

III. HEAVEN

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

What is the right end of the life of man? In other words, what should the road of life lead to? Faced with this primary question, men have tried various ways of arriving at the answer. The atheist makes an effort to place the end of the road at death: the road of every man's life runs inevitably to earth in a newly opened grave. But atheists, at any time in the world's history, are exceptional, almost freakish. And for the generality of men, the question of what is the end of life, is simply the question of what comes after death. In this at any rate, the generality of men are right. But after this initial correctness there is every variety of error. Some men have decided to work out for themselves what they think

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lies on the other side of the door of death, with the ill-success that must always attend any effort to arrive theoretically at a true idea of an unvisited country. Some have decided that whatever lies on the other side of the door, there is no need to worry about it, but merely to await death and hope for the best with a fair certainty that things will turn out well enough. A small number—even smaller than the number of atheists perhaps—have, in all ages, tried to find out by consulting the souls of the dead—which, logically, is at any rate a far better method than merely theorizing about the life after death. For all that, the method is fraught with endless danger of deception, and for all the thousands of years of its history, the results are so meagre that spiritualism can hardly be conceived as anything more worthy than a kind of peeping through the keyhole.

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

place to which it leads, and for which it was made.

At this stage no more will be said of heaven than is necessary for the mapping of the road. A slightly fuller treatment of heaven, in its own right and not simply as something which makes this life on earth comprehensible, must be reserved for the final chapter.

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

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man heaven, thought of in terms of endless hymn-singing, is not attractive.

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

to consider in what lies the happiness that comes from the soul itself.

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

Our imagination may find in this statement—that the happiness of heaven consists in the direct knowledge and direct love of God—a doctrine that it feels to be deeply unsatisfying. To the ordinary man, such a description of heaven seems far too spiritual, too remote from the kind of happiness that springs to his mind the moment he starts to think of happiness at all. It is, therefore, well to analyze just one stage further what happiness involves. In looking at a sunset or in listening to a piece of music, the soul of man may be lifted, if only for the moment, to an absolute ecstasy of happiness. Yet no man can go on endlessly looking at the same sunset, and an endless repetition of the same piece of music might

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very easily lead to madness. Both these effects, the original joy and the too rapid fatigue, come from the same source. The beauty that man enjoys in the sunset and the music, is a beauty that God Himself has created, and it is to this that the soul of man responds. But, because God has created it, it is only a shadow or a reflection of that beauty which, immeasurably, is in God Himself, or more truly is God Himself. Man, therefore, who has rejoiced in the beauty that God has placed in the sunset, will rejoice immeasurably more in God Himself, the Author and Source of all beauty. And whereas he grew weary of the sunset—which was not the beauty of God Himself, but only a created reflection of it—of the infinite beauty of God Himself he will never grow weary.

THE SUPERNATURAL LIFE

This, then, is some idea of the end of the road: what bearing has it on the road? To many, the connection is obscured by a truth which is only one truth, and not the most important. Heaven is thought of as the reward of a good life. As such, it has only a kind of accidental connection with this life. It is better to think of heaven, not only as a reward, but also as the *result* of a good life. A simple comparison may make clear the distinction. If a student passes an examination he may be rewarded in one of two ways: he may either get a mere prize—a tennis racquet say, or a volume of Browning—or

he may be admitted to a further course of study which his success in the examination has proved him to be fitted for. The tennis racquet has no real relation to the examination he has passed: but the further course of study has; it is a true result of it. To an immense number of people, heaven is rather like the tennis racquet, and, as such, is not really understood at all. But think of it as the further course, resulting from a life well lived, and instantly the connection is seen. This life is not only a test which a man must pass in order to obtain the reward of heaven, it is a preparation which man must successfully undergo in order to live the life of heaven.

From this it follows that whatever is necessary to enable a man to live the life of heaven must, in some way or other, be acquired by man in this life: otherwise this life would not be a preparation for heaven. And this consideration brings us to the most important point in the whole of Catholic teaching, the doctrine to which all others whatsoever are related, an understanding of which is necessary if Catholicism is to be understood at all. We may approach it in this way. If we were offered a journey to another planet, we should be wise to refuse, because the breathing apparatus which we have by nature, was made for the atmosphere of this world. In our atmosphere it works: in a totally different atmosphere it would not work, and we should die of suffocation. This illustration points the way to the truth, namely,

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that the equipment which is adequate to life in one world, may not be at all adequate to life in another. And God has told us that our human nature, while adequate to the ordinary life of this world, is not adequate to the life of the world to come. If we were to enter heaven with only the powers of our human nature, we should no more be able to live there than, in the illustration I have given, we should be able to live on another planet with no powers beyond those of our nature.

And just as we should need some extra powers of breathing, not contained in our nature, to live on another planet, so we need extra powers in our soul, not contained in our nature, in order that we may live the life of heaven. These powers which are not ours by nature, which are necessary in order that we may live a life totally above our nature, are what is called in Catholic teaching, the Supernatural Life.*

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

* Not, be it noted the *spiritual* life, though in Scripture this term is often used for the Supernatural Life. It seems better here to keep the terms distinct. Man's soul is by nature spiritual. The Supernatural Life is something that elevates spirit.

powers and admitted to heaven. Those who rejected God were fixed in eternal separation from Him.

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

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

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

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

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

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Discussion Aids

How can we find out anything about what comes after death? Who alone has supreme personal knowledge in regard to it? What is to be said of the spiritualist conception of it? Of the non-conformist Protestant conception?

Of what does Heaven consist? Where is the seat of human happiness? Discuss. What is the function of the intellect? Of the will? Where will these faculties function at their highest? Can you analyze the happiness of heaven on a more popular basis?

The Supernatural Life

Is it adequate to say that heaven is the *reward* of a good life? Why is the word *result* better? Illustrate. Is it not probable that a nature fitted for life in this world might be inadequate for life in the next? Might it not need extra powers, powers totally above nature? What are these powers called in Catholic teaching? What is the difference between spiritual life and the supernatural life? Can any created nature, by its own powers, enter into that relationship with God that heaven is? When

DISCUSSION OUTLINE FOR A MAP OF LIFE

and how can we obtain supernatural life? When has life been successful? When a failure?

Practice: Be in earnest about your "technical" preparation for Heaven by frequent reception of the sacraments of penance and the Holy Eucharist.