

A TRIPTYCH ARTICLE

The Debt of Nature

On Human Death, and Why the Tradition Counts It First

The Four Last Things — Volume One

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1 The Verse That Named Them

The phrase is older than the list. Somewhere in the second century before Christ a Jerusalem sage set down a line that the Latin Church has repeated ever since: *In omnibus operibus tuis memorare novissima tua, et in aeternum non peccabis*—“In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin.”¹ From *novissima*—literally *the newest things*, the things furthest along, the last in a series—the tradition drew a name: *the last things, de novissimis*, and eventually a fixed set of four. Denys the Carthusian, dying in 1471 after a lifetime in a cell at Roermond, left among his treatises one called *De quatuor novissimis*; by the sixteenth century the four had a settled order and a devotional literature of their own.²

Read the verse where it stands and it says something more particular than the phrase it produced. The plural is real: *things*, not *thing*. The possessive is real too: *novissima tua, your* last things, not the world’s. And the sentence sits in a stretch of counsel that has nothing abstract about it. Four lines earlier: “restrain not grace from the dead.” Three lines earlier: “Be not wanting in comforting them that weep, and walk with them that mourn.” Two lines earlier: “Be not slow to visit the sick: for by these things thou shalt be confirmed in love.” Then: remember your last things.³ The verse that gave Christian eschatology its shortest name is the last item on a list of things to do at other people’s deathbeds. Whatever else the last things are, they were introduced as something a person notices while sitting with the sick.

That fact is worth holding onto, because the list the phrase produced looks at first like a piece of cosmology. Death, judgment, hell, heaven: four items, apparently in sequence, apparently describing the furniture of the world after this one. But the sequence does not survive inspection. The first two are consecutive—one dies, and then one is judged—and Scripture says so in as many words.⁴ The last two are not consecutive with anything. They are alternatives. Nobody passes through hell on the way to heaven; the fourth item does not follow the third the way the second follows the first. So the fourfold list is not a timeline with four stations. It is two stations and a fork.

Nor is it the Church’s own way of laying out the material. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* treats these matters under the last two articles of the Creed, and its headings are neither four nor in this order. Article 12, “I believe in life everlasting,” runs: the particular judgment; heaven; the final purification, or purgatory; hell; the last judgment; the hope of the new heaven and the new earth. Six headings, with purgatory between heaven and hell and two judgments rather than one. And death itself is not there at all: the Catechism treats dying under Article 11, “I believe in the resurrection of the body,” in a section headed “Dying in Christ Jesus.”⁵ The placement is not an accident of editing. Put death under *life everlasting* and it becomes the doorway to a destination; put it under *the resurrection of the body* and it becomes an interruption in something that will be repaired. The Catechism chose the second, and this essay will argue that the choice is correct and consequential.

So the fourfold list is a devotional ordering, not a dogmatic one, and it is worth saying plainly at the outset that no council ever promulgated it. It is a scheme of meditation whose warrant is Ecclesiasticus 7:40 and whose logic is pedagogical: it walks a person through what will happen *to him*, in the order in which it will confront him, so that he may—the verse’s own promise—sin less. That is a modest and defensible thing for a list to be. It is not the same thing as a map of reality, and the distinction will matter every time this series has to say what the Church actually teaches as against what the tradition has usefully imagined.

Why, then, does death come first? The obvious answer is chronology, and the obvious answer is not wrong. But it is not sufficient either, because chronology fails for the other half of the list; a scheme willing to abandon strict sequence at item three cannot be relying on it at item one. Something else recommends death for the first position, and it is this: death is the only one of the four that anybody has ever seen.

Every other item on the list is known by revelation alone. No one has watched a particular judgment. No one has visited the place of the damned and filed a report, and the tradition’s warnings against imagining these things too confidently are as old as the doctrine of them.⁶ But death is a public event. It happens in rooms with other people in them. It has a smell and a sound and a paperwork trail; medicine has criteria for it, law has consequences that turn on it, and every human being who has ever lived either has undergone it or is going to. Of the four last things, exactly one is an item of common human experience, and it is the one the list puts first.

That is why the entry is here rather than somewhere else. Death is the hinge where what anyone can observe and what only revelation reports are joined at a single point. Up to the moment of death, two people looking at the same dying man—one who believes nothing and one who believes everything the Church teaches—will agree about every fact in the room. After that moment they will agree about nothing. The disagreement does not begin with an argument; it begins with an event that both of them watched. Whatever the Christian claims about judgment, hell,

and heaven, he is claiming it about a person he last saw breathing, and the credibility of the whole set depends on whether he can say something true and unsentimental about the part everyone can check.

Saying something true about that part is harder than it looks, because the tradition holds two things about death that appear to cancel: that death is natural to a bodily creature, and that death is a punishment which would not have befallen man had he not sinned. It holds them without embarrassment, in the same paragraph of the same Catechism, and the joint has been worked with great precision by the theologians and left deliberately unclosed by the councils. It holds, further, that what dies is not the whole person, and that what survives is not the person either—a formula that looks at first like a contradiction dressed in Latin, and turns out on inspection to be the only thing that keeps the Christian hope from collapsing into either a ghost story or a corpse.

Those are the claims to be tested. This essay is the first of four; the others take up judgment, hell, and heaven in the tradition's own order, and each is a complete study that does not depend on this one. What death owes them is a definition and a boundary: what exactly the event is, what it does to the thing that undergoes it, and where the evidence stops. The definition the tradition settled on is not the one most readers would supply, and it is doing more work than a definition usually does.

2 What Comes Apart

Ask a physician what death is and you will get a list of criteria: the irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory function, or of all functions of the entire brain. Ask the Catechism and you get a sentence of a different kind. "In that 'departure' which is death the soul is separated from the body. It will be reunited with the body on the day of resurrection of the dead."⁷ That is not a criterion. It is a description of an event in terms of two things that criteria cannot see, offered by a text that knows perfectly well no one can watch it happen.

The difference is not that theology is being vague where medicine is precise. It is that the two answers are answering different questions. The physician is asked *how can we tell*; the Catechism is asked *what is it*. And the answer to the second question is only available to someone who has already committed himself about what a human being is. A definition of death is an anthropology with the sound turned down.

2.1 A definition with commitments

Notice first what the formula does not say. It does not say that a person ceases. It does not say that a person is released. It says that a composite comes apart, and it says in the same breath that the coming-apart is not final—the parts are going to be put back together. Every word of that is contested by somebody, and the tradition chose each of them against a live alternative.

Against the materialist, the formula says that something survives. Against the Platonist, it says that what survives is a *part*. Against both, it says that the eventual repair matters: if the soul were the person, its reunion with a body would be at best a bonus and at worst an indignity, and the resurrection of the body—which the Creed makes an article of faith, and which the earliest Christians were mocked for—would be a strange thing to hope for. The Church hopes for it insistently, and the insistence only makes sense if what death produces is genuinely a fragment.⁸

That is a lot of freight for one sentence, and it is worth asking where the sentence came from before asking whether it is true.

2.2 Augustine's three deaths

The most careful early treatment is Augustine's, in the thirteenth book of the *City of God*, a book whose editorial argument is stated in a single line: *that death is penal, and had its origin in Adam's sin*.⁹ Augustine begins not with the penalty but with the grammar. He is bothered that we use one word, *death*, for two different partings, and he sets out to keep them distinct.

"The death, then, of the soul takes place when God forsakes it, as the death of the body when the soul forsakes it. Therefore the death of both—that is, of the whole man—occurs when the soul, forsaken by God, forsakes the body."¹⁰ The structure is relational all the way down. Nothing on Augustine's account has life in its own right except God; a

thing is alive by holding on to what animates it, and dies by losing its hold. The body's life is the soul. The soul's life is God. So there are two deaths available to a man, and the awful case is the one where both have happened.

Three consequences follow, and Augustine draws them all. First, an immortal soul can die, in the only sense that matters to it: immortality guarantees that a soul will not stop existing, not that it will not be bereft. Second, bodily death is describable without any reference to sin—it is simply what happens when the animating principle withdraws—which is why Augustine can and does treat the question of its penal character as a further and separate problem. Third, and this is the sentence that keeps his account from sentimentality: “as regards bodily death, that is, the separation of the soul from the body, it is good unto none while it is being endured by those whom we say are in the article of death.” He is emphatic about the violence of it: “the very violence with which body and soul are wrenched asunder, which in the living had been conjoined and closely intertwined, brings with it a harsh experience, jarring horridly on nature so long as it continues.”¹¹

That last is a patristic witness, not a definition of faith, and it should be received at that level. But it is a corrective worth keeping in view for the rest of this essay, because the devotional literature that grew up around dying has a standing temptation to make death lovely, and Augustine—who is often blamed for the gloom—is in fact the one insisting that the thing being described is a wrenching, and that calling it good while it is happening is a category error about who is speaking.

2.3 The form of the body

Augustine's analysis is a description. What made it a definition with dogmatic edges was a philosophical claim about how soul and body are joined, and that claim entered the Church's definitive teaching in 1312.

At the Council of Vienne, Clement V's constitution *Fidei catholicae* disposed of a set of disputed questions, and among them this: “we reprobate as erroneous and inimical to Catholic truth every doctrine or position rashly asserting or turning into doubt that the substance of the rational or intellective soul is not truly and *per se* the form of the human body—defining, that all may know the truth of sincere faith and every entry be closed to errors, that whoever shall presume hereafter to assert, defend, or pertinaciously hold that the rational or intellective soul is not the form of the human body *per se et essentialiter*, is to be censured as a heretic.”¹²

Two centuries later the Fifth Lateran Council, in *Apostolici regiminis* (1513), added the other half against the Averroist reading of Aristotle then circulating at Padua: it condemned “all who assert that the intellective soul is mortal, or one in all men,” and stated that the soul is not only “truly *per se* and essentially the form of the human body, as is contained in the canon of Clement V... but also immortal, and singularly multipliable according to the multitude of the bodies into which it is infused.”¹³

Take those two together and the definition of death acquires teeth. If the soul is the form of the body *per se and essentially*, then it is not a passenger. A form is not in matter the way a pilot is in a ship or a prisoner in a cell; it is what makes this matter be this kind of thing at all. The Catechism draws the conclusion in a sentence that is easy to read past: “spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.”¹⁴ *One* nature. Not a spirit housed in flesh, and not flesh that secretes a spirit: one thing, of which soul and body are principles rather than parts in the way planks are parts of a boat.

Which means that when the tradition calls death a separation of soul and body, it is not describing a departure. It is describing a demolition. Aquinas, working within exactly this framework, will not let “the soul is the man” pass even as a manner of speaking: “it is clear that man is not a soul only, but something composed of soul and body.”¹⁵

2.4 The corpse of God

There is a place where the tradition had to decide whether it meant this literally, and it decided that it did.

Christ died. That is a creedal statement, and what the Church means by it is not that he lost consciousness or appeared to expire. Aquinas devotes a question to the mechanics, and the answers are startling in their realism. Was the Godhead separated from the flesh when Christ died? No: “what is bestowed through God's grace is never withdrawn except through fault,” and so the body that lay in the tomb was still the body of the Son of God—which is why the Creed can say of the Son of God, without qualification, that he “was buried.”¹⁶ And yet the death was a real one: soul and body genuinely came apart, and were genuinely rejoined on the third day.

So the Church's most exact statement about what death is comes with a case in which it holds under maximum strain. The composite came apart in the one instance where, if anywhere, one might have expected the tradition to soften the account—and instead the tradition hardened it, insisting simultaneously that the parting was real and that the divine Person held on to both severed pieces. It would have been easier to say that Christ's soul departed and his body became a thing. The Church said instead that the corpse in the tomb was his, that the soul in the place of the dead was his, and that neither statement made the other less true.

If that is what death is, then the fourfold list has a problem, and it is the problem this series will keep running into. Death does not deliver a person to judgment. It delivers a fragment. And a fragment cannot be the last word about anything, which is why the Catechism files death under the resurrection of the body and why the Christian hope has never been a hope for the survival of souls.

Before that fragment can be examined, though, there is a prior embarrassment to deal with. The event we have just defined so exactly turns out to be extraordinarily difficult to locate—not in the modern sense of a disputed medical criterion, but in a much older sense that Augustine noticed and could not resolve.

3 The Moment No One Occupies

Augustine, having defined death as a parting, went looking for the instant at which the parting occurs, and could not find it. The chapters in which he fails are among the strangest in the *City of God*, and they are not a digression.

The problem is stated with almost mathematical dryness. There are three times—before death, in death, after death—and three corresponding states: living, dying, dead. Now take a man in extremity. “So long as the soul is in the body, especially if consciousness remain, the man certainly lives; for body and soul constitute the man. And thus, before death, he cannot be said to be in death; but when, on the other hand, the soul has departed, and all bodily sensation is extinct, death is past, and the man is dead. Between these two states the dying condition finds no place; for if a man yet lives, death has not arrived; if he has ceased to live, death is past. Never, then, is he dying.”¹⁷ And he presses it further, into the place where it becomes uncomfortable: “it is difficult to explain how we speak of those who are not yet dead, but are agonized in their last and mortal extremity, as being in the article of death. Yet what else can we call them than dying persons? . . . No one, therefore, is dying unless living.”¹⁸

The comparison he reaches for is the present tense: “you try to lay your finger on the present, and cannot find it, because the present occupies no space, but is only the transition of time from the future to the past.” The instant of death is like that—a boundary rather than a duration, real as a limit and unavailable as an experience. Which produces the conclusion he states and immediately declines to accept: “Must we then conclude that there is thus no death of the body at all? For if there is, where is it, since it is in no one, and no one can be in it?”¹⁹

He does not resolve it. He decides to keep speaking the way everyone speaks, and he gives a reason that is better than a resolution: Scripture itself talks about being *in* death, so the ordinary usage has warrant even where the analysis fails. This is Augustine at his best—an argument he cannot answer, reported as an argument he cannot answer, followed by a working practice.

Between the two chapters where he presses the puzzle he inserts one that has been quoted more often than either, and it is the reason the puzzle is not merely a curiosity. “For no sooner do we begin to live in this dying body, than we begin to move ceaselessly towards death. . . our whole life is nothing but a race towards death, in which no one is allowed to stand still for a little space, or to go somewhat more slowly, but all are driven forwards with an impartial movement, and with equal rapidity. For he whose life is short spends a day no more swiftly than he whose life is longer.”²⁰ The instant is unlocatable because the process is not instantaneous. If dying is something a body has been doing since it began, then asking when it *happens* is like asking at what moment a river arrives at the sea.

3.1 What the Church does about an instant it cannot find

The interesting thing is what the Church, which has never resolved Augustine's puzzle, does about it in practice. It legislates.

Canon 1004 of the current Latin code provides that the anointing of the sick may be administered to a member of the faithful “who, having reached the use of reason, begins to be in danger due to sickness or old age.” Then canon 1005:

“This sacrament is to be administered in a case of doubt whether the sick person has attained the use of reason, is dangerously ill, or is dead.”²¹

Read the third clause slowly. The Church has legislated for the case in which the minister does not know whether the person in front of him is alive. It does not tell him to determine the fact; it tells him to act. The sacrament goes forward under doubt, conditionally, on the side of the person.

That is not an accident of drafting, and it is not merely charitable improvisation. It is what a body has to do when it holds two things at once: that the sacraments are for the living, and that the boundary of living is genuinely not locatable from outside. If the moment were findable, the canon would be superfluous and slightly scandalous—one does not anoint corpses. If the moment were unreal, the canon would be incoherent. The canon exists because the moment is real and unfindable, which is precisely Augustine’s result.

Project synthesis: law at the boundary Augustine could not draw

The claim here is this essay’s own, argued from the texts cited and attributed to no source: the Church’s disciplinary practice at the deathbed is best read as a jurisprudence built on top of an admitted metaphysical indeterminacy, and the two halves are more coherent together than either is alone. Augustine established that no observer, and not even the dying man, occupies the instant of death; the canonical rule instructs the minister to act *as if* the person may still be within reach whenever he cannot know otherwise. The relation between them is not deduction—no canonist cites *De civitate Dei* XIII.11 in the margin of canon 1005—but the fit is exact, and it explains a feature of Catholic deathbed practice that puzzles observers: the priest who anoints a body that has apparently stopped is not confused about biology. He is declining to place a bet at the one point in a human life where the tradition has always said the bet cannot be placed.

The strongest objection. The canon is simply prudential and requires no such reading. Sacramental law is full of provisions for doubt—doubtful baptism, doubtful matter, doubtful consent—and they express nothing more than the ordinary principle that in doubt the safer course favors the recipient’s salvation. On this account canon 1005 is a routine application of *in dubio pro salute animae* and carries no metaphysical commitment about the instant of death whatever; reading Augustine into it is decoration. The objection is strong because it is the simpler explanation and because the canon really does sit among other doubt-provisions that have nothing to do with the boundary of life.

What would change the judgment. If the Church’s own commentary on this canon or its predecessors grounded the doubt-clause solely in the uncertainty of *medical observation*—that is, in our not yet knowing how to tell, with the implication that better instruments would remove the doubt—the synthesis here would be wrong, and the canon would be a temporary accommodation to ignorance rather than a standing accommodation to a boundary. The essay has not examined the drafting history of canon 1005 or of its predecessor in the 1917 Code, which it did not consult, and records this as an open question rather than a settled point.

3.2 Where this essay stops

One boundary must be marked here rather than later, because it is the place where readers most often expect a theological essay to overreach. Nothing said above settles any contemporary question about the determination of death—whether neurological criteria are adequate, when organs may be removed, what a family should conclude from a particular prognosis. Those are questions of fact and of applied moral theology, they turn on medical evidence this essay has not examined, and the Church’s interventions in them belong to a different order of teaching than the definitions quoted above.²² What follows from Augustine and from canon 1005 is narrower and more durable: the philosophical definition of death does not hand anyone a test for it, and the Church knows this, and has arranged its practice accordingly.

The definition, then, is secure and the instant is not. That is an odd result, and it is about to be joined by a second and larger oddity, this time not about *when* death happens but about *why*.

4 Two Questions, and Only One Answer Each

Here is a sentence from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, printed without visible strain: “In a sense bodily death is natural, but for faith it is in fact ‘the wages of sin.’”²³ Two paragraphs later: “Even though man’s nature is mortal God had destined him not to die.”²⁴

Read those two flatly and they are hard to reconcile. Man’s nature is mortal; death entered the world through sin; death was contrary to God’s plan. If a nature is mortal, death is what it does, and something a nature does is not obviously an intruder. Either the Catechism is being sloppy, or it is holding two claims apart with a distinction it has not troubled to spell out. It is doing the second, the distinction is very old, and unpacking it is the single most useful piece of work this essay can do—because almost every popular confusion about Christian teaching on death comes from collapsing it.

4.1 The texts, read where they stand

Start with the loci themselves rather than with a chain of quotations arranged to prove something.

Genesis puts the threat in the mouth of God in the garden: “But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death.”²⁵ The sentence, when it comes, is a different kind of statement: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.”²⁶ Notice the form of that. The penalty is announced in a clause that gives its own reason, and the reason is not *because you sinned* but *because you are dust*. The verse imposes a sentence by pointing at a material fact. Whatever else Genesis is doing, it is not treating the mortality of a body made from earth as a novelty introduced by the transgression; it is treating the transgression as the reason that fact is now going to be allowed to operate.

The book of Wisdom takes the other side of the tension with equal firmness: “For God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living. . . For God created man incorruptible, and to the image of his own likeness he made him. But by the envy of the devil, death came into the world.”²⁷ And Paul supplies the formula the whole later tradition works from: “Wherefore as by one man sin entered into this world and by sin death: and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned”; and, more compactly, “For the wages of sin is death.”²⁸

Two scriptural facts, then, not one. The tie between sin and death is asserted in the strongest terms available. And the mortality of a creature made of dust is asserted as the ground of the sentence rather than as its content. Any account that suppresses either half is suppressing Scripture.

4.2 What Trent defined, and what it did not

The Church’s most exact statement is the first canon of the fifth session of the Council of Trent, promulgated 17 June 1546, and it repays being read word by word rather than summarized.

“If anyone does not confess that the first man, Adam, when he had transgressed the commandment of God in Paradise, immediately lost the holiness and justice wherein he had been constituted; and that he incurred, through the offence of that prevarication, the wrath and indignation of God, and consequently death, with which God had previously threatened him, and, together with death, captivity under his power, who thenceforth had the empire of death, that is to say, the Devil; and that the entire Adam, through that offence of prevarication, was changed, in body and soul, for the worse; let him be anathema.”²⁹

The weight is unambiguous—this is definitive teaching, a canon with an anathema—and so is the content. Adam *incurred* death; the incurring was consequent on the offence; the death in question is the one previously threatened, which sends the reader back to Genesis 2:17; and the whole Adam, body and soul, was changed for the worse. Canon 2 adds the transmission, and adds it against a specific error: it anathematizes the man who says that Adam “has only transfused death, and pains of the body, into the whole human race, but not sin also, which is the death of the soul.”³⁰ That canon takes bodily transmission as common ground and defines the further point.

Now notice what the canons do not say. They do not say that Adam’s body was of itself incorruptible. They do not say how the exemption worked. They do not say whether an unfallen humanity would have been translated, transformed, or simply preserved. They do not adjudicate between the theological accounts of the preternatural gifts.

Trent defined the *that*, at the level of the sinner's liability, and left the *how* to the schools—which is exactly what a council does when the error before it concerns liability and not physics.

That reticence is the space in which the Catechism's apparently contradictory sentences live.

4.3 The distinction the schools worked out

Aquinas takes the problem twice, and the second treatment is the one that has shaped Catholic usage ever since.

He asks first whether death and the other bodily defects are the *effect* of sin, and gives an answer whose precision is easy to miss. Sin is not the cause of death *per se*—no sinner intends to become mortal, and an effect not intended by the agent is not produced by the agent's own power. Sin is the cause of death *accidentally*, in the specific sense of an agent that causes by removing an obstacle: "it is stated in *Phys.* viii. . . that 'by displacing a pillar a man moves accidentally the stone resting thereon.' In this way the sin of our first parent is the cause of death and all such like defects in human nature, in so far as by the sin of our first parent original justice was taken away."³¹

The stone was always going to fall. It was resting on something. The sin knocked out what it was resting on.

Then the harder article: are death and such defects *natural* to man? Aquinas stacks the objections on the side of nature—corruptible and incorruptible differ in genus, man is in the same genus as other animals, a body composed of contraries has the cause of its dissolution inside it—and the contrary arguments on the side of the form, including the flat scriptural assertion that "God made not death." The resolution divides the nature rather than the answer: "as regards his form, incorruption is more natural to man than to other corruptible things. But since that very form has a matter composed of contraries, from the inclination of that matter there results corruptibility in the whole. In this respect man is naturally corruptible as regards the nature of his matter left to itself, but not as regards the nature of his form."³²

Then the craftsman. A smith choosing iron for a knife chooses hardness and ductility; that the iron also rusts "results from the natural disposition of iron, nor does the workman choose this in the iron, indeed he would do without it if he could." So with the human body: nature chose a temperate mixture so the body could be an organ of touch; "that it is corruptible is due to a condition of matter, and is not chosen by nature: indeed nature would choose an incorruptible matter if it could. But God, to Whom every nature is subject, in forming man supplied the defect of nature, and by the gift of original justice, gave the body a certain incorruptibility. . . . It is in this sense that it is said that 'God made not death,' and that death is the punishment of sin."³³ And, in the parallel treatment, the whole thing compressed into one clause: "death is both natural on account of a condition attaching to matter, and penal on account of the loss of the Divine favor preserving man from death."³⁴

This is common theology, and it should be labeled as such. The magisterium has not defined the matter/form solution; it has defined the liability, and then—in the Catechism, in *Gaudium et spes*—spoken in language that the solution makes intelligible. *Gaudium et spes* 18 says "that bodily death from which man would have been immune had he not sinned"; the Catechism says "man's nature is mortal" and "God had destined him not to die." A reader who has the distinction in hand finds those sentences unremarkable. A reader who does not finds them incoherent, and reasonably.

Project synthesis: two questions, not two physics

This is the essay's own judgment, argued from the sources cited above and attributed to no authority. The apparent contradiction between "death is natural" and "death is a punishment" dissolves once one sees that the two statements answer different questions, and only different questions. *What kind of thing is this event?* is a question about the constitution of the thing that undergoes it, and the answer is: the dissolution of a composite whose matter is composed of contraries—the same answer one would give for an oak or an ox. *Why is it happening to you?* is a question about the history of a relationship, and the answer is: because a gift that held the dissolution off is not being given. Neither answer competes with the other, because neither is in the other's business. The confusion arises entirely from hearing the second answer as a rival account of the first—as though "death is a punishment" were a claim about biology, and the Christian were saying that human bodies would not decompose if not for a transgression in a garden.

Three reasons for the reading. First, the tradition's own texts index the two answers to different principles of *one nature*: the corruptibility to the matter, the incorruption to the form. That is a distinction inside a single analysis, not two competing histories of the world. Second, the magisterium defines only one side. Trent defines that Adam incurred the death that had been threatened; it says nothing about the constitution of his body, and

this silence is not an oversight in a document that is elsewhere extremely specific. Third, the grammar of the sources is the grammar of gift: *supplevit defectum naturae*, God *supplied the defect of nature*. One does not supply what was already there, and the withdrawal of a supplement does not alter the nature it was supplementing. The technical name for what was removed—original justice, a gift—is itself the argument.

The strongest objection, at full strength. The distinction is a verbal maneuver that buys consistency by relocating the contradiction. Grant the Thomistic solution and “natural” has come to mean *following from the matter considered in abstraction from the actual divine institution*—that is, from a nature that no human being has ever had. Adam as actually constituted was not mortal; his descendants are; the difference is a real difference in the world, brought about by a sin. To call the resulting condition “natural” is then to describe the actual human situation by reference to a counterfactual human being who never existed, and to let that fiction do the reconciling work. Worse, the objection has Scripture on its side at the one place where Scripture speaks directly to the point: *Deus mortem non fecit*—God did not *make* death. If bodily death follows from the matter God chose, then God made it, and the verse is false or means something other than what Aquinas takes it to mean. The synthesis above, on this objection, is not a resolution but an agreement to change the subject whenever the pressure comes from the other side.

What would change the judgment. A magisterial text, or an unambiguous locus in Aquinas, treating bodily immortality as *owed* to human nature—*debitum naturae* rather than *donum*—would collapse the distinction and make the two accounts genuine rivals, because a debt is not a supplement. So would a demonstration that Trent’s first canon defines not merely that Adam incurred death but that his body was of itself incorruptible; the essay has read the canon in both languages and finds no such definition, but the reading is of the promulgated text alone and not of the conciliar acts, and the acts might show the fathers deliberately intending more than the canon says. Either finding would require the synthesis to be withdrawn rather than qualified.

4.4 What the distinction costs

Nothing in the foregoing makes death less serious, and it is worth being explicit about that, because a distinction that dissolves a contradiction can look like a distinction that dissolves a doctrine.

It does not. On the reading defended here, every element of the Church’s teaching survives intact: that man was made for a destiny incompatible with dissolution, that he does not now attain it by the road he was meant to travel, that the diversion is his own doing, and that what he now undergoes is a real deprivation and not a neutral biological terminus. Aquinas’s own pillar-and-stone image makes the point sharply: it is no comfort to the man under the stone that gravity was always there. The gift was the point. That the gift’s absence rather than its presence is what needs explaining is precisely the Christian claim, and it is a strange claim, and it should not be domesticated by the distinction that renders it consistent.

What the distinction does buy is the ability to say something honest to a person who is watching a body fail. It is not necessary to tell him that decay is unnatural; he can see that it is exactly what bodies do. It is necessary to tell him that this is not the arrangement he was made for, and that the difference between what he is watching and what should have been is the measure of a loss that is being addressed by other means.

Those other means are the second half of the Christian claim about death, and they change what death *means* without changing a single one of its facts.

5 The Wage Paid, the Enemy Still in the Field

The New Testament speaks about death in two tenses, and the awkwardness is on the surface of the text rather than hidden in it.

In one tense the thing is finished. Christ “hath destroyed death and hath brought to light life and incorruption by the gospel.”³⁵ He became a partaker of flesh and blood “that, through death, he might destroy him who had the empire of death, that is to say, the devil: and might deliver them, who through the fear of death were all their lifetime subject to servitude.”³⁶

In the other tense the thing is pending. Paul, laying out the order of the resurrection, arrives at the end of the sequence and names what is left: “For he must reign, until he hath put all his enemies under his feet. And the enemy, death, shall be destroyed last.”³⁷ Last. Which is to say: still standing, still an enemy, and still to be dealt with at a date not yet arrived.

Both statements are in the same canon and neither is a slip. The difficulty they create is not a difficulty about words. It is the ordinary experience of every Christian who has ever buried one, and the earliest generations felt it more sharply than we do, because they were being asked to explain it to people watching them die of the same plagues as everyone else.

5.1 The complaint from the plague

Cyprian of Carthage wrote to his people during an epidemic, and the objection he answers is not a theological subtlety. It is the obvious one. “But nevertheless it disturbs some that the power of this Disease attacks our people equally with the heathens, as if the Christian believed for this purpose, that he might have the enjoyment of the world and this life free from the contact of ills.”³⁸

His answer refuses every available comfort. He does not say the Christians are being spared, because they are not. He does not say the disease is a special providence for the unbelievers, because it is not. He says that the flesh is common: “So long as we are here in the world, we are associated with the human race in fleshly equality, but are separated in spirit.” Then a list which sounds, at a distance of seventeen centuries, like a man refusing to lie: famine makes no distinction; when a city is taken, captivity desolates all; when the rocks tear the ship, “the shipwreck is common without exception to all that sail in her.” And then the twist that is not a consolation prize: “if the Christian know and keep fast under what condition and what law he has believed, he will be aware that he must suffer *more* than others in the world, since he must struggle more with the attacks of the devil.”³⁹

That is the shape of the Christian answer to the two tenses, stated before anyone had a technical vocabulary for it. The facts of death are not altered. Nothing has been subtracted from the epidemic. What has changed is what the facts are *for*.

5.2 Why the baptized still die

Augustine puts the same question in its sharpest analytical form and answers it with an argument that has no sentiment in it at all. “If, moreover, any one is solicitous about this point, how, if death be the very punishment of sin, they whose guilt is cancelled by grace do yet suffer death”—his answer is that the parting of soul and body was deliberately left in place, “for this reason, that if the immortality of the body followed immediately upon the sacrament of regeneration, faith itself would be thereby enervated. For faith is then only faith when it waits in hope for what is not yet seen in substance.”⁴⁰

He then presses it into the place where the argument earns its keep. If baptism removed death, the martyrs would have had nothing to give: “there could not even have been any conflict, if, after the laver of regeneration, saints could not suffer bodily death. Who would not, then, in company with the infants presented for baptism, run to the grace of Christ, that so he might not be dismissed from the body?” And so the inversion, which is one of the great sentences of Latin Christianity: “Then it was proclaimed to man, ‘If thou sinnest, thou shalt die;’ now it is said to the martyr, ‘Die, that thou sin not.’”⁴¹

The threat has been turned around and pointed the other way. The same instrument that enforced the prohibition is now the means of keeping it.

But Augustine will not let the inversion become an aesthetic. The very next chapter closes off the misreading with a symmetry: “as the law is not an evil when it increases the lust of those who sin, so neither is death a good thing when it increases the glory of those who suffer it... the law is indeed good, because it is prohibition of sin, and death is evil because it is the wages of sin; but as wicked men make an evil use not only of evil, but also of good things, so the righteous make a good use not only of good, but also of evil things.”⁴² And at the end of the earlier chapter, the statement that governs everything else in this section: “Not that death, which was before an evil, has become something good, but only that God has granted to faith this grace, that death, which is the admitted opposite to life, should become the instrument by which life is reached.”⁴³

Death has not been rehabilitated. It has been conscripted.

5.3 What the Catechism keeps and what it does not

The Catechism's treatment of Christian death is unusually warm, and it is worth checking whether the warmth costs anything. "Because of Christ, Christian death has a positive meaning. . . . What is essentially new about Christian death is this: through Baptism, the Christian has already 'died with Christ' sacramentally, in order to live a new life; and if we die in Christ's grace, physical death completes this 'dying with Christ' and so completes our incorporation into him in his redeeming act."⁴⁴ And CCC 1011, quoting Paul: "the Christian can experience a desire for death like St. Paul's: 'My desire is to depart and be with Christ.'"

Two things are worth noticing about the register. First, the Catechism attributes the transformation to Christ's obedience, not to death; the phrase is "the obedience of Jesus has transformed the curse of death into a blessing," which locates the change exactly where Augustine located it—in the divine act, not in a property death has acquired. Second, the Catechism does not withdraw the harder statements. It is the same document that says death is a consequence of sin, contrary to the plan of the Creator, and the last enemy left to be conquered. The warmth is not purchased by suppressing the enmity.

Paul's own sentence, read at its own locus, has the same double structure. "For to me, to live is Christ: and to die is gain. And if to live in the flesh: this is to me the fruit of labour. And what I shall choose I know not. But I am straitened between two: having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, a thing by far the better. But to abide still in the flesh is needful for you."⁴⁵ That is not a man in love with death. That is a man who has weighed two goods, found the further one better, and then set it down because he is needed. The desire is real and the desire is not decisive, and the pastoral value of the passage lies precisely in its refusal to resolve.

5.4 Two tenses, two questions

There is a tidy relation between the two tenses of the New Testament and the two questions of the previous section, and it is worth stating explicitly, as this essay's own reading rather than as anyone's doctrine.

Death was analyzed above under two heads: as the dissolution of a composite (a fact about a nature), and as the withdrawal of a preserving gift (a fact about a relationship). Christ's work bears on those two heads at different times. What is finished—what 2 Timothy can put in the past tense—is the second: for the man in Christ, death is no longer the enforcement of a sentence, because the sentence has been discharged, and this is true of him now, before he dies and whatever his prognosis. What is unfinished—what 1 Corinthians puts at the end of a queue—is the first: composites still come apart, and will until the resurrection makes the point moot by giving back what dissolution took.

So the celebrated "already and not yet" of Christian eschatology is not, at least here, a piece of vagueness or a way of postponing an embarrassment. It is the exact shape produced by the distinction the previous section defended. The penal meaning of death is cancelled in principle and the natural fact of it is not, because they were never the same thing, and there is no reason a single act should have to dispose of both at once.⁴⁶

Which leaves standing the question the queue implies. If composites still come apart, and if the repair is at the end of the queue rather than at the moment of dissolution, then something is true of the interval—and the Church has said more about that interval, and defined more of it, than most Catholics realize.

6 What the Soul Is Doing

Ask a catechism class what happens when a Christian dies and the answer will come back promptly: the soul goes to heaven. Ask where the Church defined that and the room goes quiet, and rightly, because the answer is more interesting than the question expects. Something very like it *was* defined, in 1336, by a pope whose predecessor had preached the opposite from his own pulpit and retracted it on his deathbed.

Getting to that requires first admitting how little the older evidence says.

6.1 The reticence of the Hebrew Scriptures

The Old Testament does not, for the most part, hold out a conscious and blessed life immediately after death. It says the opposite often enough that the Fathers had to work to accommodate it.

The psalmist bargains with God on the assumption that the dead are useless to him: “For there is no one in death, that is mindful of thee: and who shall confess to thee in hell?”⁴⁷ Job pushes further, into flat denial: “But man when he shall be dead, and stripped and consumed, I pray you where is he? . . . So man when he is fallen asleep shall not rise again; till the heavens be broken, he shall not awake, nor rise up out of his sleep.” And then, within four verses, the question that the whole later tradition is an answer to: “Shall man that is dead, thinkest thou, live again? all the days in which I am now in warfare, I expect until my change come.”⁴⁸ Ecclesiastes ends its long meditation on decay with a sentence that says something and refuses to say more: “And the dust return into its earth, from whence it was, and the spirit return to God, who gave it.”⁴⁹ The spirit returns to God; and there the sentence stops.

The change comes late and in Greek. “But the souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure was taken for misery: and their going away from us, for utter destruction: but they are in peace.”⁵⁰

The Catechism does not disguise this trajectory. “God revealed the resurrection of the dead to his people progressively,” it says, and locates the decisive moment in the Maccabean martyrs.⁵¹ That is an honest description of the record, and worth setting down plainly, because a reader who has been told that the Bible teaches an immortal soul going to its reward will be startled the first time he reads Job 14 and will be right to be. The doctrine is genuinely there in the end. It is not there from the beginning, and the tradition has never pretended otherwise.

6.2 The New Testament passages, each in its own place

The relevant New Testament texts are few, and each has been made to carry more than it says by being read through the others. Read singly they are more modest and more useful.

To the thief: “Amen I say to thee: This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.”⁵² The word doing the work is *this day*. Whatever paradise is, the promise attaches an immediate term to it, and the tradition has always read the verse that way.

To the Corinthians, Paul writes the most-quoted and least-read passage on the subject. Its centre is not the confidence at the end but the recoil in the middle: “For we also, who are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burthened; because we would not be unclothed, but clothed upon, that that which is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”⁵³ Paul does not want to be *unclothed*. He wants to be *further clothed*. Given the choice he would skip the disembodied condition altogether and go straight from mortal to swallowed-up-by-life. Only after registering that preference does he say the sentence everyone quotes—that he would rather be absent from the body and present with the Lord—and the order of the two is the whole point. Presence with the Lord is worth being unclothed for. It does not make being unclothed desirable.

To John on Patmos: “I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God. . . And white robes were given to every one of them one; And it was said to them that they should rest for a little time till their fellow servants and their brethren. . . should be filled up.”⁵⁴ Conscious; audible; given something; and told to wait. It is a small datum and an exact one: whatever the state is, it has a duration and it is not the end.

And the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which is where most Catholic imagination about the interval actually comes from, and which is a parable. Its furniture—the bosom of Abraham, the fixed chasm, the sight across the gap, the thirst—has been enormously influential and was not offered as a survey.⁵⁵

That is the evidence. It establishes that something of the person persists, that its condition is differentiated according to how the person lived, that it is conscious, and that it is waiting. It does not establish what the waiting is like, and the New Testament nowhere describes it.

6.3 The philosophers’ problem: a part that is not a person

What the scholastics added was not more information but an analysis of what kind of thing could be in such a state, and the analysis is uncomfortable in a way that has largely been forgotten.

Aquinas asks whether the separated soul can understand anything at all, and the difficulty he sets himself is severe: on his own account the soul understands by turning to images supplied through the body, and death removes the body. His answer is that the soul's mode of operating follows its mode of being, and that both change: separated, it understands by turning to intelligible objects directly, as the angels do. And then the sentence that costs him something: "it is as natural for the soul to understand by turning to the phantasms as it is for it to be joined to the body; but to be separated from the body is not in accordance with its nature, and likewise to understand without turning to the phantasms is not natural to it."⁵⁶

The separated soul, on the most influential account the Catholic tradition possesses, is not liberated. It is displaced. It is operating in a mode above its station and below its capacity, like a hand playing an instrument it was not shaped for.

And it is not the person. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 15, Aquinas argues that a denial of the bodily resurrection cannot be repaired by an appeal to the immortality of the soul, and he gives two reasons. The first is that a soul permanently without a body would make the unnatural condition permanent and the natural one transient, which is metaphysically backwards. The second is the one that has echoed: "since the soul is a part of the body of a man, it is not the whole man, and my soul is not I; so that although the soul obtains salvation in another life, nevertheless not I or any man."⁵⁷

Set that beside the definition of death from which this essay started, and the intermediate state acquires its proper strangeness. Death separates soul and body. The soul survives. The soul is not the man. Therefore what survives death is not, strictly, the person who died—and yet the Church prays to the saints by name, and offers Masses for the dead by name, and the whole practice presupposes that somebody is there to be addressed.

6.4 What the Church actually defined, and the crisis that made it define it

The doctrine that the blessed see God immediately, before the resurrection, is not a piece of folk piety that hardened. It is a papal definition, and it was provoked by a pope.

In the winter of 1331–1332 John XXII preached at Avignon a series of sermons proposing that the souls of the just, before the general resurrection, do not yet see the divine essence but rest under the altar in the humanity of Christ, receiving the vision only after they take their bodies again. The proposal caused an uproar. On 3 December 1334, the day before he died, he issued *Ne super his*, declaring his mind: "we confess and believe that the purified souls separated from their bodies are in heaven, in the kingdom of heaven and paradise, and are gathered with Christ in the company of the angels, and see God and the divine essence face to face clearly, according to the common law, *in so far as the state and condition of a separated soul allows*."⁵⁸

Fourteen months later his successor closed the question. Benedict XII's constitution *Benedictus Deus* of 29 January 1336 defines that the souls of the saints and of the faithful departed in whom nothing remained to be purged—and of those purged after death, and of baptized children dying before the use of reason—"immediately after their death and the aforesaid purification. . . *even before the resumption of their bodies and the general judgment*. . . have been, are, and will be in heaven, in the kingdom of heaven and the heavenly paradise with Christ"; and that they "have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive and even facial vision, with no creature intervening in the character of an object seen, but the divine essence showing itself to them immediately, nakedly, clearly, and openly."⁵⁹ And the other side of it, in the same act: "the souls of those who depart in actual mortal sin descend immediately after their death into hell, where they are tormented by infernal punishments."⁶⁰

Two features of that definition deserve more attention than they usually get.

First, John XXII's careful qualifier—*in so far as the state and condition of a separated soul allows*—does not appear in Benedict's text. Where the earlier document hedges the vision by the limits of the seer, the later one insists on the unmediated character of what is seen and says nothing about the seer's incapacity. The difference is not nothing, and a reader who wants to know what has been defined should notice that the defined form is the stronger one.

Second, and more important for this essay: what *Benedictus Deus* defines is a *when* and a *what*, and nothing else. It fixes the timing—immediately, before the bodies are resumed, before the general judgment. It fixes the object and its immediacy—the divine essence, no creature mediating. It says nothing whatever about the mode of the separated soul's knowledge, nothing about its relation to time, nothing about whether it perceives events on earth, nothing about the texture of the interval. Everything this essay reported from Aquinas about displacement and

incompleteness stands untouched by the definition, and everything popular piety has added about the dead watching over us is likewise untouched—which is to say, unsupported by it.

The Second Vatican Council states the resulting picture without adding to it: some of Christ's disciples "are exiles on earth, some having died are purified, and others are in glory beholding 'clearly God Himself triune and one, as He is'"—three conditions in one communion, the middle one temporary.⁶¹

6.5 The modern pressure, and where the Church drew the line

In the second half of the twentieth century a serious theological proposal put the whole interval in question: that the resurrection occurs for each person at the moment of his own death, so that there is no waiting and no separated soul to wait—the "resurrection in death." The motivation is not frivolous, and it is worth stating at its strongest, because its best argument is a Thomistic one. If my soul is not I, and if a soul without a body is in a condition contrary to its nature, then an interval of indefinite length in which the unnatural condition is the actual one looks like a defect in the arrangement rather than a feature of it. Resurrection in death removes the defect at a stroke.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith addressed the resulting confusion in 1979, in a letter to the world's bishops. Its method is worth noting: it does not name a theologian, does not pronounce a censure, and does not resolve the speculative question. It restates what may not be given up. "The Church affirms that a spiritual element survives and subsists after death, an element endowed with consciousness and will, so that the 'human self' subsists. To designate this element, the Church uses the word 'soul', the accepted term in the usage of Scripture and Tradition." And: "the Church looks for 'the glorious manifestation of our Lord, Jesus Christ', believing it to be distinct and deferred with respect to the situation of people immediately after death."⁶²

That is a boundary rather than a verdict, and the difference matters. Point 4 shows the reasoning: the Church's practice—requiem, suffrage, funeral—is itself a theological source, and a theory which made those acts unintelligible would be refuted by them before any argument was needed. One does not pray for someone who has already been raised and judged and glorified. The letter's argument is that the Church's knees have a vote.

So the state of the question, stated by weight, is this. That the purified see God immediately and before the resurrection, and that the damned descend immediately: definitive, *Benedictus Deus*. That a conscious subject—"the human self"—survives, and that the general resurrection is deferred with respect to it: authoritative teaching, restated in 1979 against a live pressure. That the separated soul's mode of knowing is altered and its condition is contrary to its nature: common theology of the Thomistic school, not defined. That my soul is not I: the same, with a textual caveat about the report in which the sentence survives. That the interval has a particular texture, that the dead observe the living, that time passes there as here: not taught at any level, and the popular confidence about it has no support in any document quoted in this essay.

Whatever else the interval is, it begins with something the Church has been more precise about than about anything else in this territory: the moment of accounting.

7 The Judgment at the Door

The verse that carries the doctrine is one everybody knows and almost nobody reads to the end of the sentence.

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment: So also Christ was offered once to exhaust the sins of many. The second time he shall appear without sin to them that expect him unto salvation."⁶³

The famous half is a subordinate clause. Its job in the argument is to supply a familiar once-ness against which to set an unfamiliar one: men die once, then are judged; *so also* Christ was offered once. The writer of Hebrews is not, at that moment, teaching about the individual's post-mortem judgment. He is teaching about the non-repeatability of the sacrifice, and he reaches for the one thing in human experience that everyone agrees happens exactly once.

That does not weaken the clause. It strengthens it in a particular way, because a premise assumed in passing is a premise the author expects no argument about. When a writer says *as everyone knows, X; so also Y*, the interesting evidence is in the *as everyone knows*. What the verse discloses is not a doctrine being proposed but a doctrine already in possession: among the people this letter addressed, that a man dies once and is then judged was not news.

It is worth being explicit about what the clause does and does not fix. It fixes the order—judgment after death, not before. It fixes the singularity—one death per man, which is why the Catechism cites it against reincarnation.⁶⁴ It does not fix the interval between them, and it does not say the judgment is individual rather than general. Everything further comes from elsewhere.

7.1 What is defined, and what is only named

Here the distinction between a doctrine and its vocabulary has to be made carefully, because the two are usually run together.

The Catechism’s teaching is unambiguous: “Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven—through a purification or immediately—or immediate and everlasting damnation.”⁶⁵

Now look at what the cited authorities actually say. *Benedictus Deus* defines that the purified souls are in heaven and see the divine essence *mox post mortem suam*—immediately after their death—and that the souls departing in actual mortal sin descend to hell *mox post mortem suam*. That is a definition about *timing and outcome*. In neither clause, nor in John XXII’s declaration two years earlier, does the phrase *particular judgment* occur.⁶⁶ The substance is defined. The name is the theologians’, and a very good name it is: if retribution is settled at death and the general judgment is still to come, then something judicial and individual has occurred, and it needs a word.

Why insist on the distinction? Because the name carries a picture, and the picture is not defined. A tribunal, an accounting, a reading-out of the record, an advocate and an accuser: all of that is imaginative furniture, some of it scriptural in origin and all of it inference. What is guaranteed is that at death the case is closed and the verdict is in force. How that presents itself to the one judged is not among the things the Church has told us, and the 1979 caution against “arbitrary imaginative representations” applies to this room as much as to any other.

There is also a small formal puzzle worth noticing, which turns out to be harmless. If the instant of death cannot be located—and the second section of this essay argued from Augustine that it cannot—then the instant of judgment cannot be located either, since the Catechism places it “at the very moment of his death.” But nothing follows from this except that the judgment is not an event within the world’s time, measurable against other events in it. That was never a claim anyone made. The unlocatability of the moment is a fact about the observer’s access to the boundary, not a defect in the boundary; the judgment is not late because we cannot time it.⁶⁷

7.2 The end of the time of merit

The other half of the doctrine is the one that gives the whole series its urgency, and it is stated in the Catechism at its plainest: “Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ.”⁶⁸ Compare the Catechism’s earlier and more affecting version of the same claim: “Death is the end of man’s earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny.”⁶⁹

The scholastic version is blunter, and appears where one would least look for it: in the middle of Aquinas’s argument that the immortality of the soul is no substitute for the resurrection. Explaining why Paul says that if Christ is not risen, then “they also that are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished,” he supplies the missing premise: they have perished “because in the other life there are no meritorious works.”⁷⁰

That the outcome is fixed is taught. *Why* the will should be fixed at that moment—what it is about the separated condition, or about the completion of a life, that makes the orientation final—is not defined, and the schools have offered several accounts. This essay does not survey them, and a reader should treat any confident explanation of the mechanism, including the ones he has probably heard, as theology rather than as doctrine.⁷¹

7.3 What death does not sever

One more negative is required, because the doctrine of an immediate individual judgment can be heard as making the dead unreachable, and the Church’s practice says the opposite in the loudest possible way.

The Second Vatican Council states that the union between the living and “the brethren who have gone to sleep in the peace of Christ is not in the least weakened or interrupted, but on the contrary, according to the perpetual faith of the Church, is strengthened by communication of spiritual goods,” and that the Church “from the very first ages of the Christian religion has cultivated with great piety the memory of the dead. . . and offers suffrages for them.”⁷² And the 1979 letter, as noted, treats the funeral and the suffrage as themselves theological sources: any account of what happens after death which made the Church’s prayers unintelligible would be refuted by the prayers.

So the judgment at death closes the individual’s own account and does not close the communion. Those are different things, and the distinction is what allows a Catholic to hold simultaneously that his father’s case is settled and that it is worth having a Mass said for him—a combination that looks incoherent to anyone who has collapsed judgment into finality of every kind.

That is as far as this volume goes into judgment. The event itself, its criterion, the two judgments and their relation, and the question of what could possibly be added at the end of the world to a verdict already in force, belong to *Judgment*, the second volume of this series, which treats them at length.

What remains here is the part of the subject that the tradition thought most urgent and that modern Catholic writing has largely dropped: not what happens at death, but what a person is supposed to do about it beforehand.

8 The Craft

For roughly a century and a half, from the early fifteenth century to the Counter-Reformation, the best-selling religious book in Europe after the Bible was a short manual on how to die. It circulated in Latin under at least three titles, in a picture-book version with eleven woodcuts, in French, in German, and—in the version this section will use—in English, where it was called *The Book of the Craft of Dying*.⁷³

Its subject was not death in general. It was the last few hours, and what to say and do in them.

8.1 Who did not write it

The tract is very frequently attributed to Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris, and the attribution does not survive contact with the text.

Comper, who did the collation, sets out the reasons. Gerson certainly compiled a treatise in Latin and French called the *Opusculum tripartitum*, whose third part is *de arte moriendi*. But that book “is very much shorter than the English version of *The Craft of Dying*, and there is nothing in it which corresponds to the first two chapters of the Craft.” And then the decisive point: the Craft itself, in its third and fifth chapters, cites the authority of “the noble” and “great clerk, the Chancellor of Paris”—which is to say, it quotes Gerson as a source.⁷⁴

A book does not cite itself as an authority in the third person. So the anonymous Latin author drew on Gerson, and the tradition later paid him the compliment of assuming he *was* Gerson. That is a small point of bibliography, and it is worth making because the *ars moriendi* is regularly presented as the considered teaching of a great churchman, when its actual status is that of an anonymous compilation of enormous popularity—which is a different kind of evidence about what the late medieval Church believed, and in some ways a better one.

8.2 What is in it

Six chapters: a commendation of death; the temptations of the dying; the questions to ask them; an instruction with prayers modeled on Christ’s five acts on the cross; an instruction to those who will die; and prayers to be said over the dying “of some man that is about them.”⁷⁵

The first chapter is a commendation, and its logic is not what a modern reader expects. It begins by conceding Aristotle’s point that bodily death is “most dreadful of all fearful things,” and immediately outranks it: the death of the soul is worse in the same proportion that the soul outranks the body. Then two psalm verses set against each other—“the death of the sinful man is worst of all deaths” and “the death of the good man is ever precious in the sight of God”—and the conclusion that what makes a death good or bad is not its manner: “what manner of bodily death that ever they die.”⁷⁶

Then comes a passage that a careful reader should stop at, because it is the point where the devotional tradition and the dogmatic one part company. Death, says the tract, quoting “a wise man,” is “nothing else but a going out of prison, and an ending of exile; a discharging of an heavy burden, that is the body; finishing of all infirmities; a scaping of all perils; destroying of all evil things; breaking of all bonds; paying of the debt of natural duty; turning again into his country; and entering into bliss and joy.”⁷⁷

Prison; exile; a heavy burden, *that is the body*. That is Plato, not the Council of Vienne. A body which is a burden to be discharged is not a body whose soul is its form *per se et essentialiter*, and the man who has learned from the Catechism that “spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature” will find his devotional inheritance pulling the other way. The pull is not a heresy—the tract is describing a felt relief, not proposing an anthropology—but it is a drift, and it is worth naming because it is the standing drift of the whole genre. Augustine, who could describe the wrenching apart of body and soul as “jarring horribly on nature,” is the better guide here than the anonymous author who found it a discharge.

The second chapter is the famous one: five temptations that assail the dying with a violence they have never met before—“such as they never had before in all their life.” Against faith, the devil works to unsettle belief or to insinuate doubt. Against hope, he raises despair by “objecting his sins against him.” Against charity, impatience, and here the tract is medically observant: the worst cases are those who “die not by nature and course of age—that happeth right seldom, as open experience teacheth men—but die often through an accidental sickness; as a fever” or an abscess.⁷⁸ The fourth temptation is the one that shows the author knew his readership: complacence, “that is spiritual pride, with the which the devil tempteth and beguileth most religious, and devout and perfect men”—the temptation, at the very end, to admire one’s own performance. *O how stable art thou in the faith! how strong in hope! how sad in patience! O how many good deeds hast thou done!* The fifth is attachment to “their wives, their children, their carnal friends, and their worldly riches.”

The third chapter supplies a script. On the authority of “Saint Anselm the bishop,” the man at the bedside is to put a series of questions, each answered *Yea*: Art thou glad that thou shalt die in the faith of Christ? Knowest thou well that thou hast not done as thou shouldst have done? Repentest thee thereof? Hast thou full will to amend thee, if thou mightest have full space of life? Believest thou fully that Our Lord Jesu Christ, God’s Son, died for thee? Thankest thou Him thereof with all thine heart? Believest thou verily that thou mayest not be saved but by Christ’s death and His passion? And then the instruction: “put all thy trust in His passion and in His death only, having trust in none other thing.”⁷⁹

What is striking about the script is its economy. Seven questions, each answerable by a monosyllable, designed for a person who may have very little breath and less attention. It is a liturgy for someone who can no longer perform one.

8.3 The book’s quarrel with the sickroom

The fifth chapter contains the tract’s real argument, and it is a complaint.

“It is greatly to be noted, and to be taken heed of, that right seldom that any man—yea among religious and devout men—dispose themselves to death betimes as they ought. For every man weeneth himself to live long, and troweth not that he shall die in short time; and doubtless that cometh of the devil’s subtle temptation.”⁸⁰ Then the practical grievance. A “certain decretal,” the tract says, “chargeth straitly every bodily leech that he give no sick man no bodily medicine unto the time that he hath warned and induced him to seek his spiritual leech. But this counsel is now for-slothed almost of all men, and is turned into the contrary; for men seek sooner and busier after medicines for the body than for the soul.”⁸¹

And then the sharpest thing in the book, and the reason it is worth reading in an age with better medicine and worse manners about dying: “as the great Clerk, the Chancellor of Paris saith: Often times by such a vain and a false cheering and comforting, and feigned behoting”—promising—“of bodily heal, and trusting thereupon, men run and fall into certain damnation everlastingly.”⁸² The complaint is that everyone in the room is lying, in the kindest possible way, and that the lying has a cost the liars are not paying.

Two further features of the tract’s construction should be noticed, because they explain what kind of book it is. The prologue says it is written for those who lack skill in dying, “not only to lewd men but also to religious and devout persons”—and Comper’s gloss on *lewd men* is *laymen*. And the sixth chapter’s prayers are to be said over the dying “of some man that is about them”; elsewhere the tract directs that the dying be exhorted “by a priest, or for need by another.”⁸³

Or for need by another. That is a manual written for a world in which the priest might not come. It hands a layman a script, a diagnosis of the five ways the dying mind fails, and a set of questions to ask his neighbour. Whatever else it is, it is a work of lay competence in a domain the modern Church has largely professionalized—and it was the most popular book of its kind in Christendom.

8.4 What the Church kept

The genre continued: Caxton printed an abridgment “translated from the French” before 1500, block-books circulated in almost every European language, and the Counter-Reformation produced its own successors.⁸⁴ What is more interesting is how much of the counsel the Catechism still carries, and where it has quietly changed the emphasis.

“The Church encourages us to prepare ourselves for the hour of our death. In the litany of the saints, for instance, she has us pray: ‘From a sudden and unforeseen death, deliver us, O Lord’; to ask the Mother of God to intercede for us ‘at the hour of our death’ in the Hail Mary; and to entrust ourselves to St. Joseph, the patron of a happy death.”⁸⁵

The petition is worth stopping over, because it inverts a modern preference so completely that most people who pray it do not hear what they are asking. *From a sudden and unforeseen death, deliver us.* Ask a hundred people today how they would like to die and the majority will say: quickly, in my sleep, without knowing. The Church’s litany asks to be spared exactly that. Not because slow dying is better—the tradition is under no illusions about what a fever or an abscess does—but because a death one can see coming is a death one can do something about, and the entire *ars moriendi* rests on the assumption that there is something to be done.

That assumption is the tradition’s real bequest, and it is not obviously false. What has changed is where the work is located. The medieval tract puts the decisive struggle in the last hours and gives most of its pages to them, while conceding in its fifth chapter that men ought to dispose themselves “betimes.” The Catechism reverses the proportions: one paragraph on the hour, and an entire moral theology on the life. The reversal is not a rejection. It is what happens when a counsel that began as emergency instruction is absorbed into an account of the whole Christian life, and it is the same movement by which the tract’s own author already knew that the best preparation for the deathbed happens years before anyone reaches it.

None of the foregoing is magisterial teaching, and it should not be cited as though it were. The *ars moriendi* is devotional literature of uncertain authorship, of enormous historical influence, and of no doctrinal authority whatever; its five temptations are a psychology, not a revelation; its interrogations are a pastoral form, not a rite. What the Church has authoritatively adopted from the tradition amounts to CCC 1014’s single paragraph and the liturgical petitions it quotes.

But the Church did not leave the dying to a devotional literature. It has, for the whole of its history, done specific things at deathbeds, and those things are law.

9 What the Church Actually Does

Doctrine about death can be tested against a body of practice that is unusually well documented, because most of it is law. What the Church does at a deathbed is prescribed, the prescriptions have been revised twice in living memory, and the revisions were made in explicit reference to a conciliar text of 1551. It is a rare case where a reader can check whether the practice matches the teaching, and the answer is instructive: it matches the teaching better than it matches what most Catholics believe the teaching to be.

9.1 The apostolic text, read where it stands

“Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man. And the Lord shall raise him up: and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him.”⁸⁶

The first word of the prescription is *sick*. Not dying; not *in extremis*; sick. The apostolic text names an illness and promises two things—a raising up, and forgiveness if there is anything to forgive. The raising up is grammatically the

principal promise and the forgiveness is conditional and secondary. Whatever the sacrament later came to be called, this is the text on which it rests, and it does not say what the later name says.

9.2 What Trent taught, and what everyone thinks it taught

The Council of Trent devoted the second half of its fourteenth session to the sacrament. Its four canons are definitive: that extreme unction is truly and properly a sacrament instituted by Christ and promulgated by James, not merely a rite received from the Fathers; that the anointing confers grace, remits sin, and comforts the sick, and has not ceased; that the Roman rite of it is not repugnant to James; that the ministers are ordained priests.⁸⁷

The doctrinal chapters state the effect: “the thing here signified is the grace of the Holy Ghost, whose anointing cleanses away sins, if there be any still to be expiated, as also the remains of sins; and raises up and strengthens the soul of the sick person, by exciting in him a great confidence in the divine mercy; whereby the sick being supported, bears more easily the inconveniences and pains of his sickness, and more readily resists the temptations of the Devil. . . and at times obtains bodily health, when expedient for the welfare of the soul.”⁸⁸ That is Trent’s account of what the sacrament does, and every element of it is drawn from the verse.

Now the chapter that matters, and that almost nobody quotes. Chapter III, on the minister and on the time when the sacrament ought to be administered:

“It is also declared that this unction is to be applied *to the sick*, but to those especially who lie in such danger as to seem to be about to depart this life: whence also it is called the sacrament of the departing. And if the sick should, after having received this unction, recover, they may again be aided by the succour of this sacrament, when they fall into another like danger of death.”⁸⁹

Read the Latin construction: the unction is to be given *infirmis*—to the sick—*illis vero praesertim*, but especially to those in danger. That is a preference within a class, not a restriction of it. Trent’s own explanation of the name *sacramentum exeuntium*, the sacrament of the departing, is offered as an account of where a customary title came from, immediately after stating the wider rule; and the very next sentence provides for the recipient’s recovery and a second anointing later, which would be an odd provision in a sacrament reserved for the terminal.

So the received picture—that extreme unction was the last rite, restricted to the dying, until the Second Vatican Council relaxed it—does not survive a reading of the council that is supposed to have taught the restriction. Trent taught the wider rule and recorded the narrower custom. What happened afterwards was that the custom swallowed the rule, so thoroughly that a family calling for the priest often waited until the patient was unconscious, and the arrival of the priest became the household’s signal that hope had been abandoned.

9.3 The correction, and what it was correcting

The Second Vatican Council’s sentence is therefore a restoration and not an innovation, and it is worth noticing how carefully it is phrased: “‘Extreme unction,’ which may also and more fittingly be called ‘anointing of the sick,’ is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as any one of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived.”⁹⁰ It does not say that the old name was wrong; it says the new one is more fitting. It does not announce a new discipline; it denies a misconception (“is not a sacrament for those only. . .”) and then draws the practical consequence. The current law follows: anointing may be given to a member of the faithful “who, having reached the use of reason, begins to be in danger due to sickness or old age,” and may be repeated if the person recovers and again falls gravely ill, or if the same illness worsens.⁹¹

The Catechism’s account of the effects likewise stays close to Trent while pressing one point the council mentions only in passing: the sacrament gives “strengthening, peace and courage to overcome the difficulties that go with the condition of serious illness or the frailty of old age. . . against the temptations of the evil one, the temptation to discouragement and anguish in the face of death.”⁹² That is the *ars moriendi*’s five temptations, translated out of demonology into a sacramental grace, and attached to a rite rather than to a manual. The medieval tract handed a layman a script for the dying man’s despair. The Church’s answer to the same despair is a sacrament, and the sacrament came first.

9.4 The last sacrament is not the one people think

Here is the second place where the received picture is wrong, and this one is corrected in the plainest possible language.

“As the sacrament of Christ’s Passover the Eucharist should always be the last sacrament of the earthly journey, the ‘viaticum’ for ‘passing over’ to eternal life.”⁹³ The order fixed by *Sacrosanctum concilium* 74 is the same: confession, then anointing, then viaticum. And the law is emphatic about the last of the three: “The Christian faithful who are in danger of death from any cause are to be nourished by holy communion in the form of Viaticum”; and, with a note of urgency rare in a code, “Holy Viaticum for the sick is not to be delayed too long; those who have the care of souls are to be zealous and vigilant that the sick are nourished by Viaticum *while fully conscious*.”⁹⁴

While fully conscious. The canon is legislating against a specific pastoral failure—the assumption that the sacraments are for the end, and that the end can be recognized in time. Everything in the Church’s own arrangements pushes the opposite way: anoint early, communicate while he can still receive, and do not wait for the moment that the second section of this essay showed cannot be identified.

So the popular ordering is inverted at both ends. What most Catholics call “the last rites” is anointing, and anointing is not last and is not for the last. The last sacrament is the same one the Christian has been receiving all his life, given one more time under a name that means *provision for a journey*.

9.5 The Church’s last words

When there is nothing further to be done sacramentally, there is still something to be said, and the Church has words for it. The Catechism sets them down at the head of its treatment of life everlasting, after describing what has just been given: “When the Church for the last time speaks Christ’s words of pardon and absolution over the dying Christian, seals him for the last time with a strengthening anointing, and gives him Christ in viaticum as nourishment for the journey, she speaks with gentle assurance:”

“Go forth, Christian soul, from this world in the name of God the almighty Father, who created you, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for you, in the name of the Holy Spirit, who was poured out upon you. . . May you return to your Creator who formed you from the dust of the earth. May holy Mary, the angels, and all the saints come to meet you as you go forth from this life. . . May you see your Redeemer face to face.”⁹⁵

Every claim this essay has examined is in that prayer, and none of it is argued. *Go forth*: the separation is real, and it is a departure rather than an extinction. *Return to your Creator who formed you from the dust of the earth*: Genesis 3:19, spoken not as a sentence but as an itinerary. *Come to meet you*: the communion is not interrupted. *See your Redeemer face to face*: *Benedictus Deus*, in the vocation.

It is worth saying what kind of achievement that is. The prayer is addressed to a person who by definition cannot answer and may not be able to hear. It makes no promises about the individual’s judgment—every clause is a petition or a commendation, not a verdict—and it does not console the family by pretending anything. What it does is name, out loud, in the room, what the tradition holds to be happening, at the exact moment when nobody can see it happening.

The verse this essay began with put the remembrance of the last things at the end of a list of things to do for other people: comfort the mourners, do not withhold kindness from the dead, be not slow to visit the sick. That order has turned out to be the right one. The doctrine of death is not, in the first place, a piece of information about the future; it is what makes it possible to stay in the room. A person who believes what has been set out here—that the dying man is a single nature coming apart, that the parting is a real deprivation and not a graduation, that what survives is not yet the man and will not be until the resurrection, that the accounting is immediate and the communion is not broken, and that nobody can locate the moment—has nothing to offer by way of explanation and every reason not to leave.

Of the four last things, this one can be attended. The remaining three are the subject of the volumes that follow: *Judgment*, *Hell*, and *Heaven*. What death contributes to them is a definition, a boundary, and a warning about how much of what everyone believes on the subject was never taught.

Notes

¹Ecclesiasticus 7:40, Douay–Rheims (Challoner), read 2026-07-26 in the source library’s tracked verse text of the Challoner Gutenberg witness (*verse-text-26-ecclesiasticus*). Latin from the Clementine Vulgate as transcribed at SacredBible.org’s Hetzenauer 1914 presentation, read the same day; the Clementine numbers the verse 7:40, modern critical editions of Sirach 7:36. The Douay’s “thy last end” renders the plural *novissima tua*; the singular in English is the translator’s, not the text’s. Throughout this essay Scripture is quoted from the public-domain Douay–Rheims (Challoner) and cited in Vulgate chapter and verse numbering, which is the numbering the Latin tradition’s own citations assume.

²Denys the Carthusian (Denys van Leeuwen, 1402–1471); his *De quatuor Novissimis* is listed among his theological treatises in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (New York, 1908), s.v. “Denys the Carthusian,” read 2026-07-26 at New Advent; the article prints the title “De quatuor Novissimis,” evidently for *Novissimis*. The encyclopedia is used here as a dated reference work for a bibliographic fact, not as a doctrinal authority, and no claim is made that Denys originated the enumeration.

³Ecclesiasticus 7:37–40, Douay–Rheims, read at the same locus 2026-07-26. The observation that the *memorare novissima* stands at the end of a series of works of mercy toward the dying, the dead, and the mourning is this essay’s reading of the immediate context and is offered as such; the sage’s arrangement is loose and the essay does not claim a redactional argument.

⁴Hebrews 9:27, Douay–Rheims: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment.” The verse is examined at its own locus below; it is cited here only for the ordering it states.

⁵*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part One, Section Two, Chapter Three, Articles 11 and 12; the article and section headings and the paragraph placements were read 2026-07-26 in the Holy See’s English web presentation (the IntraText delivery of the Vatican archive), Article 11 section II “Dying in Christ Jesus” (CCC 1005–1014) and Article 12 sections I–VI (CCC 1021–1050). The structural observation—six headings under life everlasting, death placed under the resurrection of the body—is a description of the text’s own arrangement, verifiable at those pages.

⁶Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, letter *Recentiores episcoporum Synodi* on certain questions concerning eschatology (17 May 1979): “When dealing with man’s situation after death, one must especially beware of arbitrary imaginative representations: excess of this kind is a major cause of the difficulties that Christian faith often encounters.” Quoted from the Holy See’s English web text, read 2026-07-26. The letter is examined at its own weight below; here it supplies only the caution.

⁷CCC 1005, Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26; compare CCC 1016 (“By death the soul is separated from the body, but in the resurrection God will give incorruptible life to our body, transformed by reunion with our soul”). The definition is not the Catechism’s invention: it is the scholastic formula, and its elements are fixed by the conciliar teaching examined below. The Catechism’s genre is authoritative catechetical restatement, not new definition; its weight in any given sentence is the weight of what it restates.

⁸The Creed’s article is *carnis resurrectionem*; CCC 990–1004 sets out the doctrine, and CCC 1015 quotes Tertullian’s “the flesh is the hinge of salvation” (*De resurrectione carnis* 8, 2) as its epigraph. Read 2026-07-26 at the Holy See English web text. This essay does not develop the doctrine of the resurrection beyond what the definition of death requires; the fourth volume of this series treats the consummation.

⁹Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XIII, argument; quoted from the public-domain translation of Marcus Dods (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871), verified 2026-07-26 in the source library’s tracked transcription of the 1871 printing, volume 1, at the book heading and the volume’s table of contents. Book XIII is the tradition’s most sustained early analysis of what death is, and the whole of this section’s Augustinian material was read in that artifact rather than through later quotation.

¹⁰*De civitate Dei* XIII.2, Dods 1871; verified 2026-07-26 in the tracked transcription at the chapter’s opening paragraphs. The chapter’s heading is “Of that death which can affect an immortal soul, and of that to which the body is subject.” Augustine’s “second death” in the same chapter is the everlasting one, and is not developed here; the third volume of this series treats it.

¹¹*De civitate Dei* XIII.6, Dods 1871, chapter heading “Of the evil of death in general, considered as the separation of soul and body”; verified 2026-07-26 in the tracked transcription. Augustine adds that the anguish “is sometimes forestalled by one stroke of the body or sudden flitting of the soul, the swiftness of which prevents it from being felt,” and that when the experience is borne piously it “increases the merit of patience, but does not make the name of punishment inapplicable.”

¹²Council of Vienne (1311–1312), constitution *Fidei catholicae*, in Denzinger–Schönmetzner numbering DS 902: “*Porro doctrinam omnem seu positionem temere asserentem, aut vertentem in dubium, quod substantia animae rationalis seu intellectivae vere ac per se humani corporis non sit forma, velut erroneam ac veritati catholicae inimicam fidei. . . reprobamus: definientes. . . quod quisquis deinceps asserere, defendere seu tenere pertinaciter praesumpserit, quod anima rationalis seu intellectiva non sit forma corporis humani per se et essentialiter, tamquam haeticus sit censendus.*” Latin read 2026-07-26 at the patristica.net web presentation of the Latin Enchiridion, which prints the revised numbering beside the older; the English above is a working gloss governed by the Latin, not a received translation. The register is definitive: the act uses *definientes* and attaches the note of heresy. Its immediate target was a position associated with Peter John Olivi; the essay makes no claim about what Olivi actually held.

¹³Fifth Lateran Council, session VIII (19 December 1513), bull *Apostolici regiminis*, DS 1440: “*damnamus et reprobamus omnes asserentes animam intellectivam mortalem esse, aut unicam in cunctis hominibus. . . cum illa non solum vere per*

se et essentialiter humani corporis forma existat, sicut in canone felicitis recordationis Clementis papae V praedecessoris Nostri in Viennensi Concilio edito continetur, verum et immortalis, et pro corporum quibus infunditur multitudine singulariter multiplicabilis, et multiplicata, et multiplicanda sit.” Latin read 2026-07-26 at the same witness; the English is a working gloss. The council also forbade teaching the contrary even as a philosophical conclusion—the “double truth” evasion—adding that “since truth in no way contradicts truth, we define every assertion contrary to the truth of illuminated faith to be entirely false” (DS 1441). The historical setting is the Aristotelian controversy over the immortality of the individual intellect; Pietro Pomponazzi’s *De immortalitate animae* appeared three years later, and this essay makes no claim about the council’s intentions regarding him.

¹⁴CCC 365, citing the Council of Vienne; CCC 366 adds that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God and is immortal, “it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection.” Read 2026-07-26 at the Holy See English web text. *Gaudium et spes* 14 states the same anthropology conciliarly: “Though made of body and soul, man is one. . . For this reason man is not allowed to despise his bodily life, rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and honorable since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day”; read 2026-07-26 at the Holy See English web text of the constitution.

¹⁵Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 75, a. 4, corpus; English from the public-domain translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, read 2026-07-26 at New Advent. The *sed contra* cites Augustine (*De civ. Dei* XIX, 3) commending Varro for holding “that man is not a mere soul, nor a mere body; but both soul and body.” Aquinas’s argument turns on sensation not being an operation of the soul alone; Plato, he says, could hold man to be “a soul making use of the body” only because he supposed otherwise. Throughout this essay the *Summa* is quoted from the English Dominican translation with the Latin checked in the Corpus Thomisticum web corpus at the loci identified in these notes.

¹⁶ST III, q. 50, a. 2, corpus and *sed contra*; a. 3 asks and denies the parallel severance between the Godhead and Christ’s soul. English read 2026-07-26 at New Advent. The *sed contra* of a. 2 reasons from the Creed’s predication of burial to the Son of God. This essay uses the question only for what it establishes about the structure of death; the Christology and soteriology it presupposes are not developed here.

¹⁷Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XIII.11, Dods 1871, chapter heading “Whether one can both be living and dead at the same time”; verified 2026-07-26 in the source library’s tracked transcription of the 1871 printing, volume 1. The parallel arguments are at XIII.9 (“Whether we should say that the moment of death, in which sensation ceases, occurs in the experience of the dying or in that of the dead”) and XIII.10.

¹⁸*De civitate Dei* XIII.9, Dods 1871; verified as above. Augustine’s conclusion in the same chapter: “The same person is therefore at once dying and living, but drawing near to death, departing from life; yet in life, because his spirit yet abides in the body; not yet in death, because not yet has his spirit forsaken the body.”

¹⁹*De civitate Dei* XIII.11, Dods 1871; verified as above. Augustine’s resolution is linguistic rather than metaphysical: “Let us, then, speak in the customary way,—no man ought to speak otherwise,—and let us call the time before death come, ‘before death’. . . And let us use the same phraseology as Scripture uses; for it makes no scruple of saying that the dead are not after but in death,” citing Psalm 6:6 (“For in death there is no remembrance of thee”). The Douay renders that verse “For there is no one in death, that is mindful of thee: and who shall confess to thee in hell?” (read 2026-07-26 in the tracked Challoner verse text), which reads the Latin *in morte* as a state one is in—exactly Augustine’s point about scriptural usage.

²⁰*De civitate Dei* XIII.10, Dods 1871, chapter heading “Of the life of mortals, which is rather to be called death than life”; verified as above. Augustine’s arithmetic is exact and worth noticing: the dying do not travel faster, they have less ground to cover—“It is one thing to make a longer journey, and another to walk more slowly.”

²¹*Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983), cann. 1004 §1 and 1005; English from the Holy See’s web text of the Code, read 2026-07-26. The governing body of law is the 1983 Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church, in force since 27 November 1983; the parallel Eastern discipline is in the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* and is not treated here. The canon is disciplinary law, not doctrine, and states a rule of practice, not a theory of death.

²²The essay takes no position on neurological or circulatory criteria for the determination of death, on organ procurement, or on the withdrawal of treatment. Those questions require medical evidence and a moral-theological treatment outside the scope of this study; a reader facing them should consult the competent pastoral and medical authorities with the complete facts. The definitional teaching quoted above—that death is the separation of soul and body—does not by itself yield a criterion, and the Church has never claimed that it does.

²³CCC 1006, Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26. The paragraph opens by quoting *Gaudium et spes* 18 (“It is in regard to death that man’s condition is most shrouded in doubt”) and closes: “For those who die in Christ’s grace it is a participation in the death of the Lord, so that they can also share his Resurrection.” The footnoted authority for “the wages of sin” is Romans 6:23 with Genesis 2:17.

²⁴CCC 1008, read as above. The paragraph’s full sequence: “Death is a consequence of sin. the Church’s Magisterium, as authentic interpreter of the affirmations of Scripture and Tradition, teaches that death entered the world on account of man’s sin. Even though man’s nature is mortal God had destined him not to die. Death was therefore contrary to the plans of God the Creator and entered the world as a consequence of sin.” The quoted phrase in the last sentence—“bodily death, from which man would have been immune had he not sinned”—is from *Gaudium et spes* 18, and the “last enemy” is 1 Corinthians

15:26. The Catechism’s own delivery lowercases some sentence-initial articles (“the Church’s Magisterium”); quotations here reproduce its wording and are begun so that the casing of the quoted words is unaffected.

²⁵Genesis 2:17, Douay–Rheims, read 2026-07-26 in the tracked Challoner verse text. “Thou shalt die the death” renders the Latin *morte morieris*, itself a rendering of the Hebrew infinitive absolute construction; the doubling is emphatic in the source languages and reads as a Hebraism in English. This essay does not examine the Hebrew and makes no claim about the idiom’s force beyond noting that the Latin and English preserve a doubling that is not native to either.

²⁶Genesis 3:19, Douay–Rheims, read as above. The observation in the text—that the sentence is stated as a fact about the material the man is made of—is a reading of the verse’s own grammar (*quia pulvis es*, “for dust thou art”), offered as such.

²⁷Wisdom 1:13 and 2:23–24, Douay–Rheims, read 2026-07-26 in the tracked Challoner verse text. Wisdom is a late book written in Greek, and the *death* it has chiefly in view in these chapters is arguably the spiritual death of the wicked, given 1:16 (“But the wicked with works and words have called it to them. . . because they are worthy to be of the part thereof”) and 2:24’s conclusion in the same verse: “and they follow him that are of his side.” This essay records the ambiguity rather than resolving it. The verse’s dogmatic career, however, does not depend on the resolution: Aquinas and the Catechism both take *Deus mortem non fecit* as bearing on bodily death, and the essay follows their use while flagging that the exegesis is contestable.

²⁸Romans 5:12 and 6:23, Douay–Rheims, read 2026-07-26 in the tracked Challoner verse text. The Douay’s “in whom all have sinned” follows the Vulgate’s *in quo omnes peccaverunt*, and it is that Latin form which the Council of Trent quotes in its decree on original sin. The construction underlying the Latin relative is disputed among interpreters; this essay did not examine the Greek and therefore asserts nothing about it, relying on Romans 5:12 only for the association of sin’s entry with death’s entry, which is not in dispute on any reading of the clause.

²⁹Council of Trent, session V (17 June 1546), decree concerning original sin, canon 1; English from the public-domain translation of J. Waterworth (London: Burns and Oates; reprint of the London 1848 translation), and the Latin from the Tauchnitz stereotype reprint of the Roman edition (Leipzig, 1887). Both were read 2026-07-26 in the full texts of those printings as digitized by the Internet Archive at the items registered for those editions in the source library. The Latin: “*Si quis non confitetur, primum hominem Adam, quum mandatum Dei in paradiso fuisset transgressus, statim sanctitatem et iustitiam, in qua constitutus fuerat, amisisse, incurrisseque per offensam praevaricationis huiusmodi iram et indignationem Dei, atque ideo mortem, quam antea illi comminatus fuerat Deus, et cum morte captivitatem sub eius potestate, qui mortis deinde habuit imperium, hoc est diaboli, totumque Adam per illam praevaricationis offensam secundum corpus et animam in deterius commutatum fuisse: anathema sit.*” The canon is definitive teaching: a conciliar canon with an attached anathema.

³⁰Trent, session V, canon 2, Waterworth English and Tauchnitz Latin, read as above. The canon’s shape is instructive: the error it condemns is not the claim that bodily death was transmitted, which it takes for granted, but the claim that *only* bodily death was. Its scriptural warrant is Romans 5:12 in the Vulgate form.

³¹ST I-II, q. 85, a. 5, corpus; English from the English Dominican translation, read 2026-07-26 at New Advent. The *sed contra* is Romans 5:12. The reply to the first objection extends the image and is worth having: “when original justice is removed, the nature of the human body is left to itself, so that according to diverse natural temperaments, some men’s bodies are subject to more defects, some to fewer, although original sin is equal in all.” The reply to the second explains why the baptized still die: our bodies remain subject to suffering “in order that we may merit the impassibility of glory, in conformity with Christ.”

³²ST I-II, q. 85, a. 6, corpus, English from the English Dominican translation, read 2026-07-26 at New Advent; Latin verified the same day in the Corpus Thomisticum: “*Unde ex parte suae formae, naturalior est homini incorruptio quam aliis rebus corruptibilibus. Sed quia et ipsa habet materiam ex contrariis compositam, ex inclinatione materiae sequitur corruptibilitas in toto. Et secundum hoc, homo est naturaliter corruptibilis secundum naturam materiae sibi relictas, sed non secundum naturam formae.*” The article’s structure is unusual and deliberate: the three objections argue from matter, the three contrary arguments from form, and the corpus grants both.

³³ST I-II, q. 85, a. 6, corpus (continuation); Latin verified 2026-07-26 at the Corpus Thomisticum: “*Sed Deus, cui subiacet omnis natura, in ipsa institutione hominis supplevit defectum naturae, et dono iustitiae originalis dedit corpori incorruptibilitatem quandam. . . Et secundum hoc dicitur quod Deus mortem non fecit, et quod mors est poena peccati.*” The knife-and-rust comparison is Aquinas’s, not this essay’s; the same comparison recurs with a saw at ST II-II, q. 164, a. 1, ad 1.

³⁴ST II-II, q. 164, a. 1, ad 1, English Dominican translation, read 2026-07-26 at New Advent. The reply expressly cross-references I-II, q. 85, a. 6. It should be received as school theology of high authority, not as defined doctrine: no council has canonized the matter/form solution, and the distinction between what is owed to a nature and what is superadded to it is a scholastic instrument, not an article of faith.

³⁵2 Timothy 1:10, Douay–Rheims, read 2026-07-26 in the tracked Challoner verse text. The verse’s participle governs a completed action: the destruction is spoken of as accomplished and made manifest.

³⁶Hebrews 2:14–15, Douay–Rheims, read as above. The word rendered “servitude” is worth pausing on: the writer’s diagnosis is not that men are afraid at the end but that the fear operates over a whole lifetime and produces a condition of bondage—the fear, not the event, is what enslaves. This essay reads the verse for that diagnosis and does not develop the atonement theology in which it stands.

³⁷1 Corinthians 15:25–26, Douay–Rheims, read as above. The Douay’s word order—“the enemy, death, shall be destroyed last”—keeps the appositive; the more familiar English is “the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” The immediate

context is Paul's ordering at 15:23–24: "But every one in his own order: the firstfruits, Christ: then they that are of Christ, who have believed in his coming. Afterwards the end." The verse's placement matters for the argument here: death is named at the end of a queue, which presupposes that it is still standing.

³⁸Cyprian of Carthage, *De mortalitate* 8, in the English of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. V (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886), tr. Robert Ernest Wallis; read 2026-07-26 in the New Advent transcription of that volume (Treatise 7). The treatise was occasioned by the epidemic that struck Carthage from 252; this essay uses it as a patristic and pastoral witness, not as a doctrinal authority, and did not collate the English against Cyprian's Latin.

³⁹*De mortalitate* 8–9, ANF V, read as above. The emphasis on "more" is this essay's; Cyprian's sentence carries it without typographic help. He supports the point from Ecclesiasticus 2:1–5 ("prepare your soul for temptation. . . acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation").

⁴⁰Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XIII.4, Dods 1871, chapter heading "Why death, the punishment of sin, is not withheld from those who by the grace of regeneration are absolved from sin"; verified 2026-07-26 in the source library's tracked transcription of the 1871 printing, volume 1. Augustine refers the reader to his earlier work on the baptism of infants for the fuller treatment.

⁴¹*De civitate Dei* XIII.4, Dods 1871; verified as above. The chapter continues: "That which was formerly set as an object of terror, that men might not sin, is now to be undergone if we would not sin. . . For then death was incurred by sinning, now righteousness is fulfilled by dying."

⁴²*De civitate Dei* XIII.5, Dods 1871, chapter heading "As the wicked make an ill use of the law, which is good, so the good make a good use of death, which is an ill"; verified as above. The chapter opens from 1 Corinthians 15:56 ("The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law") and Romans 7:12–13.

⁴³*De civitate Dei* XIII.4 (closing), Dods 1871; verified as above. Compare XIII.7: "But not on this account should we look upon death as a good thing, for it is diverted to such useful purposes, not by any virtue of its own, but by the divine interference."

⁴⁴CCC 1010, Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26, quoting Philippians 1:21 and 2 Timothy 2:11 and appending Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Romanos* 6, 1–2 ("It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to reign over the ends of the earth"). CCC 1009 supplies the christological ground: "Jesus, the Son of God, also himself suffered the death that is part of the human condition. Yet, despite his anguish as he faced death, he accepted it in an act of complete and free submission to his Father's will. the obedience of Jesus has transformed the curse of death into a blessing."

⁴⁵Philippians 1:21–24, Douay–Rheims, read 2026-07-26 in the tracked Challoner verse text. The Douay's "to be dissolved" renders *dissolvi*; the verb is the same family as the "dissolution" of the earthly house at 2 Corinthians 5:1. The passage is quoted here for its structure—a preference stated and then declined—and the essay does not enter the exegetical question of what Paul expects to happen to him immediately upon dying, which belongs to the next section.

⁴⁶This paragraph and the one preceding are project synthesis: an editorial reading connecting the two tenses of the New Testament witness to the natural/penal distinction defended in the previous section. It is argued from the texts cited in both sections and is attributed to no source. Its weakness is that it uses a scholastic distinction as a key to an apostolic text, and a reader who rejects the distinction has no reason to accept the reading. The claim is offered as an intelligible mapping, not as exegesis of Paul's intention.

⁴⁷Psalms 6:6 (Vulgate numbering), Douay–Rheims, read 2026-07-26 in the tracked Challoner verse text. The Latin *in inferno* renders the Hebrew *sheol*; the Douay's "hell" here is not the hell of the damned but the common abode of the dead, and reading it otherwise produces nonsense. Augustine cites this verse at *De civitate Dei* XIII.11 for a different purpose—to show that Scripture speaks of being *in* death—and the essay records that its own use of the verse is not his.

⁴⁸Job 14:10, 12, 14, Douay–Rheims, read as above. The chapter opens with the famous "Man born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries" (14:1). Verse 13—"Who will grant me this, that thou mayst protect me in hell, and hide me till thy wrath pass, and appoint me a time when thou wilt remember me?"—is a request rather than an assertion, and the essay does not read it as a doctrine of the intermediate state.

⁴⁹Ecclesiastes 12:7, Douay–Rheims, read as above; the preceding verses (12:1–6) are the well-known figure of the failing body. The verse is quoted by CCC 1007 to make exactly the point made here—that death lends urgency to a measured life—and the Catechism draws no further inference from it.

⁵⁰Wisdom 3:1–3, Douay–Rheims, read as above. The passage is explicitly correcting an inference—what *seemed* to be the case to "the unwise"—which suggests that the older and bleaker reading was the ordinary one among its first readers. Wisdom is a first-century-BC Alexandrian book preserved in Greek and received in the Catholic canon; the essay does not enter the canonical dispute.

⁵¹CCC 992, Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26; the paragraph quotes 2 Maccabees 7:9 and 14. CCC 993 adds that "the Pharisees and many of the Lord's contemporaries hoped for the resurrection," and that the Sadducees denied it. That a doctrine was revealed progressively is a claim about the mode of revelation, not a concession that the earlier books are erroneous; the essay records the development as the Catechism states it.

⁵²Luke 23:43, Douay–Rheims, read 2026-07-26 in the tracked Challoner verse text. The reader should note that the punctuation—whether "Amen I say to thee this day" or "This day thou shalt be with me"—has been contested, since the ancient manuscripts are unpunctuated; the Douay follows the Latin tradition's placement, which the Catholic reading assumes.

The essay flags the question and does not adjudicate it, having examined neither the Greek witnesses nor the punctuation history.

⁵³2 Corinthians 5:4, Douay–Rheims, read as above; the surrounding verses are 5:1 (“if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven”), 5:6 (“while we are in the body we are absent from the Lord”) and 5:8 (“we are confident and have a good will to be absent rather from the body and to be present with the Lord”). The reading offered here—that verse 4 states a preference *against* the unclothed condition—follows the plain sense of “we would not be unclothed, but clothed upon” and is offered as such; commentators differ about the referent of the clothing imagery, and the essay does not survey them.

⁵⁴Apocalypse 6:9–11, Douay–Rheims, read as above. The essay takes the vision as an apocalyptic image and not as a topography; the point drawn from it—that the souls are conscious, are answered, and are told to wait—is on the surface of the text and does not require decoding the imagery.

⁵⁵Luke 16:22–26, Douay–Rheims, read as above. CCC 1021 cites it (with Luke 23:43) as among the New Testament texts that “speak of a final destiny of the soul,” which is a careful formulation: the Catechism draws from the parable the fact of a differentiated destiny, not the details of the scene. The caution in the text above is this essay’s and is directed at the popular use of the parable’s imagery as description.

⁵⁶ST I, q. 89, a. 1, corpus; English Dominican translation, read 2026-07-26 at New Advent. The corpus argues expressly against the Platonic escape—“Did this not proceed from the soul’s very nature, but accidentally through its being bound up with the body, as the Platonists said, the difficulty would vanish”—and rejects it on the ground that in that case “the union of soul and body would not be for the soul’s good.” Aquinas’s comparison is a light body outside its proper place. The corpus goes on to argue that the separated soul’s knowledge, though of a nobler kind, is in it “imperfect” and “of a general and confused nature” relative to what higher substances do with the same mode.

⁵⁷Thomas Aquinas, *Super I Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios lectura*, cap. 15, lect. 2: “*anima autem cum sit pars corporis hominis, non est totus homo, et anima mea non est ego; unde licet anima consequatur salutem in alia vita, non tamen ego vel quilibet homo.*” Latin read 2026-07-26 in the Corpus Thomisticum; the English above is a working gloss. A textual caution is required and is usually omitted when this sentence is quoted: the commentary on 1 Corinthians survives in several states, and chapters 11–16—which contain this passage—are transmitted in the *reportatio vulgata*, a reported text, not in a portion written in Thomas’s own hand. The Corpus Thomisticum labels the section accordingly. The sentence is therefore excellent evidence of the Thomistic school’s teaching and weaker evidence of Thomas’s own words than its fame suggests. The preceding argument in the same passage—“the soul is naturally united to the body, and is separated from it against its nature and *per accidens*; whence the soul stripped of the body, so long as it is without the body, is imperfect”—is on the same footing.

⁵⁸John XXII, bull *Ne super his* (3 December 1334), DS 990–991: “*Fatemur siquidem et credimus, quod animae purgatae separatae a corporibus sunt in caelo, caelorum regno et paradiso et cum Christo in consortio angelorum congregatae et vident Deum de communi lege ac divinam essentiam facie ad faciem clare, in quantum status et condicio compatitur animae separatae.*” Latin read 2026-07-26 at the patristica.net presentation of the Latin Enchiridion; the English is a working gloss and the emphasis is this essay’s. The document’s own opening explains its purpose: that what had been said “both by Us and by several others in Our presence” about whether purified souls see the divine essence before resuming their bodies should not reach the ears of the faithful otherwise than as he intended it. CCC 1022 cites this act in its footnotes alongside *Benedictus Deus*. The essay reports the sermons as the occasion of the controversy on the basis of the bull’s own description of the disputed question, and does not claim to have examined the sermons.

⁵⁹Benedict XII, constitution *Benedictus Deus* (29 January 1336), DS 1000: “*Hac in perpetuum valitura Constitutione auctoritate Apostolica diffinimus: quod... mox post mortem suam et purgationem praefatam... etiam ante resurrectionem suorum corporum et iudicium generale... fuerunt, sunt et erunt in caelo... viderunt et 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.*” Latin read 2026-07-26 at the patristica.net presentation of the Latin Enchiridion; the emphasis is this essay’s. The central clause is quoted in the official English of CCC 1023: “these souls have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature.” The register is definitive: *diffinimus*, in a constitution declared to be of perpetual force.

⁶⁰*Benedictus Deus*, DS 1002: “*Diffinimus insuper, quod secundum Dei ordinationem communem animae decedentium in actuali peccato mortali mox post mortem suam ad inferna descendunt, ubi poenis infernalibus cruciantur, et quod nihilominus in die iudicii omnes homines ‘ante tribunal Christi’ cum suis corporibus comparebunt, reddituri de factis propriis rationem.*” Latin read as above; the closing quotation is 2 Corinthians 5:10. The third volume of this series treats the punishment; the point taken here is only the timing.

⁶¹*Lumen gentium* 49, Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26; the internal quotation is from *Benedictus Deus*. LG 50 grounds the Church’s prayer for the dead in the same communion, citing 2 Maccabees 12:46 (“because it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins”). The second and third volumes of this series treat judgment and its outcomes; the purification is not developed here.

⁶²Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Recentiores episcoporum Synodi*, letter on certain questions concerning eschatology (17 May 1979), points 3 and 5; Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26. Point 4 is also to the purpose: “The Church excludes every way of thinking or speaking that would render meaningless or unintelligible her prayers, her funeral rites

and the religious acts offered for the dead. All these are, in their substance, *loci theologici*.” The letter was approved by John Paul II and ordered published; it is authoritative non-definitive teaching of a curial congregation, not a definition, and its own register is that of recalling what the Church already holds rather than of deciding a disputed question.

⁶³Hebrews 9:27–28, Douay–Rheims, read 2026-07-26 in the tracked Challoner verse text. The Douay’s “to exhaust the sins of many” renders *ad multorum exhaustiendā peccata*; the sense is that the sins are drawn off or taken away. The observation offered here concerns the syntax of the comparison (*et quemadmodum... sic et Christus*), which is on the surface of the Latin and the English alike.

⁶⁴CCC 1013: “When ‘the single course of our earthly life’ is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives: ‘It is appointed for men to die once.’ There is no ‘reincarnation’ after death.” Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26; the internal quotation is from *Lumen gentium* 48. The Catechism’s use of Hebrews 9:27 here is for the singularity, not for the judgment.

⁶⁵CCC 1022, Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26. Its footnotes cite, for the purification, the Second Council of Lyons (1274), DS 857–858; the Council of Florence (1439), DS 1304–1306; and Trent (1563), DS 1820; for the immediate entrance, *Benedictus Deus*, DS 1000–1001, and John XXII’s *Ne super his*, DS 990; and for the damnation, *Benedictus Deus*, DS 1002. The appended sentence is from John of the Cross, *Dichos* 64: “At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love.” The essay read DS 990–991 and 1000–1002 directly; it did not read DS 857–858, 1304–1306, or 1820 at their own loci, and therefore relies on the Catechism’s citation of them rather than asserting their contents.

⁶⁶The negative observation is bounded and should be read as such: within the texts examined for this essay—DS 990–991 and DS 1000–1002 in the Latin Enchiridion presentation read 2026-07-26—no equivalent of *iudicium particulare* appears; DS 1002 uses *in die iudicii* of the general judgment. The essay has not searched the wider magisterial corpus for the phrase and asserts nothing about where it first appears in an official text. The claim made in the body is only that the authorities the Catechism cites at CCC 1022 for the immediacy define an immediacy, and that the term is supplied by theology.

⁶⁷This paragraph is project synthesis: an editorial reconciliation of CCC 1022’s “at the very moment of his death” with the Augustinian argument reported in the second section, attributed to no source. It claims only that the two are compatible, not that any authority has related them.

⁶⁸CCC 1021, Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26; the paragraph’s footnoted warrant is 2 Timothy 1:9–10. The same paragraph observes that “the New Testament speaks of judgment primarily in its aspect of the final encounter with Christ in his second coming, but also repeatedly affirms that each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with his works and faith”—a candid acknowledgment that the scriptural centre of gravity is the general judgment and that the immediate one is attested more diffusely.

⁶⁹CCC 1013, read as above.

⁷⁰Thomas Aquinas, *Super I Cor.*, cap. 15, lect. 2: “*quia in alia vita nulla sunt opera meritoria*”; Latin read 2026-07-26 in the Corpus Thomisticum, in the same *reportatio vulgata* noted above, and subject to the same textual caution. The English is a working gloss. The claim that the time of merit ends with death is common theology of long standing, not a definition; what the Church teaches definitively is the immediate retribution and the irrevocability of the outcome, from which the school claim is an inference about the mechanism.

⁷¹The essay deliberately does not enter the twentieth-century debates about whether the moment of death involves a final and fully lucid act of the person, nor the older scholastic accounts of the fixity of the separated will. Those discussions require sources this essay has not examined; the boundary is recorded here rather than crossed. What is asserted is only the distinction of weight: the fact of irrevocability is taught, the explanation is not defined.

⁷²*Lumen gentium* 49–50, Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26; LG 50 cites 2 Maccabees 12:46. The theology of the purification presupposed by the practice of suffrage is treated in the second volume of this series and is not developed here.

⁷³*The Book of the Craft of Dying, and Other Early English Tracts Concerning Death*, taken from manuscripts and printed books in the British Museum and Bodleian libraries, “now first done into modern spelling and edited by Frances M. M. Comper” (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1917); read 2026-07-26 in the Internet Archive’s digitization of the 1917 printing. The essay quotes Comper’s modernized-spelling text, not a manuscript, and this is a real limitation: Comper transcribed Bodleian MS 423 (which she judged the earliest of three Bodleian witnesses), collated it against Douce MS 322 and Rawlinson MS C. 894, and normalized the spelling throughout. The English tract is itself a translation of a Latin original. The wording quoted here is therefore at two removes from the Latin and one from the manuscript, and no claim is made about the Latin’s wording except where Comper reports it.

⁷⁴Comper, “Note on the Book of the Craft of Dying,” in *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pp. 48–51; read 2026-07-26 as above. She adds that the tract “has been ascribed to Richard Rolle” as so many English writings of the period were, that “it may possibly have been translated by him into English, but the author of the older Latin original is unknown,” and that “the whole question of the authorship and the various versions of the treatises which are in the catalogues generally included under the title *Ars Moriendi* is one of some difficulty and obscurity.” She distinguishes at least three distinct books: the Latin treatise (found as *De Arte Moriendi*, *Tractatus de Arte Moriendi*, and *Speculum Artis Moriendi*), the block-books, and the French *L’Art de bien Vivre et bien Mourir*, a different work published by Vêrard at Paris in 1493. This essay reports her findings as those of an identified editor working from the manuscripts, not as its own collation.

⁷⁵ *The Craft of Dying*, table of contents and prologue, Comper 1917, pp. 3–4; read as above. The prologue’s own summary of the sixth chapter—prayers “that should be said to them that be a-dying, of some men that be about them”—is quoted in the body.

⁷⁶ *The Craft of Dying*, ch. 1, Comper 1917, pp. 5–6; read as above. The tract cites “the Philosopher. . . in the third book of Ethics” for the dreadfulness of death, Psalm 33:22 (*Mors peccatorum pessima*) and Psalm 115:15 (*Preciosa est in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum eius*) in Vulgate numbering, Apocalypse 14:13, and Wisdom 4:7. All four were checked in the Douay–Rheims tracked verse text 2026-07-26 and correspond: Psalm 33:22, “The death of the wicked is very evil”; Psalm 115:15, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints”; Apocalypse 14:13, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord”; Wisdom 4:7, “But the just man, if he be prevented with death, shall be in rest.”

⁷⁷ *The Craft of Dying*, ch. 1, Comper 1917, p. 6; read as above. The tract immediately restricts the commendation—“And this is understood only of good men and the chosen people of God”—and quotes Ecclesiastes 7:2 (“The day of man’s death is better than the day of man’s birth”), which the Douay renders “A good name is better than precious ointments: and the day of death than the day of one’s birth” (checked 2026-07-26). The phrase “paying of the debt of natural duty” is the English tradition’s rendering of the *debitum naturae* from which this essay takes its title.

⁷⁸ *The Craft of Dying*, ch. 2, Comper 1917, pp. 9–20; read as above. The five are enumerated in the text: faith, despair, impatience, complacency (spiritual pride), and attachment to temporal things. The aside about how rarely men die of old age is the tract’s own, and is a small piece of demographic realism about the fifteenth century, not a claim this essay endorses about any other period.

⁷⁹ *The Craft of Dying*, ch. 3, Comper 1917, pp. 22–23; read as above. The attribution to Anselm is the tract’s own and this essay has not verified it against Anselm’s works; what is verified is that the tract makes it. The interrogations are a fixed form which the tract then qualifies: “though these interrogations abovesaid be commonly” put, they may be adapted.

⁸⁰ *The Craft of Dying*, ch. 5, Comper 1917, p. 32; read as above. “Weeneth” is supposes; “troweth” is believes.

⁸¹ *The Craft of Dying*, ch. 5, Comper 1917, pp. 32–33; read as above. The “certain decretal” is not identified in the text, and this essay has not traced it; the reference is reported as the tract’s own claim. “For-slothed” is Comper’s spelling; her footnote glosses the related form as “lost themselves through sloth.”

⁸² *The Craft of Dying*, ch. 5, Comper 1917, p. 33; read as above. Comper’s footnote glosses “behoting” as “promising.” The reference to the Chancellor of Paris is Gerson, and is one of the two citations that establish the tract is not his work.

⁸³ *The Craft of Dying*, prologue (Comper 1917, p. 3, with her footnote glossing “lewd men” as “laymen”), the prologue’s summary of ch. 6 (p. 4), and the exhortation formula in the appended tract at p. 85 (“to exhort him, by a priest, or for need by another, in the manner as followeth”). Read 2026-07-26 as above. The inference drawn in the body—that the book presupposes situations in which no priest is present—is this essay’s reading of these provisions and is offered as such; the essay has not investigated the demographic or ecclesiastical conditions that produced the genre.

⁸⁴ Comper, “Note on the Book of the Craft of Dying,” pp. 48–51, and the abridgment printed at pp. 55–91 under the title “The Art and Craft to Know Well to Die,” which Comper attributes to Caxton and describes as translated from a French source she was unable to trace; read 2026-07-26 as above. She notes that the block-books “generally contain eleven illustrations depicting the five great temptations which beset the soul at death,” and that the frontispiece of her edition is taken from the British Museum’s block-book published at Cologne c. 1450. This essay makes no claim about the later Counter-Reformation successors, which it has not examined.

⁸⁵ CCC 1014, Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26. The paragraph then quotes *The Imitation of Christ* I.23.1 (“Every action of yours, every thought, should be those of one who expects to die before the day is out. . . If you aren’t fit to face death today, it’s very unlikely you will be tomorrow”) and the stanza of Francis of Assisi’s *Cantic of the Creatures* on “our sister bodily Death.” The Catechism’s own footnotes identify both sources.

⁸⁶ James 5:14–15, Douay–Rheims, read 2026-07-26 in the tracked Challoner verse text. The Douay’s “priests” renders *presbyteros*, and Trent’s third chapter takes the trouble to insist that the word means ordained ministers and not “the elders by age, or the foremost in dignity amongst the people.” The next verse (5:16, “Confess therefore your sins one to another”) stands in the same paragraph and is not treated here.

⁸⁷ Council of Trent, session XIV (25 November 1551), canons on the sacrament of extreme unction, canons 1–4; Waterworth English and the Tauchnitz Latin, read 2026-07-26 in the full texts of those printings as digitized at the Internet Archive items registered in the source library for those editions. The canons carry anathemas and are definitive teaching. The doctrinal chapters that precede them are authoritative exposition of a lower register than the canons, though they are the same council’s teaching and are cited by the Catechism at CCC 1523 (DS 1694, 1698).

⁸⁸ Trent, session XIV, doctrine on extreme unction, ch. II, Waterworth English; Latin (*cuius unctio delicta, si qua sint adhuc expianda, ac peccati reliquias abstergit, et aegroti animam alleviat et confirmat. . . et sanitatem corporis interdum, ubi salutis animae expedierit, consequitur*) from the Tauchnitz printing. Read 2026-07-26 as above. The chapter’s exposition follows the clauses of James 5:15 in order.

⁸⁹ Trent, session XIV, doctrine on extreme unction, ch. III, Waterworth English; the emphasis is this essay’s. Latin from the Tauchnitz printing: “*Declaratur etiam, esse hanc unctionem infirmis adhibendam, illis vero praesertim, qui tam periculose decumbunt, ut in exitu vitae constituti videantur, unde et sacramentum exeuntium nuncupatur. Quod si infirmi post susceptam*

hanc unctionem convaluerint, iterum huius sacramenti subsidio iuvare poterunt, quum in aliud simile vitae discrimen inciderint.” Read 2026-07-26 as above. The construction is a preference within a class (*infirmis... illis vero praesertim*), not a restriction of the class.

⁹⁰*Sacrosanctum concilium* 73, Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26. The constitution was promulgated 4 December 1963. Its next article, SC 74, prescribes that “in addition to the separate rites for anointing of the sick and for viaticum, a continuous rite shall be prepared according to which the sick man is anointed after he has made his confession and before he receives viaticum”—which fixes the order of the three sacraments and is discussed below.

⁹¹*Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983), can. 1004 §§1–2; Holy See English web text of the Code, read 2026-07-26. Compare CCC 1528: “The proper time for receiving this holy anointing has certainly arrived when the believer begins to be in danger of death because of illness or old age,” and CCC 1529 on repetition. The governing law is that of the Latin Church, in force since 27 November 1983; readers of the Eastern Catholic Churches are governed by the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, which this essay has not examined.

⁹²CCC 1520, Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26; the footnote is Hebrews 2:15, the verse on lifelong servitude through fear of death. CCC 1521–1523 add union with Christ’s passion, an ecclesial grace, and the preparation for the final journey, the last quoting Trent’s *sacramentum exeuntium*.

⁹³CCC 1517, Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26; the paragraph also provides that the celebration “can be preceded by the sacrament of Penance and followed by the sacrament of the Eucharist.” CCC 1524–1525 develop the point: viaticum is “the last sacrament of the Christian,” and Penance, Anointing, and the Eucharist as viaticum together “constitute at the end of Christian life ‘the sacraments that prepare for our heavenly homeland.’”

⁹⁴*Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983), cann. 921 §1 and 922; Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26; the emphasis is this essay’s. Can. 921 §2 urges those in danger of death to receive again even if they have already communicated that day, and §3 recommends frequent communion, on separate days, while the danger lasts. The practice of reserving the Eucharist for the sick and carrying it to them is the subject of Trent, session XIII, ch. VI and canon 7 (Waterworth English, read 2026-07-26), which anathematizes the denial that it is lawful “that it be carried with honour to the sick.”

⁹⁵CCC 1020, quoting the Prayer of Commendation from the Order of Christian Funerals; Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26, and quoted in that official English rendering rather than in any translation composed for this essay. The ellipses mark omissions in the Catechism’s own presentation and in this quotation; the full text appears in the ritual book. The prayer is the Latin rite’s *Proficiscere, anima christiana*, and the Catechism’s placement of it—at the opening of the article on life everlasting, immediately before the particular judgment—is itself a piece of theology.

A Synopsis of Claims by Weight

The article classifies its consequential claims by the weight of the authority behind them: definitive teaching; authoritative non-definitive teaching; common or school theology; disputed opinion; and project synthesis. The table restates that classification in one place so that a reader can see at a glance which sentences in the argument carry the Church's authority and which carry only this essay's. Nothing here adds to the body; where the two differ, the body and its notes govern.

Claim	Weight	Governing witness	What remains unsettled
Death is separation of soul and body	Common formula on defined anthropology	Vienne, DS 902; Lateran V, DS 1440; restated CCC 365–366, 1005, 1016	The formula is not itself a conciliar definition, and no criterion for determining death follows from it.
The soul is the body's form	Definitive	Vienne (1312), <i>Fidei catholicae</i> , DS 902, with the note of heresy attached	The scholastic elaboration of hylomorphism; the mode of the soul's subsistence when separated.
The soul is immortal, one per body	Definitive	Fifth Lateran Council (1513), <i>Apostolici regiminis</i> , DS 1440–1441	Nothing about the soul's activity or condition after death.
Adam incurred death by his sin	Definitive	Trent, session V (1546), on original sin, canons 1–2	Whether Adam's body was of itself incorruptible; the mechanism of the exemption.
Death is natural in one sense, penal in another	Common theology, echoed in authoritative catechesis	ST I-II q. 85 aa. 5–6; II-II q. 164 a. 1 ad 1; CCC 1006, 1008; <i>Gaudium et spes</i> 18	The matter/form solution is a school instrument that no council has canonized.
Death is the last enemy, still to be destroyed	Scripture, received in authoritative teaching	1 Corinthians 15:26; CCC 1008	How the accomplished victory (2 Tim 1:10) stands to the pending one.
The purified see God immediately	Definitive	<i>Benedictus Deus</i> (1336), DS 1000–1001	The mode of the separated soul's knowledge; its relation to time; the texture of the interval.
The damned descend immediately	Definitive	<i>Benedictus Deus</i> , DS 1002	Treated in the third volume of this series; nothing further is asserted here.
A conscious "human self" survives; resurrection is deferred	Authoritative non-definitive	CDF, <i>Recentiores episcoporum Synodi</i> (1979), nn. 3, 5	The letter recalls rather than defines; it names no theologian and censures no proposition.
Retribution is immediate, in a particular judgment	Substance definitive; the name theological	<i>Benedictus Deus</i> for the immediacy; the term used at CCC 1021–1022	The phrase <i>iudicium particulare</i> does not occur in the texts examined here; the manner is not described.
Death ends the time of decision	Authoritative teaching	CCC 1013, 1021, with 2 Timothy 1:9–10; <i>Lumen gentium</i> 48	Why the orientation is fixed then; the schools differ and this essay does not survey them.
The separated soul is displaced, and knows in an altered mode	Common theology, Thomistic	ST I q. 89 a. 1; <i>Super I Cor.</i> 15 lect. 2	Not defined at any level; the second locus survives only in a <i>reportatio</i> .
"My soul is not I"	School theology, with a textual caveat	<i>Super I Cor.</i> 15 lect. 2 (<i>reportatio vulgata</i>)	Its fame exceeds its textual security: evidence of the school more than of Thomas's wording.

Claim	Weight	Governing witness	What remains unsettled
Anointing is a sacrament conferring grace and remitting sin	Definitive	Trent, session XIV (1551), canons 1–4 on extreme unction	The rite’s form and manner, revised in 1972 and governed by the liturgical books.
Anointing is for the sick, not only the dying	Authoritative teaching, and Trent’s own	Trent, session XIV, ch. III; <i>Sacrosanctum concilium</i> 73; CIC 1983 can. 1004	Nothing: the restriction to the dying was custom, not doctrine.
Viaticum, not anointing, is the last sacrament	Authoritative teaching and current law	CCC 1517, 1524–1525; SC 74; CIC 1983 cann. 921–922	Disciplinary provisions are Latin-Church law as of 2026-07-26 and may be changed.
Natural and penal answer two questions, not one	Project synthesis	This essay, from the sources cited at the block	The counterargument at full strength and the defeating finding are stated with the block.
Canon 1005 is jurisprudence over an admitted indeterminacy	Project synthesis	This essay, from <i>De civ. Dei</i> XIII.9–11 and CIC 1983 can. 1005	The canon’s drafting history was not examined; a purely prudential reading would defeat it.
The two New Testament tenses map onto the two questions	Project synthesis	This essay, from the loci cited in that section	Uses a scholastic distinction as a key to an apostolic text; a mapping, not exegesis.

B Scope, Method, and Qualifications

B.1 Reader, question, and claim

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 the first of four independent studies making up *The Four Last Things*; the remaining three treat judgment, hell, and heaven, and each volume is complete in itself. Cross-references between volumes are by title only.

Its governing question is what human death is, why the tradition places it first among the last things, and where the Church’s teaching about it stops. Its claim, stated compactly: the fourfold enumeration is a devotional and pedagogical ordering rather than a conciliar one, and death holds first place in it because death is the only member of the set that anyone can observe; death is defined as the separation of soul and body, a definition with dogmatic edges supplied by the teaching that the rational soul is the form of the body and is immortal, so that dying is the dissolution of one nature and not the release of a passenger; the instant of that dissolution is real and unlocatable, a result Augustine reached and the Church’s sacramental law quietly presupposes; the apparent contradiction between “death is natural” and “death is the wages of sin” resolves once the two are seen to answer different questions, one about the constitution of the thing that dies and one about the withdrawal of a preserving gift; Christ’s work cancels the penal meaning while leaving the natural fact standing until the resurrection, which is the exact shape of the New Testament’s two tenses; what survives death is a conscious subject that is nevertheless not the person, in a condition its own principal theologian calls contrary to its nature; the Church has defined the timing and object of the vision and the timing of damnation, and almost nothing else about the interval; the accounting at death is immediate and irrevocable while the communion of the Church with the dead is not broken; the *ars moriendi* is influential devotional literature of unknown authorship and no doctrinal authority whose central counsel the Catechism has retained in a single paragraph; and the Church’s actual practice for the dying inverts the popular picture at both ends, since anointing is for the sick rather than only for the dying and the last sacrament is viaticum.

The argument proceeds in the order in which its own evidence becomes available: the name and the enumeration; the definition and its dogmatic supports; the unlocatable instant; the natural and penal accounts and their reconciliation; the transformation of death's meaning by Christ; the intermediate state; the judgment at death; the devotional tradition of preparation; and the Church's law and liturgy for the dying. English is the working language. No liturgical rite governs any conclusion; the canonical material is the 1983 Code for the Latin Church, as of 2026-07-26.

B.2 Sources and their function

Source class	Function in the article	Governing boundary
Scripture	Ecclesiasticus 7:37–40 supplies the name and its setting; Genesis 2:17 and 3:19, Wisdom 1:13 and 2:23–24, and Romans 5:12 and 6:23 the penal account; Job 14, Psalm 6:6, Ecclesiastes 12:7 and Wisdom 3:1–3 the Old Testament's development; Luke 23:43, Luke 16:22–26, 2 Corinthians 5:1–10, Philippians 1:21–24 and Apocalypse 6:9–11 the intermediate state; Hebrews 2:14–15, 9:27–28, 1 Corinthians 15:21–26 and 2 Timothy 1:10 the two tenses and the judgment; James 5:14–15 the sacrament.	Quoted from the public-domain Douay–Rheims (Challoner) in Vulgate numbering, read in the source library's tracked verse text; readings are textual and modest; no independent exegetical apparatus is claimed, and the Greek was not examined at any locus.
Patristic witness	Augustine, <i>De civitate Dei</i> XIII, supplies the analysis of the three deaths, the evil of the separation, the unlocatable instant, the race toward death, and the argument for why the baptized still die; Cyprian, <i>De mortalitate</i> , the pastoral realism about a plague that does not discriminate.	Cited as witness and record, not as demonstration; edition and translator identified; the Augustinian material verified in a tracked transcription of the Dods 1871 printing, the Cyprianic read in a web transcription of ANF V without collation against the Latin.
Thomistic framework	ST I q. 75 a. 4 and q. 89 a. 1; I-II q. 85 aa. 5–6; II-II q. 164 a. 1; III q. 50 aa. 2–3; <i>Super I Cor.</i> 15 lect. 2 govern the analysis of the composite, the separated soul, the natural/penal distinction, and Christ's death.	Adopted as the article's framework where Catholic theology permits schools; labeled common or school theology, never as dogma; the <i>Super I Cor.</i> passages carry an explicit <i>reportatio</i> caveat.
Definitive magisterium	Vienne, DS 902; Lateran V, DS 1440–1441; <i>Benedictus Deus</i> , DS 1000–1002; Trent, session V canons 1–2 and session XIV on extreme unction, with session XIII ch. VI on the Eucharist for the sick.	Quoted at its own register, in Latin with labeled working glosses or in a public-domain translation; the Denzinger presentation is a finding aid to the underlying acts, which are the authorities cited.
Authoritative non-definitive teaching	<i>Lumen gentium</i> 48–50; <i>Gaudium et spes</i> 14, 18; <i>Sacrosanctum concilium</i> 73–74; CDF, <i>Recentiores episcoporum Synodi</i> (1979); the Catechism throughout; the 1983 Code, cann. 921–923, 1004–1007.	Cited at the weight each carries and never elevated; conciliar constitutions, a curial letter, a catechetical restatement, and disciplinary law are kept distinct, and the law is dated.
Devotional and historical witness	<i>The Book of the Craft of Dying</i> (Comper 1917) for the <i>ars moriendi</i> ; the <i>Catholic Encyclopedia</i> for one bibliographic fact about Denys the Carthusian.	Devotional literature of no doctrinal authority, quoted in a modernized-spelling edition at two removes from the Latin; the encyclopedia used only for a dated bibliographic statement.

Source class	Function in the article	Governing boundary
Project synthesis	The reading of Ecclesiasticus 7:40 in its context; the observation about the Catechism’s placement of death; the argument that death is first because it is the only observable last thing; the two-questions reconciliation; the reading of canon 1005 against Augustine XIII.11; the mapping of the New Testament’s two tenses; the reconciliation of the unlocatable instant with CCC 1022; the diagnosis of the <i>ars moriendi</i> ’s Platonic drift; and the closing formulations.	Original editorial synthesis argued from the checked sources; attributed to no source and creating no doctrine; the two extended syntheses carry their strongest counterargument and a defeating finding in the body.

B.3 Included and excluded scope

Included are: the scriptural origin of the phrase *novissima* and the character of the fourfold enumeration; the definition of death as separation and its supports at Vienne and Lateran V; Augustine’s three deaths and his aporia about the instant; the natural and penal accounts, Trent’s canon, and the Thomistic reconciliation; the transformation of death’s significance in Christ, with Augustine’s and Cyprian’s refusals to sentimentalize it; the Old Testament’s reticence and the New Testament loci on the intermediate state; the separated soul in Thomistic analysis; the John XXII controversy and the definition of *Benedictus Deus*; the 1979 letter and the boundary it drew; the particular judgment’s substance and name and the end of the time of merit; the *ars moriendi* tradition, its authorship, contents, and reception; and the Church’s sacramental and liturgical practice for the dying under current Latin law.

Excluded are: the determination of death by medical criteria, organ procurement, the withholding or withdrawal of treatment, euthanasia and assisted suicide, and every other question of applied bioethics; the theology of purgatory and the whole doctrine of the final purification; hell, its punishments, and its population; the beatific vision beyond the timing and object defined in 1336; the general judgment and eschatological chronology; the resurrection of the body beyond what the definition of death requires; limbo and the fate of the unbaptized; Christology and soteriology, presupposed throughout and nowhere developed; the theology of martyrdom; funeral rubrics, cremation, burial law, and the pastoral care of the bereaved; private revelations and reported near-death experiences; the scholastic disputes over the fixity of the separated will and the twentieth-century debates over a final option at death; and any judgment about the state, culpability, or destiny of any person.

B.4 Material qualifications

1. Scripture is quoted only from the public-domain Douay–Rheims (Challoner) in the electronic state registered in the source library, and always in Vulgate chapter and verse numbering; a reader comparing a modern Bible will find different numbers at Psalms, Ecclesiasticus, and 1 Thessalonians in particular. Every verse quoted was checked against the registered table of divergences between that electronic state and the American 1899 edition, and none of them diverges.
2. The Greek New Testament was not examined at any locus. The essay therefore asserts nothing about the construction underlying the Vulgate’s *in quo omnes peccaverunt* at Romans 5:12, nor about the punctuation of Luke 23:43, and flags both where they arise.
3. The Hebrew was not examined. The remark on *morte morieris* at Genesis 2:17 concerns only the Latin and English doubling.
4. Wisdom’s *Deus mortem non fecit* may refer chiefly to spiritual death; the essay records the ambiguity and follows Aquinas’s and the Catechism’s application of the verse to bodily death while flagging that the exegesis is contestable.

5. The matter/form reconciliation of the natural and penal accounts is common theology, not defined doctrine. The essay's extended synthesis defending it states the strongest objection at full strength and names the finding that would defeat it.
6. Trent's canons were read in the promulgated text in Latin and in Waterworth's English. The conciliar acts, the schemata, and the debates were not examined; the claim that Trent's canon 1 does not define the constitution of Adam's body is a claim about the promulgated canon.
7. The Denzinger presentation used for Vienne, Lateran V, *Ne super his*, and *Benedictus Deus* is a dated web transcription of the Latin Enchiridion that does not name the print edition it reproduces. It is used as a convenient Latin witness to acts that are themselves the authorities; no printed Denzinger was collated, and the essay's English renderings of those passages are labeled working glosses except where the official English of CCC 1023 is quoted.
8. DS 857–858, 1304–1306, and 1820, cited by CCC 1022 for the purification, were not read at their own loci. The essay reports the Catechism's citation of them and asserts nothing about their contents.
9. The report that John XXII preached the contrary opinion in 1331–1332 rests on the description of the disputed question in his own *Ne super his* and on the Catechism's citation of that act; the sermons themselves were not examined.
10. The observation that the phrase “particular judgment” does not occur in *Ne super his* or *Benedictus Deus* is bounded to those texts as read on 2026-07-26. No wider search of the magisterial corpus was performed, and nothing is claimed about where the term first appears officially.
11. The *Super I Cor.* passages, including *anima mea non est ego*, come from the *reportatio vulgata* of chapters 11–16, a reported text. They are strong evidence of the Thomistic school and weaker evidence of Thomas's own wording than their fame implies.
12. The *Craft of Dying* is quoted from Comper's 1917 modernized-spelling edition of Bodleian MS 423, itself an English translation of a lost Latin original. No manuscript was consulted and no Latin wording is asserted. The attributions the tract itself makes—to Anselm for the interrogations, to Scotus, to Isidore, to “a certain decretal”—are reported as the tract's claims and were not verified against those authors.
13. The essay's diagnosis of a Platonizing drift in the devotional literature is a critical judgment about a genre, argued from one quoted passage. It does not accuse that literature of heresy and does not extend to the *ars moriendi* tradition as a whole beyond the passage cited.
14. The canonical material is the 1983 Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church, promulgated 25 January 1983 and in force since 27 November 1983, in the Holy See's English web text as of 2026-07-26. Amendments after that date were not checked. The *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* was not examined, and nothing here applies to an Eastern Catholic without establishing applicability. This is a study aid, not canonical or pastoral advice; anyone facing an actual decision about the sacraments for a dying person should consult the competent pastor with the complete facts.
15. Nothing in this essay states or implies a criterion for determining that a person has died, and nothing in it bears on any medical decision.
16. No claim is made about the state, salvation, or culpability of any person, living or dead.

B.5 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 (Challoner) as registered in the source library. The *Summa theologiae* is quoted from the public-domain English translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province with the Latin checked in the Corpus Thomisticum web corpus at the loci identified; the *Super I Cor.* passages are quoted in Latin from the same corpus with labeled working glosses. Augustine's *De civitate Dei* is quoted from the public-domain Dods translation of 1871, verified in the source library's tracked transcription of that printing. Cyprian is quoted from the public-domain Ante-Nicene Fathers volume V. Trent is quoted from Waterworth's public-domain English and the 1887 Tauchnitz Latin. Conciliar and papal Latin from Vienne, Lateran V, *Ne super his*, and *Benedictus Deus* is quoted from a dated web transcription of the Latin Enchiridion, with English renderings labeled as working glosses

except where the official English of the Catechism is used. The Catechism, the Second Vatican Council’s constitutions, the 1979 letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the 1983 Code are quoted briefly from the Holy See’s official English web texts with attribution. *The Book of the Craft of Dying* is quoted from Comper’s 1917 edition, in the public domain in the United States. 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 2026-07-26, and the tracked source-library artifacts on the same date; every date in this article is the UTC calendar day. The canonical material is current as of that date. This revision received internal argumentative, source-consistency, quotation, weight-classification, rights, and production review by the authoring agent. Independent scriptural, patristic, Thomistic, dogmatic, canonical, theological, literary, and ecclesiastical review is outstanding; no imprimatur, nihil obstat, or ecclesiastical approval is claimed, and internal checking is not independent review.

C References

Scripture

- Genesis 2:16–17; 3:17–19 (the prohibition and the sentence); Job 14:1–14 (the reticence); Psalm 6:6; 33:22; 89:9–12; 115:15 (Vulgate numbering); Ecclesiastes 7:2; 12:1–7; Wisdom 1:12–16; 2:23–24; 3:1–3; 4:7; Ecclesiasticus 7:37–40; 41:1–6; Matthew 10:28; 24:42–44; Luke 16:22–26; 23:42–46; John 11:21–36; Romans 5:12; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:21–26, 53–57; 2 Corinthians 5:1–10; Philippians 1:21–24; 1 Thessalonians 4:12–14 (Vulgate numbering); 2 Timothy 1:9–10; Hebrews 2:14–15; 9:27–28; James 5:14–16; Apocalypse 6:9–11; 14:13. Quoted from the public-domain Douay–Rheims translation (Challoner revision) in the electronic state registered in the source library as the Challoner Gutenberg witness, read 2026-07-26 in its tracked per-book verse text and checked against the registered table of divergences from the American 1899 edition. Chapter and verse numbering is that of the Clementine Vulgate throughout. Latin for Ecclesiasticus 7:40 and 41:1–6 from the Clementine text in SacredBible.org’s presentation of the Hetzenauer 1914 printing, read 2026-07-26.

Patristic witnesses

- Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate Dei* XIII.1–11 (mortality contracted; the death of the soul, of the body, and of the whole man; whether death is good to the good; why the regenerate still die; the good use of an evil; the evil of death as separation; the saints freed from the second death; the moment of death; life as a race toward death; whether one can be living and dead at once); trans. Marcus Dods, *The City of God*, vol. I, in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, A New Translation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871); public domain; wording verified 2026-07-26 in the source library’s tracked transcription of the 1871 printing of volume I.
- Cyprian of Carthage, *De mortalitate* 1–10 (the plague common to Christian and heathen; the Christian’s greater struggle); trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886); public domain; read 2026-07-26 at New Advent’s transcription of that volume. Not collated against the Latin.

Thomistic framework

- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 75, a. 4 (man is not a soul only) and a. 6 (the soul incorruptible); q. 89, a. 1 (the separated soul’s understanding; separation contrary to its nature); I-II, q. 85, a. 5 (sin the accidental cause of death, by removing an obstacle) and a. 6 (natural as regards the matter, not the form; the knife and the rust; the gift of original justice); II-II, q. 164, a. 1 with ad 1 (death both natural and penal); III, q. 50, aa. 2–3 (the Godhead not separated from Christ’s flesh or soul in death). English from the public-domain translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province via New Advent; Latin for I-II, q. 85, a. 6 checked in the Corpus Thomisticum. All loci read 2026-07-26; work, question, article, and division govern over either site’s presentation.
- Thomas Aquinas, *Super I Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios lectura*, cap. 15, lect. 2 (the soul separated is imperfect; *anima mea non est ego*; no meritorious works in the other life). Latin read 2026-07-26 in the Corpus Thomisticum, which transmits chapters 11–16 as the *reportatio vulgata*; the English renderings in this essay are labeled working glosses.

Definitive magisterium

- Council of Vienne (1311–1312), constitution *Fidei catholicae*, DS 902 (the rational soul the form of the human body *per se et essentialiter*).
- Fifth Lateran Council, session VIII (19 December 1513), bull *Apostolici regiminis*, DS 1440–1441 (the intellective soul immortal and individually multiplied; no “double truth”).
- John XXII, bull *Ne super his* (3 December 1334), DS 990–991 (the declaration on the vision of the purified souls, with its qualifier).
- Benedict XII, apostolic constitution *Benedictus Deus* (29 January 1336), DS 1000–1002 (the intuitive and facial vision immediately after death and before the resumption of bodies and the general judgment; the immediate descent of those dying in actual mortal sin). The central definition’s English is quoted as given in CCC 1023.
- These four are quoted in Latin from the dated web presentation of the Latin *Enchiridion symbolorum* registered in the source library, patristica.net, read 2026-07-26. The presentation does not identify the printed edition it transcribes and is used as a finding aid and convenient Latin witness to acts that are themselves the cited authorities; English renderings are labeled working glosses.
- Council of Trent, session V (17 June 1546), decree concerning original sin, canons 1–2; session XIII (11 October 1551), ch. VI and canon 7 (reserving the Eucharist and carrying it to the sick); session XIV (25 November 1551), doctrine on the sacrament of extreme unction, chs. I–III, and canons 1–4. Latin from *Canones et decreta sacrosancti oecumenici Concilii Tridentini*, editio stereotypa undecima (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1887); English from the public-domain translation of J. Waterworth (London: Burns

and Oates; reprint of the London 1848 translation). Both read 2026-07-26 in the Internet Archive digitizations of the printings registered for those editions in the source library.

Authoritative non-definitive teaching and current law

- Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum concilium* (4 December 1963), 73–74; *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964), 48–50; *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965), 14, 18. Holy See English web texts, read 2026-07-26.
- Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Recentiores episcoporum Synodi*, letter on certain questions concerning eschatology (17 May 1979), nn. 1–7. Holy See English web text, vatican.va, read 2026-07-26.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 362–368 (soul and body); 992–993, 1005–1019 (the resurrection; dying in Christ); 1020–1022 (the commendation of the dying; the particular judgment); 1023 (heaven, quoting *Benedictus Deus*); 1514–1532 (the anointing of the sick and viaticum). Official Vatican English web text, vatican.va archive, read 2026-07-26. The IntraText delivery lowercases some sentence-initial articles and renders some dashes as spaced hyphens; quotations here are begun so that the casing of the quoted words is unaffected.
- *Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983), cann. 921–923 (viaticum) and 998–1007 (the anointing of the sick), Holy See English web text, read 2026-07-26. Latin-Church law, in force since 27 November 1983; as-of date 2026-07-26.

Devotional and reference witnesses

- *The Book of the Craft of Dying, and Other Early English Tracts Concerning Death*, ed. Frances M. M. Comper (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1917), prologue and chs. 1–6, the editor’s “Note on the Book of the Craft of Dying” (pp. 48–51), and the Caxton abridgment (pp. 55–91). Public domain in the United States; read 2026-07-26 in the Internet Archive digitization of the 1917 printing, item bookofcraftofdyi00caxtiala. The text is modernized in spelling by the editor from Bodleian MS 423 and is a translation of an anonymous Latin original.
- *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), s.v. “Denys the Carthusian”; public domain; read 2026-07-26 at New Advent. Used only for the bibliographic fact that Denys wrote *De quatuor novissimis*.

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