power: a capacity, and a capacity is precisely what is not yet its exercise; besides, power is as available to malice as to goodness, and nothing that can be well or badly used can be the good that using is *for*. Pleasure: real, but a companion—the glow that attends a good possessed, not the possession; chase the glow without the good and you hold a lamp with no room to light. Even the goods of the soul—virtue, knowledge, the polished instrument of a life—fail at the last step, for the soul is a creature, and its perfections are had, in Part I's currency, the way a borrower has money.

That last clause is the audit's real finding, and Aquinas generalizes it in the article that closes the question. "It is impossible for any created good to constitute man's happiness," he argues, and the reason is not that created goods are shabby but that the appetite they would have to fill is calibrated to something none of them is: "the object of the will, i.e. of man's appetite, is the universal good; just as the object of the intellect is the universal true. Hence it is evident that naught can lull man's will, save the universal good. This is to be found, not in any creature, but in God alone; because every creature has goodness by participation."⁶ *By participation*: the word on which Part I's whole argument turned, surfacing now at the bottom of desire. Creatures are lit air—bright, really bright, with a brightness not their own. The will, it turns out, knows this about them even when the intellect has not caught up. Ask the lit air to satisfy a hunger for light itself and it fails, not by having too little but by *being the wrong kind of thing*: every creature hands the wanting on, the way each answer handed on the child's question. The chain of whys and the chain of borrowed being are the same chain read in two directions, and they terminate, if they terminate, at the same address.

Aquinas's conclusion is stated in the third person and can be heard, like the metaphysics of Part I, as cold: God alone constitutes man's happiness.⁷ The first-person register of the same sentence was written seven centuries earlier, by a man who had run the audit on his own pulse rather than on paper—wealth, ambition, pleasure, the whole syllabus—and it stands in the opening lines of the *Confessions*, addressed not to the reader but to the address itself: "You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."⁸ Made *for*: the grammar of ends, in the mouth of the made thing. The Catechism states the same structure didactically: the desire for happiness "is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it."⁹ The restlessness, on this account, is not a design flaw to be medicated away. It is a compass needle refusing to lie: the creature's wanting will not settle on any creature, because it was never aimed at one.

But notice what has actually been established, and what has not. The audit identified the only sufficient object of the will's calibration. It said nothing about reach. A compass proves where north is; it does not promise a road there, still less an invitation. What would it even *mean* for a creature to have God—not God's gifts, which are creatures; not truths about God, which Part I's ascent already delivered and which left the heart demonstrably capable of remaining restless? The question sounds rhetorical. The tradition treats it as exact, and its answer sets up the strangest turn in this series' whole architecture: the discovery that the ascent, followed to its very top, ends at a door it can identify and cannot open.

3 The Ceiling of the Ascent

To have God: the tradition's name for what that would be is exact to the point of audacity. Not nearness, in some spatial metaphor the metaphysics already retired—Part I found God nearer to each thing than its own core, and the heart stayed restless. Not information, however elevated. Aquinas puts the requirement in terms of the mind's own hunger and follows it without flinching: "man is not perfectly happy, so long as something remains for him to desire and seek"; and something *does* remain, so long as the first cause is known only from its effects—known, that is, in the manner Part I's whole ascent knew it, as the unseen singer inferred from the song. "If therefore the human intellect, knowing the essence of some created effect, knows no more of God than 'that He is,' its perfection has not yet reached the source; the natural desire to know *what* the cause is stands unfulfilled. "Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence."¹⁰ Seeing, not concluding. The difference is the difference between reading a fine description of a face and turning around.

The same reasoning appears at the very front of the *Summa*, wearing its most disarming clothes. "There resides in every man a natural desire to know the cause of any effect which he sees; and thence arises wonder in men. But if the intellect of the rational creature could not reach so far as to the first cause of things, the natural desire would remain void."¹¹ Wonder—the child's why, dignified by a Greek name—is the intellect's form of the heart's restlessness,

and it aims past every intermediate answer at the first answer, not as a proposition but as a presence. A universe in which that aim were structurally futile would be a universe with a hunger built in and no food in it anywhere. Aquinas declines to believe in such a universe. But watch precisely what he asserts and where he asserts it: writing as a Christian theologian, he concludes that the blessed *do* see the essence of God. The philosophical thread alone delivers something more austere: that nothing short of such seeing could be the end the will is calibrated to, and that a creature is the sort of thing whose desire runs that far. Whether the desire will be met is another matter entirely—and here the ascent, for the third time in this series, runs into its own ceiling, this time with a force the first two arrests only rehearsed.

For the seeing in question is not available for the climbing. Aquinas is as blunt about this as about the desire: “the created intellect cannot see the essence of God, unless God by His grace unites Himself to the created intellect, as an object made intelligible to it.”¹² And in the treatise on happiness: perfect beatitude “surpasses the nature not only of man, but also of every creature”; neither man nor angel can reach it by natural powers. Weigh what this does to the picture. The audit of the last section aimed every human wanting at one address. This section’s first argument showed that having the address means seeing, not inferring. And now the same analysis certifies that no creature can see—not by effort, not by genius, not by ten thousand years of purification, not by being promoted through every rank of finite excellence, because the gap is not a distance within the creaturely order but the border of that order itself. The creature is calibrated to an end it cannot attain. Its reach is built longer than its arms.

This is the ontological vertigo again, in its final and most intimate register. Part I found the creature suspended over its own existing; Part II found it indebted beyond settlement; here it hangs over its own *wanting*: the deepest desire in it is for something no exertion of its own can procure, and the honest ascent ends not at a summit but at a locked ceiling, with the compass still pointing up. Recoil has its move ready, as always: call the calibration a cruelty—a hunger installed, on this reading, as a taunt. And as always, recoil has misread the same asymmetry one section too early. For Aquinas notices what kind of creature you would have to be for the ceiling to be an insult, and answers with a comparison of striking gentleness: a nature “that can attain perfect good, although it needs help from without in order to attain it, is of more noble condition than a nature which cannot attain perfect good, but attains some imperfect good, although it need no help from without in order to attain it”—as a man curable by medicine is better off in the order of health than one whose constitution can manage only a lesser health, however self-sufficiently.¹³ The beasts have no locked ceiling; nothing in a sparrow reaches past the creaturely order, and nothing in a sparrow is disappointed. To carry a desire only God can satisfy is not the design flaw of the human creature. It is its rank. The open mouth is not the mark of the starving; it is the shape of a creature made to be fed—made, as Augustine said with his preposition, *for*.

But a shape is not a meal, and here the philosophical thread of this series reaches the end it has been approaching since Part I named its own boundary at the Trinity. Whether the source will give what no creature can take is not a question any argument can settle, for the same reason no argument in Part I could have predicted creation: a gift, by definition, cannot be deduced. The ascent can establish the calibration, the insufficiency of every creature, the identity of the only sufficient end, and the impossibility of self-help. It can establish, in other words, exactly this: that the creature’s situation is a question addressed to God—asked not by its words but by its structure, the way the open mouth of a nestling is a question. What philosophy cannot do is answer for Him. If an answer exists, it will have to come from the other side, and it will have to be, once more and finally, a gift. The remainder of this essay listens to what the tradition testifies that answer to be; and the seam between what has been argued and what is now received—marked in every part of this series—is hereby marked for the last time, at the exact place where the creature runs out of ladder.

4 The End That Is Offered

What revelation asserts, at the precise joint where the ascent went silent, is that the ceiling has been opened from above. The First Vatican Council—the same constitution this series has quoted on free creation and on total dependence—states it in a single Latin clause: revelation is necessary because “God, out of His infinite goodness, ordered man to a supernatural end” (*Deus ex infinita bonitate sua ordinavit hominem ad finem supernaturalem*), namely “to share in divine goods which altogether surpass the understanding of the human mind”; and the council seals the clause with the sentence Scripture keeps at that door: “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him.”¹⁴ *Ordered to*: the grammar of ends again, now on the giver’s side of the relation. The creature was not merely built with a reach exceeding its arms;

it was aimed, deliberately, at the very thing its arms cannot reach—aimed by the one being who can close the gap, in an act the council is careful to root in goodness, not in debt. Nothing in the creature’s nature extorted this. The gift beneath the creature’s being, which Part I uncovered, turns out to have a second story: the same liberality that gives existence has appointed, for the existing creature, an end above every created order.

The Scriptures name the end with a bluntness the metaphysics can only envy. Paul, to the Corinthians: “We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I am known.”¹⁵ John, in his first letter, in two sentences that hold the whole structure of this series: “Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be the sons of God. . . . Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God; and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know, that, when he shall appear, we shall be like to him: because we shall see him as he is.”¹⁶ And behind both, the old psalm this series’ second part learned to read—the psalmist who asked what he should render—has a companion verse that now sounds like the whole human ascent compressed to a cry: “My heart hath said to thee: My face hath sought thee: thy face, O Lord, will I still seek.”¹⁷ A face sought; a face promised; a seeing that transforms the seer into the likeness of the seen. Revelation does not correct the ascent’s finding that the end is vision. It confirms it past all daring, and then adds the one thing the ascent could not: *it is offered*.

How such seeing is possible for a creature, the tradition explains with a doctrine that repeats, at the summit, the exact structure Part I found at the foundation. The created intellect sees the essence of God only when “God by His grace unites Himself to the created intellect, as an object made intelligible to it”; and for the creature to bear that union, something must be given to it—a strengthening the tradition calls the *light of glory* (*lumen gloriae*), by which, Aquinas writes, “the blessed are made ‘deiform’—i.e. like to God, according to the saying: ‘When He shall appear we shall be like to Him, and we shall see Him as He is.’”¹⁸ Attend to the shape of that sentence. The creature does not see by finally flexing hard enough; it sees because even its seeing is received—eyes lifted by the very light they look at, as the air of Part I was bright with a brightness not its own. At the top of everything, the lit-air structure does not give way to some achievement at last the creature’s own. It intensifies: the vision of God is the gift of God, given *in* the seer, and the creature’s last act is like its first existence—a reception all the way down. What the vertigo disclosed at the bottom of being is the very mechanism of glory.

The Church has fixed this hope in her most deliberate register, and the fixing has a date and an occasion. In 1336, ending a controversy his own predecessor had stirred, Benedict XII defined that the purified souls of the saints, even now, before the resurrection and the general judgment, “have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature”—*visione intuitiva et etiam faciali, nulla mediante creatura*—“the divine essence immediately showing itself to them, plainly, clearly and openly” (*divina essentia immediate se nude, clare et aperte eis ostendente*); and that so seeing they possess it in joy, “truly blessed,” having “eternal life and rest.”¹⁹ A dogmatic definition is the Church speaking with maximum deliberateness, and it is worth hearing what this one is *for*. Not speculation satisfied; a promise guaranteed. *No creature mediating*: the seeing will not be one more inference from effects, one more song argued back to its singer. *Nude, clare et aperte*: the God whom Part I could approach only through the analogy of lamps and springs, and whom the apophatic masters warned every concept would misdescribe, will show *Himself*—and the initiative, note the participle, is His: *ostendente*, showing. The one-sided relation that made the vertigo dizzying—the source that receives nothing, on whom nothing can be inflicted—was never, it turns out, a closed door. It was the silence of someone intending to be seen rather than deduced.

And with that, the arrest of Part I completes its long transformation. The creature hangs, now as ever, wholly suspended from what it cannot repay or affect. But the suspension has been given a direction and a terminus: the hands beneath the falling creature are carrying it *toward the face*. What remains is to ask what such a promise makes of the relation in the meantime—what it is called when the one who cannot be repaid nevertheless communicates his own happiness to the debtor. The tradition’s answer is the most startling single word in this series, and it comes from the mouth of the promise himself, at supper, on the night he was betrayed.

5 The Friendship

The word is *friends*. In the long discourse John records between the supper and the arrest, Christ says to the eleven: “I will not now call you servants: for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I have called you friends: because all things whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you.”²⁰ Servants was the accurate word; Part II spent an essay honoring it—*I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid*. The sentence does not

say the word was wrong. It says it is being surpassed, and it gives the reason in the grammar of friendship itself: the servant is outside his lord's counsels, executing a will he is not shown, while the friend is the one to whom the inner things are *made known*. Disclosure is the marker. And disclosure—the essence shown *nude, clare et aperte*, the face promised to the seekers of a face—is exactly what the last section found at the summit of the creature's hope. The vision is not a spectacle offered to spectators. It is what friends do: the interior made known, at last, without mediation.

Aquinas takes the sentence with complete metaphysical seriousness, and his question—whether charity, the love commanded by the whole law, is *friendship* with God—faces the obvious objection first. Friendship, on the classical analysis he inherits, requires three things: benevolence, wishing the other's good; mutuality, the wishing returned; and a shared ground, a *communicatio*, some common life within which friends exchange. Between creature and Creator the third looks impossible by everything this series has established: what common life could there be across the border where the one-sided relation stands? Aquinas's answer does not soften the border; it locates the commonness in a gift crossing it. "Accordingly, since there is a communication between man and God, inasmuch as He communicates His happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication. . . . The love which is based on this communication, is charity: wherefore it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God."²¹ The shared life on which this friendship stands is not a neutral ground between the parties, for there is none. It is *God's own happiness*, communicated. The friendship is possible because the richer friend has made his native country the common country—has given the creature, as a beginning now and an inheritance then, the very beatitude in which He lives. Friendship with God is not the meeting of two climbers halfway. It is the high one furnishing the whole meeting place, guest, ground, and feast.

Then comes the verse this series has been unknowingly circling since Part I. Asked where such a love in the creature could come from, Aquinas answers that it cannot come from the creature at all—not from nature, not from practice, not from moral athletics: charity "can be in us neither naturally, nor through acquisition by the natural powers, but by the infusion of the Holy Ghost, Who is the love of the Father and the Son, and the participation of Whom in us is created charity"; and his warrant is Paul: "the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us."²² *Participation*: Part I's deepest word, the one that named how creatures have being and Part II's account never needed, has been waiting here for its last promotion. The creature exists by participating in being itself; it will see by a light that participates in the light itself; and it loves, even now, by participating in the love that God *is*—the love between the Father and the Son, poured into a creature that could no more have brewed it than the air could have lit itself. The lit-air structure, three times over: being, seeing, loving. What the friendship asks of the creature was itself the first thing the friendship gave.

Two boundary stones keep this from dissolving into sentimentality, and both are set by the friendship's own logic. First, friendship does not repeal creatureliness. The friend remains the singer; the friend remains the song; adoration, the due return, the whole architecture of Part II stands—indeed it stands *more* intelligibly, for Aquinas had noted, and Part II quoted him, that the theological virtues *command* the acts of religion: charity is the form of the virtues, ordering every rendered due to the end now disclosed as a shared life.²³ The kneeling of Part II is not outgrown; it is what this friendship looks like from the knees. Second, the friendship is real now and unfinished now. To the objection that there is no living-together with God, Aquinas answers that man's life is twofold, and that in respect of the spiritual life there is fellowship with God already—"imperfectly indeed in this present state of life," as Paul says, "our conversation is in heaven"; but the conversation "will be perfected in heaven, when 'His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face.' Therefore charity is imperfect here, but will be perfected in heaven."²⁴ The same charity, there and here; the same friendship, seed and tree. Heaven is not a different relation from the one infused at baptism into the least spectacular believer. It is this relation, done being partial.

And with the friendship named, the arrow Part II left in the argument finally lands. Justice could establish that a return was owed and could not say what the relation was *for*; the analysis of gratitude noticed an exchange designed never to close and could not say why the design; the open account stood open, and the essay could only report that wanting it closed was wanting the relation over. Now the reason is on the table. Accounts are for transactions; friendship is not a transaction, and its exchanges are not attempts at settlement but the circulation of a common life—gift answering gift precisely so that neither party is ever done with the other. "The more it is paid the more it is due": Part II heard that sentence as the strange arithmetic of an unpayable debt. Said of friends, it is not strange at all. It is just what love's bookkeeping looks like from outside: the account that grows by being paid is the only kind two friends would ever want between them.²⁵ What the giver wanted was never the payment. It was the payer—wanted, it now appears, not as a possession but as a companion in the very happiness of God.

The creature so befriended still walks in the dark manner of the mirror, with the vision promised and not possessed. Between infusion and face there stretches an interval called a lifetime; and the tradition has a virtue for exactly that stretch of road.

6 The Meantime

Hope has the misfortune of a name worn smooth by weather forecasts, and the tradition's first service is to give it back its edges. The theological virtue of hope is not optimism, which is a temperament, nor wishing, which is idle. Its object is precise: a good that is *future*, not yet possessed; *arduous*, beyond the easy reach that needs no virtue; and *possible*—but possible in a particular way, “by means of the Divine assistance,” so that in reaching for the good “our hope attains God Himself, on Whose help it leans.”²⁶ *Leans* is the load-bearing word. The posture of hope is not the sprinter's crouch, self-gathered for self-propulsion; the ceiling section retired that picture for good. It is the posture of a creature that has taken the measure of its arms, believed the promise anyway, and shifted its weight onto the one who made it—the vertigo's falling posture, turned by trust into something with a destination.

Sized against its object, the virtue becomes almost comically audacious. What may a creature hope for, from God? Aquinas answers by matching the hope to the helper rather than to the hoper: “the good which we ought to hope for from God properly and chiefly is the infinite good, which is proportionate to the power of our divine helper. . . . Such a good is eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of God Himself. For we should hope from Him for nothing less than Himself, since His goodness, whereby He imparts good things to His creature, is no less than His Essence.”²⁷ *Nothing less than Himself*. Every lesser hope aims at what the helper can give; this one aims at the giver, and its warrant is not the size of the creature's deserving—about which the entire series has been one long deflationary argument—but the size of the divine generosity, which is not smaller than the divine essence. Hope is the audit of section two, run in reverse: there, no created good was large enough to be the end; here, no created good is large enough to be the hope. The will's calibration and the virtue's object finally agree, and what they agree on is a person.

Between the two counterfeit postures, hope walks a ridge, and the counterfeits are old acquaintances of this series. On one side, presumption: the end grasped as if owed—spiritual bookkeeping's final form, in which the open account is imagined closed in the creature's favor and the vision awaited the way a creditor awaits payment. Part II diagnosed the desire underneath: to be done receiving, square at last, self-possessed in the one order where self-possession is a contradiction. On the other side, despair: the end refused as if the offer could not cover this case—which sounds like humility and is actually the old recoil in penitential dress, still insisting that the relation runs on the creature's adequacy, still refusing to let the gift be a gift. Both counterfeits make the same mistake in opposite directions: they take the creature's own performance as the measure of an end that was never measured by it. Hope differs from both not by moderation—it is far more extravagant than presumption, hoping for God from God—but by where it puts its weight. It leans; it does not bill, and it does not resign.²⁸

Paul's hymn to charity, read whole, gives the meantime its furniture and its horizon in six words apiece. “We see now through a glass in a dark manner”—the mode of the interval, the mirror-knowledge this series has practiced from its first page. “Charity never falleth away: whether prophecies shall be made void, or tongues shall cease, or knowledge shall be destroyed”—the demolition notice posted on everything proper to the interval as interval. “And now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.”²⁹ The tradition reads the ranking structurally, not sentimentally. Faith and hope are the virtues of the gap: faith believes what it cannot yet see, hope leans toward what it does not yet hold, and both are therefore self-retiring, scaffolding that comes down when the building stands. Charity is the building. The love infused now and the love of the blessed is one love, differing as the seed differs from the tree; it is the only part of the present life that is not provisional, the only act the creature performs in the dark that it will still be performing in the light. Which is why the greatest is charity: not because faith and hope are lesser duties, but because they are roads, and charity is the country.

So the meantime is not a waiting room, and the trilogy's earlier findings settle into their final places within it. The due return goes on—the knees still bend, the account stays open—but rendered now *inside* a friendship, its acts no longer only justice's acknowledgment but love's correspondence: the letters written from the road. The vertigo goes on—the creature is as suspended at the end of this series as at its beginning—but the suspension has become the very thing hope leans into: being carried was never a predicament; it was transportation. What the interval adds is simply the direction of travel, and the tradition's last word about the destination is not an argument at all. It is a description—the most famous description of the end ever written from inside the dark manner of the mirror—and this series, like the book it comes from, can only finish by looking at it.

7 The End Without End

Augustine finished *The City of God*—thirteen years of writing, twenty-two books, the ruin of Rome behind him and the two cities traced through all of history—with a chapter on the everlasting sabbath, and in it he set down the sentence toward which this whole series has been walking. Describing the felicity of the city of God, “which shall be tainted with no evil, which shall lack no good,” he reaches the question of reward and lets the structure of gift close over itself one last time: “God Himself, who is the Author of virtue, shall there be its reward; for, as there is nothing greater or better, He has promised Himself.” What else, he asks, can the old covenant formula—*I will be your God, and ye shall be my people*—finally mean but this: “I shall be their satisfaction, I shall be all that men honourably desire,—life, and health, and nourishment, and plenty, and glory, and honour, and peace, and all good things?” And then the sentence: “He shall be the end of our desires who shall be seen without end, loved without cloy, praised without weariness.”³⁰ Seen, loved, praised: the three verbs are not ornament. Seeing is the vision the dogma guaranteed; loving is the charity that never falleth away; praising is Part II’s due return, carried past every duty into delight. The end of every why is not an answer. It is Him—the one good that closes the question not by silencing it but by being what it was asking for all along.

And the creature that arrives there remains, gloriously, a creature. Augustine guards the border in the very chapter of consummation: the blessed will be filled with God, “partakers” of Him—“for it is one thing to be God, another thing to be a partaker of God.”³¹ Participation, the word that named borrowed being in Part I, borrowed seeing and borrowed loving in the sections above, here names the creature’s final state: filled, not fused; like Him because seeing Him, not lost in Him. The vertigo’s asymmetry survives into glory intact—and so, remarkably, does the open account. Even in the sabbath, Augustine notes, the saints’ good works are “rather His than ours,” imputed to them precisely so that the rest remains rest and never curdles back into wage-earning; and the freedom of the blessed, no longer able to sin, is not freedom’s amputation but its perfection—“all the more truly free, because set free from delight in sinning to take unfailing delight in not sinning.”³² Recoil’s first and last suspicion—that what is wholly received cannot be wholly one’s own—is refuted at the highest possible stakes: in the city where everything is received, the citizens have never been more themselves. The account stands open forever, and no one in the city would close it, because its openness has stopped even looking like debt. It is simply the circulation of the common life the friendship promised: gift answering gift, without cloy, without weariness, without end.

The Catholic Church teaches this consummation in her own condensed registers, and—as at every such seam in this series—the paragraphs are cited as her teaching, in her voice. Heaven, says the Catechism, is “this perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity—this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed”; it is “the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.” The vision defined in 1336 she names in her own catechesis: since God “cannot be seen as he is” unless He “opens up his mystery” and “gives him the capacity for it,” the Church calls this contemplation “the beatific vision”; and the blessed, seeing, are not dissolved into passivity but “continue joyfully to fulfill God’s will in relation to other men and to all creation.”³³ And when her catechesis of beatitude wants a final image, the Church reaches for the very chapter this section has been reading: paragraph 1720 closes with Augustine’s sabbath sentences, quoted entire.³⁴ Fifteen centuries after the old bishop laid down his pen, the Church still ends where he ended. So may this series.

Part I stood a creature upright in the middle of its own existing and let it feel the floor refuse to push back: the falling that turned out to be carrying, the ground that turned out to be hands. Part II taught the carried creature that it could answer—not repay, answer: take the cup, say the name, kneel, vow, and stay, freely or not at all. This essay has followed the answer to its destination, and the destination gathers every earlier finding into itself without discarding one. The dependence never ends; in glory it is total, and totally welcome. The account never closes; in glory its openness is the music. The due return never ceases; in glory it is praise without weariness, the servant’s rendering and the friend’s delight now indistinguishable. And the vertigo—the arrest with which everything began—receives its answer not as a proposition but as a face: the source that could not be repaid, inconvenienced, enriched, or affected, and that sustained the creature anyway, at every instant, innermost, for nothing, turns out to have been carrying it the whole time toward the one thing the carrying could still add. Not existence; that was given at the start. Not pardon; that is another story, told elsewhere. *Sight*. The child’s chain of whys, followed with a lifetime’s honesty, ends at no wall and in no circle. It ends where Augustine said everything ends that ends well: “There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain to the kingdom of which there is no end?”³⁵ At the end of every why stands neither an answer nor a wall but the giver of the questions, waiting to be seen; and the seeing, like the being and the loving and everything else the creature will ever have, will be a gift—received, at last, face to face, by someone who knows it, says so, and stays forever.

Notes

¹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 1, a. 4, corpus; wording checked 2026-07-25, English at New Advent, Latin at Corpus Thomisticum. English quotations from the *Summa* throughout this essay are from the public-domain translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province; the Latin is checked in the Corpus Thomisticum web corpus at the loci identified in the Notes. The regress denied is in the order of intention (what is wanted for the sake of what), the same essentially ordered structure whose refusal of infinite deferral Part I used in the order of being; a chain of for-the-sake-ofs, like a chain of borrowers, never adds up to a reason unless something in it is wanted on its own account.

²*Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 1, a. 6, corpus; checked 2026-07-25 as above. The claim is formal, not optimistic: even perverse choices are made under some description of good, which is why the last-end analysis applies to every human life and not only to well-ordered ones.

³Part II, *The Due Return: On Rendering What Cannot Be Repaid*, closing section, drawing on *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 106, a. 6, ad 2 (“The debt of gratitude flows from charity, which the more it is paid the more it is due”), verified in Part II’s audit on 2026-07-24. Part I, *Ontological Vertigo: On Being Held in Being*, establishes the claims this essay inherits and does not re-argue: existence received and presently conserved (ST I, q. 104, a. 1); the one-sided real relation (I, q. 13, a. 7); the analogical judgment that God loves all existing things (I, q. 20, a. 2); and the coined terms *ontological vertigo*, *recoil*, and *consent*, used here in the senses defined there.

⁴*Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 1, a. 7, corpus; checked 2026-07-25, English at New Advent. The agreement is in the *ratio*—the formal aspect under which the last end is desired (complete fulfillment, the perfect good)—while men “differ about the thing in which it is realized,” which is the whole moral drama. The traditional name for the last end so conceived is *beatitudo*, rendered “happiness” in the Dominican translation and in this essay; the word means the complete and completing good, not a mood.

⁵The audit is *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 2, aa. 1–7, considering wealth, honor, fame or glory, power, bodily goods, pleasure, and goods of the soul in turn; checked 2026-07-25 at New Advent. The one-line verdicts in this paragraph compress Aquinas’s arguments and add this essay’s images; the compression is signaled here once rather than at each clause.

⁶*Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 2, a. 8, corpus (*impossibile est beatitudinem hominis esse in aliquo bono creato... nihil potest quietare voluntatem hominis, nisi bonum universale. Quod non invenitur in aliquo creato, sed solum in Deo, quia omnis creatura habet bonitatem participatam*); checked 2026-07-25, English at New Advent, Latin at Corpus Thomisticum. The corpus concludes: “Wherefore God alone can satisfy the will of man... Therefore God alone constitutes man’s happiness.” The argument’s force depends on the participation metaphysics established in Part I (ST I, q. 44, a. 1); a reader who rejected that framework there is not being asked to accept its consequence here on other grounds.

⁷Same article; the conclusion is quoted in the preceding note. Its precise claim should be kept modest: it identifies *what* would satisfy the will’s calibration, not whether, how, or on what terms satisfaction is available—questions the following sections take in order.

⁸Augustine, *Confessions* I.1.1 (*fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*), in the Pilkington translation (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st series, vol. 1), wording checked 2026-07-25 at the New Advent transcription; Latin checked 2026-07-25 at the Latin Library text of Book I. The sentence is a prayer, not a syllogism; it is cited as the classic first-person register of the conclusion argued above, in the same way Part I cited Augustine’s arrest scenes—as record, not premise.

⁹*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1718, official Vatican English web text, wording checked 2026-07-25; the paragraph’s own first witness is Augustine (“We all want to live happily; in the whole human race there is no one who does not assent to this proposition, even before it is fully articulated,” quoting *De moribus ecclesiae* 1, 3, 4). Cited as the Church’s catechesis, in its own register, of the conclusion the ascent reached; compare CCC 1723 (true happiness “not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power... but in God alone, the source of every good and of all love”).

¹⁰*Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 3, a. 8, corpus (*ultima et perfecta beatitudo non potest esse nisi in visione divinae essentiae*); checked 2026-07-25, English at New Advent, Latin at Corpus Thomisticum. The corpus concludes that the intellect “needs to reach the very Essence of the First Cause. And thus it will have its perfection through union with God as with that object, in which alone man’s happiness consists.” The article stands in a work of Christian theology, and its author holds on faith that the vision is in fact man’s destiny; what the argument itself supplies is the conditional: nothing less would close the distance between the will’s calibration and its possession. This essay uses it at that level.

¹¹*Summa theologiae* I, q. 12, a. 1, corpus (*inest enim homini naturale desiderium cognoscendi causam, cum intuetur effectum; et ex hoc admiratio in hominibus consurgit... remanebit inane desiderium naturae*); checked 2026-07-25 as above. The corpus concludes: “Hence it must be absolutely granted that the blessed see the essence of God.” How much the natural-desire argument proves, and in what sense the desire is “natural,” is one of the most contested questions in the Thomistic tradition; the appendix states the boundary this essay observes, and nothing below treats the desire as a claim on its own fulfillment.

¹²*Summa theologiae* I, q. 12, a. 4, corpus; checked 2026-07-25 as above. The reason is structural: knowledge is according to the mode of the knower, and the mode of every created knower is proportioned to created natures, whereas “to know self-subsistent being is natural to the divine intellect alone.” Compare I-II, q. 5, a. 5, corpus: perfect happiness “surpasses the

nature not only of man, but also of every creature,” so that “neither man, nor any creature, can attain final Happiness by his natural powers.”

¹³*Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 5, a. 5, ad 2, citing Aristotle, *De caelo* ii, 12; checked 2026-07-25 as above. The reply’s comparison (“he is better disposed to health who can attain perfect health, albeit by means of medicine, than he who can attain but imperfect health, without the help of medicine”) is Aquinas’s own; its application here—the open mouth as the shape of a creature made to be fed—is this essay’s image.

¹⁴First Vatican Council, dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* (24 April 1870), ch. 2 (*Deus ex infinita bonitate sua ordinavit hominem ad finem supernaturalem, ad participanda scilicet bona divina, quae humanae mentis intelligentiam omnino superant; siquidem oculus non vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit, quae praeparavit Deus iis, qui diligunt illum*, citing 1 Cor 2:9). Latin checked 2026-07-25 at the Holy See web text; the English renderings here are a labeled working gloss governed by the quoted Latin, except that the scriptural clause is given in the Douay–Rheims wording of 1 Corinthians 2:9 (“That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him”), checked 2026-07-25 at drbo.org. Note the council’s own restraint: the supernatural end flows from God’s goodness (*ex infinita bonitate sua*), not from any exigency of nature. Part I quoted ch. 1 of this constitution (creation *ex nihilo*, “not for increasing his own beatitude”); Part II quoted ch. 3 (total dependence grounding the obedience of faith).

¹⁵1 Corinthians 13:12, Douay–Rheims (Challoner revision); Scripture quotations in this essay are from the public-domain Douay–Rheims translation, wording checked 2026-07-25 at the drbo.org text. “Through a glass in a dark manner” renders *per speculum in aenigmate*: the mirror-and-riddle knowledge of God from creatures is exactly the mode of knowing this series’ first two parts exercised; the verse’s own contrast term is the face.

¹⁶1 John 3:1–2, Douay–Rheims, checked 2026-07-25 as above. The exegetical use made here is modest and textual: the verses assert a present filiation (“we are *now* the sons of God”), a real but undisclosed future (“it hath not yet appeared”), and a likeness effected by vision (“we shall be like to him: because we shall see him as he is”). Aquinas quotes verse 2 at exactly the joint where this essay uses it, ST I, q. 12, a. 5, cited below at the light of glory.

¹⁷Psalms 26:8, Douay–Rheims (Vulgate numbering), checked 2026-07-25 as above. The verse is cited as the psalter’s own register of the desire analyzed in the preceding sections—the heart seeking not a doctrine but a face—and not as an exegetical claim about the psalm’s original setting.

¹⁸*Summa theologiae* I, q. 12, a. 4, corpus (the grace-union), with q. 12, a. 5, corpus (the created light by which “the blessed are made *deiform*”—*efficiuntur deiformes, idest Deo similes*—quoting 1 John 3:2); the phrase *lumen gloriae*, the light of glory strengthening the intellect to see God (*confortans intellectum ad videndum Deum*), stands in q. 12, a. 2, corpus. All checked 2026-07-25, English at New Advent, Latin at Corpus Thomisticum. The light of glory is a created disposition of the seer, not a created image of the seen: what is seen is the divine essence itself, not a likeness—the point the dogmatic definition below makes with the phrase “no creature mediating.”

¹⁹Benedict XII, apostolic constitution *Benedictus Deus* (29 January 1336), Latin text as received in Denzinger–Hünemann, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, nn. 1000–1002 (*vident divinam essentiam visione intuitiva et etiam faciali, nulla mediante creatura in ratione obiecti visi se habente, sed divina essentia immediate se nude, clare et aperte eis ostendente. . . sunt vere beatae et habent vitam et requiem aeternam*); Latin phrases checked 2026-07-25 at a public bilingual transcription of DH 1000–1002, and the English of the central definition quoted as given in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1023, official Vatican English web text, checked 2026-07-25 (“have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature”). The remaining English renderings are a labeled working gloss governed by the quoted Latin. The definition concerns the souls of the purified dead prior to the resurrection; questions beyond its own scope lie outside this essay.

²⁰John 15:15, Douay–Rheims, checked 2026-07-25 as above; compare 15:9 (“As the Father hath loved me, I also have loved you. Abide in my love”) and 15:16 (“You have not chosen me: but I have chosen you”), read at the same locus. The sentence is quoted here as the scriptural datum on which the scholastic analysis of charity as friendship rests—Aquinas cites this very verse as the *sed contra* of ST II-II, q. 23, a. 1—and the essay does not develop the Christology or sacramental setting of the discourse, which lie beyond this series’ scope.

²¹*Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 23, a. 1, corpus (*cum igitur sit aliqua communicatio hominis ad Deum secundum quod nobis suam beatitudinem communicat, super hac communicatione oportet aliquam amicitiam fundari. . . caritas amicitia quaedam est hominis ad Deum*), with the elided middle citing 1 Corinthians 1:9 (“God is faithful: by Whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son”); checked 2026-07-25, English at New Advent, Latin at Corpus Thomisticum. The classical requirements of benevolence, mutual love, and *communicatio* are drawn in the same corpus from Aristotle’s *Ethics* VIII, cited through Aquinas as in Part II.

²²*Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 24, a. 2, corpus (*per infusionem spiritus sancti, qui est amor patris et filii, cuius participatio in nobis est ipsa caritas creata*), with the *sed contra* citing Romans 5:5, quoted here from the Douay–Rheims, checked 2026-07-25 as above. The corpus’s premise is that charity is “a friendship of man for God, founded upon the fellowship of everlasting happiness,” a fellowship of gratuitous gift surpassing every natural faculty. That the love in question is the Holy Spirit, the mutual love of Father and Son, is revealed doctrine (Part I marked the Trinity as beyond the ascent at ST I, q. 32, a. 1); it is received here as the tradition’s teaching, not argued.

²³*Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 23, a. 8 (charity as the form of the virtues, ordering their acts to the last end), with q. 23, a. 6 (charity the most excellent of the virtues, as attaining God Himself); both checked 2026-07-25 at New Advent and cited here in

summary rather than quotation. Part II quoted the corresponding joint from the side of religion: ST II-II, q. 81, a. 5, ad 1 (the theological virtues “by their command... cause the act of religion”). Friendship with God does not abolish *latría* but grounds it: what justice renders, charity now renders *to a friend*, which changes the renderer, not the debt.

²⁴ *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 23, a. 1, ad 1, quoting Philippians 3:20 and Apocalypse 22:3–4; checked 2026-07-25 as above. The reply’s closing sentence is quoted verbatim. Note the untroubled coexistence of “servants shall serve Him” and “see His face” inside the perfected state: the scriptural text itself holds together what this section’s first paragraph distinguished, service and friendship, the due return and the vision.

²⁵ *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 106, a. 6, ad 2 (the debt of gratitude flows from charity, “which the more it is paid the more it is due”), quoted and verified in Part II (audit of 2026-07-24) and re-read at the same witness 2026-07-25. The reframing of the open account as friendship’s circulation rather than failed settlement is this essay’s synthesis, offered as the reading toward which Aquinas’s own derivation of gratitude from charity points; it is not a quotation.

²⁶ *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 17, a. 1, corpus; checked 2026-07-25, English at New Advent, Latin at Corpus Thomisticum. The corpus analyzes hope’s object as a future, difficult, possible good, and concludes that hope is a virtue precisely as leaning on the divine help (*divino auxilio innitens* in the article’s development). Hope, like charity, is infused, not acquired; the essay does not separately develop the psychology of the acquired hopes from which the theological virtue is distinguished.

²⁷ *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 17, a. 2, corpus (*bonum quod proprie et principaliter a Deo sperare debemus est bonum infinitum... vita aeterna, quae in fruitione ipsius Dei consistit, non enim minus aliquid ab eo sperandum est quam sit ipse*); checked 2026-07-25 as above. The proportion argued is to the power and goodness of the helper, not to the merits of the hoper—the exact reversal of every calculation the creature would make about itself.

²⁸ The mapping of presumption and despair onto Part II’s “spiritual bookkeeping” and Part I’s “recoil” is this essay’s synthesis, labeled as such. The underlying doctrine—presumption and despair as the two vices opposed to hope, each corrupting trust in the divine help—is Aquinas’s (ST II-II, qq. 20–21, treated summarily here and not separately quoted); nothing in this paragraph is a judgment about the culpability or interior state of any person, and pastoral treatment of despair lies outside this essay’s scope.

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:8, 12, 13, Douay–Rheims, checked 2026-07-25 as above. The traditional doctrinal reading summarized in this paragraph—faith and hope proper to the wayfaring state and ceasing in the vision they await, charity remaining because its act is the very substance of beatitude—is common theology grounded in the text’s own contrasts; the essay does not enter the scholastic details of how faith and hope are “evacuated” in glory.

³⁰ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XXII.30, in the public-domain translation of Marcus Dods (*The City of God*, vol. II, in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, A New Translation*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871); wording checked 2026-07-25 in the source library’s tracked transcription of the 1871 printing, at the registered passage covering XXII.30 (artifact lines 21430–21588). The chapter’s internal citation quoted here is Leviticus 26:12 (“I will be your God...”); Augustine’s gloss on the covenant formula is his own. Part II quoted this work’s Book X on sacrifice from the same tracked edition.

³¹ *De civitate Dei* XXII.30, Dods translation, checked 2026-07-25 as above. The sentence stands in Augustine’s discussion of the sabbath rest: the saints, made “as gods” not by deserting God but “by participating in Him,” remain creatures; the deification the tradition dares to name is participation, never identity of essence—the same border respected by ST I, q. 12, a. 5’s “deiform,” quoted above. This is the trilogy’s participation structure at its maximum extension, not its repeal.

³² *De civitate Dei* XXII.30, Dods translation, checked 2026-07-25 as above (“For even our good works, when they are understood to be rather His than ours, are imputed to us that we may enjoy this Sabbath rest”; the last freedom “shall not be able to sin,” a gift, “for it is one thing to be God, another thing to be a partaker of God”—and this liberty is greater, not less). Recoil’s oldest suspicion—that dependence subtracts from the creature—is answered here at maximum stakes: total gift, total freedom, in the same act. The chapter also teaches a grateful memory of past misery in the blessed; its details lie beyond this essay.

³³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1024, 1028, 1029, official Vatican English web text, checked 2026-07-25; CCC 1023 quotes the central definition of *Benedictus Deus*, as cited in the preceding section. Compare CCC 1721 (“God put us in the world to know, to love, and to serve him, and so to come to paradise”; beatitude makes us “partakers of the divine nature,” citing 2 Pet 1:4), 1722 (such beatitude “surpasses the understanding and powers of man” and “comes from an entirely free gift of God: whence it is called supernatural”), and 1726–1727; all checked 2026-07-25. The gratuity clause of 1722 is the catechetical register of *Dei Filius* ch. 2, quoted in the preceding section, and CCC 1028’s “gives him the capacity” is the *lumen gloriae* of ST I, q. 12, a. 5.

³⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1720, checked 2026-07-25, quoting *De civitate Dei* 22, 30: “There we shall rest and see, we shall see and love, we shall love and praise. Behold what will be at the end without end. For what other end do we have, if not to reach the kingdom which has no end?” The Catechism’s rendering differs slightly in wording from the Dods 1871 translation quoted in this section’s closing paragraph; both are identified exactly, and neither is altered.

³⁵ *De civitate Dei* XXII.30, Dods translation, checked 2026-07-25 in the tracked 1871 transcription as above; the sentence matches the registered passage record’s checked transcription exactly. These are the closing sentences of the final chapter of the whole work, followed only by Augustine’s valediction.

A Scope, Method, and Qualifications

A.1 Reader, question, and method

This is a discursive theological article for a serious general reader, able to follow careful distinctions but not presumed to know scholastic terminology. It is Part III, the conclusion, of a three-part series, *The Creature Before God*; each part is a complete essay. Part I (*Ontological Vertigo*) established received being, present conservation, the one-sided real relation, and the fork of recoil or consent; Part II (*The Due Return*) established the unpayable debt, the virtue of religion, and the open account, ending at an arrow from gratitude toward charity. This essay follows that arrow. Its governing question is what the creature is finally for: what stands at the end of every why once justice has named the necessary rendering. Its claim: the will of the rational creature is calibrated to the universal good, which no created good is; the only end that would close its desire is the vision of the divine essence, which no created power can attain; this incapacity is the creature's rank, not its defect; that the end is nevertheless offered is a datum of revelation, not of the ascent—God has ordered man to a supernatural end, and the vision is dogmatically guaranteed, no creature mediating; the love by which the creature moves toward that end is charity, friendship with God, founded on God's communication of His own happiness and infused, not acquired; hope is the virtue of the interval, leaning on the divine help for nothing less than God Himself; and the consummation—rest, vision, love, praise, in an account open forever—perfects rather than repeals the creature's dependence, freedom, and due return. The trilogy thus closes where it began: the falling that was being carried arrives at the face of the carrier.

The argument proceeds in epistemic order: the last-end structure of desire (ST I-II, q. 1), stated without theological premises beyond the participation framework adopted in Part I; the audit of created goods and the universal-good argument (I-II, q. 2); the identification of the satisfying end as vision (I-II, q. 3, a. 8; I, q. 12, a. 1) with the incapacity of natural powers (I, q. 12, a. 4; I-II, q. 5, a. 5) and the dignity of the capacity (I-II, q. 5, a. 5, ad 2); the seam to revelation expressly marked where the ascent runs out; the offered end (*Dei Filius* ch. 2; 1 Cor 13:12; 1 Jn 3:1–2), the light of glory (I, q. 12, aa. 2, 4–5), and the dogmatic definition (*Benedictus Deus*; CCC 1023); charity as friendship (John 15:15; II-II, q. 23, a. 1; q. 24, a. 2) with its boundaries; hope (II-II, q. 17, aa. 1–2) between presumption and despair; and the consummation (*De civitate Dei* XXII.30; CCC 1023–1029, 1718–1729) with the trilogy's deliberate close. Revealed claims are labeled as received where they appear and are nowhere presented as conclusions of the philosophical thread. English is the working language; no liturgical rite, civil or canonical jurisdiction, or mutable discipline governs any conclusion. All online witnesses were checked on 2026-07-25; the City of God quotations were checked in the source library's tracked 1871 transcription at its registered passage.

Source class	Function in the article	Governing boundary
Scripture	John 15:9–16 supplies the friendship datum; 1 Cor 13:8–13 the mirror, the remaining three, and charity's permanence; 1 Jn 3:1–2 filiation and vision; Rom 5:5 infusion; Ps 26:8 the sought face; 1 Cor 2:9 within <i>Dei Filius</i> .	Quoted from the public-domain Douay–Rheims (Challoner) at exact loci; readings are textual and modest; no independent exegetical apparatus is claimed.
Thomistic framework	ST I-II, qq. 1–5; I, q. 12; II-II, qq. 17, 23–24 govern the analysis of the last end, the vision, hope, and charity; II-II, q. 106 and Part I-II loci are inherited.	Adopted as the article's framework where Catholic theology permits schools; not asserted as dogma; each locus used at its exact argumentative level.
Patristic witness	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> I.1.1 supplies the first-person register of the restless heart; <i>De civitate Dei</i> XXII.30 the consummation: God as self-promised reward, partakers not gods, perfected freedom, the sabbath.	Cited as witness and record, not demonstration; the Dods 1871 edition witness is identified and its wording verified in the tracked source-library transcription.
Authoritative Catholic teaching	<i>Dei Filius</i> ch. 2 (supernatural end); <i>Benedictus Deus</i> (the beatific vision defined); CCC 1023–1029, 1718–1729 (heaven; the vocation to beatitude).	Cited as the Church's teaching at its stated authority, explicitly beyond what the philosophy proved; dogmatic force confined to what the texts state.

Source class	Function in the article	Governing boundary
Project synthesis	The why-chain opening and its three endings; the corridor/room, compass, ceiling, open-mouth, scaffolding, and letters-from-the-road images; the mapping of presumption and despair onto Parts I–II’s coinages; the reading of the open account as friendship’s circulation; all final formulations.	Original editorial synthesis argued from the checked sources; attributed to no source and creating no doctrine.

A.2 Included and excluded scope

Included are: the necessity of a last end in the order of intention (I-II.1.4, 1.6) and the formal agreement of all in desiring it (1.7); the audit of created candidate goods (2.1–7) and the universal-good conclusion (2.8); beatitude as vision of the divine essence (3.8) with the natural-desire argument (I.12.1) at its stated level; the incapacity of natural powers (I.12.4; I-II.5.5) and the nobility of assisted capacity (5.5 ad 2); the supernatural end as dogma (*Dei Filius* ch. 2); the promise texts (1 Cor 13:12; 1 Jn 3:1–2; Ps 26:8); grace-union and the light of glory (I.12.2, 4–5); the definition of *Benedictus Deus* with CCC 1023; charity as friendship founded on communicated beatitude (II-II.23.1 with ad 1), its infusion (24.2), its primacy and form-giving role (23.6, 23.8, cited summarily); the landing of Part II’s gratitude arrow (106.6 ad 2); hope’s object and leaning (17.1–2) with presumption and despair named structurally; the permanence of charity (1 Cor 13:8, 13); and the consummation (De civ. Dei XXII.30; CCC 1020s and 1720s) with the trilogy’s close.

Excluded are: treatise-scale accounts of grace, justification, merit, predestination, assurance, and perseverance; the mechanics of infused virtue and the gifts of the Holy Spirit; Christology, soteriology, and the Passion (named as presupposed by the tradition’s texts, nowhere developed); ecclesiology and the sacraments, including Eucharistic theology and the sacramental economy of the meantime; purgatory, judgment, hell, and the resurrection of the body beyond the definition’s own boundary; the timing and states of eschatology beyond *Benedictus Deus*’s stated scope; mystical theology, contemplative prayer, private revelation, and any phenomenology of religious experience; the scholastic disputes over the natural desire for the supernatural (named, not adjudicated); pastoral counsel on despair, scrupulosity, or assurance; and judgments about any person’s state, culpability, or salvation.

A.3 Material qualifications

1. *Ontological vertigo, recoil, consent* (Part I), *the due return, the open account*, and *spiritual bookkeeping* (Part II) are this series’ coinages, used in their defined senses; *beatitude/happiness* translates *beatitudo*, the complete good, not a mood.
2. The last-end and universal-good arguments presuppose the participation metaphysics adopted and bounded in Part I; a reader who rejects that framework is not offered independent grounds here.
3. ST I-II.3.8 and I.12.1 stand in a work of Christian theology; the essay uses them for the conditional (nothing less than vision would satisfy) and flags that “the blessed see the essence of God” is Aquinas’s theological conclusion. How much the natural-desire argument proves is contested among Thomists; this essay does not adjudicate the dispute, and nowhere treats the desire as an exigency binding God.
4. The gratuity of the supernatural end is dogmatically protected (*Dei Filius* ch. 2: *ex infinita bonitate sua*); the essay’s “question addressed to God” image asserts an openness of the creature, not a claim on the answer.
5. *Benedictus Deus* defines the state of purified souls before the resurrection; the essay confines its use to the definition’s content (intuitive, facial vision, no creature mediating) and takes no position on disputed eschatological questions outside it.
6. The light of glory is a created disposition of the seer, not a created object seen; “made deiform” (I.12.5) and “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4 in CCC 1721) assert participation, never identity of essence, absorption, or loss of creaturehood.

7. Charity as friendship (II-II.23.1) rests on God’s communication of His own beatitude; the essay derives no mutuality from creaturely resources and retains Part I’s one-sided real relation intact. Friendship does not abolish *latría*, obligation, or the Creator–creature asymmetry.
8. The infusion of charity and its identification with participation in the Holy Spirit’s love are received doctrine (II-II.24.2 with Rom 5:5); the Trinitarian identification is revelation, marked as beyond the ascent in Part I and not argued here.
9. Presumption and despair are treated structurally as the vices opposed to hope; the mapping onto “spiritual bookkeeping” and “recoil” is project synthesis, and no claim is made about the culpability or interior state of any person; pastoral treatment of despair is outside scope.
10. The reading of 1 Cor 13 (faith and hope as proper to the interval, charity permanent) follows the common doctrinal reading; the scholastic details of the cessation of faith and hope in glory are not developed.
11. Augustine’s XXII.30 is quoted from the Dods 1871 translation; the Catechism’s own rendering of the same sentences (CCC 1720) differs verbally and both witnesses are identified exactly; neither is altered or conflated.
12. The perfected freedom of the blessed (“not able to sin”) is Augustine’s teaching in XXII.30, received by the broad tradition; the essay uses it against the rivalry picture diagnosed in Part I and makes no claim about the mechanics of impeccability.
13. The essay’s closing sentences are deliberate synthesis closing the series; “pardon. . . another story, told elsewhere” marks redemption as presupposed and undeveloped, not as unnecessary.
14. No pastoral, canonical, or liturgical advice is given; nothing here diagnoses any person’s hope, charity, or destiny.

A.4 Notes, translations, rights, currentness, and review

The numbered Notes carry exact citations, edition and translation identifications, verification dates, and qualifications that would interrupt the argument; no indispensable premise lives only in a note. Scripture is quoted from the public-domain Douay–Rheims translation (Challoner revision) at drbo.org. Aquinas is quoted from the public-domain English Dominican translation with Latin checked at Corpus Thomisticum. Augustine’s *Confessions* is quoted from the public-domain Pilkington translation (NPNF 1/1) with the Latin phrase checked at a public Latin text; *De civitate Dei* from the public-domain Dods translation (1871), checked in the source library’s tracked transcription of the 1871 printing at the registered passage for XXII.30. *Dei Filius* is quoted from the Holy See’s Latin web text with labeled working glosses; *Benedictus Deus* from the received Denzinger Latin (DH 1000–1002, checked at a public bilingual transcription) with its central definition in the official English of CCC 1023 and remaining renderings as labeled glosses; the Catechism is quoted briefly from the official Vatican English web text with attribution. Official texts and third-party translations remain outside the project’s CC BY 4.0 grant; project-created prose, images, and organization are project content.

All online witnesses were checked on 2026-07-25; no mutable law or discipline is relied on. This revision received internal argumentative, source-consistency, quotation, rights, and production review by the authoring agent. Independent scriptural, patristic, Thomistic, dogmatic, theological, literary, and ecclesiastical review is outstanding; no imprimatur, nihil obstat, or ecclesiastical approval is claimed, and internal checking is not independent review.

B References

Scripture

- John 15:9–16 (the friends discourse); 1 Corinthians 2:9 (as quoted by *Dei Filius*); 1 Corinthians 13:8, 12–13 (the mirror; the remaining three); 1 John 3:1–2 (sons now; we shall see him as he is); Romans 5:5 (charity poured forth); Psalm 26:8 (Vulgate numbering; the sought face). Quoted from the public-domain Douay–Rheims translation (Challoner revision), wording checked 2026-07-25 at the online Douay–Rheims text. The translation is an identified working witness, not a critical edition.

Patristic witnesses

- Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* I.1.1 (*fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*); trans. J. G. Pilkington, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st series, vol. 1 (1887); public domain; checked 2026-07-25 at New Advent; Latin checked at The Latin Library.

- Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate Dei* XXII.30 (God Himself the reward, having promised Himself; the end of our desires seen without end, loved without cloy, praised without weariness; partakers of God; the perfected freedom; the everlasting sabbath; “There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise”); trans. Marcus Dods, *The City of God*, vol. II, in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, A New Translation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871); public domain; wording checked 2026-07-25 in the source library’s tracked transcription of the 1871 printing (registered passage for XXII.30, artifact lines 21430–21588). Book X of the same edition was quoted in Part II.

Thomistic framework

- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 1, a. 4 (a last end necessary), a. 6 (under the aspect of good), a. 7 (all agree in the last end’s ratio); q. 2, aa. 1–7 (the audit of created goods) and a. 8 (no created good; the universal good; God alone); q. 3, a. 8 (beatitude the vision of the divine essence); q. 5, a. 5 with ad 2 (no natural attainment; the nobility of assisted capacity); I, q. 12, a. 1 (the natural desire; the blessed see God’s essence), a. 2 (*lumen gloriae*), a. 4 (only by grace), a. 5 (the created light; “deiform,” quoting 1 Jn 3:2); II-II, q. 17, a. 1 (hope leaning on the divine help) and a. 2 (nothing less than Himself); q. 23, a. 1 with *sed contra* and ad 1 (charity the friendship of man for God, founded on communicated beatitude; imperfect here, perfected in heaven), a. 6 and a. 8 (most excellent; form of the virtues, cited summarily); q. 24, a. 2 (charity by infusion; created charity a participation of the Holy Ghost). Inherited from Parts I–II: I, q. 13, a. 7; q. 20, a. 2; q. 44, a. 1; q. 104, a. 1; II-II, q. 81, a. 5, ad 1; q. 84; q. 106, a. 6. English from the public-domain translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province via New Advent; Latin checked in the Corpus Thomisticum online corpus for I-II.1.4, 2.8, 3.8, 5.5; I.12.1–2, 12.5; II-II.17.2, 23.1, 24.2. All loci checked 2026-07-25; work, question, article, and division govern over either site’s presentation.

Authoritative Catholic witnesses

- First Vatican Council, dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* (24 April 1870), ch. 2 (*Deus ex infinita bonitate sua ordinavit hominem ad finem supernaturalem*, quoting 1 Cor 2:9); Holy See Latin text, vatican.va, checked 2026-07-25. English renderings are labeled working glosses governed by the Latin, with the scriptural clause in the Douay–Rheims wording. Chapters 1 and 3 were quoted in Parts I–II.
- Benedict XII, apostolic constitution *Benedictus Deus* (29 January 1336), on the beatific vision; Latin as received in Denzinger–Hünemann, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, nn. 1000–1002 (*visione intuitiva et etiam faciali, nulla mediante creatura...*), phrases checked 2026-07-25 at a public bilingual transcription of DH 1000–1002; the central definition’s English quoted as given in CCC 1023; an unattributed English translation at Papal Encyclicals Online was consulted as a finding aid, checked 2026-07-25. The 1336 Latin act is public domain; printed Denzinger editions retain their own editorial rights.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1023–1029 (heaven; the beatific vision) and 1718–1729 (the desire for happiness; Christian beatitude; the In Brief paragraphs), official Vatican English web text, vatican.va (1023–1029) and vatican.va (1720–1724) with adjacent pages for 1718–1719 and 1725–1729, checked 2026-07-25. CCC 1720 quotes *De civitate Dei* 22, 30 in the Catechism’s own rendering, identified beside the Dods wording where both appear.

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