

**NOT EVERYTHING IS GRACE:
AQUINAS'S NOTION OF "PURE NATURE"
AND THE CHRISTIAN INTEGRALISM OF HENRI DE LUBAC
AND OF RADICAL ORTHODOXY**

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Abstract

Henri de Lubac argues that, in early modern times, a pernicious concept began to become commonplace in Roman Catholic theology: this concept is “pure nature.” Pure nature is human nature, considered without reference to grace or to the supernatural destiny of personal union with God. Further, de Lubac argues that Catholic theology, in assimilating this idea, has departed from the sound tradition represented by St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. He holds that the notion of pure nature leads inevitably to the self-exclusion of Christianity from the affairs of the world—when, in fact, the light of the Gospel ought to be shed on all aspects of human existence.

This dissertation tests de Lubac’s thesis concerning the history of the idea of pure nature, showing that this notion is not, in fact, a modern novelty. This study examines the role of the idea of pure nature in the Bible and early Church, in the theology of Thomas Aquinas, in the early modern Jansenist controversy, in the theology of Henri de Lubac, and in the theology of the contemporary Radical Orthodoxy movement, paying particular attention to the historical circumstances which made the repudiation of “pure nature” attractive.

Today, some theologians follow de Lubac in contending that Catholic doctrine must eschew the idea of pure nature in order to resist secularism and maintain Christianity’s relevance to all aspects of human life. This dissertation contends that the idea of pure nature is not only traditional, but necessary for Christian theology. It argues that a Christian “integralism” which refuses to prescind from grace when considering nature can do justice neither to nature nor to grace.

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CHAPTER 1

PURE NATURE AND THE CHALLENGE OF INTEGRALISM

“In everything God works for good with those who love him” (Rom 8:28). This is what St Thérèse of Lisieux meant when she said, famously, that “everything is grace.”¹ However, there are other contexts in which it is important to affirm that not everything is grace. This dissertation is about a theological dispute involving some of those other contexts, the dispute over the idea of “pure nature.”

In this study we will explore the Thomistic notion of pure nature and examine the opposing idea of Catholic integralism, as developed by the French Jesuit Henri de Lubac (1896–1981) and later by the lay Anglican theologian John Milbank (b. 1952). We proceed in this introductory chapter under the following six headings:

1. Defining “Pure Nature”
2. Objections to the Notion of Pure Nature
3. Defining “Integralism”
4. The Integralist Challenge of Henri de Lubac
5. The Integralist Challenge of John Milbank
6. The Plan of this Study

¹ See *Thérèse de L'Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face: Œuvres Complètes* Paris: Cerf, 1998), 1009. See the “Yellow Notebook” of M. Agnes, 5 June 1897, n. 4: “Si vous me trouviez morte un matin, n’ayez pas de peine: c’est que Papa le bon Dieu serait venu tout simplement me chercher. Sans doute, c’est une grande grâce de recevoir les Sacrements; mais quand le bon Dieu ne le permet pas, c’est bien quand même, tout est grâce.”

1. Defining “Pure Nature”

“Pure nature” is a term which became common in the scholastic tradition, particularly among Thomists. When it was first used, and by whom, is unknown. The precise term “*natura pura*” does not appear in the writings of St Thomas Aquinas, but, as we shall show in chapters three and four, the substance of the idea is present in his work.

We may draw a working definition of pure nature from the writings of Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange,² the Dominican who, as much as anyone, epitomised early 20th-century Thomism. According to Garrigou-Lagrange, “pure nature” means “nature with its intrinsic constituent principles and such as follow from them or are due to them.” The expression, then, does not refer to a real state in which anyone has ever existed. Rather, it indicates “all those notes which are included in the definition of man, a rational animal, and further the properties of man and the natural aids due to

² Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP (1877–1964), belonged to the Dominican Province of France (i.e., Paris) and became one of the most prominent Catholic theologians in the decades before Vatican II. See Richard Peddicord, “Another Look at the Theological Enterprise of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.,” *Angelicum* 82 (2005): 835–48 and *The Sacred Monster of Thomism: An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.* (South Bend, IN: St Augustine’s, 2005).

human nature that it may attain its final natural end.”³ Pure nature is, in other words, the idea of human nature which can be had by any reasoning person. (“Aristotle,” Garrigou remarks, “thought that men were actually in this merely natural state.”⁴) It belongs to the Christian faith to announce that a *supernatural* life, a life above that of nature, has been planned by God and made possible in Christ.

It is not the purpose of this study to advance or defend any particular hypothesis concerning the development of the terminology of pure nature within the scholastic tradition after Aquinas. That there was development and diversity in early modern scholasticism is not in question. In regard to the notion of pure nature, we may follow M. W. F. Stone in recognising three sources that affected the transmission of earlier teaching, at least from the 16th century.

First, as Stone observes, scholastic theologians from the Renaissance onwards were influenced by the common nominalist distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*. The former, *potentia absoluta*, refers to God’s omnipotent capacity to do whatever he wills. To consider this absolute power is to consider everything that

³ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, trans. Dominican Nuns of Corpus Christi Monastery (Menlo Park, CA), *Grace: Commentary on the Summa theologiae of St. Thomas, 1 2, q. 109–14* (St Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1952), 21. In the 1946 original, page 19, the passage reads: “Status naturae purae importat praecise naturam cum suis principiis intrinsece constituentibus et iis quae ex illis sequuntur seu ei debentur; scil. importat ea omnia quae sunt de definitione hominis, animal rationale, necnon proprietates hominis, et auxilia naturalia naturae humanae debita, ut attingat finem suum ultimum naturalem. Aristoteles putabat homines esse de facto in statu mere naturali.” Throughout this study, I retain the unmarked pronoun “he” (and other apparently “male” forms) when quoting the words of other authors and translators; I recognise that this may be somewhat dissonant, especially since, in keeping with current convention, I generally use less ambiguous and more obviously inclusive language.

⁴ Ibid.

is possible. In contrast, *potentia ordinata* is the power God has actually exercised in the real world. The term refers to what is, and not merely to what could be. In an excess of zeal to defend the “freedom” of God’s *potentia absoluta* (i.e., God’s ability to command anything by sheer choice and will, with regard to the nature of things), the nominalists came to speculate about how human beings might have been—but, in fact, were not—created. From this it was only a step to speaking of pure nature as a real and concrete state in which human beings had initially existed. As Servais Pinckaers writes,

In the tradition of nominalism, one will tend to see nature as self-sufficient, autonomous, possessing its own end and laws. This will be the concept of Renaissance theologians, to be concretized in the hypothesis of a state of pure nature existing at the beginning of history.⁵

The theology of limbo was, as Stone writes, a second source for early modern scholastic treatments of pure nature. Catholic theologians were concerned not only with hypothetical cases, but with the real situation of infants who die without baptism. As we shall see, it is in connection with limbo that Thomas Aquinas speaks of *homo in solis naturalibus constitutus*, supplying later theologians with an idea some will call *pure nature*.

⁵ See Servais Pinckaers, “Aquinas on Nature and the Supernatural,” in *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, ed. John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus, trans. Mary Thomas Noble et al. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 365.

The third influence Stone identifies is “the postulation in theological circles of a ‘natural end’ for human beings, an end . . . independent of any ‘supernatural end’.”⁶ This development was characteristic of the Dominicans at Padua, and was, according to Stone, transmitted to the wider theological world through Cardinal Cajetan.⁷ Whether this development was well-grounded in the theology of Thomas Aquinas is a matter of dispute.

Besides the three sources indicated by M. W. F. Stone, we may adduce two other circumstances that fostered reflection upon pure nature in the 16th century. First, the Reformation and the Wars of Religion sent Europeans searching for a conceptual common ground on which to build a social and legal edifice that would promote peace and stability in their newly pluralist world. The Catholic Dominican theologian Francisco de Vitoria, the Protestant jurist Hugo Grotius, and others turned to the idea of pure nature as a common basis for conceiving of international law. Second, 16th-century Roman Catholic theologians were confronting a moral and humanitarian crisis in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies: the indigenous peoples of Latin America were being brutalised, and their very humanity was called into question. Here again, theologians drew on the idea of a general human nature to

⁶ M. W. F. Stone, “Michael Baius (1513–89) and the Debate on ‘Pure Nature’: Grace and Moral Agency in Sixteenth-Century Scholasticism,” in *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity*, ed. Jill Kraye and Risto Saarinen (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 70.

⁷ See Stone, “Baius and Pure Nature,” 70–3. On Cajetan and the Paduans generally, see Cesare Vasoli, “The Crisis of Late Humanism and Expectations of Reform in Italy at the End of the Fifteenth and Beginning of the Sixteenth Centuries, in *History of Theology*, vol. 3, *The Renaissance*, ed. Giulio D’Onofrio, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), 387–93.

defend the natural rights and dignity of the native peoples.⁸ Here the Dominican Thomistic schools, especially that of Salamanca, deserve particular credit.⁹

Without denying that the language of pure nature and the notion of universal human rights were distinctive developments of early modern Europe, we may nonetheless emphasise that their coming to the fore in the 1500s does not mean they were utterly novel concepts.¹⁰ On the contrary, the notion of pure nature is a Christian concept of long standing, as we shall show in the chapters that follow. The properly modern development of this idea within the ramifying scholastic traditions is a subject, however, that is beyond the scope of the present study. We will certainly not deny that developments took place. These later developments are excluded from our attention, however, since they ultimately played only a relatively small part in the theological arguments marshalled by the main 20th century critics of “pure nature.” In the logic and rhetoric of these disputes, the ultimate authority was Aquinas himself, and “scholasticism” and “the Thomistic school” were treated as monolithic wholes. A central concern of ours, then, is the question of *pura natura*’s foundation in the

⁸ See John M. Headley, *The Europeanization of the World: On the Origins of Human Rights and Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 77–8.

⁹ See José M. Desantes Guanter, “La opinión en el ‘ius communicationis’, según Francisco de Vitoria”; Ramón Hernández Martín, “Dominigo Báñez, continuador de Francisco de Vitoria en la doctrina internacionalista sobre las Indias”; and Luciano Pereña Vincente, “Francisco de Vitoria, conciencia de América”, in *Los Dominicos y el Nuevo Mundo: Actas del II Congreso Internacional*, ed. José Barrado (Salamanca: Editorial San Esteban, 1990), pp. 27–42, 61–91, and 93–111, respectively.

¹⁰ On the roots and gradual development of these concepts, see Headley, *Europeanization of the World*, 66–148.

teaching of Aquinas himself. Thus, we will turn mainly to see what place the notion of pure nature actually has in his thought.

2. Objections to the Notion of Pure Nature

There are four important objections to the theology of pure nature, all of which are voiced by the Henri de Lubac. For the moment, it will suffice to summarise these four objections in general terms, leaving the details of de Lubac's arguments for examination in due course.

Against the notion of pure nature, first, it may be objected that pure nature is not, and has never been, the state of any real human being. Since we know that God made the universe in order to bring created persons to share the divine life, and since our nature is such that it is capable of receiving this supernatural life, it would seem that every adequate understanding of human nature must take cognisance of our capacity for grace and of our supernatural destiny in Christ. If we fail to do so, our anthropology will be mistaken or incomplete. Accordingly, Christian theology ought only to entertain concepts of human nature which include the supernatural in their anthropological reckoning.

Second, one may object that the notion of pure nature is alien to the Christian tradition. As we shall see, de Lubac avers that the very idea of pure nature would have baffled St Augustine and other early Fathers of the Church. In fidelity to tradition, the argument goes, we ought to imitate the early doctors and ignore the idea of pure nature. Our constant preference should be always to consider human nature in

reference to supernatural transformation and to the goal of personal communion with God.

Third, it has been objected that the idea of pure nature is dualistic. The force of this objection is that to speak of *natura pura* is to imply, in the life of believers, a real separation between natural human life and the life of faith. This objection expresses the fear that by speaking of pure nature we shall obscure the truth that human beings, made in the image of God, are intrinsically (i.e., internally) capable of receiving the divine life of grace. When such an intrinsic orientation is denied, theology is left unable to think of grace except as a sort of alien invader, a foreign organism which seizes our nature and forces us to be its host. If we deny that there is any intrinsic link between nature and grace, we also lose our sense of grace as perfective of nature. In addition, to treat nature and grace as only extrinsically related is to imply that grace leaves our natural, everyday human life untouched, reserving its effects for a separate “religious” part of our humanity.

Fourth and finally, it is said that the idea of pure nature is to blame for certain ills of the modern Church and world. The critics of *natura pura* whom we shall consider in this study hold that this scholastic concept has contributed to the marginalisation of Christianity in the Western world. Alone or in combination with other principles, the idea of pure nature is made to carry the blame for atheistic humanism, capitalism, secularism, and an array of other phenomena which the critics of pure nature find objectionable.

3. Defining “Integralism”

These major objections to the notion of pure nature are associated with the challenge of Catholic “integralism.” This is a relatively new name for an older modern phenomenon. Perhaps the least pejorative way to describe integralism is to say that it is a programme or world-view which deplores “the alienation and anomie of industrial society” (things like political liberalism, capitalism, and religious pluralism) and instead pursues “arduous strategies of economic practice and cultural meaning”¹¹ with the goal of establishing a total programme of social life and culture, in which everything conduces to the formation and preservation of a single, clear communal identity. As a political programme, integralism normally presents itself as a new “third way” between Right and Left, a way of getting beyond customary political divisions, organising social institutions for the attainment of specific results, and forging individuals into an autarkic socialist or communitarian society.¹²

Integralism was not a word that Henri de Lubac used to describe his own work or goal. This is not because de Lubac lacked enthusiasm for socialism or for the goals of social reorganisation. The explanation lies rather in the fact that, until the 1990s, the French word *intégralisme* was practically indistinguishable from *intégrisme*. Even now, the distinction is not universally recognised in the French-speaking world, and requires explanation.

¹¹ See Douglas R. Holmes, *Integral Europe: Fast-Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), ix–3.

¹² See Holmes, *Integral Europe*, 13–16; and Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), especially 153–86.

In the early 20th century, *intégrisme* and *intégralisme* were used interchangeably to name two allied but distinct phenomena.¹³ First, both *intégrisme* and *intégralisme* denoted a type of reactionary political theory which, in opposition to liberal and republican traditions, favoured the establishment of integrally Catholic confessional states. Second, both names also denoted programmes of defensive intellectual conservatism: resisting new theories in philosophy, history, and biblical studies, these integralists sought to strengthen and extend the neo-scholastic tradition in all its details, in the name of integrally Catholic thinking. Often, but not always, political and theological integralism overlapped.

In today's French, the word *intégriste* is still used to indicate religious conservatives or “fundamentalists,” usually Christian or Muslim, who favour a more religious state and who hold theological views of an intransigent and reactionary kind. The term is largely pejorative, and does not always imply an objective standard of description.¹⁴ The word *intégraliste*, however, has become uncommon and, as we shall see, has been given a new meaning in some circles.

According to *Le Grand Robert*, the word *intégriste* can be dated to the year 1894, and came into French as a direct borrowing of the new Spanish word *integrista*. This detail of history is by no means unimportant, since it points to the political and cultural root of today's arguments about integralism and human nature.

¹³ This appears to be true not only of French, but also of English and German. See *See Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (1957), s.v. “Integralismus.”

¹⁴ See *Le Grand Robert de la langue Française*, 2nd ed., 6 vols. (Paris: Dictionnaires le Robert, 2001), s.v. “intégriste,” but also s.vv. “intégrisme” and “intégralisme.”

To be an *integrista* in Spain or an *intégriste* in France in the late 19th and early 20th centuries meant being a nationalist and an opponent of 19th-century liberalism. Although integrists were concerned with the Catholic faith, this does not mean they were all ardent believers. Some integrists embraced religion mainly as a feature of their national culture, while others more cynically favoured the Catholic faith as a means to maintaining social order and restraining public vice.

In France and Spain alike, integrism flourished in the wake of embarrassing military defeats. The humiliations of the Franco-Prussian war (which cost France Alsace-Lorraine) and the Spanish-American war (which cost Spain Cuba and the Philippines) were subsequently explained as the result of spiritual weakness. France and Spain had suffered defeat, not because they went to war against militarily superior foes, but because they had faltered morally. The way back to glory was to regain the national spirit, a step which naturally involved renewed adherence to the Catholic faith. In this way the reclamation of national glory (and territory), religious revival, and the establishment of a Catholic national identity came to be seen as a single goal. Thus the editors of *La Voz Católica de Madrid* argued in 1899, for example, that liberal democracy could never regenerate the nation, since the liberals ignored the root cause of Spain's disaster: "immorality and the lack of religion have hurled Spain into an abyss of calamities."¹⁵ This mood on the Catholic right remained strong throughout the 20th century, and is evident in the support lent by French and Spanish Catholics to such programmes as *Action Française*, the National Revolution

¹⁵ As cited in translation in William J. Callahan, *The Catholic Church in Spain: 1875–1998* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 44.

of Philippe Pétain's government, and the regime of Generalissimo Francisco Franco.¹⁶ Whatever may be said in defence of these political and cultural programmes, they were by no means simply or unproblematically Catholic; in each case, Catholic ties to partisan and anti-liberal politics reduced the appeal of the Catholic faith and undermined the moral credibility of the Church.

In theology, the integrists (or integralists) were those whom historians often call the anti-Modernists. These theological integrists were concerned with the evils of Kantian epistemology, secular readings of the bible, and the range of intellectual innovations that threatened, or seemed to threaten, the realistic affirmation of the Creed. Very often, Catholic doctrinal integralism went hand in hand with socio-political integralism—that is, with the conviction that the only fitting place to live was in a thoroughly Catholic society, with the Catholic faith popularly embraced, enshrined in law, and thoroughly shaping all public institutions.

Since the 1980s, some authors, including John Milbank, have argued that in theology and politics alike, *intégrisme* and *intégralisme* ought to be distinguished. The former, it is said, bespeaks a totalitarian impulse, and connotes irrational dogmatism. In other words, no one calls himself an *intégriste*. However, there are those who are neither “reactionary” nor “fundamentalist” who desire a culturally

¹⁶ See Eugene Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), and Hilari Ragner, *Gunpowder and Incense: The Catholic Church and the Spanish Civil War*, trans. Gerald Howson (London: Routledge, 2007). For an overview of early 20th-century Catholic politics see Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe: 1918–1945* (London: Routledge, 1997).

unified society. Some of this party have come to call their position “*intégraliste*.” They advocate the building of an “integral” or “total” society, but do not see themselves as propagating totalitarianism.¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, not everyone agrees that such a distinction between bad *intégrisme* and good *intégralisme* is realistic. Problematic though the term “integralism” may be, however, we employ it in the present study because it is used by John Milbank, who is himself one of the principal authors under examination.¹⁸ We admit that it is somewhat anachronistic to refer to de Lubac as an “integralist,” yet this usage is current and has merit.

4. The Integralist Challenge of Henri de Lubac

We turn now to the figure of Henri de Lubac, the theologian whose critique of pure nature is among our primary concerns. De Lubac¹⁹ was born to a comfortable banker’s family in Cambrai, in northern France, in 1896, and moved to Lyons with his family as an infant. At the age of 17 he joined the Society of Jesus. Because a

¹⁷ The Tunisian scholar and politician Chokri Hamrouni makes this claim, arguing that the West fails to appreciate the Arab and Muslim experience of social unity. He considers *l’intégralisme* a helpful name for indicating the sort of total society many Muslims desire, and against which the West is wrongly prejudiced. See Chokri Hamrouni, “Intégrisme: le grand malentendu,” 28 March 2002, *Aqlamonline*, http://cprtunisie.net/article/.php3?id_article=60 (accessed 7 February 2007). Not all French speakers recognise a distinction between *l’intégrisme* and *l’intégralisme*, and none is indicated in *Le Grand Robert*.

¹⁸ See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 206. Unless otherwise noted, all references to *Theology and Social Theory* are to the 2nd ed.

¹⁹ By convention, Henri de Lubac’s surname retains the particle “de” in English, so that he is commonly called “de Lubac” (rather than simply “Lubac,” as would otherwise be correct).

1904 law banned members of religious orders from all teaching on French soil, this meant going off-shore, to England. The young de Lubac began his two-year novitiate in 1913, but with the coming of the Great War in 1914 he was drafted and sent to the front as an infantryman. He fought in Flanders until receiving a serious head wound, returning to the Society in 1916 to recover and to resume his training. (He would suffer from debilitating headaches, earaches, and dizziness until a successful surgery in 1954.) After the war, de Lubac remained on British soil until 1926, studying letters at Canterbury (1919–20), philosophy on the channel island of Jersey (1920–23), and theology at Ore Place, Hastings (1924–26). When French anti-clerical laws were relaxed, he returned to Lyons to complete his ordination studies in the restored Jesuit scholasticate at Fourvière.²⁰

The details of de Lubac's studies and their wider cultural and theological circumstances are treated below, in chapter six. It suffices for now to explain that, while still a scholastic (an unordained student), de Lubac was urged by one of his professors, Joseph Huby, to contrast certain texts of Thomas Aquinas with the commentary on those same texts by the great 16th-century Dominican Thomist, Thomas de Vio (Cajetan). De Lubac found what he believed was a radical misunderstanding of Thomas by Cajetan, and indeed by Thomists in general. In de Lubac's view, Cajetan had corrupted authentic Thomism by introducing the destructive idea of pure nature into his discussion of the human desire for God, thereby inadvertently leading Catholic theology to infect Europe with an ideology of

²⁰ See the newly translated life of de Lubac, Rudolf Voderholzer's *Meet Henri de Lubac: His Life and Work*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007).

anti-religious secularism. The nub of this claim is that the scholastic idea of *natura pura* made Catholic thinking about human nature dualistic or extrinsicist, inasmuch as the thought of human nature, apart from the supernatural, invited and validated atheistic humanism.

De Lubac wrote and worked on a variety of theological projects over his lifetime. His largest undertaking was the production of the *Sources chrétiennes* series, which he supervised alongside his younger confrere, Jean Daniélou. This famous series, which today contains more than 500 volumes, provides the works of early Christian authors with translation (into French) and commentary, and was originally meant to nourish the ordinary literate Catholic. From the beginning, however, *Sources chrétiennes* quietly declared its superiority to scholastic and scientific theology, identifying itself as the key to “sources of spiritual life and teaching” that scholasticism allegedly ignored.²¹ This drew criticism from the Dominican M.-M. Labourdette and others, who resented the implication that contemporary Thomism was spiritually insipid and failed to produce anything besides dull seminary manuals.²²

De Lubac challenged the theological establishment with other undertakings in the 1930s, but never more directly than by extending and publishing, in article form,

²¹ “Note liminaire du no. 1 de la Collection,” quoted in trans. in Brian Daley, “The *Nouvelle Théologie* and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and the Science of Theology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005), 368.

²² See M-M Labourdette et al., *Dialogue théologique, Pièces du débat entre La Revue Thomiste d’une part et les R.R. P.P. de Lubac, Daniélou, Bouillard, Fessard, von Balthasar, S.J., d’autre part* (Les Arcades: Saint-Maximin, 1947).

the work he had begun in the scholasticate on Cajetan's interpretation of St Thomas.²³ As the Second World War broke out, de Lubac was composing this material into a book, which he completed by 1942 and which appeared in print in 1946. This was his *Surnaturel, études historiques*. It drew a level of attention that his earlier articles had not, and ignited one of the great disputes of 20th-century theology. De Lubac responded to *Surnaturel's* early critics in his 1949 article, "Le mystère du surnaturel," which appeared in his Jesuit province's journal, *Revue des sciences religieuses*.

In *Surnaturel* and "La mystère du surnaturel," de Lubac contends that the idea of pure nature was a novelty imposed on the theology of Aquinas by his later commentators, chiefly Denys the Carthusian (1402–1471) and Cajetan (1469–1534). According to de Lubac, the Church's condemnations of Baianism and Jansenism in the 16th, 17th, and early 18th centuries left theology with the false impression that the notion of pure nature had been confirmed and adopted by the Magisterium as a proper part of Catholic doctrine.

Against this impression, de Lubac argued that, although Jansenism and Baianism had been rightly condemned, their rejection of the ideas of Denis and Cajetan had not been mentioned in the condemnations; and therefore, said de Lubac,

²³ Stephen J. Duffy provides the references to these articles in his *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1992), 66, n.2. The original articles are "Apologétique et Théologie," *Nouvelle revue théologie* 57 (1930): 361–78; "Deux Augustiniens fourvoyés: Baius et Jansenius," *Recherches de sciences religieuses* 2 (1931): 422–33 and 513–40; "Remarques sur l'histoire du mot 'surnaturel'," *Nouvelle revue théologie* 61 (1934): 350–70; and "La reconte de 'superadditum' et de 'supernaturale' dans la théologie médiévale," *Revue de moyen age latin* 1 (1945): 27–34. Since *Surnaturel* received its *imprimatur* in 1942, the last of these articles must have been written by that year; its appearance in *Revue de moyen age latin* was probably delayed by the war.

we must not suppose that the idea of pure nature has somehow been ratified, or made an obligatory part of the Catholic conceptual repertoire. Touching only lightly on the actual writings of Aquinas and his commentators, de Lubac went on to aver that scholasticism had abandoned the genuine views of St Thomas insofar as it had adopted the idea of pure nature.

Finally, de Lubac claimed that the idea of pure nature was, in fact, a major theological contribution to the loss and marginalisation of faith among Europeans. By advancing a concept of human nature that prescinded from our supernatural end (that is, by advancing the concept of pure nature), late scholasticism, according to de Lubac, had unwittingly taught Europe to put God aside and to organise itself without reference to religion. To reverse the consequent disasters of secularism, atheism, and totalitarianism, de Lubac wished to begin by exposing what he saw as the whole growth's deadly root: namely the pseudo-Thomistic idea of pure nature.

De Lubac's argument with the Thomists about history and sound doctrine could, no doubt, have continued for many years. But even in 1946 the handwriting was already on the wall: Pope Pius XII was not happy with the criticism of scholastic theology, and *L'Osservatore Romano* carried at least two papal allocutions (one to the Jesuits' 29th General Congregation, and one to the Dominicans' 1946 General Chapter) denouncing "the new theology" and its attempts to undermine the perennial truths of the scholastic tradition.²⁴

²⁴ See Daley, "The *Nouvelle Théologie*," 378, n. 54. Daley cites *L'Osservatore Romano* of 18 and of 22 September 1946. Note that de Lubac himself was present at the Jesuits' 1946 General Congregation; see Rudolf Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac*, 65–6.

One year after de Lubac's response to his critics in "Le mystère du surnaturel," he and a number of other Jesuits were abruptly removed from Fourvière and from teaching, evidently because their superiors considered them theologically unreliable. De Lubac was sent to Paris, and upon his arrival there he received a copy of Pius XII's new encyclical, *Humani generis*, which many saw as an explanation for the progressive Jesuits' removal from the classroom. In the encyclical Pius lamented the growth of religious and moral "discord and aberration"²⁵ among Catholic intellectuals, asserting that by evasive books and articles, and by more directly worded lectures and covert papers, certain unnamed Catholics were "daring seriously to question whether theology and its methods, as are found and approved in theological schools, should not merely be perfected but rather entirely reformed."²⁶ One of the Pope's great concerns was the "neglect, or rejection, or devaluation" of the

²⁵ See Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Humani generis*, AAS 42 (1950): 561–78, n. 1. "Humani generis in rebus religiosis ac moralibus discordia et aberratio a veritate probis omnibus, imprimisque fidelibus sincerisque Ecclesiae filiis, vehementissimi doloris fons et causa semper fuere, praesertim vero hodie, cum ipsa culturae christianae principia undique offensa cernimus."

²⁶ See *Humani generis* n. 11. "[H]odie non desunt qui eo usque procedere audeant ut serio quaestionem moveant num theologia eiusque methodus, quales in scholis ecclesiastica approbante auctoritate vigent, non modo perficiendae, verum etiam omnino reformandae sint, ut regnum Christi quocumque terrarum, inter homines cuiusvis culturae vel cuiusvis opinionis religiosae efficacius propagetur."

“vocabulary and notions which are customarily used in scholastic theology,”²⁷ a trend which he linked to the desire “to free dogma from terminology long received in the Church and from the philosophical notions of Catholic doctors, that in the exposition of Catholic teaching there might be a return to the mode of speaking used in holy scripture and by the saintly Fathers.”²⁸ Although Pius acknowledged the zeal and good will of some who opposed scholasticism or were otherwise promoting unwelcome innovations (for example, in biblical studies or in biology and anthropology),²⁹ he warned that no innovations could be allowed to detract from the received body of scholastic teaching, “for this philosophy, acknowledged and received by the Church, protects the genuine value of human knowledge, the stable

²⁷ See *Humani generis* n. 17. “Quapropter negligere, vel reiecte, vel suo valore privare tot ac tanta, quae pluries saeculari labore a viris non communis ingenii ac sanctitatis, invigilante sacro Magisterio, nec sine Sancti Spiritus lumine et ducta, ad accuratius in dies fidei veritates exprimendas mente concepta, expressa ac perpolita sunt, ut eorumdem in locum coniecturales notiones sufficiantur ac quaedam fluxae ac vagae novae philosophiae dictiones, quae ut flos agri hodie sunt et cras decident, non modo summa est imprudentia, verum etiam ipsum dogma facit quasi arundinem vento agitatum. Despectus autem vocabulorum ac notionum quibus theologi scholastici uti solent, sponte ducit ad enervandam theologiam, ut aiunt speculativam, quam, cum ratione theologica innitatur, vera certitudine carere existimant.” See also n. 32, where Pius complains that scholasticism is being attacked as outdated and rationalistic.

²⁸ See *Humani generis* n. 14. “Quod autem ad theologiam spectat, quorumdam consilium est dogmatum significationem quam maxime extenuare; ipsumque dogma a loquendi ratione in Ecclesia iamdiu recepta et a philosophicis notionibus penes catholicos doctores vigentibus liberare, ut in catholica exponenda doctrina ad Sacrae Scripturae sanctorumque Patrum dicendi modum redeatur.”

²⁹ See *Humani generis* nn. 8, 10, 11, 12, 13.

principles of metaphysics—of sufficient reason, causality, and finality—and, finally, the ability to ascertain certain and immutable truth.”³⁰

In the eyes of some of the encyclical’s readers, de Lubac himself was clearly indicated by the complaint in *Humani generis* n. 26 that “other [erring theologians] compromise the gratuity of the supernatural order by saying that God cannot create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision.”³¹

The papal judgement in *Humani generis* included a practical remedy. Before the disease became an epidemic, all bishops and superiors general were obliged to take “the most diligent care” that the offending opinions “not be advanced in schools, nor in conferences, nor in any writings whatsoever, and that they not be conveyed in

³⁰ See *Humani generis* n. 29. “In comperto est quanti Ecclesia humanam rationem faciat, quod pertinet ad existentiam unius Dei personalis certo demonstrandum, itemque ad ipsius christianae fidei fundamenta signis divinis invicte comprobanda; parique modo ad legem, quam Creator animis hominum indidit, rite exprimendam; ac denique ad aliquam mysteriorum intellegentiam assequendam eamque fructuosissimam. Hoc tamen munus ratio tum solum apte ac tuto absolvere poterit, cum debito modo exculpta fuerit; nempe cum fuerit sana illa philosophia imbuta, quae veluti patrimonium iamdudum exstat a superioribus christianis aetatibus traditum, atque adeo altioris etiam ordinis auctoritatem habet, quia ipsum Magisterium Ecclesiae, eius principia ac praecipua asserta, a viris magni ingenii paulatim patefacta ac definita, ad ipsius divinae «revelationis» trutinam vocavit. Quae quidem philosophia in Ecclesia agnita ac recepta, et verum sincerumque cognitionis humanae valorem tuetur, et metaphysica inconcussa principia—rationis nempe sufficientis, causalitatis, et finalitatis—ac demum certae et immutabilis veritatis assecutionem.”

³¹ *Humani generis* n. 26. “Alii veram «gratuitatem» ordinis supernaturalis corruptunt, cum autement Deum entia intellectui praedita condere non posse, quin eadem ad beatificam visionem ordinet et vocet.”

any way either to the clergy or to the laity.”³² Accordingly, de Lubac’s superiors removed *Surnaturel* from the open shelves of Jesuit libraries, told him to stop writing on nature and grace, and required that he submit all future writings to review by a Jesuit censor in Rome. De Lubac submitted to these restrictions, though not happily, and turned his scholarly attention to Buddhism. He was comforted by a message of general encouragement from Pius XII, communicated through the pope’s Jesuit confessor, Augustin Bea, and was honoured by a summons to Rome in 1959: Pope John XXIII chose him to serve as a *peritus* in the preparations for Vatican II, a position he filled until the council’s conclusion in 1965. When Jean-Baptiste Janssens, the Jesuit General, died in 1964, however, de Lubac was ready— notwithstanding his duties at the council—to return to the question of the supernatural with a pair of monographs he called his twins: *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* and *Le mystère du surnaturel* appeared in 1965, published by Aubier, Paris (which had also distributed *Surnaturel*). These volumes repeated and expanded the claims he had made twenty and thirty-five years earlier, concerning Cajetan, pure nature, the natural desire for God, and the corruption of Thomism.

In 1960s and 70s, relatively little attention was paid to de Lubac’s two new volumes, at least compared with the furore his original scholarship had aroused in

³² See *Humani generis* nn. 40–41. “At novimus quoque novus eiusmodi opiniones incautos allicere posse; ideoque principiis obstare malumus, quam inveterato iam morbo medicinam praestare. [41] Quapropter, re coram Domino mature perpensa ac considerata, ne a sacro Nostro officio deficiamus, Episcopis ac Religiosorum Sodalitatum Moderatoribus, gravissime eorum onerata conscientia, praecipimus, ut quam diligentissime curent, ne in scholis, in coetibus, in scriptis quibuslibet opiniones huiusmodi proferantur, neve cleris vel christifidelibus quovis modo tradantur.”

1946. Greater attention was paid to the work of Karl Rahner. For a host of reasons, the scholastic establishment crumbled, not least because the council itself had seemed (for example, in *Optatum totius* n. 16) to vindicate de Lubac and other historical theologians by requiring that seminary courses propose their subject matter in historical or genetic order, rather than in the customary theological sequence.

De Lubac gave various lectures and papers on the theology of grace after the council, and in 1980 published yet another book, his *Petite catéchèse sur Nature et Grâce*. This final volume is more irenic in tone than his earlier works on grace, but retracts nothing essential. Being more meditative and less historical than either *Surnaturel* or the 1965 “twins,” the *Brief Catechesis* may well be de Lubac’s most-read work on theological anthropology; in is unquestionably the most useful for studying his interpretation of Vatican II and of the evolution of 20th-century Catholic theology.

Henri de Lubac was made a Cardinal by Pope John Paul II in 1983, and died in 1991 at the age of 95. Having made tremendous contributions to theology and patristics in the course of the 20th century, he was nevertheless saddened in his declining years by what he perceived to be his own marginalisation in the Society of Jesus. He was also troubled by what he saw as the spiritual decline of the Church in the 1970s and 80s.³³

In one of his memoirs, de Lubac attributes the success of his work in the area of nature and grace to *Humani generis* and that encyclical’s consequences. He writes,

³³ See Christopher J. Walsh, “De Lubac’s Critique of the Postconciliar Church,” *Communio* (English) 19 (1992): 404–32.

“I sincerely believe that if, at that date [1950] some of my writings had not been—or had not seemed to be—publicly repudiated by the authorities, the importance that was sometimes attributed to them afterwards would not have been recognised.”³⁴ Continuing in the same memoir, he reflects that his real or apparent repudiation in *Humani generis* ensured that he would thereafter be liberated from the strictures of formal theology.³⁵ This, in de Lubac’s view, was an advantage, inasmuch as his life’s work was not the articulation of a scientific understanding but, as it were, the weaving of a new Christian tapestry out of the threads of tradition. “In this multi-coloured fabric,” he continues, “[we may] discern a certain texture that . . . creates a unity. Without claiming to open up any new avenues of thought, I have sought rather, without any antiquarianism, to make known some of the great common areas of Catholic tradition.”³⁶ To make this tradition loved and to show its fertility, de Lubac undertook, as he said, a “reading across the centuries” rather than “a critical

³⁴ Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances That Occasioned His Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 143. French p. 146, “Je crois sincèrement que si, à cette date [1950], plusieurs de mes écrits n’avaient pas été ou paru être publiquement désavoués par l’autorité, on ne leur aurait pas reconnu l’importance qui leur fut parfois attribués depuis lors.”

³⁵ See de Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 143.

³⁶ De Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 143. French p. 146–7, “On chercherait en vain dans l’ensemble de publications si diverses les éléments d’une synthèse philosophique ou théologique—ou, comme certains l’ont dit, «gnoséologique»—vraiment personnelle, que ce soit pour la critiquer ou pour l’adopter. Dans ce tissu bariolé qui s’est constitué peu à peu au gré des enseignements, des ministères, des situations, des appels de tout ordre, il me semble toutefois discerner une certaine trame qui, vaille que vaille, en fait l’unité. Sans prétendre frayer de nouvelles avenues de pensée, j’ai plutôt cherché, sans aucun passéisme, à faire nonnaître quelques-uns des grands lieux communs de la tradition catholique.”

application to specific points.”³⁷ We will look more closely at the precise pattern and texture of de Lubac’s work on grace and pure nature in chapter six, attending to its larger context and to his impressionistic treatment of scientific theology.

During de Lubac’s lifetime and in the years since his death, a number of studies have qualified or cast doubt on his reading of Thomas Aquinas and the Thomistic tradition. Recent works include the special 2001 double issue of *Revue thomiste*, Florent Gaboriau’s *Thomas d’Aquin en dialogue*,³⁸ and the widely-discussed doctoral dissertation of Lawrence Feingold.³⁹ More favourable discussions have also appeared, such as John Milbank’s *The Suspended Middle*,⁴⁰ Tracey Rowland’s *Culture and the Thomist Tradition*,⁴¹ and the as-yet unpublished dissertation of Robert F. Gotcher.⁴²

In the 20th century, de Lubac was not the only theologian critical of traditional scholasticism, and especially of its perceived extrinsicism with regard to the relationship of nature and grace. Indeed, the better-known and arguably more

³⁷ De Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 143. French p. 147, “J’ai voulu la faire aimer, en montrer la fécondité toujours actuelle. Pareille tâche comportait plus de lecture à travers les siècles que d’application critique à des points déterminés”

³⁸ See Florent Gaboriau, *Thomas d’Aquin en dialogue* (Paris: FAC-éditions, 1993).

³⁹ See Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Rome: Apollinare Studi, 2001).

⁴⁰ See John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

⁴¹ See Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁴² See Robert F. Gotcher, “Henri de Lubac and Communio: The Significance of His Theology of the Supernatural for an Interpretation of Gaudium et Spes” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 2002).

influential wing of modern theological anthropology draws, not on de Lubac, but on the work of the distinguished German Jesuit, Karl Rahner. Rahner's approach has sometimes been described as one of "naturalising the supernatural."⁴³ Rahner, famously, argues for a universal "supernatural existential," a supernatural orientation and receptivity to God in the basic structures of human thought and existence. He keeps *pure nature* as a "residual" or "remainder concept" (*ein Restbegriff*), a necessarily imperfect estimate of what human nature would be without the supernatural existential.⁴⁴ Taking Rahner's approach, theology shifts in the direction of anthropology: human experience and the actual human condition (always already shaped by grace) become not only a central theological concern, but a proper source or authority for theology.⁴⁵

⁴³ The expressions "naturalising the supernatural" and "supernaturalising the natural" are used in several sources, without attribution. See S. Joel Garver, "Rahner and De Lubac on Nature and Grace," n.d., <http://joelgarver.com/writ/theo/naturegrace.htm> (accessed 7 February 2007); Joseph A. Komonchak, "Returning from Exile: Catholic Theology in the 1930s," in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 43; and Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 224.

⁴⁴ See Karl Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 301–3. See also Patrick Burke, *Reinterpreting Rahner: A Critical Study of His Major Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 55–56.

⁴⁵ See Burke, *Reinterpreting Rahner*, 47–72, and William Dych, *Karl Rahner* (New York: Continuum, 1992), 32–48. On anthropology as a *locus theologicus* see Harvey D. Egan, "Theology and Spirituality," Stephen J. Duffy, "Experience of Grace," and Philip Endean, "Has Rahnerian Theology a Future?," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13–28, 43–62, and 281–96, respectively.

The integralism of de Lubac is like that of Rahner inasmuch as both centre on the natural human orientation toward God. De Lubac, however, does not favour any elaboration of the idea of pure nature, even as a residual concept. He believes instead that this notion is a misleading and mischievous fiction, an idea implying that a “humanity” of some sort actually exists (or once existed) independently of God’s grace and of a supernatural destiny. Without its supernatural orientation, says de Lubac, human nature would not be itself—it would be *another* nature. Hence de Lubac is often described as “supernaturalising the natural,” defining human nature itself in such a way that no *pure* or non-supernaturally-oriented humanity can be spoken of or even imagined.

5. The Integralist Challenge of John Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy

Henri de Lubac’s theological critique of pure nature has been further elaborated by John Milbank and the theologians of the Radical Orthodoxy movement (hereafter RO). Milbank considers de Lubac one of the 20th century’s two “truly great” theologians.⁴⁶ His greatness is said to consist, above all, in his exposing the fraudulence of the idea of pure nature. RO agrees with de Lubac that this notion is a fundamental error with grave consequences for Western culture. In a wide-ranging philosophical and theological argument, Milbank proposes that the idea of pure nature was dormant until the late mediaeval period. When the idea awoke, so to speak, it

⁴⁶ John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 104. The other “great” is the Russian Orthodox theologian Fr. Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944).

propelled Christendom into decadence and spawned the Reformation, Revolutions, and Enlightenment—all of which are to be regretted.⁴⁷ Hence “the main historical target of Radical Orthodoxy is not the Reformation but rather late Scholasticism,”⁴⁸ since it was late scholasticism that methodically articulated and canonised the idea of pure nature.

Milbank and RO, however, go well beyond the conclusions of de Lubac. As we shall see, Milbank rejects not only atheistic humanism, but all forms of secularity. We shall see that he denies the validity of all non-theological knowledge, and is committed to radical Christian politics and to sweeping socio-cultural criticism in ways de Lubac was not. In RO’s perspective, no sphere of life or society, no art or science, can be autonomous or self-sufficient: everyone and everything is an integral part of a single whole, and this whole can only be ordered and understood in a fully Christian theological vision.

Milbank’s hope is that, by exposing *natura pura* as a theological error, he will contribute to the crafting of a new modern world. As Milbank writes, “Radical Orthodoxy, although it opposes the modern, also seeks to save it. It espouses, not the pre-modern, but an alternative version of modernity.”⁴⁹ We will consider the shape of that alternative modernity more carefully in due course, as well as the narrative of

⁴⁷ John Milbank, “The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy,” in *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming (Aldershot, HAM, UK: Ashgate, 2000), 44.

⁴⁸ John Milbank, “Alternative Protestantism: Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition,” in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition*, ed. James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthius (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 26–7.

⁴⁹ Milbank, “Programme of Radical Orthodoxy,” 45.

intellectual history whereby RO would justify its vision of an integrally Christian modern society.

As we have already mentioned, John Milbank is an important figure in the development of the distinction between “integrism” and “integralism.” He identifies the former with clericalism and political reaction, writing that Vatican II “was rightly concerned to repudiate” it, and that integrism “insisted upon a clerical and hierarchic dominance over all the affairs of secular life” and was “founded upon a ‘totalizing’ theology which presents a complete system, whose details cannot be questioned without compromising the whole.”⁵⁰

In contrast to the nationalist and populist movements which also employ this term today, Milbank’s integralism is conceived as the fruit of grace and of eucharistic community life. His vision of how the Kingdom of God may come to be realised on earth does not posit the need for strong centralisation or for an absolutist state. Integralism, as presented by Milbank and RO, is rational and critical, but not systematic: this is why it is sometimes called a sensibility or a tendency, rather than a theological or political school.

Finally, mention should be made that John Milbank is by no means the only theologian to make Henri de Lubac’s theology of nature and grace foundational for his own theological criticism of Western liberal culture. Outstanding among these is

⁵⁰ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 206–7.

the great Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar.⁵¹ Among English speakers, we may instance Catholic theologians David L. Schindler⁵² and Tracey Rowland.⁵³ De Lubac is also said to have influenced Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, at least in their personal theological views.⁵⁴

6. The Plan of this Study

In order to discover what place the notion of pure nature held in Catholic theology before the early modern period, and in order to describe and criticise the treatment of this notion by Henri de Lubac and John Milbank, we proceed according to the following plan.

In chapter two, we explore the Hellenistic origins of the idea of nature (*physis*). Surveying the early church's use of the relevant Hellenistic terminology, we indicate five phenomena that are important precursors to the scholastic language of *natura pura*. These five precursors are (i) the use of the word *nature* (*physis*) in the Septuagint and New Testament; (ii) the Jewish and Christian doctrines of election,

⁵¹ See David L. Schindler, "The Significance of Hans Urs von Balthasar in the Contemporary Cultural Situation," in *Glory, Grace, and Culture: The Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Ed Block Jr. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2005), 16–36.

⁵² See David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

⁵³ See Rowland, *Thomism and Catholic Culture*.

⁵⁴ See Rocco Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II*, trans. Paolo Guietti and Francesca Murphy (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 198, and Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (London: Continuum, 1988, 2005), 145, 289–90. See also Walter Kasper, "The Theological Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*," *Communio* (English) 23 (1996), 121–40.

which contrast the life of the chosen people with natural life; (iii) the recognition of a neutral political space in the course of Christian assimilation to the Roman Empire; (iv) the Church's, and especially St Augustine's, rejection of millenarianism and affirmation of terrestrial human finality; and (v) the use of "the World" as a spatial metaphor distinguishing the sacred, the ecclesial and the monastic from a space that is purely or merely natural.

Chapters three and four respond in depth to de Lubac's critique of Thomism by showcasing six areas in which St Thomas himself considers human nature apart from grace and the supernatural vocation. First, in chapter three, we examine Thomas's treatment of human mortality, the infused virtues and gifts, and limbo. Next, in chapter four, we look to his writings on kingship, natural law, and the epistemology of the sciences.⁵⁵ We argue that in considering all six of these topics, Aquinas invokes and presupposes the notion of pure nature, often quite plainly.

In chapter five, we move to early modern theology, and to the Jansenist controversy which took up so much of de Lubac's theological attention. Without disputing the fact that the Church's condemnations of Jansenism and Baianism said nothing about *natura pura*, we aim to show how the larger political and theological context in which these condemnations became necessary—a context which de Lubac ignores—reveals the injustice and inadequacy of the French Jesuit's attempt to blame European secularisation on the scholastic theology of pure nature. Our point is that,

⁵⁵ I regret that I have been unable to examine Matthew Levering's latest work, *Biblical Natural Law: A Theocentric and Teleological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), in time for this study.

ironically, French secularism (*laïcité*) is better understood in relation to the very political and theological context of Jansenism which de Lubac fails to mention.

With a sharper picture of past theology in place, chapter six covers Henri de Lubac's life and arguments in detail. His theology of grace is presented as part of Europe's great loss of cultural confidence after World War One, and as part of a wider reaction against scholasticism. Our concern here is to account for de Lubac's later importance by explaining how he stood for a "lost generation" and spoke to specifically modern interests.

Chapter seven looks at the Radical Orthodoxy movement, which draws heavily on de Lubac's history and theology of grace. Our task here is to explain how the trajectory of de Lubac's work has been continued, at least by one school of theologians. We take Radical Orthodoxy, and particularly its denial of the secular, as an important sign of what de Lubac's theology implies, and also as a sign of why it is not only legitimate and traditional but necessary for Catholic theology to retain the notion of pure nature. The importance of this task, and the dangers attending its neglect, are the concern of our conclusion, chapter eight.

CHAPTER 2

NATURE AND SECULARITY IN PRE-THOMISTIC THEOLOGY

Where did the idea of pure nature originate? For Henri de Lubac and his heirs the usual answer is that *pura natura* was invented by Cardinal Cajetan in the early 16th century.¹ In this chapter I propose another answer, namely that the idea of pure nature, though not the term itself, is at least as old as Hellenistic Christianity. I shall present this investigation under the following four sections:

1. The Term and Idea of “Nature” in Hellenistic Philosophy and in Scripture
2. Pure Nature and the Doctrines of Election and Separation
3. Christian Assimilation and Difference in the Roman Empire
4. Spatial Metaphors: the World vs. the Holy, the Ecclesial, and the Monastic

1. The Term and Idea of “Nature” in Hellenistic Philosophy and in Scripture

We begin with the word *nature* itself, to consider how the remarkable idea it denotes became part of early Christian (and, before that, of Jewish) thought. The word “nature” comes into English, from the Latin *natura*, inheriting a meaning developed in Greek around the word *physis*. Like *natura*, *physis* is from the verb that means “to grow” or “to be born” (*nascor* in Latin, *physo* in Greek), and designates what is born or grows spontaneously. More philosophically, *nature* points to the

¹ Thomas de Vio, OP (1469–1534), of Gaeta in central Italy (formerly Caieta, hence “Cajetan”), was Master General of the Dominicans (1508–1518) before becoming a Cardinal and bishop. He is famous as a commentator on Aquinas and for his confrontation with Luther at Augsburg in 1518.

principle by which particular things are what they are: so we say this or that quality or behaviour is *natural* when we mean it corresponds to what something is. It is in the *nature* of cats, but not ducks, to meow. It is *natural* for people, but not for turtles, to care for their young. *Nature*, however, is not just another word with roots in antiquity—it is, perhaps more than any other term, the telltale fingerprint of Hellenistic thinking. *Nature* is the characteristically Greek answer to the characteristically Greek question of the One and the Many: as Jan Aertsen puts it, *nature* is “the Greek answer to the problem of being,” “a conception that, as no other, is distinctively and essentially Greek.”² To be part of the Hellenistic world, including the world of Rome and Judaism and now the Church, is to think and talk, in some measure at least, about *nature*.

The oldest surviving discussions of nature occur in the remnants of pre-Socratic philosophy. They are concerned with a common problem: when we look around the world, though we see motion and change, we can grasp an underlying continuity. Somehow, underneath or beyond or within the changing multitude, there is some kind of stability, some primordial reality or foundation which persists through all change.³

² Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas’s Way of Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 5–6.

³ See R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945); Paul Edwards, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1967), s.v. “Nature, Philosophical Ideas of”; S. O’Flynn Brennan in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Nature (in philosophy)”; and Jörg Splett and Juan Alfaro in Karl Rahner et al., eds., *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1968–70), s.v. “Nature.”

The ancient cosmologists identified the constant, underlying reality of the world in different ways. Thales nominated water as the most basic reality, Anaximenes air, Democritus atoms, and Heraclitus a kind of fiery flux. Parmenides ventured to say that the changing world is, despite appearances, not really changing at all.⁴ The more abstract or idealistic exception among the pre-Socratics was Pythagoras, who took a cosmological position resembling that later assumed by Socrates and Plato. Together, Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato contended that *physis* belongs to the changing manifold world only in a flimsy, derivative sense. What matters, on this view, is not a lowly primordial stuff but a higher and more real world than the one we see moving. It is the higher world of number, of ideas, or of pure intelligible forms—a world that is only dimly reflected or imitated by the world of matter and sense. Finally, a third sort of explanation came with Aristotle, who explained motion in terms of forms immanent in matter (thus combining Platonic insights on immaterial form with pre-Socratic interest in empirical reality). For Aristotle, *physis* is what things are, prescinding from their matter: it is the principle that accounts for any given thing's acting in whatever particular manner it acts. Thus *nature* belongs, properly speaking, only to natural wholes that move (change) themselves⁵—cabbages and planets and ponies, but not statues or brick walls (artificial wholes) or feet or brains (which are only parts of wholes).

⁴ On the pre-Socratics see W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers: From Thales to Aristotle* (New York: Harper, 1960), 1–62.

⁵ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V.4 (1015a12–19).

The pre-Christian world also thought about “nature as a whole” (*natura rerum*)—roughly what ecologists mean by “nature”—and imagined nature in some sense as personified.⁶ Besides these meanings, nature could also indicate the rural or rustic, as opposed to the artificiality of the urban: this is the nature which comes back and conquers the city-dweller, says Horace, even though we drive her out with a pitchfork.⁷

For Christian theology, pagan Hellenistic philosophy has always been present as an interlocutor, if only in the language, letters and culture in which Christianity flourished.

The Hellenistic word and idea of nature is well-established in Jewish thought by the 1st century AD: it is a commonplace in Philo and Josephus,⁸ and appears in the originally Greek books of the Septuagint.⁹ To see something of how *nature* became Jewish and biblical, it suffices for our purposes to quote the passages where the word *physis* appears. All the common meanings of the Greek word are represented in the Septuagint, from the most literal (nature as something grown or born) to the most

⁶ See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (London: Fontana, 1976), s.v. “nature.”

⁷ See Horace, Epistles I.X, lines 24–25, “Naturam expelles furca, tamen usque recurret / et mala perumpet furtim fastidia victrix” (You may expel nature with a fork, but she will return / a furtive victor, and break false refinements).

⁸ See Helmut Köster in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–76) (hereafter *TDNT*), s.v. “physis.”

⁹ The LXX and NT translations provided here are from the NRSV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), with the word or words representing *physis* printed in boldface. For Catholics 3 and 4 Maccabees are non-canonical, but are valuable witnesses to intertestamental Jewish belief.

abstract (nature as essence), the only exception being nature as a personified agency. I

note the following examples:

- [God] “gave me unerring knowledge of what exists, to know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements” [including] “the **natures** of animals” (Wis 7:20)
- “For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish **by nature**” (Wis 13:1)
- [The whole creation was fashioned anew] “water forgot its fire-quenching **nature**” (Wis 19:20)
- [Pleasure and pain are] “**by nature** concerned with both body and soul” (4 Macc 1:20)
- “When **nature** has granted it to us, why should you abhor eating the very excellent meat of this animal [i.e., pork]? It is senseless not to enjoy delicious things that are not shameful, and wrong to spurn the gifts of **nature**” (4 Macc 5:8–9)
- “Therefore we do not eat defiling food; for since we believe that the law was established by God, we know that in **the nature of things** the Creator of the world in giving us the law has shown sympathy toward us” (4 Macc 5:25)
- “**nature** and companionship and virtuous habits had augmented the affection of family ties” (4 Macc 13:27)
- “O sacred **nature** and affection of parental love, yearning of parents toward offspring, nurture and indomitable suffering by mothers” (4 Macc 15:13)

In the last of these passages just quoted, from the non-canonical book of 4 Maccabees,¹⁰ “nature” names something that competes with the demands of fidelity

¹⁰ 4 Maccabees is included in the LXX and was considered deuterocanonical by some Orthodox churches until the Synod of Jerusalem in 1762.

to the Torah. Indeed, the text suggests that if God had not given Israel the Law then the demands of *physis* would be paramount. This sense of *physis* is perhaps implied in 4 Mac 5:8–9 and 15:13, quoted above, but is explicit in the account of the widow who overcomes *physis* and lets her seven sons be martyred.¹¹ This contrast and competition between natural desire and the demands of “devout reason” (cf. 4 Macc 16:3) is a foundation for thinking about the natural and the supernatural, nature and grace. Although not the main point of the passages referred to, the biblical author presumes that his Jewish readers will appreciate the experience of conflict, that is, of the fact that obedience to the Torah can conflict with natural instinct.

In the New Testament the noun *physis* and its derivatives appear eighteen times. In most of these cases, there is no detectable contrast of natural and supernatural. These uses of *physis* are part of the everyday Greek language, so that anyone fluent in Greek would understand them. They do not presuppose any particular Christian or Jewish belief. For example,

- “their women exchanged **natural** intercourse for **unnatural**” (against nature, *para physin*), “and in the same way also the men, giving up **natural** intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another” (Rom 1:26–27)
- “those who are **physically** uncircumcised” (or “who are **by nature** the uncircumcision”) “but keep the law

¹¹ See 4 Macc 15:25–26 (“For as in the council chamber of her soul she saw mighty advocates—nature, family, parental love, and the rackings of her children—this mother held two ballots, one bearing death and the other deliverance for her children”) and 16:3 (“The lions surrounding Daniel were not so savage . . . as was her innate parental love,” but she “quenched so many and such great emotions with devout reason”).

will condemn you that have the written code and circumcision but break the law” (Rom 2:27)

- “Does not **nature** itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him” (1 Cor 11:14)

(See also Gal 2:15, 4:8; Jas 3:7; 2 Pet 2:12; Jud 1:10.)

But not all references to *physis* in the New Testament are so straightforward. Like 4 Maccabees, some New Testament texts contrast nature with the life of Torah, or with the grace of Christ. In the letter to the Romans, St Paul uses the word *physis* when contrasting the conditions of Jews and Gentiles:

Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do **instinctively** what the law requires (*echonta physei ta tou nomou poiosin*) (Rom 2:14)

At first this use of *physis* seems to refer to a moral law known “by birth” (cf. Gal 2:15) or “by what is innate.” A superficial reading might suggest that this usage is a generalisation about ethnic character, as if “Jewish nature” and “Gentile nature” were being compared. However, Romans 2:14 is not suggesting that Jews and Gentiles are different in nature. On the contrary, this passage speaks of a single human nature, belonging to Jews and Gentiles alike, by which it is possible for Gentiles to know and fulfil certain moral norms which are made known to the Chosen People in the gift of the Torah. As Joseph Fitzmyer explains, in Romans 2:14

Paul does not imply a perfect observance of the Mosaic law by such Gentiles. But what they do, they do *physei*, “by nature, instinctively,” in other words, by the regular, natural order of things, i.e., prescinding from any positive revelation. Following the guidance of *physis*, Gentiles frame rules of conduct for themselves

and know at least some of the prescriptions of the Mosaic Torah.¹²

In one sense, then, the knowledge and observance of Torah is *not* natural; it is not something that is done *physei*, “naturally” or “by instinct.” On the other hand, we find a rather different sense of “nature” being discussed by St Paul later in the same epistle:

For if God did not spare the **natural** branches, perhaps he will not spare you (Rom 11:21)

For if you have been cut from what is **by nature** a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to **nature**, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these **natural** branches be grafted back into their own (Rom 11:24)

Here the Apostle Paul speaks of the Jews as belonging to God *kata physin* (“by birth” or “by nature”). The Gentiles, in contrast, are *kata physin* from a wild olive tree, so that when adopted by God they become Israel only *para physin*—that is, only “contrary to birth” or “against nature.” This contrast, writes Fitzmyer, “suggests the transcendent nature of the vocation to which Gentile Christians have been called. The restoration of the Jewish people, however, will be easier than the call of the Gentiles.”¹³

Yet another way of speaking of the nature(s) of Jews and Gentiles appears in the Letter to the Ephesians. Here the biblical author remarks that all human beings are naturally under God’s wrath for following *epithumia* (evil desire): “we were **by nature** children of wrath, like everyone else” (Eph 2:3). Here Jews and Gentiles are

¹² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 309.

¹³ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 617.

meant equally, so that the one concept and name *physis* is applicable to both. Here *physei* “could mean either ‘character’ or ‘constitution’: children of wrath because of behaviour or children of wrath as human beings.”¹⁴ Whether or not the author of Ephesians is St Paul, either use of *physei* is consonant with Romans 2:14—not, this time, to use Fitzmyer’s words, the “regular, natural order of things . . . , prescinding from any positive revelation” but rather, we might say, the regular order of things without divine intervention. Thus the very next verses in Ephesians are: “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you were saved” (Eph 2:4–5). Here, what happens “by nature,” *physei*, is plainly contrasted to what happens because of grace, *charis*. Even if we interpret Ephesians 2:3 as referring only to fallen nature (which is a problematic reading¹⁵), the fact remains that the category of the natural is complete and intelligible in this text without any reference to the supernatural. Its sense is the same whether we take salvation to mean merely imputed justice (changing nature not at all) or deification.

Finally there is a remarkable use of *physis* at the beginning of the Second Epistle of Peter:

¹⁴ Ernest Best, *Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 211.

¹⁵ See Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Commentary*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 93: “But why are they ‘Children of Wrath ‘by nature’? The phrase does not allow any protological speculations (divine punishment because of original sin) or anthropological reflections (on the natural predisposition of such people) but refers to the natural state in which such people found or still find themselves. It is the same nature which is attributed to the heathen in Wis. 13.1 because of their inadequate recognition of God and their worship of idols: they are ‘foolish by nature’.”

[God's] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become participants of the divine **nature** (2 Pet 1:3–4).

As PHEME PERKINS writes, this soteriology “has the ring of popular stoicized Platonism” and expresses the doctrine of deification that will be “a staple element in later Christian mystical traditions.”¹⁶ Nonetheless, the Christian language of sharing the divine nature differs from Platonic parallels. What separates 2 Peter from Platonic philosophy is described by Jerome NEYREY:

[I]n the perspective of 2 Peter and other Jewish and Christian writings, imperishability is related to sinlessness; for death and corruption entered the world through sin (Gen 2:17). Hence, in the new creation, God's clients are being cleansed of their sins; remaining spotless, they will be restored to the benefaction given the first Adam. Thus, they become deathless because sinless. This understanding precludes any sense of pantheism. And so the Hellenistic phrase “divine nature” contains concepts which are thoroughly biblical, although quite compatible with popular [i.e., philosophical Hellenistic] theology.¹⁷

In the New Testament, then, *physis* appears with a range of meanings not unlike that found in the Septuagint or in the wider Jewish and Hellenistic world. The

¹⁶ PHEME PERKINS, *First and Second Peter, James, and Jude* (Louisville: John Knox, 1995), 168–9. See also DONALD SENIOR, *1 & 2 Peter* (Dublin: Veritas, 1980), 108–9. For comments less patient with Hellenism, see BO REICKE, *The Epistles of James, Peter and Jude*, Anchor Bible vol. 37 (New York: Doubleday, 1964), who includes 2 Pet 1:4 in his broadside against “these Hellenistic figures [that are] only dashes of color used by the authors to make their expositions more attractive” (xxxvi).

¹⁷ JEROME H. NEYREY, *2 Peter, Jude* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 158. See also E. M. SIDEBOTTOM, *James, Jude and 2 Peter* (London: Nelson, 1967), 106–7.

most peculiarly Christian use of *physis* would seem to be in the epistles to the Romans and Ephesians, quoted above, where the life of nature is contrasted with the life of grace and godliness. Less striking but no less important is the remark in Romans 11:24 about the natural, Jewish branches being grafted back onto God's chosen vine. From the Christian point of view, the Jewish people, even if they do not believe in Christ, are nevertheless "*physei*" (by birth or nature) already the Lord's. Here, obviously, *physis* is not being used in a philosophical or scholastic sense. Instead it points to the central Jewish doctrine of election, and to separation of Israel from the nations, which we will now treat.

2. The Doctrines of Election and Separation

As Michael Wyschogrod, David Novak, Kendall Soulen, and others have emphasised, the doctrine of God's election of Israel is definitive for Judaism and therefore inescapable for Christianity.¹⁸ According to Novak, a corollary of election is that the Chosen People belong to two worlds and possess two levels of understanding: the revealed understanding of Torah, on the one hand, and reason's native, non-revealed understanding of human life and action on the other. Rabbi Novak writes:

In simple language, Judaism teaches that before Jews became part of the unique covenanted people . . . at Mount Sinai, we were participants in a more general

¹⁸ See Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God and the People of Israel* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989); David Novak, *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996). See also Shai Held, "The Promise and Peril of Jewish Barthianism: The Theology of Michael Wyschogrod," *Modern Judaism* 23 (2005): 316–26.

world within which there has been a consensus about certain norms always applying there and everywhere. Moreover, not only *were* we Jews participants in the world before Sinai, we *are* still participants in that world even after Sinai.¹⁹

As participants in this world, however, the religious Jew remains a man or woman set apart. “For the doctrine of the covenant teaches that there is a relationship with God, indeed *the* relationship with God, that although *in* the world is clearly not *of* it or *through* it.”²⁰

Except for the contemporary case of religious Zionists actually living in the State of Israel, Jewish life involves having a kind of double or multiple identity,²¹ and has done so ever since the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BC.²² The prophetic-Rabbinic tradition that became traditional or orthodox Judaism developed as it did largely because, in order to survive, Judaism could not remain purely and exclusively Hebrew. Indeed, the good of one’s Gentile neighbours was seen to be a precondition for the Jew’s own flourishing. Hence the prophet Jeremiah tells the Jews in Babylon to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for on its welfare depends your own” (Jer 29:7). After Aristotle’s most famous student, Alexander the Great, conquered Judaea in 332 BC, it was inevitable

¹⁹ David Novak, “Is Natural Law a Border Concept between Judaism and Christianity?”, *Journal of Religious Ethics* 32 (2004): 243. See also David Novak, *Natural Law in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁰ Novak, *Natural Law in Judaism*, 130.

²¹ See Leon Wieseltier, *Against Identity* (New York: William Drenttel, 1996).

²² See Jacob Neusner, *How Important Was the Destruction of the Second Temple in the Formation of Rabbinic Judaism?* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006).

that Judaism come to terms with Hellenism, including with Greek philosophy and its core idea of *physis*.²³ For many Jews the dividing line between their Jewish and their wider human identity seems to have approximated the division *within* each individual's life between the sacred and the profane, a division that according to Abraham Heschel is, for Jewish piety, "the ultimate human dichotomy."²⁴ Although obedience to the Torah may colour every action of the devout, this does not mean those acts are all intrinsically different from those of the Gentiles. Rather the Torah comes as something extrinsic by which even secular actions may be consecrated and ordered toward the sacred. In themselves, however, profane times and profane business are at least potentially common ground between Israel and the nations. "God chooses Israel, but remains the creator and sustainer of all the nations of the world, indeed of the entire universe. God could have chosen some other people, or no people at all."²⁵ Therefore Israel is not radically isolated from humanity any more than the Sabbath is radically isolated from everyday time; rather, whatever the distinction or separation, there remains a Providential relation with the ordinary world and ordinary time. This separation is a great work of divine goodness, for which God is praised at the end of each Sabbath, with this prayer: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who makest a distinction between holy and profane, between light and

²³ See David G. Singer, "God in Nature or Lord of the Universe?: The Encounter of Judaism and Science from Hellenistic Times to the Present," *Shofar* 22/4 (Summer 2004), 80–91.

²⁴ Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 75.

²⁵ Novak, *Election of Israel*, 11.

darkness, between Israel and other nations, between the seventh day and the six working days.”²⁶

Jewish encounters with Hellenism in antiquity varied widely. John Barclay offers a helpful vocabulary for describing this variation: he speaks of *assimilation*, *acculturation* and *accommodation*. First, Jewish integration into the dominant Hellenic culture was strikingly varied, so much so that there is no “normal” pattern of adaptation—we find great variety in comparing different times, different places, and different individuals. This range of *assimilation* runs from utter abandonment of Jewish social distinctiveness (effectively the abandonment of Judaism itself) to total isolation from Gentile society and culture (as practised, for instance, by the Essenes and Therapeutae). Second, Jews differed in their *acculturation* to Hellenism, that is, in the extent to which they took up Greek society’s language, letters and ideas. Some Jews became masters of Hellenistic learning, some never learned basic Greek, and most were somewhere in between. Sometimes but not always, assimilation and acculturation went hand in hand; no *a priori* assumptions are legitimate in this respect. Third and finally, Jews differed widely in the ways they *accommodated* Judaism and Hellenism to one another. Some of those who mastered Greek rhetoric and philosophy used this learning to reinterpret and re-articulate Judaism, some became anti-Jewish in their philhellenism, and others used Hellenistic resources to boost Judaism at the expense of the dominant Greco-Roman civilisation. When facing

²⁶ See J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire*, 26th ed., trans. S. Singer (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1960), 216–7.

the three questions of assimilation (*Should we blend in with the Greeks?*), acculturation (*Should we acquire Greek learning?*) and accommodation (*How shall we, as Jews, use this new learning?*), there was no clear Jewish consensus or typical solution. What common agreement did exist had nothing to do with acculturation or accommodation, but only with assimilation: some practices remained, regardless of acculturation, to set Jews apart. According to Barclay, the common features of Jewish communities in the extremely diverse world of the Mediterranean diaspora were chiefly these: all Jewish communities kept the major feasts and gathered *somewhere* on each Sabbath; all collected an annual tax to fund the Temple in Jerusalem; all somehow revered Moses and the scriptures; and all acknowledged their connection with the rest of scattered Israel. The more publicly observable features that set Jews apart from Gentiles were their dietary restrictions, male circumcision, the Sabbath rest and abstention from all worship but their own. In other words, ethnicity and a limited core of religious observance united Judaism: not a theological orthodoxy, not an attitude toward non-Jews and their culture, not a uniform jurisprudence or a complete style of life.²⁷

The complex diversity of Jewish relations to Hellenism is significant in a Catholic theological discussion of pure nature. The Church arose in precisely this varied Mediterranean community and needed for its survival to confront many of the

²⁷ See John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 88–98. See also Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1984), 39–44 and *A Short History of Judaism: Three Meals, Three Epochs* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 49–122.

same questions about assimilation, acculturation and accommodation. Like the Jews in the Mediterranean diaspora, the early Christians found that they were both inside and outside their world. Even when Christianity became the official Roman religion and the Empire had a Christian majority, the position of cultural dominance did not remove altogether the Christian sense of exile or pilgrim existence. The boundaries Christianity drew between Church and world are comparable to the boundaries of Judaism—and, indeed, as varied. The pagan world of the Roman Empire, in contrast, had been much less concerned with the boundaries between sacred and secular. The dividing lines were far more porous, and far less closely guarded.²⁸

Although Christians thought of themselves corporately as “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16) and “the true circumcision” (Phil 3:3), the New Testament’s vocabulary of Christian election usually does not refer to Israel specifically but to the action of the Divine Persons, as believers are adopted by the Father, in the Son, and sealed with the gift of the Spirit. This Christian doctrine matches and enlarges the Jewish doctrine of Israel’s corporate, corporeal election.

Though the doctrine of election may be unappealing to modern Western sensibilities, its belongs to classical Judaism and of Christianity and received close attention from Augustine, Aquinas, the Council of Trent, and other patristic,

²⁸ By late antiquity in the Roman empire, pagan religion “had been woven into the deepest levels of daily life and culture, the secular included” (Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997], 32), but there are exceptions and complications to take into account. See Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism* as well as his *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) and *Christianizing the Roman Empire: A.D. 100–400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

scholastic and conciliar authorities.²⁹ It denotes a divine choice of particular people in specific contexts within the economy of salvation. It emphasises divine freedom and the transcendent source of God's gifts: God could just as easily have chosen others, or no one. However this difficult doctrine is interpreted (as, for instance, by Augustine, Aquinas, John Calvin, the Fathers of Trent, or Luis de Molina), it does not suggest that the divine election extends simply to human nature as such, as though this nature were automatically (indeed, naturally) the recipient of divine grace or of a supernatural destiny. At this point, we may remark that de Lubac would seem to undermine this doctrine of election by affirming that a supernatural destiny is "inscribed" or inherent in human nature. The critical point is this: human nature must be capable of supernatural elevation—and, therefore, not essentially assured of it on the grounds of nature alone. De Lubac hurries this point by arguing that the gratuity of election is sufficiently accounted for by the fact that God need not have created our nature at all.³⁰

The theology of election has, of course, been controversial, especially where it has seemed to clash with the biblical affirmation of human freedom. No less important and difficult, however, is the question of the Church's relationship to the larger human society. For a great part of Christian history, most believers have lived

²⁹ Election from among the nations (as a new "nation from the nations") seems to have been the dominant theme of Syriac patristic ecclesiology; see Robert Murray, *Symbols of Christ and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 41–68.

³⁰ See chapter 6, below, as well as the treatment of this point by Lawrence Feingold in *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Rome: Apollinare Studi, 2001), 511–20.

in officially Christian states, and when division and disestablishment have come, Catholics have often assumed that these are evils, and that the Church should expect to regain its position of social dominance. History has forced an examination of such assumptions as we look back to early Christianity and the manner in which it faced the challenge of legal existence in the Roman Empire.

3. Christian Assimilation and Difference in the Roman Empire

Like the Old Testament *qahal*, the Christian *ekklesia* is assembled apart from the world—the Church is elected, *e-lecta* (picked out, extracted). But like Israel in the diaspora, Christians must combine separation with integration, being “in the world, but not of it” (cf. Jn 17:6–19). The right balance of these elements, especially given the hostility of the outside world, is struck in more than one way even in the New Testament period. For example, contrast the anti-imperial and anti-mundane language of the Johannine authors (1 Jn 2:15–17, 2 Jn 7–11, 3 Jn 1:7, and Rev 2:13, 6:10–17 and 7:4) with the more conciliatory, pro-imperial texts of Peter and Paul (1 Pet 2:17, Rom 13:7) or the very mild social demands imposed by the Apostles in Acts 15. The more abundant evidence of later centuries witnesses even more thoroughly to this diversity.

One important difference between Israel and the Church is that Christians are not in any natural sense a tribe or *ethnos*. They do not have ties to a land or an earthly ancestry that would lead them, as a group, to prize a particular country or polity. On the whole, the New Testament “shows no awareness of the distinction between

[particular political] regimes, does not indicate any preference for one over the others, imposes none of its own, and makes no concrete recommendations for the reform of the social order.”³¹ What sets Christians apart is that they are what the Apostolic tradition calls *pneumatikoi*, “spiritual” persons who have died in Christ, as opposed to the *psychikoi*, “living” or “natural”³² people who have not received that gift of rebirth.

In this, Christianity contrasts two principles of human life, *psyche* and *pneuma*, which for Hellenistic Judaism had been had been largely interchangeable.³³ In the New Testament, *psyche*, which is the natural life force or the individual life or the self, can be sacrificed (“the Son of Man . . . came . . . to give his *self* as a ransom” Mk 10:45), hated (“If anyone . . . does not hate . . . even his own *life*, he cannot be my disciple” Lk 14:26), and even destroyed (“do not fear those who kill the body but

³¹ Ernest L. Fortin, “Rational Theologians and Irrational Philosophers: A Straussian Perspective,” in *Ernest L. Fortin: Collected Essays*, vol. 2, *Classical Christianity and the Political Order: Reflections on the Theologico-Political Problem*, ed. J. Brian Benestad (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 289. See also Robert M. Grant, *Early Christianity and Society: Seven Studies* (London: Collins, 1978), 97–8.

³² Translating *psychikos* as “natural” may seem to beg the question here, but is a common translation in English bibles. For example, translating *psychikos* in 1 Cor 2:14 the KJV, ASV, NAB, NASB and ESV all give “the natural man.” The NIV speaks of one “without the spirit” and the JB “the unspiritual,” simply making *psychikos* the negation of *pneumatikos*. Another rendering is possible through the Vulgate’s “*homo animalis*” (which reads *anima* for *psyche*): “the sensual man” (Douay-Rheims) or “mere man with his natural gifts” (Knox).

³³ See Richard A. Horsley, “Pneumatikos vs. Psychikos: Distinctions of Spiritual Status among the Corinthians,” *Harvard Theological Review* 69/3-4 (July/October 1976), 269–88.

cannot kill the *soul*” Mt 10:28).³⁴ In contrast, the “spiritual,” especially in St Paul’s language, is that which is governed by the agency of the Holy Spirit: the *pneuma*, not the flesh or the works of the flesh, is what is supremely valuable and everlasting. Eduard Schweizer explains the contrast of *psychikos* (the “natural man”) and *pneumatikos* (the “spiritual man”):

The *pneumatikos* is the man who knows God’s saving work by virtue of the Spirit of God, while the *psychikos* is blind thereto. The contrast is especially sharp in Paul because he recognizes no neutral ground between them. Not to have the *pneuma* of God is to be controlled by the *pneuma tou cosmou*. No less specifically the *soma pneumatikon* is distinguished from the *soma psychikon* [in 1 Cor 15:44–46] In [1 Cor 9:11 and Rom 15:27] earthly things are *sarchika*, though without taking on the character of what is evil. These are simply things that promote natural life, but do not unite with God.³⁵

If Schweizer is correct, then the language of St Paul is a highly developed 1st-century foundation for the scholastic idea of pure nature. It is clear at the very least that the primitive Church considered the “things of the Spirit” unintelligible to those not in Christ: “the [*psychical*] man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are insipid to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are

³⁴ Eduard Schweizer writes that the use of *psyche* in the New Testament “makes possible a neutral estimation of that which belongs to the soul,” that is, a view of the soul as what belongs to “man as such,” as opposed to the life produced in man by the Holy Spirit, which “is understood only as a miracle.” In St Paul’s vocabulary, adds Schweizer, “the psychical is neither sinful as such nor does it incline to the *pneuma*.” See Schweizer, *TDNT*, s.v. “*physikos*.”

³⁵ Schweizer, *TDNT*, s.v. “*pneuma, pneumatikos*.” I have transliterated the Greek text in Kittel here and elsewhere.

understood spiritually” (1 Cor 2:14–15).³⁶ Meanwhile those with understanding, the *pneumatikoi* (cf. 1 Cor 2:13), were taught and empowered to live a new life, with “minds set on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:2–3). The result of this new and higher life is, according to Paul, a radical detachment from the world, from “things on earth” (*epigeia*). Though living on earth, our *politeuma* (citizenship, homeland, “walk” or conversation) is in heaven, with the risen and ascended Christ. St Paul writes,

Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things [*epigeia*]. But our commonwealth [*politeuma*] is in heaven, and from it await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 3:17–20).

Watching for the Second Coming and lacking an earthly home, Christians are not necessarily to abandon all everyday business or involvement in the *polis*. Though “a new creation” (cf. 2 Cor 5:17, Gal 6:15), their honest temporal affairs may be carried on as always: what is required—and indeed what the newness wrought by the Holy Spirit makes possible—is a kind of holy indifference to these affairs: “from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as

³⁶ My trans. The RSV-CE has “The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” The Vulgate has “Animalis autem homo non percipit ea quae sunt Spiritus Dei; stultitia est enim illi et non potest intellegere quia spiritualiter examinatur.” Aquinas takes *animalis* to mean *naturalis*: see *Super I Epistolam ad Corinthios* cap. 1, lec. 3.

though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:29–31). Some earthly goods and involvements, like marriage (cf. 1 Cor 7:1, 8) may, with advantage and for a higher purpose, be renounced; but daily work is expected to continue: “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us” (2 Thess 3:6). The goal, then, is not the idle abandonment of earthly things, but detachment or purity of heart, an inner adherence to God in love and a freedom with regard to whatever might rival that affection.

Before the legalisation of Christianity under the Constantine in AD 313, the Christian life remains fairly inconspicuous in the Roman Empire.³⁷ In the 2nd century, the author of the *Letter to Diognetus* can say that “Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by either country, speech or customs; the fact is, they nowhere settle in cities of their own; they use no particular language; they

³⁷ See Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

cultivate no eccentric mode of life.”³⁸ Nevertheless Christians remain social outsiders, with little chance of forgetting the boundary between the Church and the unbelieving world. When more cordial relations between Church and Empire supervened, “the need to define the boundaries that demarcated the Church from what lay outside” became more acute: the “world was flowing into the Church, being taken over wholesale by the Church, and the Church was expanding its influence into more and more areas of the culture of Roman society and dominating ever-growing areas of its daily life.”³⁹ Yet the culture to be transformed had no ready rule of discrimination by which Christianity could separate legal social life from complicity in the surviving paganism which penetrated and shaped every Roman institution. Christianity, never

³⁸ Letter to Diognetus 5:1–2, trans. James A. Kleist (Baltimore: Newman, 1948). The *Letter* also indicates that some Christians did indeed adopt an “eccentric” way of life, a way that is “above nature, and beyond ordinary human society”—that is, the monastic life. See Michael J. Hollerich, “Hebrews, Jews, and Christians: Eusebius of Caesaria on the Biblical Basis of the Two States of the Christian Life,” in *In Dominico Eloquio: In Lordly Eloquence, Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken*, eds. Paul M. Blowers et al., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 172–4.

³⁹ Robert A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 23.

having “developed its own particular way of doing everything,”⁴⁰ needed to accept Roman legalisation without accepting Roman religiosity or syncretism.⁴¹

The compromises the 4th-century Christians reached show that the integration of faith and imperial citizenship was difficult. Christian emperors retained the title *divus* for generations. Likewise they fostered public imperial cults, complete with idols, festivals and statuary. If a pagan official became Christian, he was not always expected to abandon his pagan cultic identity (for instance, in the early 300s the Council of Elvira ruled that converted *flamines* could keep their priestly title and office as long as they hired substitutes to conduct the idolatrous rites). For centuries, Christians attended formally pagan festivals,⁴² apparently overcoming their religious scruples with the reflection that these practices were, for themselves but not for the

⁴⁰ MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 74. On the mixing of Christian and secular—or even seemingly pagan—elements in early Christian life, see also Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World, From the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (London: Penguin, 1988) and MacMullen, *Christianity & Paganism*.

⁴¹ There is, of course, a Radical Reformation tradition which rejects the early Church’s settlements with the Roman world (though neither de Lubac nor Milbank goes this far). See John Howard Yoder, “The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics,” in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 135–50, and John Howard Yoder, “See How They Go with Their Faces to the Sun,” in *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 51–78.

⁴² See Robert A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 107–123.

pagans, “a civic duty without religious content.”⁴³ This readiness to distinguish religious culture (offices and ceremonies) from “religious content” (actual beliefs and devotion) is significant in that it shows the early Church treating certain materially idolatrous institutions as conceptually separable from formal idolatry. Believers in late antiquity may not have spoken of pure nature or a religiously neutral (or pluralist) public forum, but clearly in practice they somehow justified a compromise with paganism in manners to which Christian historiography from the days of “Christendom” has seldom adverted.

As time went on and paganism declined, civic institutions and observances could be shorn of their idolatrous aspects and interwoven more thoroughly with Christianity. Some institutions, like the *imperium* itself, were reinvented as “sacralised” Christian kingship.⁴⁴ Even if the Constantinian Church maintained a principled distinction between the sacred and secular spheres,⁴⁵ there was still much enthusiasm for the idea that paganism could be definitively vanquished by a new Christian Empire.

⁴³ MacMullen, *Christianity & Paganism*, 36. For examples of these seemingly inconsistent Christian retentions of pagan religious practice and of occasional (but ineffective) objections by certain bishops, see also pages 32–40, and Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 664–7.

⁴⁴ See Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, especially 213–228 on the transformation of Gallic society and the theology of Gregory the Great.

⁴⁵ See Hugo Rahner, *Church and State in Early Christianity*, trans. Leo Donald Davis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 41. “At least in theory, Constantine was convinced that the Church should be completely free from state interference in her own proper area of competence.”

Although it is true that Clement of Rome and other early Fathers broached the subject of the Roman Empire's providential role in the drama of salvation, the heyday of Christian enthusiasm for imperial power came in the 4th century. The frequent crimes, heterodoxy, and occasional apostasy of Emperors notwithstanding, there was a tendency among Christians in the 300s to think they had reached a theological, indeed an eschatological milestone: as if Christ had begun to reign in and through the Empire. Some feverishly wondered if the Millennium was arriving and if it would not be best to use brute force to repress paganism and heresy in the name of Christ the King.⁴⁶

In the 390s and early in the first decade of the 400s, even St Augustine took this view. As Robert Markus writes, "It was no mere passing infatuation that found expression in Augustine's jubilant endorsement of the *tempora christiana*. For a decade or more his historical thinking was dominated by this motif."⁴⁷ Augustine, however, would be instrumental in western theology's awakening from the dream of a Christian Empire and of an earthly, pre-parousial *pax christiana*.

⁴⁶ On the sudden drop in Christian interest in religious toleration and on the ensuing persecutions, see MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*. Unfortunately MacMullen does not explore the theological rationale for smashing idols.

⁴⁷ Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 32. Interestingly, the years of Augustine's enthusiasm for the Christian Empire coincide largely with the years of his greatest withdrawal from public affairs: his retreat at Cassiciacum in 386–7, and monastic life in Thagaste from 388–91 and in Hippo (as a priest) from 391–396/397. Perhaps being a bishop made Augustine more aware of the frailty of public institutions.

The exact steps by which Augustine's thinking evolved cannot be fully identified. What we do know is that, after the Gothic incursions and the sack of Rome in 410, we find Augustine warning against excessive distress at these worldly disasters and responding (most famously in *De Civitate Dei*) to pagan complaints that the *tempora christiana* has brought only calamity. He repudiates not only "the pagan belief in Rome's eternal destiny and its expression in Vergil's *Aeneid*,"⁴⁸ but also the very idea of a Christian empire:

"The City which begat us according to the flesh still remains; thanks be to God! If only it would be spiritually reborn, and go over with us into eternity!" Augustine is still speaking of the *civitas* as—perhaps—capable of spiritual rebirth; but this is a hope, dubiously realisable, if at all. The whole myth of the christianisation of the Empire is blown away in this optative sigh of Augustine's.⁴⁹

A few years later, by 414, Augustine's theological approach to history has stabilised in what we may call its mature form. Though there are many references to the *tempora christiana*, this term now names the whole stretch of time between the Incarnation and the Second Coming. Within these last days, there can occur no genuinely new events of sacred history, no shifts in what the world is from God's and the Gospel's point of view. There is no room for chiliastic theology.

The theory of prophecy [namely that the canon was closed and that the prophetic age ended] and the theology of history bound up with it made it increasingly difficult to speak of any episode of post-Incarnation history in terms of any *heilsgeschichtlich*

⁴⁸ Markus, *Saeculum*, 39.

⁴⁹ Markus, *Saeculum*, 39. The internal quotation is from Augustine, Sermon 105.

significance; the disillusion with the Theodosian mirage of a Christian Empire removed the urge to do so.⁵⁰

Instead the theologically mature Augustine will see the utility of a worldly, imperfect peace, without any mention of a chiliastic kingdom. In his discussion of human ends in Book XIX of the *City of God*, however, Augustine will write not of one single, “ultimate end” at all—instead there are (1) the Christian end of eternal life and (2) the end of earthly peace that Christians and non-Christians share, the end that “nature” keeps anyone from denying.

Augustine begins his discussion of human teleology in Book XIX of the *City of God* by talking about a text that is no longer extant, the *De Philosophia*, by the Roman sage and statesman Varro (116–27 BC). This author, Augustine tells us, calculated that at least two hundred and eighty-eight different philosophical sects were theoretically possible, sects distinguishable by their views on the end of the human person. “And although they erred in a variety of ways,” writes Augustine, “yet [*naturae limes*, “the boundary of nature”] has prevented them from wandering from the truth so far that they have not placed the supreme good and evil, some in the soul, some in the body, and some in both.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Markus, *Saeculum*, 44. See also Todd Breyfogle, “Toward a Contemporary Augustinian Understanding of Politics,” in *Augustine and Politics*, eds. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth (Oxford: Lexington, 2005), 219. “Augustine denies any human institution a claim to divine sanction or perfect justice; there is no historical progress after Christ, but only providential justice.”

⁵¹ Augustine, *De civitate dei* (hereafter “*De civ*”), trans. Marcus Dodds (New York: Modern Library, 1983), 19.1. The 288 possibilities come from distinguishing not only the goods each sect seeks but whether those goods are shared or solitary, whether opinions about them are posited as certain or only probable, etc.

To simplify the discussion, Augustine follows Varro's lead and reduces the 288 possibilities to three. These three are not, as one might guess, sects that prize the body, the soul, and the combination of both. Rather, taking it for granted that "man is neither the body alone, nor the soul alone, but both together,"⁵² the three broad possibilities are distinguished according to the way their advocates link the combined goods of body and soul with virtue. Some people, says Augustine, "hold that the primary objects of nature [the *prima naturae*] are to be desired for virtue's sake, [others] that virtue is to be desired for their sake, and [others still] that virtue and these objects are to be desired each for their own sake."⁵³ According to Varro, reports Augustine, the best approach is to prize both the *prima naturae* and virtue for their own sakes. Christians disagree: according to Augustine, all the philosophising sectaries, including Cicero and Varro, "have, with a marvellous shallowness, sought to find their blessedness in this life and in themselves. Contempt has been poured upon such ideas by the Truth, saying by the prophet, 'The Lord knoweth the thoughts of men' (or, as the Apostle Paul cites the passage, 'The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise') 'that they are vain'."⁵⁴

The Christian view, says Augustine, is that the proper end to strive for is eternal life—not virtue, not the *prima naturae*, and not their combination. Yet as James Wetzel and others have explained, Augustine does not repudiate philosophy's

⁵² *De civ* 19.3.

⁵³ *De civ* 19.2. The *prima naturae* are the goods of mind and body (wholeness, health, and the mind's innate abilities). See Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 197.

⁵⁴ *De civ* 19.4.

goals or the good of imperfect (pagan) virtue.⁵⁵ In fact, Augustine goes on to tell us in Book XIX that these lower pagan and philosophical ends are shared by Christians—pagans and Christians have a common human *finis*, and it is not the beatific vision. Contrasting the two cities (the community of unbelief and the community of faith), Augustine says, to quote him fully:

But the families which do not live by faith seek their peace in the earthly advantages of this life; while the families which live by faith look for those eternal blessings which are promised, and use as pilgrims such advantages of time and of earth as do not fascinate or divert them from God, but rather aid them to endure with greater ease, and to keep down the number of those burdens of the corruptible body which weigh upon the soul. Thus the things necessary for this mortal life are used by both kinds of men and families alike, but each has its own particular and widely differing aim in using them. The earthly city, which does not live by faith, seeks an earthly peace The heavenly city, or rather that part of it which sojourns on earth and lives by faith, makes use of this peace only because it must, until this mortal condition which necessitates it shall pass away. Consequently, so long as it lives like a captive and a stranger in the earthly city . . . , it makes no scruple to obey the laws of the earthly city, whereby the things necessary for the maintenance of this mortal life are administered; and thus, as this life is common to both cities, so there is harmony between them in regard to what belongs to it

As a result, Augustine further explains,

This heavenly city, then, while it sojourns on earth, calls citizens out of all nations, and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages, not scrupling about

⁵⁵ See James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Markus, *Saeculum*; and Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*. The last title deals directly with the Augustinianism of John Milbank.

diversities in the manners, laws, and institutions whereby earthly peace is secured and maintained, but recognising that, however, various these are, they all tend to one and the same end of earthly peace [*finem terrenae pacis intenditur*].⁵⁶

Here the difference between the earthly and heavenly communities is not that only one of them seeks earthly peace—*both* do so, and they seek it as an end “common to *both* cities,” so that *both* the just and the unjust are happy to see laws and institutions “tend to one and the same end of earthly peace.” The unjust, notably, are not all wanton criminals: the unjust are decent, civil people who lack faith and therefore the hope of salvation. Because the end of terrestrial peace is one Christians share with unbelievers, the Christian is, in Eugene TeSelle’s phrase, “living in two cities”⁵⁷ and walks freely in the midst of a world that does not know God—the Christian goal does not threaten that of the earthly city, at least not usually. Contrasting the two cities but noting the peace they share and strive for, Augustine continues a little later in Book XIX:

Miserable, therefore, is the people which is alienated from God. Yet even this people has a peace of its own which is not to be lightly esteemed, though, indeed, it shall not in the end enjoy it But it is in our interest that it enjoy this peace meanwhile in this life; for as long as the two cities are commingled, we also enjoy the peace of Babylon. For from Babylon the people of God is so freed that it meanwhile sojourns in its

⁵⁶ *De civ* 19.17.

⁵⁷ See Eugene TeSelle, *Living in Two Cities: Augustinian Trajectories in Political Thought* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1998). TeSelle is especially helpful in explaining *peregrinatio* in its ancient political context, but see also Robert O’Connell, *St Augustine’s Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989) on the theme’s broader resonances.

company. And therefore the apostle also admonishes the Church to pray for kings and those in authority, assigning as the reason, “that we may live a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and love.” And the prophet Jeremiah, when predicting the captivity that was to befall the ancient people of God, and giving them the divine command to go obediently to Babylonia, and thus serve their God, counselled them also to pray for Babylonia, saying, “In the peace thereof shall ye have peace”—the temporal peace which the good and the wicked enjoy together.⁵⁸

In interpreting the *City of God* as a whole, some care must be taken not to draw too selectively from Augustine’s account of the two cities, exaggerating in Montanist or Donatist fashion the difference between the sinful world and the justified Church. To be sure, the two cities do differ, but seeing exactly who belongs to which city (and who will belong to each city in eternity) is deferred to the judgement of God alone.

[Let the city of God] bear in mind, that among her enemies lie hid those who are destined to be fellow-citizens, that she may not think it a fruitless labour to bear what they inflict as enemies until they become confessors of the faith. So, too, as long as she is a stranger in the world, the city of God has in her communion, and bound to her by the sacraments, some who shall not eternally dwell in the lot of the saints In truth, these two cities are entangled together in this world [*in mundo*], and intermixed until the last judgment effect their separation.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *De civ* 19.26.

⁵⁹ *De civ* 1.35. On the theme of the two cities in ancient literature (including the bible) and in the other works of Augustine, see Gerard O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God*, 53–66.

Now Augustine is well aware that the Church is not the only place we find a mixture of good and evil, wheat and tares: there is also such a commingling in the soul, where all life long concupiscence remains, whether in disordered sense appetite or in the more subtle sins of pride and vanity, complacency and curiosity.⁶⁰ This Augustinian theme is needed to balance three words that de Lubac and his followers have sometimes taken out of context or quoted as a free-standing sentence, namely the phrase in Augustine's *Sermon 96*, "*mundus reconciliatus, ecclesia.*" This phrase is not a definition of the church—"the church is the world reconciled"⁶¹—, as if Augustine were telling us that the church is understood now, or ever, as encompassing everyone and everything in creation.⁶² Instead, taken in context, the phrase is an example of how the word *mundus*, "world," connotes more than one reality. Here Augustine is not talking about a grand cosmic unification, or even about a unification of all people, "all the world."⁶³

⁶⁰ Augustine the bishop finds all these sins, or traces of them, in himself. See Augustine, *Confessions* (hereafter "*Conf*") 10.28.39 through 10.41.66.

⁶¹ See Henri de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (London: Sheed & Ward, 1955), 133.

⁶² This is clear in context, *Sermo* 96.5–8, especially 96.6. The phrase in question appears in 96.8. See Edmund Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine, Sermons III/4, 94A–147A* (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1992), 35, n. 12: "This uncompromising statement [*mundus reconciliatus, ecclesia*], which would have satisfied any Donatist, has to be balanced against the innumerable occasions in and out of [Augustine's] sermons, in which he describes the Church as a very mixed bag of wheat and weeds, grain and chaff, sheep and goats, good fish and bad; and against the fewer but still definite occasions in which he remarks that there are those apparently outside the Church now, who will certainly be inside at the final sorting out."

⁶³ See Augustine, *Sermo* 96.5–8.

Years after his conversion, Augustine still finds that there is evil and concupiscence in his own soul. He confesses to the Lord that “[m]any and great are those diseases [of my soul], many and great indeed. But your medicine is still more potent. We might have thought that your Word was far removed from being united to mankind and have despaired of our lot unless he had become flesh and dwelt among us.”⁶⁴ For Augustine, certainly, there is no hint that our transformation in Christ can be complete in this life.

As a bishop looking back on the early days of his conversion, Augustine tells us that he was then so concerned about his inner sickness that “I had racked my heart and had meditated taking flight to live in solitude”⁶⁵—that is, to become a monk in the desert, like Anthony. However, Augustine would develop a new kind of monastic life,⁶⁶ and it is to his role as a monastic founder and legislator that we now briefly turn.

4. Spatial Metaphors of the World and the Sacred, Ecclesial, and Monastic

The “Father of Western Monasticism” is St Benedict (AD 480–547), but the fame and influence of his *Rule* makes it easy to overlook the other rules of the

⁶⁴ *Conf* 10.43.69. Unless otherwise noted, English quotations from *Conf* are from *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁶⁵ *Conf* 10.43.70.

⁶⁶ See Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, *The Rule of Saint Augustine: With Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Raymond Canning (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), Gerald Bonner, *Augustine of Hippo: The Monastic Rules* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), George A. Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), and Adolar Zumkeller, *Augustine’s Ideal of the Religious Life* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986).

Western church. One rule that approaches Benedict's in its longstanding influence is that of St Augustine, though, as George Lawless observes, this is a strangely neglected text within the Augustinian corpus.⁶⁷ In the present study we will take note of Augustine's role as a monastic legislator, not least because his *Rule* shaped the life and St Thomas Aquinas. As a Dominican, Aquinas lived under Augustine's *Rule* and heard it read once every week.⁶⁸ Thus, the Augustinian monastic theology of separation from the world promises to be a useful resource for appreciating Thomism's outlook on Christianity, the world, and human nature.

Like so many others, Augustine was inspired by the example of St Anthony and the other fathers of the Egyptian desert. Hearing about Christian monasticism for the first time was, as Augustine tells us in *Confessions* VIII.6, instrumental in his conversion: the very same desire, the same, single experience of grace, drew him both

⁶⁷ See Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo*, xii. One reason for this neglect is that extensive palaeographical sleuthing was needed before scholars could be sure what parts of the *Rule* were actually written by Augustine. Confusingly, two texts (one of only probable authenticity) were combined in the 12th century to make up what later ages called the *Regula Sancti Augustini*. . When referring to the *Rule* or *Regula*, I mean this 12th century combination. It consists of the *Praeceptum* (or *Regula tertia*) of Augustine, plus some of the *Ordo monasterii* (or *Regula secunda*). See Lawless and Bonner for more on the textual problems.

⁶⁸ “These precepts should be read to you once a week, so that you will see yourselves in this little book as in a mirror, and not neglect anything through forgetfulness” (*Praeceptum* 8.2, lines 378–381). The decisive Dominican *Expositio Regulae Beati Augustini* was written in St Thomas's lifetime by Bl. Humbert of Romans, elected Master General in 1254: see Joachim Joseph Berthier, ed., *B. Humberti de Romanis, Quini Praedicatorum Magistri Generalis, Opera de Vita Regulari*, 2 vols. (Rome: Befani, 1888) and Edward Tracy Brett, *Humbert of Romans: His Life and Views of Thirteenth-Century Society* (Toronto: PIMS, 1985). Of course Thomas, having grown up at Monte Cassino, also knew and had been formed by the *Rule* of St Benedict.

to baptism and to monastic life.⁶⁹ However, Augustine did not go to the desert or join an existing community. Like Anthony before him (and Benedict afterwards), Augustine began by going to a convenient retreat, close at hand. Unlike Anthony (and Benedict), however, he did not go alone: he took several friends, his illegitimate son, and his mother along to a quiet country villa, to join him for a season of prayer, philosophy and spiritual repose; and he had not yet been baptised.⁷⁰ Like St Basil in the East, Augustine developed a monastic theology which stressed fraternal charity and the holding of all things in common, more than the moral and mystical progress of the individual monk or nun.⁷¹ Additionally, though Augustine valued manual labour, he and his cleric-monks tended to be engaged in more literary and intellectual work, making *otium* (peaceful, contemplative leisure) a necessarily large part of their monastic life.⁷² By putting comparatively greater stress on love and learning than on perfection and penance, Augustinian monasticism contrasts less starkly with lay Christian life. As Robert Markus observes,

[Augustine] never ceased to place the highest value on virginity and self-denial. They were bound to remain important for his conception of what constituted Christian perfection. But the way to thinking of monastic life in terms of the pursuit of perfection was

⁶⁹ See Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo*, ix–62.

⁷⁰ See *Conf* 9.2–8.

⁷¹ See Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 45–83.

⁷² Lawless goes so far as to say Augustine “makes monasticism contemplative, at least in the west.” See Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo*, 52: “Augustine actually feeds *otium* as a ‘good thing’ into western monasticism. For Cassian it is still a ‘bad thing’, as it is for Benedict Even the Cappadocians did not do this, apart from their early experiment which came to nothing.”

barred to him. His instinctive suspicion of any form of spiritual elitism was reinforced by the thrust of the theology of human action and divine grace which he developed in the course of his debate with Pelagius Thus Augustine came to realise that he had to abandon the old idea that what distinguished the monastic life from other forms of Christian living was the pursuit of perfection through self-denial. The quest of perfection could not be allowed to be the monopoly of one group of Christians. The Christian community could not be allowed to be divided by a double standard, one for the ordinary Christian, another for an ascetic elite . . . : there is a single final end all must strive to attain.⁷³

The end in question is, precisely, charity. In the first place, charity comes from the divine initiative: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). Secondly, according to Augustine, charity will never completely expel cupidity (our inner disorder)⁷⁴ in this life: “a very characteristic feature of Augustine’s teaching about Christian perfection, at least in the final two decades of his life, is the emphasis with which he insists that a Christian’s righteousness will achieve its perfection only in the world to come.”⁷⁵ This is why, in his sermons and monastic exhortations, Augustine frequently speaks of the need to strive, to look to heaven and to be united in the community of love (as

⁷³ Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 77. However, Augustine does sometimes speak of “a perfection reserved for only certain Christians”—namely monks and, more so, martyrs (see Zumkeller, *Augustine’s Ideal*, 106–8).

⁷⁴ See William S. Babcock, “*Cupiditas* and *Caritas*: The Early Augustine on Love and Human Fulfilment,” in *Augustine Today*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 1–34.

⁷⁵ Zumkeller, *Augustine’s Ideal*, 105.

“one mind and heart in God”⁷⁶). “Press on, press forward, keep on going! Do not hang back on your journey, do not turn back, do not turn aside!”⁷⁷ Neither the monastery nor the Church on earth is for the perfect: both are for sojourners, *peregrini*, in keeping with the words of St Paul, “As long as we are in the body, we sojourn away from the Lord (*peregrinamur a Domino*), for we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:6–7).⁷⁸ Augustine writes, “Justification will be complete if our cure is complete,” and “our cure will be complete if our love is complete; for ‘the completion of the law is love.’ But our love is then complete when ‘we shall see Him as He is’.”⁷⁹

The relevance of Augustine’s theology of perfection and of monastic life to the question of pure nature lies in Augustine’s habitual use of a spatial metaphor—that is, of *saeculum* (the secular) as the name for a place, a sphere of action and interest outside the monastery,⁸⁰ or, indeed, outside the sphere of religion. To contrast

⁷⁶ Augustine, *Praeceptum* 1.2 (lines 3–5): “Primum, propter quod in unum estis congregati, ut unianimes habitetis in domo et sit vobis anima una et cor unum in deum.”

⁷⁷ Augustine, *Sermo* 169, 15.8. Quoted in Zumkeller, *Augustine’s Ideal*, 106.

⁷⁸ Trans. Eugene TeSelle, who remarks Augustine cites this text at least 80 times. “The Greek text in this passage is *ekdoumenon*, ‘live away from,’ without the positive connotations of *paroikos*; the Latin translation allows Augustine to exploit both the negative and the positive aspects of *peregrinare*.” TeSelle, *Living in Two Cities*, 56, n. 43.

⁷⁹ Augustine, *De perfectione iustitiae hominis* 3.8. Quoted in Zumkeller, *Augustine’s Ideal*, 106. The internal quotations are from Rom 13:10 and 1 Jn 3:2.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Augustine, *Praeceptum* 1.4 (line 16) and 1.7 (line 48), where the monastery is contrasted with life *in saeculo*, “in the world”—there is no claim here that monks live outside of normal time, or elsewhere than in the same “last days” as everyone else. The only difference is that they have abandoned *secular* concerns, occupations and ownership.

the *saeculum* and *coenobium*, however, or the world and the church, or the secular and the spiritual, is no innovation on Augustine's part. It is found in pagan Latin in the 1st century⁸¹ and in the Christian Latin of Cyprian, Jerome, Faustus of Riez, the Council of Elvira, Gregory of Tours, Cassiodorus, and other early writers,⁸² paralleling the Greek use of *kosmos* and *kosmikos* found, with the same metaphorical sense, in Polycarp, Second Clement, Justin Martyr, Origen, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Theodore the Studite, pseudo-Macarius, Maximus the Confessor, and the canons of the Council of Chalcedon.⁸³ There are even precedents in Hebrew, arising when Rabbinical Jewish translators rendered some Septuagint texts back into Hebrew, adding to the Hebrew *'olam* (and

⁸¹ See P. G. W. Lampe, ed., *The Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), s.v. "saec(u)lum." The OLD cites two examples of *saeculum*, meaning "human life, the world," from the 1st century AD *Declamationes* of M. Fabius Quintilianus.

⁸² See Charles Dufresne Du Cange, *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*, 7 vols. (Paris: Didot, 1840–50), s.v. "saeculum" and derivatives. See also J. F. Niermeyer and C. Van De Kieft, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002), s.vv. "saecularis," "saecularitas," "saeculariter," and "saeculum."

⁸³ There are, of course, other more common and non-pejorative uses of *kosmos* and *kosmikos* in Christian Greek, just as there are of *saeculum* in Latin. The point is that *saeculum* and *kosmikos* are both used extensively to name the opposite (or outside, or "Other") to the sacred, ecclesial or monastic. For detailed citations of the Greek sources named, see P. G. W. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), s.vv. "kosmos," "kosmikos" and "kosmikōs"; and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and of Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and ed. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), s.v. "kosmikos."

the Aramaic *'alam*)⁸⁴ what one commentator called, however prejudicially, a “hitherto alien spatial significance.”⁸⁵

In short, long before modern secularism, before the Gregorian reform, before the cloister, before the Desert Fathers, Hellenistic Judaism and primitive Christianity were deploring worldly desires (*kosmikas epithumias*) (Titus 2:12, 2 Clem 17:3) and admiring those who dwelt apart, the faithful “of whom the world was not worthy, wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb 11:38). St Augustine was one among many who saw Christian life as essentially detached from the earthly city: even if Christians share with the worldly the end of secular peace, this is not their defining *telos*. The Christian remains a stranger or sojourner, going with Christ “outside the camp, bearing abuse for him. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come” (Heb 13:13–14).

The Christian and monastic language of spatial difference, pilgrimage, and exile points to a theological distinction—if not, indeed, a separation—that is to be maintained between the sacred and the secular orders of reality. Any integralist theology, as Radical Orthodoxy insists, will avoid such language, precisely because it

⁸⁴ See Ludwig Koehler, ed., *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), s.v. “’olam.” For examples see H. D. Preuss in G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., Douglas W. Stott, trans., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2004), s.v. “’olam”. The key examples are non-canonical, inasmuch as they come from back-translations (Hebrew translations from Greek), which would have drawn less interest after Jamnia. These texts were of limited use but survived, for instance, in the Cairo Geniza (e.g., Sirach, MS “A”).

⁸⁵ Hermann Sasse in *TDNT*, s.v. “kosmos,” section B 3.

undermines the key integralist belief in a single and wholly sacred world-order.⁸⁶ The use of these strongly differentiating metaphors in the early Church, particularly by St Augustine, calls into question the claim that an integralist theology of nature is simply traditional. It suggests, on the contrary, that some notion of “nature, without reference to grace” is actually well-grounded in Christian custom and orthodoxy.

Conclusion

I have no positive claims to make about the origins of the expression “pure nature.” It may very well be an early modern coinage, as de Lubac says. I think it is clear, however, that the *idea* of pure nature is already present in the ancient textual witnesses of the Christian faith. Some evolution of this idea may occur—for example, in the work of Aquinas, to whom we turn in chapters three and four—but, already in Judaism and in the early Church, there is significant evidence to show that thinking about human nature, without reference to grace or supernatural destiny, is a practical presupposition of Judaeo-Christian religious discourse.

Clearly, before the coming of faith there was no reason for the Hellenistic tradition to speak of “pure” nature, for the simple reason that no possibility of a further gift had come up for discussion. With the revelation of grace, as the free and further gift of God leading to eternal life, however, the idea of pure nature did, I suggest, quickly and necessarily develop. As we have seen, pure nature (“nature with its intrinsic constituent principles and such as follow from them or are due to them,”

⁸⁶ See chapter 7, below. On the modern use of these spatial metaphors see Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Equinox, 2005).

to repeat Garrigou-Lagrange's words⁸⁷), is implied, if not expressed, in the Septuagint and New Testament usages of the word *physis*, in the Jewish and Christian doctrines of election (and especially in the contrast of the life or demands of election with those of nature), in the recognition of a religiously neutral political sphere by Christians in the Roman Empire, in the Church's rejection of millenarianism, and in the use of "the world" as a spatial metaphor distinguishing the sacred, the ecclesial, and the monastic from the merely natural realm. Counter-examples there may well be, but this evidence is sufficient to cast serious doubt on the suggestion that the very idea of pure nature (our humanity with only its "natural constituent principles") was absent and unimagined in Christian antiquity.

The thinking of the ancient church aside, what shall we make of de Lubac's controversial claim about pure nature in the work and understanding of Thomas Aquinas—namely, that Thomas entertained no such notion and that it was foisted on theology by Cajetan or another late commentator? At issue here is not merely the historical question of who said what, and when, but the properly theological question of whether pure nature is a sound Christian idea—whether Aquinas thought about it or not.

For the sake of clarity, it should be emphasised that no Thomists suggested that any person ever existed in the *state* of pure nature—that is, without the effects of grace or sin. Even before the Fall, our first parents enjoyed numerous divine graces and favours from the beginning—these are what some call the *preternatural* gifts,

⁸⁷ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace*, 21.

which include immortality, impassability and other endowments that took Adam and Eve beyond their human nature (*praeter naturam*, hence preternatural). Adam and Eve were also endowed with *supernatural* gifts (those absolutely above all created nature, *super naturam*) by which they were united to God in a personal communion of love and righteousness. *Pure nature* is the state in which we would be (a) without grace, and (b) without the burden of sin and its punishments incurred for us all by the fall of our first parents. The *idea* of pure nature is, as Garrigou-Lagrange says, the idea of our nature in its own inherent constituents, as affected neither by the accidents of grace nor of sin.

Thomists who adopt an idea of pure nature like that articulated by Garrigou-Lagrange are doing more than retaining a Rahnerian *Restbegriff* or residuum. The latter concept is reached by a short *via negativa*, so that it is the merely implicit remainder that is left after one mentally subtracts sin, grace and the hope of glory. This approach leaves an idea of pure nature that is relatively empty, and of only nominal significance.

Taking the Thomistic line (which, I maintain, accurately reflects the thought of Thomas himself), I would suggest that the definition of pure nature proposed by Garrigou-Lagrange has a rich and positive significance which Rahner's approach does not. Instead of a mere remainder concept, traditional Thomists are able to affirm the power and dignity, however limited, which remain even in fallen humankind.

Because of original sin, all men and women (except for the Incarnate Word and Mary his Mother) are born not merely without supernatural (let alone

preternatural) grace, but without even the wholeness of natural integrity. Because of original sin, *sinning* has become second nature to us: once we are old enough to act we add to our native injustice various personal sins, great and small, through what appears to be a naturally bad inclination—“the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21).⁸⁸ Yet faith tells us that our inclination to sin is only “second nature,” and that our constituent human nature itself is not destroyed or utterly defiled by the loss of justice and integrity. Even without grace, we are not utterly corrupt.

By thinking of pure nature as “nature with its intrinsic constituent principles,” we are positioned to affirm principles of goodness in all human beings—*regardless* of whether they have faith and the other infused gifts of God. If we can think about pure nature, then we can think about the mind and body, about society, and about a whole range of human concerns *without* always appealing to faith and divine revelation. The value of doing so is not in putting faith aside as a speculative or tactical exercise, but rather in recognising that some non-Christian ideas and activities are legitimate and valuable. This is not to say that unbelievers (who, by definition, lack faith and therefore charity) are living utterly without grace,⁸⁹ but rather to admit that there is good in them, and indeed that this is God’s doing—the good of nature, surviving

⁸⁸ The doctrine of original sin has been repudiated in some forms of modern Judaism, but is well-established in the Rabbinical tradition. See Novak, *Natural Law in Judaism*, 31, 35.

⁸⁹ One would have to allow, at least, that non-Christians (like many of us Christians!) are moved by actual grace whenever they do good and avoid evil, even when they are not in the state of grace and burning with divine charity.

despite the ravages of sin. Otherwise we are reduced to saying that sin has utterly annihilated the good work of God, except where sanctifying grace has come to the rescue, or that everyone who is not utterly corrupt is an “anonymous Christian.”⁹⁰ Neither option does justice to the traditional articulation of the Christian faith. This point and other implications and corollaries of the idea of pure nature will be considered below, in chapter eight.

To learn from the theological wisdom of Thomas Aquinas and to address the historical question raised by Henri de Lubac—that is, Did Thomas have a place for the idea of pure nature, or was it a corruption of his thinking?—we turn next to the evidence of his writings. This task falls to the next two chapters.

⁹⁰ For the theology of religious pluralism, there is no better work than that of J. A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992).

CHAPTER 3

THOMAS AQUINAS ON MORTALITY, INFUSED VIRTUES, AND LIMBO

To show the place that the idea of pure nature has in the theology of Thomas Aquinas we shall consider six topics: three in the present chapter, and three more in chapter four. In order, the six topics are human morality, the necessity of the infused virtues and gifts, limbo, kingship, natural law, and the epistemology of the sciences.

Before proceeding with the first of these, however, it will be advantageous to recall an exceedingly fine distinction that Thomas Aquinas makes concerning “nature” and “the natural.” As we shall see, Thomas repeatedly discriminates between the specifically or essentially natural (nature as essence) and the intrinsically natural (nature as condition or as an individual’s non-specific principle of motion). At times, this distinction appears as a discrimination between what belongs to the form (essential nature) and matter (intrinsic nature) of a given substance. Aquinas articulates this distinction most explicitly in his Christology, as we see in his interpretation of Cyril of Alexandria in *Summa theologiae* 3, q. 2, a. 1.

In the text, we find Thomas asking whether the union of God and man in the Incarnation occurred “in a nature” (*in natura*). The trend of the objections is to say that the union did indeed occur in a nature. This trend is at least superficially consistent with the doctrine of Cyril, who proposed that “we should not think of two natures” in Christ, “but of one nature (*mia physis*) in the incarnate Word of God.”¹ On

¹ See DS 429 (canon 8 of Constantinople II).

its face, this formula clashes with the later definition of Chalcedon, namely that Christ is true God and true man, “in two natures unconfused, immutable, undivided, and inseparable.”² The point that interests us here is that Thomas, following the Second Council of Constantinople, resolves the apparent conflict by explaining that Cyril and Chalcedon meant the word “nature” in two different senses. Where Chalcedon spoke of nature as essence, and thus confessed “two natures” to affirm Christ’s true divinity and true humanity (so that Christ is constitutionally and specifically human, constitutionally and specifically divine), Cyril referred to nature as the quality of a single subject, the Incarnate Word: his *mia physis* formula points to the real union of divinity and humanity in Christ, for “from the divine and human natures a union according to subsistence results.” According to Thomas, the “sense [of Cyril’s dictum] is not that in the Incarnation one nature is formed out of two natures, but that the one nature of the Word of God united flesh to himself in his

² See DS 302.

person.”³ “Nature,” in short, can mean something other than what is formally essential and specific.⁴

Two examples may help us see how “nature” can mean something besides “essence.” In Matthew’s Gospel, after Jesus calms the sea, the apostles ask, “What sort of man is this?” (Matt 8:27). The fact that, in their very question, they already identify Christ as man means that they are not wondering about metaphysical essence. Or again, if we speak of someone as “good-natured,” we are affirming something intrinsic to the individual, not something about the essence of humanity or the entire human species.

Given that what is “essential” (constitutive, specific) and what is “intrinsic” (peculiar, inner) may differ, and that Thomas Aquinas uses the words “nature” and “natural” for both of these, great delicacy is needed in exploring Thomistic anthropology.⁵ The essentially natural and the intrinsically natural are

³ *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *STh*) 3, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1: “Non ergo sensus est quod in incarnatione ex duabus naturis sit una natura constituta, sed quia una natura Dei Verbi carnem univit in persona.” Unless otherwise noted, translations of the *Summa theologiae* are from the sixty-volume Gilby edition (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1963–1973).

⁴ See *STh* 3, q. 2, a. 1, resp.: “Ad hujus quaestionis evidentiam oportet considerare quid sit natura. Sciendum est igitur quod nomen naturae a nascendo . . . ; Deinde translatum est nomen naturae ad significandum principium hujus generationis; et quia principium generationis in rebus viventibus est intrinsecum, ulterius derivatum est nomen naturae ad significandum quodlibet principium motus Hoc autem principium vel forma est vel materia; unde quandoque natura dicitur forma, quodoque vero materia. Et quia finis generationis naturalis est in eo quod generatur essentia speciei quam significat definitio, inde est quod hujusmodi essentia speciei vocatur etiam natura”

⁵ See J. A. Di Noia, “Imago Dei, Imago Christi: The Theological Foundations of Christian Humanism,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 2 (2004): 267–78.

easily confused. Attending to this distinction, we now turn to our first three topics which point to a place for the idea of pure nature in Aquinas's theology. The topics are these:

1. Human Morality
2. The Necessity of the Infused Virtues and Gifts
3. Limbo

1. Human Mortality

According to Plato's *Phaedo*, the last words of Socrates were, "Crito, we ought to offer a cock to Asclepius. See to it, and don't forget."⁶ Why Asclepius? This minor god of healing was more particularly the god of pharmaceuticals. He had magic potions to kill the living and to raise the dead.⁷ Socrates, drinking his hemlock and expecting a better life after death, is doubly grateful to Asclepius, since the god is giving him death and life in a single poisonous draught—the death of the body, and life beyond the disease of embodiment.

At first blush, it might seem that Platonic views of death and mortality would have little to recommend them to believers in the Incarnation and Resurrection. However, the scriptures themselves show evidence of considerable ambiguity regarding the bodily nature of salvation. For instance, besides certain patristic

⁶ Plato, *Phaedo* 118a. This excerpt is translated by Hugh Tredennick in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

⁷ See Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.118.

speculations about the full import of our first parents' receiving "garments of skins" (Gen 3:21) upon exile from Eden, there are open complaints about bodily life, such as Wis 9:15, "a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthly tent burdens the thoughtful mind." (Wis 9:15). Given the common experience of the unruliness of the flesh, St Paul's distinctions between the flesh and the spirit, and the desire for martyrdom, it is not surprising that the early Church suffered some entanglement with gnostic dualism. Benedict Ashley writes,

The first phase of the development of a Christian theology of the body was dominated by the influence of a dualism deriving from the philosophy of Plato. Adopting a Pythagorean saying that reflected the widespread ancient belief in the transmigration of souls, *sōma sēma*, "The body is a tomb," Plato and his followers expressed their deep conviction that the true human self is the spiritual soul and that the soul's earthly existence in the body is a kind of death or exile or imprisonment.⁸

Ashley allows that this "conception has something in common with the Christian vision of what it is to be human, namely, that our inner spiritual life somehow transcends our outward bodily life." Nonetheless, he concludes that "fundamentally it [that is, this dualistic outlook] contradicts our belief that 'the Word became flesh' (John 1:14)."⁹ The ambiguity or complexity of the matter has, however, ensured the survival of gnosticism, whether in Albigensianism, Renaissance

⁸ Benedict Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (Braintree, MA: Pope John Center, 1985), 103.

⁹ Ashley, *Theologies of the Body*, 103.

Platonism, or in some versions of New Age spirituality.¹⁰ We can, therefore, appreciate that there is a certain perduring ambiguity about the nature of human death. As the 1993 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* remarks, “In a sense bodily death is natural, but for faith it is in fact ‘the wages of sin’ [Rom 6:23, cf. Gen 2:17].”¹¹ The precise sense in which “death is natural” is left to theological and philosophical reflection. Subsequent disputes inevitably turn on the validity of the notion of pure nature.

Is death natural? The book of Wisdom insists that “God did not make death” (Wis 1:13), and that “ungodly men by their words and deeds summoned death; considering him a friend, they pined away, and they made a covenant with him, because they are fit to belong to his party” (Wis 1:16). This tradition is behind St Paul’s declaration that sin is the cause of death: “sin came into the world through one man and death through sin” (Rom 5:12).¹² It might seem, then, that death can no more be called *natural* than sin can be so named, unless one is willing to say that sin has given us a new nature altogether. Thomas Aquinas, however, determines a sense in

¹⁰ See Ashley, *Theologies of the Body*, 101–249; and the Pontifical Council for Culture and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Jesus Christ, The Bearer of the Water of Life* nn. 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.3, 4.0.

¹¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1006.

¹² Most controversies about Rom 5:12 centre on its final phrase in the Vulgate and VL, which refer to “one man in whom all have sinned” (*in quo omnes peccaverunt*). This form of the biblical text contributed to the Western theology of original sin, especially through St Augustine and the councils of Carthage XVI, Orange II and Trent. “Indeed, the Roman Catholic theological tradition has almost unanimously so interpreted it . . . in terms of the universal causality of Adam’s sin on the sinfulness of human individuals” (Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 408). See also Gabriel Daly, “Theological Models in the Doctrine of Original Sin,” *The Heythrop Journal* 13 (1972), 121–42.

which death is indeed natural. This would weigh against Henri de Lubac's claim that the idea of pure nature is alien to Aquinas. Per Erik Persson writes:

[T]he idea of the possibility of a *status naturae purae* which we find in Thomistic literature dealing with the doctrine of grace . . . is simply not discussed in Thomas—for which reason H. de Lubac, [in] *Surnaturel* . . . suggests that it should be rejected as basically alien to Thomas [Yet] there is some evidence that contemporary Thomistic interpretation at this point does express an idea which is to be found in Thomas himself We see this more clearly particularly if we note that Thomas always speaks of death as something that belongs to man's nature While Thomas defines sin as 'unnatural' . . . , he regards death as something essentially unrelated to sin, and as a consequence rather of the fact that man is *ex contrariis compositum*.¹³

The extent to which St Thomas treats human mortality as natural has been discussed in some detail by Josef Pieper and, more recently, by Gilles Emery.¹⁴ Aquinas's position finds concise expression in *De Malo*, q. 5., a. 5 and more briefly in the *Compendium theologiae* I.152. His view is that death—the separation of body and soul—is natural for the human body, but unnatural for our subsistent form, the human soul. Thomas writes in the *Compendium*,

[W]e must take up the question of how this separation [of soul and body in death] is according to nature, and how it is opposed to nature. We showed above that the

¹³ Per Erik Persson, *Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas*, trans. J. A. R. Mackenzie (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 175–6, n. 52. (Swedish original 1957.)

¹⁴ See Josef Pieper, *Death and Immortality*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), especially pp. 47–82; and Gilles Emery, “The Unity of Man, Body and Soul, in St. Thomas Aquinas,” trans. Therese Scarpelli, in *Trinity, Church, and the Human Person: Thomistic Essays* (Naples, FL: Sapientia, 2007), 209–35.

rational soul exceeds the capacity of all corporeal matter in a measure impossible to other forms. This is demonstrated by its intellectual activity, which is exercised without the body. To the end that corporeal matter might be fittingly adapted to the soul, there had to be added to the body some disposition that would make it suitable matter for such a form. And in the same way that this form itself receives existence from God alone through creation, that disposition, transcending as it does corporeal nature, was conferred on the human body by God alone for the purpose of preserving the body itself in a state of incorruption so that it might match the soul's perpetual existence. This disposition remained in man's body as long as man's soul cleaved to God.

But when man's soul turned from God by sin, the human body deservedly lost that supernatural disposition whereby it was unrebliously subservient to the soul. And hence man incurred the necessity of dying.

Accordingly, if we regard the nature of the body, death is natural. But if we regard the nature of the soul and the disposition with which the human body was supernaturally endowed in the beginning for the sake of the soul, death is *per accidens* and contrary to nature,

inasmuch as union with the body is natural for the soul.¹⁵

In this context Thomas does not venture to offer an opinion on the possible fate of Adam and Eve, had they been created without the supernatural endowment of bodily immortality: had he done so, it would certainly have been an extreme form of speculation about a *status purae naturae*. De Lubac is, therefore, right to say that Thomas avoids this kind of hypothesising. Indeed, de Lubac's thesis seems to be reinforced when Thomas considers that a supernatural gift of immortality was needed to make the body apt for the soul (*necesse fuit quod aliqua dispositio corpori superadderetur*). However, Thomas never goes so far as to state what de Lubac repeatedly affirms; namely, that a supernatural finality is "inscribed" in our being or "constitutive" of our humanity. Instead, de Lubac's interpretation is called into

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae ad Fratrem Reginaldum* I.153: "Considerandum est ergo quomodo sit secundum naturam, et quomodo contra naturam. Ostensum est enim supra quod anima rationalis praeter modum aliarum formarum excedit totius corporalis materiae facultatem, quod eius operatio intellectualis demonstrat, quam sine corpore habet. Ad hoc igitur quod materia corporalis convenienter ei aptata fuerit, necesse fuit quod aliqua dispositio corpori superadderetur, per quam fieret conveniens materia talis formae. Et sicut haec forma a solo Deo exit in esse per creationem, ita illa dispositio naturam corpoream excedens, a soli Deo corpori humano attributa fuit, quae videlicet ipsum corpus incorruptum conservaret, ut sic perpetuitati animae conveniret. Et haec quidem dispositio in corpore hominis mansit, quamdiu anima hominis Deo adhaesit. Aversa autem anima hominis per peccatum a Deo, convenienter et corpus humanum illam supernaturalem dispositionem perdidit per quam immobiliter animae subdebatur, et sic homo necessitatem moriendi incurrit. Si igitur ad naturam corporis respiciatur, mors naturalis est; si vero ad naturam animae, et ad dispositionem quae propter animam supernaturaliter humano corpori a principio indita fuit, est per accidens et contra naturam, cum naturale sit animae corpori esse unitam." (The translation given is the revised work of Cyril Vollert in *Light of Faith: The Compendium of Theology* [Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute, 1993].)

question because Aquinas insists that death, though unnatural for the soul, is natural indeed for the body. Were death *not* natural for the body, then no supernatural immortality would have been needed before the fall to preserve Adam and Eve from dying. However, were separation of the body and soul natural for the soul, then death would not be a punishment. And because “death is both natural on account of the condition of the material, and penal because it is a loss of the divine gift which preserved man from death,”¹⁶ the idea of pure nature has a singular place. It is needed to identify the superadded grace of Edenic immortality as genuinely gratuitous. It is likewise necessary for an understanding of death as a punishment. Indeed, neither immortality nor death, strictly speaking, change human nature. Pieper takes up this point: “One might venture to say that man became “different” because of that primordial transgression. But it is surely impossible to say that he became “something different.”¹⁷ Pieper goes on to say,

However, this very formulation could kindle the dispute anew, and make it even hotter than before. To be changed from an immortal being to a mortal one—is that not “becoming something different”? Or else, is that not what is meant when it is said that death was imposed upon man as a punishment. The answer to this question can only be: No, that was not meant! [. . .] [T]he proposition [that] death is a punishment is valid, but does not express the whole of the matter. Thomas says in the *Summa theologiae*: *Mors et est naturalis . . . et est poenalis*; death is both something imposed as a punishment and something natural. Would this mean

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2-2, q. 164, a. 1, ad 1: “Et sic mors est naturalis propter conditionem materiae, et est poenalis propter amissionem divini beneficii praeservantis a morte.”

¹⁷ Pieper, *Death and Immortality*, 63.

that death is in one respect natural, in another respect non-natural? Indeed, it means just that.¹⁸

The opinion of this eminent Thomist might be criticised for not really facing the question, “Is death natural for the human person?” When Thomas himself speaks of what is natural for the body and of what is natural for the soul, is he not failing to do justice to our nature as a unified composite? To answer this objection in full would take us far afield. For our present purposes, we can reply that the composition of body and soul is *not* a kind of hypostatic union, a joining of two natures in a single pre-existing person or hypostasis. The composite in question pertains only to a single nature, that of the human. In this way Thomas resists anthropological dualism. He affirms the unity of body and soul in a single nature by identifying the intellectual soul as the body’s subsistent form.¹⁹ Unlike bears, cabbages, and other living material creatures, Adam is uniquely “a living soul” (Gen 2:7),²⁰ and “there is no more sense in asking whether the soul and body are one thing than in asking whether the wax and

¹⁸ Pieper, *Death and Immortality*, 63.

¹⁹ See *STh* 1, q. 75, a. 2.

²⁰ The RSV-CE has “a living being,” which is accurate for the Hebrew (MT) *nephesh* (any “breathing” thing) but which does not bring out the distinction between Adam and the other animals that results from God’s breathing into Adam alone “the breath of life,” *neshamah*. The translation “living soul” for Gen 2:7 is given in the Douay and AV, reflecting the Vulg and LXX. See Daniel Lys, “The Israelite Soul According to the LXX,” *Vetus Testamentum* 16 (1966), 181–228; and T. C. Mitchell, “The Old Testament Usage of N^ešāmâ,” *Vetus Testamentum* 11 (1961): 177–87. See also *STh* 1, q. 25, a. 6, ad 1: “nam anima brutorum producitur ex virtute aliqua corporea, anima vero humana a Deo. Et ad hoc significandum dicitur, quantum ad alia animalia, producat terra animam viventem, quantum vero ad hominem dicitur quod inspiravit in faciem eius spiraculum vitae.”

its shape are.”²¹ This still allows Thomas to say that the soul is *more properly* human than the body (“whatever is most fontal in anything has the most right to be called that thing”²²). In addition, as we see in *De Malo* q. 5, a. 5, it gives him a way to explain how mortality is natural to our bodiliness.

There are two ways, Thomas explains, in which we may consider a given trait as natural: it may be natural to a being’s form (essentially natural) or to a being’s matter. In the latter case, we may further distinguish two ways of being natural-to-matter. Something may be natural to matter either as a condition that befits form (in which case, we are talking about a quality or feature that makes this particular matter suitable for a given form and *telos*), or something may be natural to matter in a way that is unbecoming to a given form and *telos*, or even contrary to them, but which may yet be unavoidable.

As an illustration, Thomas gives us the case of a blacksmith making a saw. Being prone to rust is not part of a saw’s very definition, but is a function of the saw’s being made of iron. Some qualities of iron, such as its hardness, make it good material for a saw; but other qualities, like iron’s susceptibility to rust, are unsuitable, yet (for mediaeval metallurgy) unavoidable. In this example, the blacksmith making

²¹ Aristotle, *De Anima* 2.1 (412b6–9).

²² Aristotle, *Ethics* 9.8 (1168b31–4). See *STh* 1, q. 75, a. 4, ad 1.

the saw corresponds to God, the saw to humanity, and the iron to bodily being.²³ Just so, writes Thomas,

if one could find iron incapable of breaking or rusting, it would be most suitable matter for a saw, and a blacksmith would seek it. But because one cannot find such iron, the blacksmith takes such as he can find, namely, hard but breakable iron. And likewise, since there can be no body composed of elements that is by the nature of matter indissoluble, an organic but dissoluble body is by nature suitable for the soul that cannot pass away.²⁴

Aquinas hastens to add that God was not frustrated by the weakness of bodies. On the contrary, for the good of the human soul God overcame the inherent corruptibility of bodies by endowing Adam and Eve with an added “supernatural” blessing, namely immunity to bodily dissolution. “Just so, a blacksmith, if he could, would endow the iron he moulds with the incapacity to break.”²⁵ In other words, just as being able to break or to rust has nothing to do with the form of a saw, so being able to die has nothing to do with the rational soul. Death remains natural to human beings because they are bodily, yet unnatural on account of their souls. Thus, death is

²³ See Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo* q. 5, a. 5, lines 164–249. All references to the *De Malo* are to the Leonine edition (t. 23), and follow that text’s orthography. Unless otherwise note, all translations are from *On Evil*, trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo* q. 5, a. 5, lines 235–49: “Sicut si posset inueniri ferrum infrangibile et rubiginem non contrahens, esset couenientissima materia ad serram, et talem artifex quereret; set quia talis inueniri non potest, accipit qualem potest, scilicet duram set frangibilem. Et similiter, quia non potest inueniri corpus ex elementis compositum quod secundum naturam materie sit incorruptibile, aptatur naturaliter anime incorruptibili corpus organicum licet corruptibile.”

²⁵ *De Malo* q. 5, a. 5, lines 256–7: “sicut et faber prestaret ferro ex quo operatur, sit posset, quod numquam frangeretur.”

both natural and unnatural to the composite whole of human nature: we are naturally bodily, yet “death and dissolution are contrary to our nature insofar as immortality is natural for us.”²⁶

Because human beings are truly composite, and are not merely souls inhabiting bodies, Thomas’s account shows how immortality is a gift, not only to the body, and not only to the soul, but to the whole nature of the human being. However, without a concept of pure nature (nature without the supernatural), we could not speak of this original immortality as a preternatural gift at all: it would simply be another trait of the original human condition. In speaking of death as natural to the human being, however, Thomas refers to our mere (essential) nature, to what we are by our natural constitution, and what we would be if we had neither received grace nor incurred the penalties of sin.

It is true, of course, that no one has ever existed in the *status purae naturae*, but that fact does not eliminate the ability or need to think about our innate mortality—which, again, is proper to the human being, and not to the body alone. The idea of our natural mortality is absolutely necessary if we are to recognise immortality as an added gift; and it is absolutely necessary if we are to recognise the loss of that gift as a punishment for the whole person; and it is absolutely necessary if we are to see the

²⁶ See Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo* q. 5, a. 5, lines 258–270: “Sic igitur mors et corruptio naturalis est homini secundum necessitatem materie, set secundum rationem forme esset ei conueniens immortalitas. Ad quam tamen prestandam nature principia non sufficiunt; set aptitudo quidem naturalis ad eam conuenit homini secundum animam, complementum autem eius est ex supernaturali uirtute Et in quantum immortalitas est nobis naturalis, mors et corruptio est nobis contra naturam.”

resurrection as a gift surpassing all that human nature—not merely the human body—expects.

With regard to human mortality, then, my argument is that *natura pura* is a necessary ingredient in any Thomistic understanding; without this concept, Thomas’s own account of mortality and immortality becomes incoherent. If we banish the idea of pure nature, then we cannot think of mortality as anything but a violation of human nature, and even as a violation of the body—both of which, according to Thomas, are *naturally* mortal.

De Lubac is right to say that theology errs in giving the impression that pure nature is a real state in which people have lived. This eminent theologian is, however, misrepresenting Thomism when he denies Aquinas’s use of the category of pure nature altogether. Going that far is to ignore the sophisticated anthropology that Thomas develops to explain that, in different respects, mortality is both natural and punitive, and immortality both natural and supernatural.

Unlike Plato or Socrates, Thomas Aquinas, as a Christian theologian, looks on human mortality as an evil contrary to the natural immortality of the human body’s subsistent form, the intellectual soul. As Gilles Emery notes, Thomas insists that, when the soul is parted from the body by death, that soul is “situated in a state ‘outside its nature’ or ‘contrary to nature’.”²⁷ As Emery writes,

The expression “contrary to nature” here carries great weight, if one recalls the exceptional importance that St. Thomas accords to the integrity of nature in the

²⁷ Emery, “Unity of Man,” 230. Emery quotes *STh* 1, q. 118, a. 3 (*contra naturam*) and *STh* 1, q. 89, a. 1 (*praeter rationem suae naturae*).

creating and saving plan of God. Furthermore, the qualification “contrary to nature” does not specially concern man or the body, but the *soul*. In fact, from the point of view of the body, death is natural, since the body is corruptible by nature; while the soul is both incorruptible and made for union with the body. Thus if St. Thomas teaches that the state of the separated soul is “contrary to nature,” it is because the soul is a *subsistent form*. The separated soul exists therefore in a state of imperfection, deprived as it is of that which its nature requires. The expression “contrary to nature” means that death is a profound evil *for the soul*. Death is repulsive to the deepest nature of man because of the dignity of his soul.²⁸

Unlike Socrates, Thomas sees bodily life as natural and necessary for the soul—between death and the bodily resurrection, the soul endures a deprivation, and the joy of heaven is only complete when the whole human person, body and soul, is glorified. Accordingly, Emery suggests that the truth of the natural immortality of the soul and the truth of the resurrection of the body are “mutually converging and cohering truths about man.”²⁹ This anthropological and theological vision could not be maintained, however, without the idea of pure nature. Without a notion of *natura pura* it would not be possible to treat immortality as a gift, either supernatural or preternatural; or, at best, one could call it a gift only in precisely the same sense as all existence is a gift. In this latter case, we would be left saying that bodily immortality is natural to us—something that Thomas, for one, certainly does not hold. Admittedly, Aquinas does not use the exact phrase “pure nature,” but it is clear that he invokes and teaches the idea.

²⁸ Emery, “Unity of Man,” 230–1.

²⁹ Emery, “Unity of Man,” 231.

2. The Necessity of the Infused Virtues and Gifts

A second example of Thomas's use of the concept of pure nature is his treatment of the human need for infused supernatural virtues and for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In de Lubac's view, it is natural for intellectual creatures to tend toward communion with God: he is unmoved by common Thomistic teaching that every nature, including human nature, tends only to an end that is proportionate to it and its capacities.³⁰ To de Lubac, this point seems to be more the product of Aristotelianism than of Christianity. Hence he objects to the main Dominican and Jesuit Thomistic schools, writing of Suárez that,

like Cajetan before him, he refers, with no attempt to justify doing so, to what Aristotle says in the *De caelo* of the movement of the stars: "Nature, in giving them the inclination to a certain motion, gives them the organs for it." That this is relevant seems to him [Suárez] to go without saying; the vital corrections brought to Aristotelianism by St. Thomas are forgotten.³¹

Readers unfamiliar with Thomas Aquinas might suppose that de Lubac has some relevant "vital corrections" in mind, but one looks in vain for any specific reference to them in de Lubac's writings. More to the point, however, the commentatorial traditions which de Lubac rejects are demonstrably well-founded, at

³⁰ See Benedict Ashley's helpful discussion of this in *Living the Truth in Love: A Biblical Introduction to Moral Theology* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1996), 99–100.

³¹ Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 148–9.

least on this issue of proportionate ends. To show this, we must first recall what an *end* is, in scholastic parlance, and what place the notion of finality has in Thomistic cosmology.

In the present context, *end* translates the Greek *telos* and Latin *finis*. In its philosophical and theological usage, *end* tells us what something is when fully determined or matured in its being. It implies what a given being is when it attains the status of “the defined; the complete; a condition of perfection, completion, fulfilment.”³²

For example, the *end* of a grain of wheat is a mature wheat plant: *that* is what the grain will become. True, the farmer has ends or purposes of his own in sowing: he intends something beyond the growth of wheat, such as the sale of the crop, the feeding of livestock, the production of thatch for his roof, or some other goal for which sowing wheat is expedient. Whatever the farmer’s purposes, the living wheat is acting for its own end all along. Although mindless and therefore purposeless, the wheat has an end, a state of full flourishing. The principle invoked to explain the grain’s *kinesis* (motion, change) and *stasis* (rest) is *nature*. The *end* of that nature is its *good*: and thus the grain, if it is to attain its fullest reality, must move from being *potentially* a mature wheat plant to being *actually* a mature wheat plant. This much is rudimentary Aristotelian cosmology, and is assumed by Aquinas. Aristotle developed this schema as a satisfactory description of the motion and rest observable in the

³² Francis Slade, “Ends and Purposes,” in *Final Causality in Nature and Human Affairs*, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy 30, ed. Richard F. Hassing (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 83.

world. However, he left a somewhat incomplete account of the Prime Mover's role in teleology.³³ Even so, Thomas readily drew on Aristotle's recognition of God as the world's provident creator to explain the intrinsic ordering of natures to their various ends—as we see, for instance, in the last of the “Five Ways.”³⁴

At this point the peculiar complexity of human nature and its end arises. Unlike the nature of a grain of wheat or of a brute animal, the human soul is intellectual. Its flourishing, therefore, must involve a properly intellectual fulfilment. Indeed, “all men by nature desire to know,”³⁵ and in order to find the perfect fulfilment of such a desire, we need to know the First Cause and to possess it as the ultimate Truth. Here, the long-lasting debate over natural and supernatural finality in human existence has its roots.

In speaking of human fulfilment and beatitude, we may note that Aquinas does not limit himself to speaking of perfect (let alone a supernatural) beatitude. He considers the possibility of a certain imperfect beatitude that can be attained by our

³³ For an overview and a reading that resolves the apparent discontinuity in Aristotle, see Sarah Waterlow, *Nature, Change and Agency in Aristotle's "Physics": A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), especially 204–57 (Chapter V, “Self-Change and the Eternal Cause”).

³⁴ See *STh* 1, q. 2, a. 3.

³⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.1 (980a22).

natural powers—i.e., not by grace—during this life.³⁶ Thus Thomas says in *STh* 1-2, q. 5, a. 5 that an imperfect beatitude may be acquired by natural intellectual contemplation, even as imperfect virtue may be acquired through repeated good actions:

The [*beatitudo imperfecta* which] we can hold in this life, a man can secure for himself, as he can virtue, in the activity of which it consists. . . . But man's complete happiness . . . consists in the vision of the divine essence, and this is beyond the natural stretch of any creature, not merely of man, as we have established Now all knowing according to a manner of created things falls short of seeing what God really is, for the divine infinitely surpasses every created nature. Consequently neither man nor any

³⁶ See Feingold, *Natural Desire*; Antoninus Finili, "Natural Desire," *Dominican Studies* 1 (1948) and 2 (1949), 313–59 and 1–15, respectively; and Thomas Gilby, "The Vision of God," in *Summa theologiae*, ed. Thomas Gilby, vol. 16, 153–5.

See also the literature on Feingold's work, including: Harm Goris, "Steering Clear of Charybdis: Some Directions for Avoiding 'Grace Extrinsicism' in Aquinas," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 5 (2007): 67–80; Reinhard Hütter, "*Desiderium Naturale Visionis Dei—Est autem duplex hominis beatitudo sive felicitas*: Some Observations about Lawrence Feingold's and John Milbank's Recent Interventions in the Debate over the Natural Desire to See God," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 5 (2007): 81–132; Steven A. Long, "On the Loss, and the Recovery, of Nature as a Theonomic Principle: Reflections on the Nature/Grace Controversy," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 5 (2007): 133–84; and Guy Mansini, "Loneragan on the Natural Desire in the Light of Feingold," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 5 (2007): 185–98. See also John Milbank's *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 26–7, n. 10 (confusingly, Milbank consistently calls Feingold "Feinberg").

creature can attain final happiness through their natural resources.³⁷

These two possibilities—perfect and imperfect beatitude—are again compared in *STh* 1-2, q. 62, a. 1, where Thomas begins his treatment of the virtues, and particularly the existence of theological virtues. Here he refers us back to *STh* 1-2, q. 5, and affirms that there are theological virtues for this striking reason:

A person is perfected by virtue towards those actions by which he is directed towards happiness, as was explained above. Yet man's happiness or felicity is twofold, as was also stated above. One is proportionate to human nature, and this he can reach through his own resources. The other, a happiness surpassing his nature, he can only attain by the power of God, by a kind of participation in the Godhead; thus it is written that by Christ we are made *partakers of the divine nature*. Because such happiness goes beyond the reach of human nature, the inborn resources by which a man is able to act well according to his capacity are not adequate to direct him to it. And so, to be sent to this supernatural happiness, he must needs be divinely endowed with some additional sources of activity; their rôle is like that of his native capabilities which direct

³⁷ *STh* 1-2, q. 5, a. 5, resp.: “Dicendum quod beatitudo imperfecta quae in hac vita haberi potest potest ab homine acquiri per sua naturalia, eo modo quo et virtus, in cuius operatione consistit Sed beatitudo hominis perfecta consistit in visione divinae essentiae. Videre autem Deum per essentiam est supra naturam non solum hominis, sed etiam omnis creaturae, ut . . . ostensum est Omnis autem cognitio quae est secundum modum substantiae creatae deficit a visione divinae essentiae, quae in infinitum excedit omnem substantiam creatam. Unde nec homo, nec alia creatura, potest consequi beatitudinem ultimam per sua naturalia.”

him, not, of course, without God's help, to his connatural end.³⁸

Of particular interest is this question's third objection, namely that theological virtues are superfluous on account of soul's *natural* finality; the imaginary objector could well de Lubac, except that the eminent Jesuit would never have carried his principles to such a plainly unorthodox conclusion. Thomas poses the objection very cogently:

Moreover, virtues are called theological because by them we are directed to God who is the first fount and last end of things. By the very nature of his reason and will, however, man is directed to his first cause and last end. There is no need, then, for habits of theological virtue to direct the reason and will to God.³⁹

In responding to this argument, Thomas repeats his point about the duality of human ends. In fact, he makes the disproportion more stark by pointing more directly

³⁸ *STh* 1-2, q. 62, a. 1, resp.: “Respondeo dicendum quod per virtutem perficitur homo ad actus quibus in beatitudinem ordinatur, ut ex supradictis patet. Est autem duplex hominis beatitudo sive felicitas, ut supra dictum est. Una quidem proportionata humanae naturae, ad quam scilicet homo pervenire potest per principia suae naturae. Alia autem est beatitudo naturam hominis excedens, ad quam homo sola divina virtute pervenire potest, secundum quandam Divinitatis participationem; secundum quod dicitur, quod per Christum facti sumus *consortes divinae naturae* [2 Pet 1:4]. Et quia huiusmodi beatitudo proportionem humanae naturae excedit, principia naturalia hominis, ex quibus procedit ad bene agendum secundum suam proportionem, non sufficiunt ad ordinandum hominem in beatitudinem praedictam. Unde oportet quod superaddantur homini divinitus aliqua principia, per quae ita ordinetur ad beatitudinem supernaturalem, sicut per principia naturalia ordinatur ad finem connaturalem; non tamen absque adiutorio divino.” Here and elsewhere, I follow the Gilby *Summa*'s orthography and set Thomas's quotations in italics.

³⁹ *STh* 1-2, q. 62, a. 1, obj. 3: “Praeterea, virtutes theologicae dicuntur quibus ordinamur in Deum, qui est primum principium et ultimus finis rerum. Sed homo ex ipsa natura rationis et voluntatis, habet ordinem ad primum principium et ultimum finem. Non ergo requiruntur aliqui habitus virtutum theologiarum, quibus ratio et voluntas ordinetur in Deum.”

at the insufficiency of human nature to attain an essentially supernatural beatitude. He argues that “our reason and will by nature go out to God in that he is the cause and the end of nature, and this is the measure of their innate capacity. Yet this is not enough for them to reach out to him as the object of supernatural happiness.”⁴⁰ In other words, the *natural* ordination of human beings is to find their joy in knowing God as the first and final cause of creation. What results from such knowledge is what we might call philosophical happiness or natural contemplative fulfilment. However such a natural fulfilment may be described, Thomas refuses to confuse it with the finality of life in Christ, which is a new finality, a new and naturally unforeseen beatitude by which God is known and enjoyed supernaturally.

In view of this response (ad 3), it must seem that de Lubac goes too far in faulting Denys the Carthusian and the later Thomistic commentators for distinguishing between knowing God naturally, as first cause, and supernaturally, by vision.⁴¹

To be fair to de Lubac, we should bear in mind that his primary concern was not the correct reading of Thomistic texts, but evangelisation and the combating of atheistic humanism. As we shall see in chapter seven, this largely explains why de Lubac did not carry his principles on to their more radical conclusions—a task left for

⁴⁰ *STh* 1-2, q. 62, a. 1, ad 3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod ad Deum naturaliter ratio et voluntas ordinatur, prout est naturae principium et finis; secundum tamen proportionem naturae. Sed ad ipsum secundum quod est objectum beatitudinis supernaturalis, ratio et voluntas secundum suam naturam non ordinantur sufficienter.”

⁴¹ See Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 190–213, and de Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 46–7.

John Milbank, as we shall see in chapter eight. Whatever de Lubac's motive for this selectivity, the fact is that Thomas plainly does include in his teaching the doctrine of a merely natural human happiness and finality.⁴² For Thomas to refuse to do so would entail a very different view of philosophy, of the power of God, and of the awe and gratitude that normally characterise devout Christians.⁴³

Perhaps the most theologically important argument for the validity of the notion of pure nature arises from reflection on the new life to which Christians are raised in Christ by the Holy Spirit. This life is, as we read in the Second Epistle of St Peter, a true sharing in the divine nature (cf. 2 Pet 1:4). Without the idea of pure nature, it becomes impossible to explain just how the grace of God is strictly necessary, and not merely fitting or helpful, for our salvation.

De Lubac always intended to affirm that we stand in need of the gratuitous assistance of God. According to him and to all theologians of the Catholic tradition, grace is necessary in order for us to come to the fulfilment of our nature and desire.

⁴² De Lubac's reading has been echoed, in some respects, by Denis J. M. Bradley, in his study, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good: Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas's Moral Science* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997).

⁴³ On the importance of maintaining that there is a twofold human finality see chapter 8, below, as well as Stephen A. Long, "Obediential Potency, Human Knowledge, and the Natural Desire for God," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 37 (1997), 45–63; Stephen A. Long, "On the Possibility of a Purely Natural End for Man," *Thomist* 64 (2000), 211–37; Guy Mansini, "Henri de Lubac, the Natural Desire to See God, and Pure Nature," *Gregorianum* 83 (2002), 89–109; and Peter A. Pagan-Aguiar, "St. Thomas Aquinas and Human Finality: Paradox or *Mysterium Fidei*?" *Thomist* 64 (2000), 378. Against the view of the New Natural Law Theorists, that there are many natural ends for the human person, see Benedict Ashley, "What is the End of the Human Person? The Vision of God and Integral Human Fulfilment," in *Moral Truth and Moral Tradition*, ed. Luke Gormally (Dublin: Four Courts, 1994), 69–98.

De Lubac never suggests that we possess within ourselves the means to achieve our end. There is, then, no reason to designate de Lubac's position as Pelagian. Yet there is a relevant doctrinal defect older than Pelagianism, and reflecting on it might have might have caused de Lubac to modify his theology of nature and grace. This defect we may call soteriological Arianism.⁴⁴ I would suggest that it is possible to affirm a flawed doctrine of this sort (to be described presently) while nonetheless sincerely and deliberately professing Christological and Trinitarian orthodoxy.

As Alan Torrance writes, there is a more subdued Arianism than that which openly denies the equality of the Father and Son. The telling mark of this problem is the treatment of salvation as a relatively minor "adjustment internal to the contingent order."⁴⁵ This soteriological Arianism occurs whenever it is suggested that what God has done for us in Christ is capable of adequate explanation in terms of our human nature. What is missing from such a soteriology is sufficient recognition of our genuine participation in the life and nature of God—that "entry into God's being *as it is proper to him*."⁴⁶ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange makes this point with particular clarity:

⁴⁴ See Alan Torrance, "Being of One Substance with the Father," in *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism*, ed. Christopher R. Seitz (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2001), 49–61 and Thomas G. Weinandy, "Gnosticism and Contemporary Soteriology: Some Reflections," *New Blackfriars* 76 (1995), 546–54.

⁴⁵ Torrance, "Being of One Substance," 57.

⁴⁶ William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 276. Quoted in Romanus Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 25.

To grasp what this distance is [i.e., the distance between nature and sanctifying grace], we must bear in mind that grace is really and formally a participation in the divine nature precisely in so far as it is divine, a participation in the Deity, in that which makes God God Even stones, by the fact of their existence, have a remote likeness to God in so far as He is being; plants also resemble Him in so far as He is living; human souls and angels are by nature made to the image of God and resemble Him by analogy in so far as He is intelligent; but no created or creatable creature can resemble God exactly in so far as He is God. Grace alone can make us participate really and formally in the Deity The Deity, which remains inaccessible to all natural created knowledge, is superior to all the divine perfections naturally knowable, superior to being, to life, to wisdom, to love. All these divine attributes, diverse as they appear to be, are one and the same thing in God and with God. They are in the Deity formally and eminently as so many notes of a superior harmony, the simplicity of which is beyond our comprehension.⁴⁷

And grace, in this theological perspective, is that by which our participation in the Godhead comes about:

Grace makes us participate really and formally in this Deity, in this eminent and intimate life of God, because grace is in us the radical principle of essentially divine operations that will ultimately consist of seeing God immediately, as He sees Himself, and in loving Him as He loves Himself. Grace is the seed of glory.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, trans. M. Timothea Doyle (St Louis, MO: Herder, 1937), 55–6.

⁴⁸ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, 56.

This consideration is essential to a Thomistic evaluation of Henri de Lubac’s theology of nature and grace, as we examine Thomas’s account of the theological life.⁴⁹ This is the life of fellowship with God through the divine indwelling, endowment with the theological virtues, and the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In treating “of the rational creature’s advance to God”⁵⁰ in the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas not only differentiates acquired and infused *habitus*, but makes a distinction between two kinds of law and knowledge about what is good for us. In *STh* 1-2 q. 19, aa. 3–4, he contends that the goodness of acts depends both on human reason (or natural law) and on the eternal law (or Divine law). He thereby indicates that some aspects of the human good are known to us by reason—though these are also of divine law, since God is the author of nature. But other aspects of the good are known to us only through revelation. Now the goods in question are many. Thus Thomas says in *STh* 1-2 q. 63, a. 2 that

[since] good consists *in mode, species and order*, according to Augustine [in *De natura boni*, 3], or *in number, weight and measure*, according to *Wisdom* [11:20], man’s good must necessarily be appraised by some rule. This rule is twofold . . . [namely,] human reason and divine law. Since divine law is the higher rule, it extends to more things, so that whatever is ruled by human reason is ruled by the divine law also, but the converse does not hold.

⁴⁹ According to Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 1, we owe the distinction between *theological* and *theologal* to “spiritual authors of the classical French tradition.” Cessario notes that the word *theologal* has been taken into the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (cf. nn. 2607 and 2803).

⁵⁰ *STh* 1 q. 2, prol.: “de motu rationalis creaturae in Deum.”

It follows that human virtue, ordained to a good measured by the rule of human reason, can be caused from human acts; inasmuch as they proceed from reason, by whose power and rule such a good is constituted. Whereas virtue ordained to a man's good as measured by the divine law, not human reason, can not be caused through human acts originating in reason, but is produced in us by the divine operation alone. And so Augustine's definition of this virtue includes the words, *which God works in us without us*.⁵¹

These virtues produced by divine operation alone are not acquired by repeated human action: hence they are said to be infused. Against Lubac's reading of Aquinas it must be stressed that the infused virtues are necessary not only (as one might suppose) because they would, like knowledge of God's existence, be acquired "only by a few, after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors" (see *STh* 1, q. 1, a. 1), but also because the good in question—which is *not* intelligible in the natural law—utterly surpasses the "number, weight, and measure" of our nature. The infused virtues, then, are strictly necessary to reach the end of personal communion with God. No human activity can produce these virtues, since the activities to which the

⁵¹ *STh* 1-2, q. 63, a. 2: "Cum autem ratio boni consistat *in modo, specie et ordine*, ut Augustinus dicit, *sive in numero, pondere et mensura*, ut dicitur *Sap.*, oportet quod bonum hominis secundum aliquam regulam consideretur. Quae quidem est duplex, ut supra dictum est, scilicet ratio humana et lex divina. Et quia lex divina est superior regula, ideo ad plura se extendit: ita quod quidquid regulatur ratione humana, regulatur etiam lege divina; sed non convertitur. [para] Virtues igitur hominis ordinata ad bonum quod modificatur secundum regulam rationis humanae, potest ex actibus humanis causari, inquantum huiusmodi actus procedunt a ratione, sub cuius potestate et regula tale bonum consistit. Virtus vero ordinans hominem ad bonum, secundum quod modificatur per legem divinam et non per rationem humanam, non potest causari per actus humanos, quorum principium est ratio; sed causatur solum in nobis per operationem divinam. Et ideo huiusmodi virtutem definiens Augustinus, posuit in definitione virtutis: *quam Deus in nobis sine nobis operatur*."

theological virtues are the principles are, in a sense, divine activities which do not belong to human nature: “the full development of the rational creature,” writes Aquinas, “consists not only in what is proper to it in keeping with its own nature, but also in what can be ascribed to it by reason of a supernatural share in the divine good.”⁵² Because an “intelligent creature understands the meaning of good as such and of being as such, it has an immediate order to the universal source of being.”⁵³ Participation in God is, as de Lubac rightly emphasises, perfective of the rational nature. But Aquinas distinguishes what belongs to the rational creature according to its nature from actual participation in the divine nature. This participation is a gift, a new, supernatural form—charity—and it includes the infused dispositions of faith and hope.

A natural, lesser—but still real—good is found in the imperfect moral virtues: that is, in cases where moral virtue exists without divine charity.⁵⁴ Thomas calls these virtues “generically good” (*bonus ex suo genere*).⁵⁵ They lack the specific formality of charity (i.e., divine love for the divine good):

⁵² *STh* 2-2, q. 2, a. 3, resp.: “Perfectio ergo rationalis creaturae non solum consistit in eo quod ei competit secundum suam naturam, sed etiam in eo quod ei attribuitur ex quadam supernaturali participatione divinae bonitatis.”

⁵³ *STh* 2-2, q. 2, a. 3, resp.: “Natura autem rationalis, in quantum cognoscit universalem boni et entis rationem, habet immediatum ordinem ad universale essendi principium.”

⁵⁴ See Thomas M. Osborne, Jr., “Perfect and Imperfect Virtues in Aquinas,” *Thomist* 71 (2007): 39–64.

⁵⁵ *STh* 2-2, q. 23, a. 7, ad 1: “sine caritate potest quidem esse aliquis actus bonus ex suo genere, non tamen perfecte bonus, quia deest debita ordinatio ad ultimum finem.”

[V]irtue is ordered to the good. Now the good is realized principally in an end, for whatever is subordinated to an end is said to be good only with reference to it. Therefore as end is twofold, ultimate and proximate, so too is good, ultimate on one hand, proximate and particular on the other. For man the ultimate and principal good is the enjoyment of God . . . , and to this end he is directed by charity. A secondary and, as it were, particular good is also twofold, one which is truly good and by its nature capable of being directed to the principal good which is the ultimate end, another a seeming good but not a true good, since it leads man away from his final good. It is obvious then that true virtue, without any qualification, is directed to man's principal good And so taken, there can be no true virtue without charity. Yet take it in the context of some particular end, and you can talk about a virtue without charity, virtue, that is, in a restricted sense as being about some particular good Yet if such a limited good is a true good, for example, the defence of one's country or the like, then there is true virtue certainly, though imperfect, unless it is given further reference to the final and perfect good. And, on this reckoning, without charity there cannot be true virtue in an unqualified sense.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *STh* 2-2, q. 23, a. 7: "Dicendum quod virtus ordinatur ad bonum, ut supra habitum est. Bonum autem principaliter est finis, nam ea quae sunt ad finem non dicuntur bona nisi in ordine ad finem. Sicut ergo duplex est finis, unus ultimus et alius proximus, ita etiam est duplex bonum, unum quidem ultimum [Piana: *ultimum et universale*], et aliud proximum et particulare. Ultimum quidem et principale bonum hominis est Dei fruitio . . . , et ad hoc ordinatur homo per caritatem. Bonum autem secundarium et quasi particulare hominis potest esse duplex, unum quidem quod est vere bonum, quod est ultimus finis, aliud autem est bonum apparens et non verum, quia abducit ad finali bono. Sic igitur patet quod virtus vera simpliciter est illa quae ordinat ad principale bonum hominis Et sic nulla vera virtus potest esse sine caritate. Et si accipiatur virtus secundum quod est in ordine ad aliquem finem particularem, sic potest aliqua virtus dici sine caritate in quantum ordinatur ad aliquod particulare bonum Si vero illud bonum particulare sit verum bonum, puta conservatio civitatis vel aliquid hujusmodi, erit quidem vera virtus, sed imperfecta, nisi referatur ad finale et perfectum bonum. Et secundum hoc simpliciter vera virtus sine caritate esse non potest."

This passage echoes *De Regno*, Book II, cap. 4 (considered below, in chapter four), where Thomas writes that the king's concern is not the ordering of subjects and city to the *summum bonum*, but to particular goods capable of being directed to that highest end. Still, particular goods that are *not* referred to the ultimate end of personal communion with God may nevertheless be goods of a particular kind (*bonum ex suo genere*). Such particular goods may be acknowledged as such, even if they lack the form of charity, as long as they do not lead us away from our final end. Properly understood, these are “secular” goods. For example, a person without supernatural charity may be kind to mice (not killing them, but only chasing them away). Such compassion need not lead away from God, but may be acknowledged as a genuine good *ex suo genere*, even though it is not informed by supernatural charity. (Of course, the charitable person, like St Martin de Porres, may also be compassionate to vermin.⁵⁷) In short, what we see in Aquinas's handling of generically good acts is a middle way between a Pelagian “works righteousness” and Jansenist denial of loves inferior to charity.

We may note, incidentally, another feature of Thomas's anthropology when he responds to this article's first objection: he remarks that one lacking charity may do good in virtue of faith, hope or of any natural good left intact in the wake of sin. The

⁵⁷ On charity and irrational creatures, see *STh* 2-2, q. 25, a. 3: “Yet they can be loved from charity as good things we wish others to have, in that by charity we cherish this for God's honour and man's service. Thus does God love them by charity.”

good we do is always from God; it is always the result of divine help and providential premotion;⁵⁸ but it is not always the fruit of the infused habitus of charity.

According to Thomas Aquinas, Peter Lombard and some other mediaeval theologians had identified charity with the personal presence of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁹ But Thomas distinguishes the gift of the Spirit from the created effects of grace and charity. It is important at this later stage of theological, philosophical, psychological and anthropological development to appreciate the role that the presence of the Holy Spirit plays according to Thomistic doctrine. As Charles Bouchard writes, a modern emphasis on discrete choices and acts has “not readily accommodate[d] the continuity or habitual influence that characterize the virtues or the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁰ Thomas’s approach is retained by later Thomists. In Thomas O’Meara’s words, “the Dominican school, in contrast to the theologies of actual graces or the various philosophies of human virtues, placed a constant emphasis on grace as a divine

⁵⁸ See Steven A. Long, “Providence, Freedom, and Natural Law,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 4 (2006): 557–605; and Thomas M. Osborne Jr., “Thomist Premotion and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 4 (2006), 607–32.

⁵⁹ See Thomas Aquinas *STh* 2-2, q. 23, a. 2. Thomas reads Peter Lombard as taking this approach, but see Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 260–1: “The notion of the Holy Spirit as charity in His mission to man was later rejected by Thomas Aquinas and some other thirteenth-century scholastics. In taking that line, they appear to have read Peter as the participationist that he decidedly was not, and either objected to his position on that account or wished to advance a different way of viewing the effects of grace, under the headings of created grace or Aristotelian *habitus*” (261).

⁶⁰ Charles E. Bouchard, “Recovering the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in Moral Theology,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 545. See also Thomas F. O’Meara, “Virtues in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas,” *Theological Studies* 58 (1997), 254–85, especially pp. 269–76.

presence and as the supernatural source and character of the virtuous life.”⁶¹ This stress on the Gifts did not figure prominently in the typical manuals *ad mentem Sanctae Thomae*. A vital dimension tended to be overlooked in what it means to live in and by the Spirit: not only is the Spirit personally sent in an invisible mission, but a further range of “gifts of the Spirit” are given to dispose the human mind and heart to the Spirit’s movements. Anthony Kelly, treating of the Spirit’s gifts, observes that:

a certain paradox appears. Though theology is indeed an intellectualist procedure, Christian living breaks out of any intellectual scheme. When the Spirit possesses man, no systematic reasoning says the last word. The ultimate meaning of authentic human existence is to be open to the freedom of the Spirit of God. This enables man to act in a “divine manner,” in a “supra-human mode,” beyond the scope of human deliberation.⁶²

In the *Summa theologiae*, the treatment of the seven gifts (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord⁶³) is not confined to a single “tract.” Instead, like the beatitudes and fruits of the Spirit, the gifts are first considered *in genere* as things relating to *habitus* (see 1-2, q. 68).

⁶¹ O’Meara, “Virtues in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas,” 276.

⁶² Anthony J. Kelly, “The Gifts of the Spirit: Aquinas and the Modern Context,” *Thomist* 38/2 (1974): 194. Kelly considers implications of the theology of the gifts for interreligious dialogue and Christian inculturation: “The limited scale of human reason is opened to the unlimited expanse of the wisdom of God [This is] the kind of thinking that will have increasing relevance for those who are seeking the contemplative dimension of life and so to enter with some sympathy into the wider culture of a whole humanity.”

⁶³ The list of Gifts is from the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11:2–3. The Septuagint and Vulgate have all seven gifts, a reading that has been dominant among Christians. The MT and other versions omit *piety* (*pietas/eusebeia*) and repeat *fear of the Lord* (keeping the seven-item list).

Considered all together, says Thomas, the gifts are infused and abiding dispositions (*habitus*) of receptivity to movement by the Holy Spirit:

[T]he higher the mover, the more perfect must be the disposition by which the mobile is proportioned to it. Thus a student needs to be more perfectly disposed to receive a more profound doctrine from his teacher. Now it is evident that the human virtues perfect man in so far as it is his nature to be moved by reason in the things he does, both interiorly and exteriorly. There must, therefore, be still higher perfections in man to dispose him to be moved by God. These perfections are called Gifts, not only because they are infused by God, but also because they dispose man to become readily mobile to divine inspiration.⁶⁴

The shared supra-human purpose of the gifts leads to Thomas's conclusion on the inseparable connection of the gifts to each other: "the gifts of the Holy Spirit are connected with one another in charity, in such wise that one who has charity has all the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, while none of the Gifts can be had without Charity."⁶⁵

The gifts are many, writes Thomas, because our needs are manifold,⁶⁶ and because

⁶⁴ *STh* 1-2, q. 68, a. 1: "Quanto igitur movens est altior, tanto necesse est quod mobile perfectiori dispositione ei proportionetur: sicut videmus quod perfectius oportet esse discipulum dispositum ad hoc quod altiorem doctrinam capiat a docente. Manifestum est autem quod homo natus est moveri per rationem in his quae interius vel exterius agit. Oportet igitur inesse homini altiores perfectiones secundum quas sit dispositus ad hoc quod divinitus moveatur. Et istae perfectiones vocantur dona: non solum quia infunduntur a Deo; sed quia secundum ea homo disponitur ut efficiatur prompte mobilis ab inspiratione divina"

⁶⁵ *STh* 1-2, q. 68, a. 5: "ita dona Spiritus Sancti connectuntur sibi invicem in caritate: ita scilicet quod qui caritatem habet, omnia dona Spiritus Sancti habet; quorum nullum sine caritate haberi potest."

⁶⁶ See *STh* 1-2, q. 68, a. 4.

our way of speaking about the things of God ought to follow the bible's manner of referring to such realities.⁶⁷

The gifts receive particular, individual treatment in the *Secunda-Secundae* of the *Summa*, within the tracts on virtues which are needed by all rational creatures on their way to union with God. In his treatment of the theological virtue of faith (2-2, qq. 1–16), Thomas connects this virtue with the gifts of knowledge and understanding (qq. 8, 9). Similarly, hope (qq. 17–22) is associated with fear of the Lord (qq. 19), and charity (qq. 23–46) with wisdom (q. 45). As for the cardinal virtues, prudence (qq. 47–56) is related to counsel (q. 52), and justice (qq. 57–122) to piety (q. 121), while the virtue of fortitude (qq. 123–140) is enhanced with the gift of fortitude (q. 139). (No gift is associated with temperance.)

This manner of treating the particular gifts represents a development in St Thomas's thought. He moves beyond his earlier discussion of the matter, where he had treated the gifts as strictly corresponding to the seven virtues and seven beatitudes. Edward O'Connor suggests that this development had three phases. First, in his commentary on the *Sentences*, Thomas breaks new ground by presenting the seven gifts, collectively, as (in O'Connor's words) "a superhuman mode of action in human life, proportionate to man's supernatural destiny." Next, in the *Prima-Secundae*, Thomas presents a further insight into the gifts as a manifold receptivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit—an account which goes beyond his earlier discussion of the gifts as proportioned to the supernatural end, and emphasises more clearly the

⁶⁷ See *STh* 1-2, q. 68, aa. 1, 4.

guiding and directing power of God. Finally, in the *Secunda-Secundae*, Thomas frees himself from

the uncongenial biases that had been imposed on [the topic of the gifts] the pressures of Augustinian rhetoric and scholastic systematization. The assumption that the *Sacrum Septenarium* constitutes a complete, coherent system, in which each Gift corresponds to a particular sector of the moral life, is abandoned. What remains is the notion of qualities by which [the] moral life of man is divinized in its mode through the variegated operations of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁸

We may then safely conclude from Thomas's treatment of the particular gifts in the *STh* 1-2 and 2-2 that these infused modes of receptivity are present in all who live in charity. They are not restricted to a spiritual elite, nor limited to a particularly "religious" genus of activities. What is specific to the gifts as gifts is that they are necessary dispositions to be moved in a higher fashion toward the ultimate end of personal communion with God. Thus Thomas explicitly compares the role of the gifts to the role of human reason itself. Just as we need the use of human reason to act for a terrestrial end, so we need the gifts to act, by God's direction, for a supernatural end. By ourselves, in our nature, and even with the infused theological virtues as principles of supernatural activity, we still cannot direct ourselves adequately toward life with God, since that life is not connatural to us. Responding affirmatively to the question of whether the gifts are necessary for salvation, Thomas answers:

Now God perfects human reason in two ways: by a natural perfection, or one that is in accordance with the natural light of reason, and by a supernatural perfection

⁶⁸ Edward D. O'Connor, in *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Thomas Gilby, vol. 24 (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1974), 130.

through the theological virtues Although the latter perfection is greater than the former, the former is possessed by man in a more perfect way than the latter; for he has complete possession of the former, but only an imperfect possession of the latter, since we know and love God imperfectly. Now it is obvious that whatever possesses a nature, form, or power perfectly is able to act in accordance with it (by which, of course, is not excluded the work of God, who acts interiorly in every nature and will). But that which possesses a nature, form or power only imperfectly is not able to act by itself, but only as it is moved by something else

Thus, therefore, man is able to act by the judgment of reason in regard to matters that are subject to human reason, viz. to perform acts ordained to man's connatural end But the case of the ultimate and supernatural end is different. Towards it man is moved by reason in so far as reason is formed by the theological virtues, which form it only after a fashion and imperfectly. And so the moving of reason is not sufficient to direct man to his ultimate and supernatural end without the prompting and moving of the Holy Spirit from above. Thus it is written, *They that are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God and heirs*; and, *Your good Spirit will lead me into a right land*. For no one can attain the inheritance of that land of the blessed unless he is moved and led by the Holy Spirit. Hence,

to attain that end, it is necessary for a man to have the Gift [N.B., singular] of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹

According to this passage, then, we ought to distinguish two human ends. First, there is a natural or connatural end, which can be more perfectly ours because it can be realised by through intelligent human action (albeit not without “the work of God, who acts interiorly in every nature and will”). In contrast there is the supernatural human end, toward which our reason is disposed to move by the theological virtues. This supernatural end cannot be fully realised by intelligent human action, however, since the virtues do not determine our acts entirely—they are dispositions or *habitus*, in regard to the higher direction and guidance needed on account of the sublimity of the supernatural end. To be called to communion with the

⁶⁹ *STh* 1-2, q. 62, a. 2: “Ratio autem hominis est perfecta dupliciter a Deo: primo quidem, naturali perfectione, scilicet secundum lumen naturale rationis; alio modo, quadam supernaturali perfectione, per virtutes theologicas Et quamvis haec secunda perfectio sit major quam prima, tamen prima perfectiori modo habetur ab homine quam secunda: nam prima habetur ab homine quasi plena possessio, secunda autem habetur quasi imperfecta; imperfecte enim diligimus et cognoscimus Deum. Manifestum est autem quod unumquodque quod perfecte habet naturam vel formam aliquam aut virtutem potest per se secundum illam operari; non tamen exclusa operatione Dei, qui in omni natura et voluntate interius operatur. Sed id quod imperfecte habet naturam aliquam vel formam aut virtutem non potest per se operari, nisi ab altero moveatur Sic igitur quantum ad ea quae subsunt humanae rationi, in ordine scilicet ad finem connaturalem homini, homo potest operari per iudicium rationis Sed in ordine ad finem ultimum supernaturalem, ad quem ratio secundum quod est aequaliter et imperfecte formata per virtutes theologicas, non sufficit ipsa motio rationis, nisi desuper adsit instinctus et motio Spiritus Sancti; secundum illud *Rom.*, *Qui Spiritu Dei aguntur, hi filii Dei sunt, si filii, et haeredes*; et in *Psalm.* dicitur, *Spiritus tuus bonus deducet me in terram rectam*; quia scilicet in haereditatem illius terrae beatorum nullus potest pervenire, nisi moveatur et ducatur [Leonine, Piana: *deducatur*] a Spiritu Sancto. Et ideo ad illum finem consequendum, necessarium est homini habere donum Spiritus Sancti.”

divine persons requires God's transformative grace, above and beyond the capacities of human nature alone. This is what the gifts of the Spirit supply.

In this context, the notion of pure nature has an important, even if implicit, theological function. It puts the gratuitous character of sanctifying grace in sharp relief, distinguishing this gift of God's superabundance from the gifts of creation and providence. At the same time, pure nature points to the still-intelligible and never eclipsed reality of human action, and to the continuing activity of the human being as the one moved by grace.

As we see in chapter seven, below, it may be that de Lubac's objection to the idea of pure nature can be best understood in relation to his acute sensitivity to the secularism of France's Third Republic. That kind of *laïcisme*, needless to say, was unknown to Aquinas. At the same time we should note that there are important differences between the spiritualities of the two authors, Aquinas and de Lubac, and between de Lubac and his contemporaries in the Thomism of the classic scholastic tradition. The gap between de Lubac and his Thomist contemporaries corresponds to a division in theological sensibility that Reinhard Hüter has recently identified. There are, Hüter suggests, two "overarching types" of theological answer to the question, *What is the human person?* One approach, de Lubac's, begins from "a statement, for some of almost canonical status, from Augustine's *Confessions*: 'Inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te,'" and another that "begins with Psalm 8: 'What is

man that thou art mindful of him and the son of man that thou dost care for him?’ (Ps 8:4 RSV).”⁷⁰

Aquinas’s view derives, it must be stressed, from the meaning of the Incarnation itself, and from the exaltation it implies. God has elevated human nature by offering it a good that immeasurably transcends our nature’s desire. A new life and order is established. Created persons, through this further gift of grace, relate *ad Patrem, per Filium, in Spiritu*. This good is not the natural *telos* or aspiration of any creature, or the imagination of any creature, but is a divine good; hence “eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9). The scriptures witness to something new and, by nature, unexpected. So Isaiah says in prophecy, “behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Is 65:17). In our present wayfaring “we have no lasting city, but seek the city that is to come” (Heb 13:14), so that our *politeuma*, our *conversatio* (citizenship, commonwealth) are in heaven (Phil 3:20), in “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ‘Behold, the dwelling of God is with men,’ and ‘the former things have passed away’” (Rev 21:2–4). It is true that these texts and others like them could fuel an escapist attitude toward the world, with implications of the dualism or extrinsicism that make Christianity seem irrelevant to everyday life. However, the integralist insistence that our *politeuma* and *conversatio* be both earthly and natural is not well-founded in scripture. Distinctions between the natural and the

⁷⁰ Hütter, “*Desiderium Naturale Visionis Dei*,” 82, 84.

supernatural orders are designed to show the proper integrity of the human being and of the natural domain, while at the same time making clear the novelty of God's free gift of grace and new life in Christ.

3. Limbo

A third example of Thomas Aquinas's appeal to the notion of pure nature occurs in his theology of limbo. Although de Lubac lists two of the relevant passages in *Surnaturel's* third appendix of *notes historiques*,⁷¹ he does not reveal the content of Thomas's position. This leads uninformed readers to presume that there is no tension between the opinion of de Lubac and that of Thomas Aquinas in this area.

This tension become more clear in de Lubac's 1949 article, "The Mystery of the Supernatural," in which he raises a major objection to the theology of pure nature by appealing to the Christian doctrine of hell. De Lubac argues that the goodness and justice of God must always prevent Him from creating spiritual beings who lack the destiny and means of coming to the beatific vision. The reason such a creation would be contrary to God's nature, according to de Lubac, is that for an intellectual being to exist without the vision of God is, by definition, hell—a penalty which it would be unjust to inflict upon innocent beings existing in the state of pure nature.

The core of de Lubac's argument is expressed in this brief passage:

It is said that a world could have existed in which man . . . had restricted his reasonable ambitions to some

⁷¹ See Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel, études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946), "Note C," 455–7.

inferior [i.e., purely natural] beatitude. But . . . [i]n me, a real, personal human being, in *my* concrete nature, the “desire to see God” could not be eternally frustrated without essential suffering. Is this not the very definition of the “punishment of the damned”? And consequently, it seems, the good and just God could not frustrate me in this way if it were not I who, by my own fault, freely turned away from him.⁷²

Putting aside, for now, the questions raised by the phrase “*my* concrete nature” and by the complex conclusion about what God cannot do, we may ask whether the “inferior beatitude” of existence without the comprehension of the divine essence is, in fact, “the very definition” of the punishment of the damned—at least according to Aquinas, as de Lubac interprets him.

For Thomas, however, the question of the lack of the beatific vision is not nearly as simple as it appears to be for de Lubac. First, Aquinas consistently refers to the *lack* (*carentia*) of the beatific vision, rather than to a privation (the removal or prevention of a due good).⁷³ Further, he holds that the absence of the beatific vision

⁷² De Lubac, “Mystery of the Supernatural,” 291–2. French pp. French pp. 91–2, “On dit qu’un monde aurait pu être, dans lequel l’homme . . . eût borné ses ambitions raisonnables à quelque béatitude inférieure. Mais . . . [en] moi, être humain réel et personnel, en *ma* nature concrète, le « désir de voir Dieu » ne saurait être éternellement frustré sans une souffrance essentielle. N’est-ce pas la définition même de la « peine du dam » ? Et par conséquent, semble-t-il, le Dieu juste et bon ne saurait m’en frustrer, si ce n’est pas moi qui par ma propre faute me détourne librement de Lui.”

⁷³ *Carentia*, *-ae*, is an uncommon late Latin noun indicating a lack or absence. Unlike *privatio*, it does not suggest a loss or corruption.

is, in itself, only the very least and lightest punishment of the damned, not its “very definition.” Thomas’s theory of limbo derives from this position.⁷⁴

The principal relevant text is St Thomas’s *De Malo* q. 5, a. 1, where he considers three objections that share ground with de Lubac’s position. The point at issue in q. 5, a. 1 is whether the lack of the beatific vision (*caerentia visionis dei*) is a fitting punishment (*poena*) for original sin.⁷⁵ De Lubac himself never denies the reality of original sin or its fitting punishment. However, *De Malo* q. 5 is relevant to the discussion of pure nature because in this question we can see where St Thomas and de Lubac part ways. We will look at *De Malo* q. 5, a. 1, objections 1, 3, and 15.

The first of these objections (*De Malo* q. 5, a. 1, obj. 1) proposes that the lack of the beatific vision cannot be a punishment for original sin because this would make the reproduction of the human race (after the Fall) pointless. That is to say, precisely, that since “what does not reach its end is in vain,” and since “beatitude consists in the vision of God,” it follows that “human beings exist in vain if they do not come to the divine vision.” However, since it is axiomatic that God does nothing in vain, it would seem to follow instead that no one lacks the beatific vision on

⁷⁴ See Christopher Beiting, “The Idea of Limbo in Thomas Aquinas,” *Thomist* 62 (1988): 217–44 and Serge-Thomas Bonino, “La théorie des limbes et le mystère du surnaturel chez saint Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue thomiste* 101 (2001): 131–66. For comparison, see the April 2007 study of the International Theological Commission, “The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptised.”

⁷⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo* q. 5, a. 1. proem.: “Et primo quaeritur utrum poena originalis peccati sit caerentia visionis Dei.”

account of original sin.⁷⁶ While Henri de Lubac certainly never questioned the reality or consequences of original sin, his interpretation of human finality matches that of this first objection. The existence of innocent beings who lack the beatific vision, but are without the torment of punishment, seems like nonsense to de Lubac. He does not pursue this matter either to the conclusion that the innocent unbaptised are (a) in torment, or (b) in heaven (both of which views have been proposed over the centuries), but instead seizes only upon St Thomas's teaching that the human *telos* of beatitude necessarily consists in the vision of God. This, it seems to de Lubac, rules out any putatively Thomistic theology of pure nature.

Objection 3 of *De Malo* q. 5, a. 1 also anticipates de Lubac's position. Here the objector says that that lack of the beatific vision is (in the words of St John Chrysostom) "the greatest punishment and more intolerable than hell,"⁷⁷ and that, as such, it cannot be a just penalty for original sin because, as Augustine says, those souls tainted *only* by original sin suffer only the "mildest" (*mitissima*) punishment.

⁷⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo* q. 5, a. 1, obj. 1, my trans.: "Et primo queritur utrum sit conueniens pena peccati originalis carentia uisionis diuine. Et uidetur quod non. Quia ut dicitur in II Phisicorum, frustra est quod est ad finem, que quidem beatitudo in diuina uisione consistit; ergo frustra est homo si non perueniat ad uisionem diuinam. Set Deus propter peccatum originale non destitit causare hominum generationem, ut Damascenus dicit. Cum igitur in operibus Dei nichil sit frustra, uidetur quod homo propter peccatum quod ex sua origine contrahit non incurrat reatum carentie uisionis diuine." Except when otherwise noted, the English given for passages from the *De Malo* is from Richard Regan, trans., and Brian Davies, ed., *On Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo* q. 5, a. 2, obj. 3, my trans.: "Augustinus dicit in Encheridion quod mitissima est pena eorum qui pro solo peccator originali puniuntur. Set Crisostomus dicit Super Matheum quod carentia uisionis diuine est maxima penarum et intollerabilior quam iehenna. Ergo carentia uisionis diuine non est conueniens pena originalis peccati."

Rather than contradicting St Augustine, the objector concludes that original sin has some lighter penalty. De Lubac intervenes at this point with a rhetorical aside: the lack of the beatific vision, he avers, is “the very definition of the punishment of the damned,” with nothing “mild” about it.

Finally, *De Malo* q. 5, a. 1, obj. 15 speaks directly of what later scholastics would call pure nature. Here, Thomas presents an objector who argues that the lack of the beatific vision should not be called original sin’s punishment at all, posing this argument:

Even if man, constituted in his natural powers, had never sinned, he would deserve the lack of the divine vision, to which one may not come except by grace. But sin properly deserves punishment. Therefore the lack of the divine vision cannot be called the penalty of original sin.⁷⁸

This objection, obviously, is a far cry from any position taken by de Lubac—who wishes to do away entirely with the thought of human beings as merely “constituted in their natural powers.” However, Thomas’s somewhat convoluted reply is instructive for the present investigation. Let us examine the replies to objections 1, 3, and 15 in their order of appearance.

Aquinas’s responses to objections 1 and 3 make it clear that he uses the idea of *homo in solis naturalibus constitutus* without speculating beyond the facts of the real world or the real economy of salvation. To objection 1, which insisted that human life

⁷⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo* q. 5, a.1, obj. 15, my trans.: “Homo in naturalibus constitutus etiam si numquam peccasset, deberetur ei carentia uisionis diuine, ad quam peruenire non potest nisi per gratiam. Set [*sic*] pena proprie debetur peccator. Ergo carentia uisionis diuine non potest dici pena peccati originalis.”

would be in vain without a means to salvation (and therefore, the loss of salvation would have been an inappropriate penalty for original sin, since God's work cannot be in vain), Thomas replies by pointing to Christ. Granting that our life would indeed be vain without grace, Aquinas simply replies that "lest human beings begotten with original sin be created uselessly and in vain, God from the beginning of the human race intended a remedy for them by which they would be freed from such frustration, namely, Jesus Christ."⁷⁹

In the case of objection 3 (that existing without the beatific vision is too severe a punishment for original sin, since Augustine says those who die with only original sin incur only the mildest penalty, as already mentioned), Thomas replies in a typically conciliatory fashion by explaining how the authorities cited—John Chrysostom and Augustine—are both right, despite their apparent conflict. With respect to the good taken away, the loss of heaven is indeed the worst punishment; with respect to the individuals on whom this penalty falls, however, "the punishment is worse as the thing taken away is proper and connatural to the one from whom it is taken away." Considered subjectively, those without any personal sins, but with original sin, would be suffering scarcely at all—there would be no pain of sense or anguish of spirit for these innocents (q. 5, aa. 2, 3), and their lack of the divine vision would be like the case of people who were "prevented from coming into possession of a kingdom to which they had no right." Unlike someone deprived of a proper inheritance, one who is merely kept from receiving a great but utterly undeserved

⁷⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo* q. 5, a. 1, ad 1.

good suffers only “the mildest of all punishments, insofar as the vision is an altogether supernatural gift.”⁸⁰

Finally, to objection 15 (that the penalty for original sin cannot be the *carentia visionis divinae*, because that lack would be due to us even without original sin), Thomas replies with a fine distinction:

A human being constituted with only natural powers would indeed lack the divine vision if he were to die in that state, yet it would not be due to him not to have it. It is one thing *not to deserve* (which would not be a punishment, but merely a defect), but something else to deserve not to have (which would be a punishment).⁸¹

Some hypothetical persons who died innocently and in the state of pure nature, and who consequently lack the beatific vision, in other words, would lack it without *poena*, and would only “not deserve to have it.” Others, in contrast, who are not hypothetical but really do die burdened by original sin, yet innocent of personal sins, experience the lack of vision as a punishment (albeit a very light one), and they properly “deserve not to have” the vision of God.

⁸⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo* q. 5, a. 1, ad 3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod grauitas alicuius pene potest attendi dupliciter: uno modo ex parte ipsius boni quod priuatur per malum pene, et sic cauentia uisionis diuine et fruitionis Dei est grauissima penarum; alio modo per comparisonem ad eum qui punitur, et sic tanto est grauior pena, quanto id quod subtrahitur est magis proprium et connaturale ei cui subtrahitur, sicut magis diceremus puniri hominem si auferretur ei patrimonium suum quam si impediretur ne perueniret ad regnum quod ei non debetur. Et per hunc modum dicitur esse mitissima omnium penarum sola cauentia uisionis diuine, in quantum uisio diuine essentie est quoddam bonum omnino supernaturale.”

⁸¹ Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo* q. 5, a. 1, ad 15, my trans.: “Ad quintum decimum dicendum quod homo in solis naturalibus constitutus careret quidem uisione diuina si sic decederet, set tamen non competeret ei debitum non habendi. Aliud est enim debere habere, quod non habet rationem pene set defectus tantum, et aliud debere non habere, quod habet rationem pene.”

Thomas's references to *homo in naturalibus constitutus* and *homo in solis naturalibus constitutus* invoke the same reality later generations call *pure nature*. Thomas is not only familiar with the idea, but employs it without objecting to its fictional or hypothetical quality. On the contrary, a careful reading shows that these references to *homo in naturalibus constitutus* are the presupposition of an intelligible nature which is to receive grace. Thomas Aquinas, in using this phrase, is not talking only about a humanity that *might have been*, but is referring to the real case of infants who die unbaptised and in the state of original sin. Original sin does not substantially change human nature, the nature which constitutes us as the kinds of beings we are: instead, that defining nature remains intact, and because an unbaptised child who dies is innocent of all personal sin, the punishment of the lack of the divine vision is both the lightest of penalties and compatible with a certain natural happiness.

Today, as is well known, the doctrine or theory of limbo has been put aside as overly speculative—we do not know, after all, what becomes of unbaptised infants, but can only reason about their future from the data of faith and from sound theological conclusions. The consensus of theologians and of the Church's pastors today, as expressed in sermons, theology books, catechetical materials, and in the liturgy provided for the burial of unbaptised children, is that we may hope in Christ that these innocents may be brought to the life of heaven. This view itself, of course, is also a speculative theological conclusion inspired by hope; it is not a dogma. Whatever the reality of this matter, however, claims about the actual theology of Thomas Aquinas must take his theology of limbo into account when it comes to the

question of whether the lack of the beatific vision is a cause of great pain to those who die tainted with original sin but innocent of personal offences. Thomas may be mistaken. This is not our concern here. What is our concern is that Thomas's writing on this subject is sufficient to show that Henri de Lubac was over-hasty in concluding that his own view of human finality and that finality's frustration accurately represents that of Aquinas.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have attended to three topics in the theology of Thomas Aquinas, namely his teachings on human mortality, on the necessity of the infused virtues and gifts, and on the nature of the punishment due to original sin. Our examination has shown that, far from being something alien to Aquinas, the idea of pure nature is employed implicitly or explicitly in these three portions of Thomas's work.

In treating of human mortality, Thomas plainly considers human nature in abstraction from our supernatural destiny in teaching that death is natural to us inasmuch as we are bodily composites. He holds that immortality is appropriate to the soul, but is not the soul's natural possession, since it is the nature of the soul to be the form of the physical and necessarily mortal body. By identifying the immortality of Adam and Eve as a *preternatural* gift, Aquinas draws a bright line between the endowments of grace and the intelligible nature to which those graces are given. This

intelligible nature is indistinguishable from the pure nature conceived in the theologies which de Lubac and RO have found objectionable.

The Thomistic treatment of the nature of our supernatural salvation is also illustrative of the place of the idea of pure nature in authentic Thomism. Because the supernatural end of life with God is disproportionate to our nature, we need supernatural dispositions (the infused virtues, especially the theological virtues) and the effective guidance of the Holy Spirit (through the activation of the seven gifts) to arrive at the realisation of that high goal. Thomas recognises that we are *capax dei* in virtue of our creation in the divine image, but this capacity is not itself a power or disposition to act in view of supernatural destiny.

Finally, we note that in his teaching on limbo Thomas Aquinas speaks of *homo in solis naturalibus constitutus*, a notion that is interchangeable with that of purely natural humanity. The theory of limbo as we find it in Aquinas is no longer a common theological position, but it does originally depend on the idea of pure nature—for if the *telos* of supernatural beatitude is inscribed in our very nature, then it is nonsense to say, as Thomas does, that human beings may innocently and painlessly lack that vision. De Lubac, then, would seem to be seriously mistaken in suggesting that his account of the natural human desire for God conforms with that of Aquinas.

The examination of three further topics in the work of St Thomas will fill out our picture of the place of *natura pura* in authentic Thomism. Having shown that a notion of pure nature is present in some of Thomas's specifically theological teachings (namely his treatments of human mortality, of the necessity of the infused

virtues and gifts, and of limbo), we now turn to three matters in which he deals with more secular and naturally intelligible concerns—kinship, natural law, and the epistemology of the sciences. These are the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THOMAS AQUINAS ON KINGSHIP, NATURAL LAW, AND THE SCIENCES

Henri de Lubac and John Milbank both argue that accounts of human life and nature must be integrally theological. In other words, they insist that prescind from the supernatural distorts our understanding of what it is to be human, at least when this idea is being put to practical use—for example, in politics. They both contend that Thomas Aquinas would teach us to shun the idea of pure nature, and they both hold that today's societies must be deliberately and theologically organised if we are to avoid inhumane polities. More profoundly and more consistently than de Lubac, Milbank objects to all recognition of the secular, averring that secularity is a modern invention and that the best remedy for modern ills includes the overcoming of belief in secular (non-theological) spheres of political and intellectual life.

In the present chapter we examine three more topics addressed by Thomas Aquinas which should enlarge our sense of the history and meaning of *pure nature*, illustrating its place in authentic Thomism. These topics are kingship, natural law, and the epistemology of the sciences. We begin with kingship.

1. Thomas Aquinas on Kingship

St Thomas never developed a systematic political theory. But around 1267, while teaching at the Dominican *studium* in Rome, he had occasion to begin (but not

to complete) a short treatise *De Regno*, addressed to the king of Cyprus.¹ The intended recipient was probably the adolescent Hugh II of Antioch-Lusignan (1253–67), whose premature death may account for the *De Regno*'s incompleteness.² After Thomas's own death this incomplete work was extended by including material from another Dominican, Tolomeo de Lucca (d. c. 1327). Only in the 20th century were the contributions of these two authors disentangled, so that Thomas's text was properly identified and authenticated. The uncertain authenticity of the *De Regno* before 1950 excuses de Lubac for failing to consider it when writing *Surnaturel*, but today the incomplete work cannot be ignored—even though, as the Leonine editor wrote in 1979, “this opusculum presents itself under some rather difficult conditions; those conditions call for prudence and discretion in recourse to the text as an expression of the thought of its author.”³

Despite this confused provenance and the work's incompleteness, the *De Regno* as we now have it remains highly relevant to any treatment of the question of pure nature. In this treatise, meant for the instruction of a young Christian king, Aquinas writes about kingship in mostly non-religious Aristotelian and Ciceronian

¹ See Jean-Pierre Torrell, trans. Robert Royal, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996) (French original 1993), 169–71, 350; and *On Kingship, To the King of Cyprus*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan, revised and annotated by I. Th. Eschmann (Toronto: PIMS, 1949), ix–xxxix. All English quotations of the *De Regno* are from the Phelan-Eschmann translation. Latin quotations are from the text of Hyacinthe-François Dondaine, in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino, Opera Omni, Iussu Leonis XIII P.M. Edita*, tome 42, pp. 449–71.

² Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, 169. Hugh II is not the only possibility, and the exact dating of the *De Regno* is disputed.

³ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, 171. See the Leonine text, t. 42, p. 424.

terms. More importantly, when, in the incomplete second book of the *De Regno*, Thomas writes of the monarch's religious responsibilities, these are explicitly circumscribed: the Christian king, writes Thomas, cannot lead his people to their supernatural end, and must rather be occupied, as indeed all monarchs ought to be, with temporal arrangements and ends—namely terrestrial justice, public morality, and the liberty of the clergy and papacy. In this context, Thomas even distinguishes the duties of kings and clergy in terms of the human ends they promote, with the supernatural end of union of God *excluded* from the royal purview, precisely because it is an end extrinsic to human nature.

The opening pages of the *De Regno* set the tone for the whole work. Following the axiom that what is last in the order of execution comes first in the order of intention, Thomas begins by looking at the end of kingship. He points out how, unlike most animals, we human beings are not naturally capable of reaching our end without the co-operation of others of our own species. Already it is plain that Thomas is thinking of a natural end, one that he compares to the natural flourishing of our fellow animals. He takes the conspicuous neediness of human babies as a sign that “it is natural for man, more than for any other animal, to be a social and political animal, and to live in a group.”⁴ Because we are social, says Thomas, we need not only individual governance (the government of each agent's own right reason), but also

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* I.1, lines 25–27: “Naturale autem est homini ut sit animal sociale et politicum, in multitudine uiuens, magis etiam quam alia animalia.” The Phelan-Eschmann translation notes (page 4, note 2) that in this passage Aquinas leans heavily on Aristotle's *Politics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Historia Animalium*, and that this is a rare instance where Aquinas says “social and political” animal—he usually replaces Aristotle's *political* with *social*, and does not use both adjectives.

group governance—such as royal authority. Thomas does not think that reason alone can unite people in peace; they need authorities, for reasonable people will inevitably differ in many of their prudential judgements. Thus, Thomas does not suggest that kingship in which authority is invested is necessary only on account of our fallen condition. Explaining further the need for rulers, Thomas writes:

For where there are many . . . together and each one is looking for his own interest, the multitude would be broken up and scattered unless there were also an agency to take care of what appertains to the commonweal With this in mind, Solomon says: “Where there is no governor, the people shall fall.”⁵

The task of earthly rulers, then, is to guide society to whatever is in the earthly common interest. This position is typical of Aquinas.⁶ If any being is to achieve an end, it needs some suitable intelligence to guide it. Thus,

In the nature of things there is both a universal and a particular government. The former is God’s government Whose rule embraces all things and Whose providence governs them all. The latter is found in man and is much like the divine government. Hence man is called a *microcosmos*. Indeed there is a similitude between both governments in regard to their form; for just as the universe of corporeal creatures and all spiritual powers come under the divine government, in like manner the members of the human body and all the powers of the

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* I.1, lines 70–74, 78–80: “Multis enim existensibus hominibus et unoquoque id quot est sibi congruum prouidere, multitudo in diuersa dispergeretur nisi etiam esset aliquid de eo quod ad bonum multitudinis pertinet curam habens Quod considerans Salomon dixit, Vbi non est gubernator, dissipabitur populus.” The Scriptural quotation is from Proverbs 11:14.

⁶ See also Thomas Aquinas, *De regimine Iudaeorum, ad ducissam Brabantiae* (“Sexto quaerebatis . . .”): “considerare debetis, quod principes terrarum sunt a Deo instituti non quidem ut propria lucra quaerant, sed ut communem populi utilitatem procurent.”

soul are governed by reason. Thus, in a proportionate manner, reason is to man what God is to the world. Since, however, man is by nature a social animal living in a multitude, as we have pointed out above, the analogy with the divine government is found in him not only in this way that one man governs himself by reason, but also in that the multitude of man is governed by the reason of one man. This is what first of all constitutes the office of a king.⁷

Analogically compared to the rule of God and to the rule of reason, a king has two responsibilities pertinent to his domain: first, to create or institute his society (unless a previous king has already done so) and, secondly, to rule it.⁸ Most of the incomplete second book is, in fact, a compilation of general and, admittedly, somewhat bland advice on building new cities. For example, the royal reader is advised to pick fertile and defensible land, with good sunlight and a healthy populace, to remember to build churches and to permit enough (but not too many!) merchants. Of greater theological interest, however, is Thomas's treatment of kingship in relation to humanity's earthly and heavenly ends. Here the decisive metaphor is connoted in the Latin and Greek words for governing (*gubernare, kybernao*), which suggest the

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.1, lines 7–27: “Inuenitur autem in rerum natura regimen universale et particulare: uniuersale quidem, secundum quod omnia sub Dei regimine continentur quia sua prouidentia uniuersa gubernat; particulare autem regem, maxime quidem diuino regimini simile, inuenitur in homine, qui ob hoc minor mundus appellatur, quia in eo inuenitur forma uniuersalis regimine continentur, sic et corporis membra et cetere uires anime a ratione reguntur; et sic quodammodo se habet ratio in homine sicut Deus in mundo. Sed quia, sicut supra ostendimus, homo est animal naturaliter sociale in multitudine uiuens, similitudo diuini regiminis inuenitur in homine non solum quantum ad hoc quod ratio regit ceteras hominis partes, sed ulterius quantum ad hoc quod per rationem unius hominis regitur multitudo; quod maxime pertinet ad officium regis”

⁸ See Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.2.

meaning “to pilot” or “to steer a ship.” Now a ship, writes Thomas, needs several different kinds of sailors, so as to include, say, a carpenter. Similarly the ship of state needs several special kinds of expertise to bring its citizens to natural perfection: “The doctor sees to it that a man’s life is preserved; the tradesman supplies the necessities of life; the teacher takes care that man may learn the truth; and the tutor sees that he lives according to reason.”⁹ Significantly, however, Thomas notes that these kinds of expert attention are not enough to perfect the individual:

Now if man were not ordained to another end outside himself, the above-mentioned cares [i.e., attention to the concerns of the physician, tradesman, and other specialists] would be sufficient for him. But as long as man’s mortal life endures there is an extrinsic good for him, namely, final beatitude which is looked for after death in the enjoyment of God, for as the Apostle says: “As long as we are in the body we are far from the Lord.” Consequently the Christian man, for whom that beatitude has been purchased by the blood of Christ, and who, in order to attain it, has received the earnest of the Holy Ghost, needs another and spiritual care to direct him to the harbour of eternal salvation, and this

⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.3, lines 24–31: “Faber enim lignarius curam habet restaurandi si quid fuerit collapsum in nauis, sed nauta sollicitudinem gerit in nauim perducit ad portum. Sic etiam contingit in homine: nam medicus curam gerit ut hominis uita conseruetur, yconomus ut suppetant necessaria uite, doctor autem curam gerit ut ueritatem cognoscat, institutor autem morum ut secundum rationem uiuat.”

care is provided for the faithful by the ministers of the church of Christ.¹⁰

We should note that Thomas specifies that final beatitude, the end which requires the ministrations of the priesthood, is an extrinsic good. So much, then, for the needs and ends of the individual. But what about society? According to Aquinas, the multitude is similar to the individual in that it needs the attention of specialists (merchants, teachers, etc.) to reach its perfection. However, in considering the good of a society one must consider its end carefully, and distinguish the day-to-day good secured by good government from the ultimate good of union with God. These two goods are not the same; they are two different (albeit compatible) ends. Thus Thomas contends that,

the same judgment is to be formed about the end of society as a whole as about the end of one man. If, therefore, the ultimate end of man were some good that existed in himself, then the ultimate end of the multitude to be governed would likewise be for the multitude to acquire such good, and persevere in its possession. If such an ultimate end either of an individual man or a multitude were a corporeal one, namely life and health of body, to govern would then be a physician's charge. If that ultimate end were an abundance of wealth, then [the merchant would be king of the multitude]. If the good of the knowledge of truth were of such a kind that the multitude might attain to it, the king would have to be a teacher. It is, however, clear that the end of a multitude gathered together is to

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.3, lines 32–44: “Quod si homo non ordinaretur ad aliud exterius bonum, sufficerent homini cure predicte; sed est quoddam bonum extraneum homini quandiu mortaliter uiuit, scilicet ultima beatitudo que in fruitione Dei expectatur post mortem, quia, ut Apostolus dicit, «quandu sumus in corpore peregrinamur a Domino». Vnde homo christianus, cui beatitudo illa est per Christi sanguinem acquisita et qui pro ea consequenda Spiritus Sancti arram accepit, indiget alia spiritali cura per quam dirigatur ad portum salutis eterne; hec autem cura per ministros Ecclesie Christi fidelibus exhibetur.”

live virtuously. For men form a group for the purpose of *living well* together, a thing which the individual man living alone could not attain, and *good life* is virtuous life. Therefore, virtuous life is the end for which men gather together.¹¹

This is not to say, however, that the virtuous life is the *only* end of the city. In fact, Aquinas explains, “through virtuous living man is further ordained to a higher end, which consists in the enjoyment of God.”¹² Thus, the city serves a double purpose: it provides for the natural needs of human life (as detailed at the start of *De Regno*, cited above), and in doing so it is also ordered to the achievement of the further (*ulterius*), supernatural end of enjoying God. Thus “it is not the ultimate end of an assembled multitude to live virtuously, but through virtuous living to attain to the possession of God.”¹³

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.3, lines 45–64: “Idem autem oportet esse iudicium de fine totius multitudinis et unius. Si igitur finis ultimus hominis esset bonum quodcumque in ipso existens, et regende multitudinis ultimus finis esset ut tale bonum multitudo acquireret et in eo permaneret. Et si quidem ultimus siue unius hominis siue multitudinis finis esset corporalis uita et sanitas corporis, medici esset officium; si uero ultimus finis esset diuitiarum affluentia, yconomus rex quidam multitudinis esset; si uero bonum ueritatis cognoscende tale quid esset ad quod posset multitudo pertingere, rex haberet doctoris officium. Videtur autem ultimus finis esse multitudinis congregate uiuere secundum uirtutem: ad hoc enim homines congregantur ut simul bene uiuant, quod consequi non posset unusquisque singulariter uiuens; bona autem uita est secundum uirtutem, uirtuosa igitur uita finis est congregationis humanae.” Italics as in the original translation.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.3, lines 74–76: “quia homo uiuendo secundum uirtutem ad ulteriorem finem ordinatur, qui consistit in fruitione diuina”

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.3, lines 78–80: “non est ultimus finis multitudinis congregate uiuere secundum uirtutem, sed per uirtuosam uitam peruenire ad fruitionem diuinam.”

The crucial point for this present discussion is that earthly kings, according to Aquinas, are not charged with “piloting” their subjects—still less their kingdoms—to heaven. Instead, the scope of the rulers’ duty is limited by their power, and since God alone has power sufficient to bring people to the ultimate end of divine communion, only God reigns in an unlimited manner. “If this end [i.e., enjoyment of God] could be attained by the power of human nature, then the duty of a king would have to include the direction of men to it.”¹⁴ Thomas adds: “because a man does not attain his end . . . by human power but by divine . . . , therefore the task of leading him to that last end does not pertain to human but to divine government.”¹⁵ The conclusion is drawn: “Consequently, government of this kind [governing salvation] pertains to that king who is not only man, but also God, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁶ Now Christ’s authority, says Thomas, is exercised on earth not by kings but by priests; accordingly, Thomas firmly distinguishes between earthly and spiritual types of rule. He writes,

in order that spiritual things might be distinguished from earthly things, the ministry of this kingdom has been entrusted not to earthly kings but to priests, and most of all to the chief priest, the successor of St Peter, the Vicar of Christ, the Roman Pontiff. To him all kings

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.3, lines 81–83: “Siquidem igitur ad hunc perueniri posset uirtute humane nature, necesse esset ut ad officium regis pertineret dirigere homines in hunc finem”

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.3, lines 94–98: “Sed quia finem . . . non consequitur homo per uirtutem humanam sed uirtute diuina . . . , perducere ad illum ultimum finem non est humani regiminis sed diuini.”

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.3, lines 99–101: “Ad illum igitur regem huiusmodi regimen pertinet qui non est solum homo sed etiam Deus, scilicet ad Dominum Ihesum Christum”

of the Christian People are to be subject as to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. For those to whom pertains the care of intermediate ends should be subject to him to whom pertains the care of the ultimate end, and be directed by his rule.¹⁷

Had Thomas said only that “kings of the Christian people” ought to be subject to the Pope and clergy, we might think he was arguing for an ultimately theocratic (or hierocratic) government. Thomas is more careful and nuanced, however. Following Gelasius and the Western tradition generally, he does not propose that kings ought to be subject to the clergy *in everything*. Instead, in line with Gelasius and the *Decretals*, Thomas distinguishes two orders of interest and responsibility: the terrestrial and the spiritual. It is because he recognises these two orders that Thomas is able to recognise the legitimacy of pre-Christian kings, whose responsibility for the common good of their people is substantially the same as the responsibility of Christian kings. This is why he can write:

Because the priesthood of the gentiles and the whole worship of their gods existed merely for the acquisition of temporal goods (which were all ordained to the common good of the multitude, whose care devolved upon the king), the priests of the gentiles were very properly subject to the kings. Similarly, since in the old

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.3, lines 110–119: “ergo regni ministrarium, ut a terrenis spiritualia essent discreta, non terrenis regibus sed sacerdotibus est commissum, et precipue summo sacerdoti successori Petri, Christi vicario Romano Pontifici, cui omnes reges populi Christiani oportet esse subiectos sicut ipsi Domino Ihesu Christo. Sic enim, ut dictum est, ei ad quem ultimi finis pertinet cura subdi debent illi ad quos pertinet cura antecedentium finium, et eius imperio dirigi.” Phelan-Eschmann points out that in this passage Aquinas is echoing the words of Pope St Gelasius (r. 492–96) on the differentiation of secular and ecclesiastical powers (see Gelasius, PL 59, 109A), as well as Gratian (*Decretals* D. 96, c. 6); see Phelan and Eschmann, *On Kingship*, 61, nn. 12 and 13.

law earthly goods were promised to . . . religious people (not indeed by demons, but by the true God), the priests of the old law, we read, were also subject to kings. But in the new law there is a higher priesthood by which men are guided to heavenly goods. Consequently, in the law of Christ, kings must be subject to priests.¹⁸

This subjection of Christian kings to priests, says Thomas, was providentially prepared for in Rome (the seat of the papacy) and in France (where Christianity would thrive, and where the King of Cyprus's Norman relatives lived) by the earlier subjection of pagan rulers to pagan priesthoods. While historically doubtful,¹⁹ the point of these illustrations is to show what kind of deference or docility a Christian king should have toward Christian priests. Thus,

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.3, lines 120–131: “Quia igitur sacerdotium gentium et totus diuinorum cultus erat propter temporalia bona conquirenda, que omnia ordinantur ad multitudinis bonum commune cuius regi cura incumbit, conuenienter sacerdotes gentilium regibus subdebantur. Sed et in Veteri lege promittebantur bona terrena, non a demonibus sed a Deo uero, religioso populo exhibenda; unde et in Veteri lege sacerdotes regibus leguntur fuisse subiecti. Sed in Noua lege est sacerdotium altius, per quod homines traducuntur ad bona celestia; unde in lege Christi reges debent sacerdotibus esse subiecti.”

¹⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.3, lines 132–48: “Vnde mirabiliter ex diuina prouidentia factum est ut in Romana urbe, quam Deus prouiderat christiani sacerdotii principalem sedem futuram, hic mos paulatim inolesceret ut ciuitatis rectores sacerdotibus subderentur. Sicut enim Maximus Valerius refert, «omnia post religionem ponenda semper nostra ciuitas duxit, etiam in quibus summe maiestatis conspici decus uoluit. Quapropter non dubitauerunt sacris imperia seruire, ita se humanarum rerum habitura regium existimantia, si diuine potentie bene atque constanter fuissent famulata.» Quia etiam futurum erat ut in Gallia christiani sacerdotii plurimum uigeret religio, diuinitus est prouisum ut etiam apud Gallos gentiles sacerdotes, quos druides nominabant, totius Gallie ius diffinerent, ut refert Iulius Cesar in libro quem De bello gallico scripsit.” This remark about the Druids suggests that Thomas relied on a source other than Caesar, since “[t]he word ‘priest’ was never applied to Druids by any Classical writer”; see Peter Berresford Ellis, *The Druids* (London: Constable, 1995), 167.

As the life by which men live well here on earth is ordained, as to its end, to that blessed life which we hope for in heaven, so too whatever particular goods are procured by man's agency—whether wealth, profits, health, eloquence, or learning—are ordained to the good life of the multitude. If, then, as we have said, the person who is charged with the care of our ultimate end ought to be over those who have charge of things ordained to that end, and to direct them by his rule, it clearly follows that, just as the king ought to be subject to the divine government administered by the office of priesthood, so he ought to preside over all human offices, and regulate them by the rule of his government.²⁰

This subjection, Thomas goes on to explain, is analogous to the subjection of an armourer to a warrior, or of a builder to an architect: in each case the worker at a lower level labours to produce what may serve the intentions of the higher (making arms suitable for war, or buildings that match the architect's plans). Forging swords, however, is not part of a soldier's defining competence, just as architects are not necessarily experts with the hammer or trowel. Instead, the higher agent in each case provides the inferior with instructions on how to contribute to the ultimate goal—so, for example, the warrior orders a sword whose edges will not easily chip, or the architect asks for floors that will support enough weight.

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.4, lines 1–14: “Sicut autem ad uitam quam in celo speramus beatam ordinatur sicut ad finem uita qua hic homines bene uiuant, ita ad bonam multitudinis uitam ordinantur sicut ad finem quecumque particularia bona per hominem procurantur, siue diuitie, siue lucra, siue sanitas, siue facundia uel eruditio. Si igitur, ut dictum est, qui de ultimo fine curam habet preesse debet hiis qui curam habent de ordinatis ad finem, et eos dirigere suo imperio, manifestum ex dictis fit quod rex, sicut diuino regimine quod amministratur per sacerdotum officium subdi debet, ita preesse debet omnibus humanis officiis et ea imperio sui regiminis ordinare.”

What this analogy implies for Christian kings is not that they will be governed or dictated to by priests²¹ but that priests will supply those principles by which Christian kings may hope to promote more than the natural, common good. Drawing on revealed doctrine, Christian kings will be able to “promote the good life of the multitude in such a way as to make it suitable for the attainment of heavenly happiness . . . , command[ing] those things which lead to the happiness of heaven and, as far as possible, forbid[ding] the contrary.”²² Note, therefore, what Thomas does *not* say: that kings promote the attainment of heaven or directly arrange for love and holiness. Instead kings are to establish, preserve and promote the *polis* and its common good in a way that, to some extent, favours Christian living and discourages vice. “Thus the king, [having been] taught the law of God, should have for his principal concern the means by which the multitude subject to him may live well. This concern is threefold: first of all, to establish the virtuous life in the multitude

²¹ The competence of priests is due to their professional knowledge of sacred doctrine, which is why Thomas, following Deuteronomy 17:18–19, also points out that kings are well-advised to read scripture themselves. See Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.4, lines 28–40: “Que autem sit ad ueram beatitudinem uia et sint impedimenta ipsius, ex lege diuina cognoscitur, cuius doctrina pertinet ad sacerdotum officium, secundum illud Malachie «Labia sacerdotum custodiunt scientiam et legem requirunt ex ore eius». Et ideo in Deuteronomio Dominus precepit «Postquam sederit rex in solio regni sui, describet sibi Deuteronomium legis huius in uolumine, accipiens exemplar a sacerdotibus Leuitice tribus; et habebit secum, legetque illud omnibus diebus uite sue, ut discat timere Dominum Deum suum et custodire uerba et cerimonias eius que in lege precepta sunt.»”

²² Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.4, lines 22–27: “ad regis officium pertinet ea ratione bonam uitam multitudinis procurare secundum quod congruit ad celestem beatitudinem consequendam, ut scilicet ea precipiat que ad celestem beatitudinem ducunt, et eorum contraria secundum quod fuerit possibile interdicit.” Cf. *STh* 1-2 q. 96, a. 2.

subject to him; second, to preserve it once established; and third, having preserved it, to promote it greater perfection.”²³

Although in the *De Regno* Thomas does not burden the teenage king with a disquisition on the logical relationship of political and theological expertise, the precise relationship in question is one of subalternation. Indeed, the examples taken from the mechanical arts are instructive, time-honoured illustrations of good government. They were familiar from antiquity, as when Callicles complained to Socrates, “I believe, on my soul, you absolutely cannot ever stop talking of cobblers and fullers, cooks and doctors, as though our discussion had to do with them.”²⁴ Thomas, then, is discreetly playing a major theme in the Western understanding of government and of the interdependence of various sorts of rule, knowledge, and expertise.²⁵

Politics, for Aquinas as for Aristotle, is a practical science; in fact, it is the chief *praktikos* or active art. Charles McCoy explains:

²³ Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* II.4, lines 41–47: “Per legem igitur diuinam edoctus, ad hoc precipuum studium oportet intendere qualiter multitudo sibi subdita bene uiuat. Quod quidem studium in tria diuiditur: ut primo quidem in subiecta multitudine bonam uitam instituat, secundo ut institutam conseruet, tertio ut conseruatam ad meliora promoueat.”

²⁴ Plato, *Gorgias* 491a. The translation supplied is by W. R. M. Lamb and taken from *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 3 (London: William Heinemann, 1967). Cited in Elspeth Whitney, “Paradise Restored: The Mechanical Arts from Antiquity through the Thirteenth Century,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s. 80.1 (1990), 26. Whitney’s article, particularly pp. 23–55 and 57–73, is extremely useful for tracing the history of Western philosophical views of the mechanical arts, as well as intellectuals’ ambivalence about these lower sorts of understanding.

²⁵ See Whitney, “Paradise Restored,” 23–73.

Politics is the name given by Aristotle to that science under which falls the consideration of the whole of human affairs; for this reason St Thomas, following Aristotle, calls politics the first of the practical sciences. Just as in the division of speculative sciences, metaphysics subordinates to itself all other speculative sciences having for their objects particular determinations of being (physics, the study of being as qualitative and mobile; mathematics, the study of being as quantitative), so in the division of practical sciences politics subordinates to itself all other practical sciences having for their objects ends inferior to and included within the end of politics, the common good.²⁶

As a practical science, politics stands between two other broad categories of knowledge. Below politics and its subordinate practical arts (such as ethics and economics) are the productive crafts or *techne*, which are concerned with the making of things as diverse as swords, houses, and poems. When he says that the practical art of steering a society toward the common good draws some principles from the religious *scientia* which the king receives from the clergy, St Thomas is saying that the relationship of king to priest (or at least to the pope) is like the relationship of the city's artisans, farmers, and practical workers to the king himself. The king need not be an expert on blacksmithing, agriculture or architecture, but he provides these epistemologically lower disciplines with certain guiding principles by which they may contribute to the common good which *is* the king's peculiar concern. For instance, the king might require that blacksmiths work to supply his army, for public defence; or he might forbid the construction of very tall buildings, to cut down on the

²⁶ Charles McCoy, "St Thomas and Political Science," in *On the Intelligibility of Political Philosophy: Essays of Charles N. R. McCoy*, ed. James V. Schall and John J. Schrems (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 26.

disastrous possibilities of fires and earthquakes. There would be no question, however, of the king's dictating the very principles of metallurgy or engineering. In a similar way, the priestly authority provides principles of doctrine or divine law to kings, not because the clergy are experts in government or in the practical attainment of the common good, but because the priest's doctrine can enlighten kings in such a way that they attempt to order the common good with an eye to an even higher ultimate end. For example, the king might decide to build monasteries or forbid commerce on Sundays, hoping to foster love for God and to discourage the sin of Sabbath-breaking. In teaching the king (and everyone else) religion, however, the priesthood will not replace the king as governor or dictate the details of his work any more than the king will personally replace or micro-manage the city's builders and blacksmiths. Even when a kind of knowledge or action is subalternated to a higher science—that is, when it draws some of its guiding principles from outside itself (as when engineering draws on mathematics, or when theology itself draws on the *scientia divina*)—the lower science or art retains its own relative autonomy; it is never merely subordinated to a higher governance, as a mere subset or department. As Thomas sees the human situation, no one ever has omniscience or omni-competence.

With regard to pure nature, then, the unfinished *De Regno* is an important work. In it, we find Thomas defining and discussing kingship in purely natural terms, making no essential distinction between Christian and pagan governors. Moreover, when he does consider how society may be ordered to the ulterior, extrinsic end of heavenly beatitude, he stipulates that he is speaking of Christian society, implying

that although non-Christian societies lack this orientation, they are nonetheless intelligible and genuinely human. In addition, Thomas describes the interplay of priestly and royal ministries in terms that allow each power its own finality and autonomy, thereby incorporating an older Christian tradition that recognises an autonomous secular sphere and transmitting a tradition that can discuss kingship and civil life in natural, non-theological terms.

In treating kingship from a secular or non-theological point of view, Thomas is not being innovative, but is drawing on an ancient heritage which, he evidently believes, can shed light even on the duties of Christian kings. The Christianity of these kings does not change the essential duty of their office. Their kingship, by definition, is still about the guidance of public affairs so that human beings' natural finality may be fulfilled in the realising of the common good. Given the realities of the Christendom of his day, Thomas considers that Christian kings should be guided by the pope and priesthood, so that their civil arrangements—within the limits of possibility—serve their subjects' attainment of the supreme good, salvation. But, far from denying the secular or insisting on a theocratic order, Thomas refuses to confuse temporal and eternal ends or to downplay the separate responsibilities of kings and priests. Whether or not Thomas's teaching, in particular, affected later divisions between church and state, it is at least true to say that a radical differentiation of royal and religious duties is recognised and defended by St Thomas.

In the later 1940s and after Vatican II, Henri de Lubac favoured a stable division of sacred and secular authorities and responsibilities.²⁷ In the early 1930s, however, he sketched a more integralist vision. While dismissing the early modern view that the Church possesses indirect jurisdiction over all temporal affairs, the younger de Lubac had nonetheless argued that the Church's "entirely spiritual" authority is "limited to the individual conscience." In regard to these conscientious individuals, however, the Church is said to have ultimate authority in every "area of thought or human activity . . . , because there is no activity or thought—however profane in appearance—in which . . . faith and morality cannot be involved."²⁸ The shift in his thinking between 1930 and 1945 is not dramatic, but it is palpable,²⁹ while the claim to authority over *every thought and activity* would surely not have sounded so attractive after the experience of totalitarianism in the Second World War.

St Thomas, along with the entire Christian tradition, necessarily holds that the Gospel bears upon the whole life of the believer. However, he carefully distinguishes the transformation of the individual, through grace, from the transformation of any

²⁷ See de Lubac, *Splendour of the Church*, 114–146, esp. 137–40. The original essays of this volume were written between 1945 and 1950, according to de Lubac's introduction to its 2nd ed.

²⁸ Henri de Lubac, "The Authority of the Church in Temporal Matters," trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski, in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 211.

²⁹ More light could be shed on the development of de Lubac's thought by a critical study of his "Political Augustinism?" (in *Theological Fragments*), 235–86, which he began in the 1930s as an appendix to "The Authority of the Church in Temporal Matters" and which was published, in an expanded form, in 1954. On the importance of the 1940–45 Occupation for understanding de Lubac, see David Grummet, *De Lubac: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clarke, 2007), 25–45.

given human “activity or thought.” For Aquinas, certainly, grace affects the believer’s whole existence, and no human act (properly so called) can ever be morally neutral. It does not follow, however, that therefore every kind of thought and activity is changed in itself.

For example, suppose I am a carpenter and an atheist; and suppose that I undergo a religious conversion and become a faithful Catholic. Although I would be changed by this conversion, and although all my acts might now be animated by charity, still, my carpentry itself, as I continue to practice that craft, is not essentially changed.³⁰ This is why, when we want some carpentry done, we do not insist that the carpenter be in the state of grace, or expect that there will be any necessary correlation between his charity and his craftsmanship. The person, and the moral quality of his or her acts will be changed by the infusion of sanctifying grace, but we cannot rightly expect this grace to improve anyone’s acuity in the practical, artistic, or scientific disciplines—including the disciplines of kingship.

This brings us to a wider but no less relevant topic, namely Thomas’s account of how the various human sciences are related. In this context, the idea of pure nature corresponds to that of autonomous philosophy—or, indeed, to that of any discipline that might exist apart from theology. The link between the idea of pure nature and the

³⁰ That is, I will not normally expect anyone’s human skills (as such) to be improved by grace. But obviously, God can endow anyone with practical or scientific skills as He pleases. See Exodus 35:30–31: “See, the LORD has called . . . Bezalel . . . , and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability, with intelligence, with knowledge”—that is, in the LXX, with *sophias kai sunēseus kai epistēmēs*. These are what Thomas would call *gratiae gratis datae* (gratuitous graces) and not *gratiae gratum facientes* (sanctifying graces). See, for example, *STh* 1, q. 111, a. 5.

autonomy of non-theological disciplines may not be immediately obvious, but I believe John Milbank is correct in inferring from de Lubac's denial of *natura pura* a principled objection to *every* claim of non-theological scientific autonomy.

We shall examine Milbank's position in chapter seven, but for now turn to examine the relationship between the idea of pure nature and Aquinas's account of the natural moral law.

2. Natural Law

More light may be shed on Aquinas's use of the idea of pure nature by recalling his theory of natural law, especially in its relationship to the law of grace. Here we draw mainly, but not exclusively, from the "treatise on law," *STh* 1-2, qq. 90–114, and begin with Thomas's definition of law itself.

Law, writes Thomas Aquinas, is "nought else than an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by the authority who has care of the community, and promulgated."³¹ On its face, this definition describes positive, human law. But the precepts of church and state do not draw much of Thomas's attention. He is more interested in the eternal divine law, the natural law, and the laws of the old and new covenants. Three observations will help us see how Aquinas's definition of law is more commodious than it initially appears, and how it applies to these higher laws.

First, in speaking of the common good, Thomas allows that two distinct realities can be meant. Many laws are ordained to a "material and earthly benefit,"

³¹ *STh* 1-2, q. 90, a. 4, resp., "[Lex] nihil est aliud quam quaedam rationis ordinatio ad bonum commune, ab eo qui curam communitatis habet, promulgata."

typically the collective welfare of the people in a juridical community. However, some laws are ordained to a “spiritual and heavenly good,”³² and above all to subsistent goodness itself, i.e., God, who is “the common good which is participated in by all,”³³ and whose goodness “is the good of the whole universe.”³⁴ So all law is not designed to serve the very same common good, but rather the common good in some sense.

Second, when Thomas speaks of legislators, he again means not only kings and magistrates, but also God, the supreme lawgiver, and even human reason itself.

Third, by stipulating that all laws are promulgated, Aquinas does not mean that all law must be printed in a gazette or announced in the marketplace. He evidently means that law must be somehow pronounced, proposed, or rationally articulated. Promulgation, then, is characteristic even of God’s eternal law: as the law

³² See *STh* 1-2, q. 91, a. 5, resp.: “ad legem pertinet ut ordinetur ad bonum commune sicut ad finem Quod quidem potest esse duplex, scilicet bonum sensibile et terrenum. Et ad tale bonum ordinabat directe lex vetus: unde statim, *Exod.*, in principio legis invitatur populus ad regnum terrenum Chananaeorum. Et iterum bonum intelligibile et et coeleste; et ad hoc ordinat lex nova; unde statim Christus ad regnum coelorum in suae praedicationis principio invitavit, dicens, *Paenitentiam agere, appropinquabit enim regnum caelorum.*”

³³ Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio super Romanos* cap.1, lec. 6: [to God’s *divinitas*, perceived in creatures (Rom 1:20)] “pertinet quod cognoverunt deum sicut ultimum finem, in quem omnia tendunt. Divinum enim bonum dicitur bonum commune quod ab omnibus participatur.” Trans. from Lawrence Dewan, “St. Thomas and the Divinity of the Common Good” (paper presented at the “Providence, Practical Reason, and the Common Good” conference, Providence College, Providence, RI, 25–26 April 2008).

³⁴ See *STh* 1-2, q. 19, a. 10, resp.: “Bonum autem totius universi est id quod est apprehensum a Deo, qui est universi factor et gubernator, unde quidquid vult, vult sub ratione boni communis, quod est sua bonitas, quae est bonum totius universi.”

of providence, this is the law of divine wisdom “promulgated” in the eternal utterance of the divine Word.³⁵

We should also note that, by characterising law as an *ordinatio rationis*, Aquinas leads us to think of law as purposeful, practical, and as a kind of measure (hence, a “rule,” *regula*). As an ordination of reason, law is essentially an arrangement of some intelligent lawgiver, an arrangement of action (and, in the case of the eternal law, of acts of being) for the sake of an end. For Aquinas, then, law is best explained neither in terms of the lawgiver’s will nor in terms of the obligations incumbent upon those ruled: instead he will always look to how law regulates or measures some *ordo*, carefully arranging (“regulating”) change for a purpose.

a. The Law of the Gentiles

Focussing now on the natural law, let us begin with Thomas’s exegesis of a pivotal New Testament text: “When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts” (Rom 2:14–15a). Here St Paul uses the word “law” in at least two senses, as Thomas explains most fully in his *Expositio super Romanos*, cap. 2, lec. 3. On one hand, “law” means the Torah, and especially what Thomas calls the ceremonial law of Judaism. This is the

³⁵ See *STh* 1-2, q. 91, a. 1, ad 2. For clarification see also Romanus Cessario, “Why Aquinas Locates Natural Law within the *Sacra Doctrina*,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas and the Natural Law Tradition: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. John Goyette, Mark S. Latkovic, and Richard S. Myers (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 80.

law that the Gentiles, not being Jews, obviously lack. On the other hand, there is the natural moral law, and it is this that Romans 2 insists is written on the hearts of the Gentiles and accounts for their being called “a law to themselves.” In his *Expositio super Romanos* and again in *STh* 1-2, q. 91, a. 2, Thomas explains this moral law of the Gentiles by invoking a suggestive verse from the Latin psalter: “the light of your face is signed upon us, O Lord” (*signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, Domine*) (Ps 4:7 Vulg).

Thomas contends that the natural, God-given light of the human intellect is what makes the Gentiles (and, for that matter, all humans) “a law to themselves.” Without revelation and even in our fallen state, human intelligence is able to frame general principles of right action. This task falls to the practical intellect, that is, to our human intelligence as it goes beyond speculation (the consideration of what is) and considers how to be and do good. “As to be real first enters into human apprehending as such, so to be good first enters the practical reason’s apprehending when it is bent on doing something.”³⁶ We are able to consider the good as action’s *telos* and to make moral judgements accordingly because of our innate disposition to grasp the first and most general precept of moral law. This first precept is “that good is to be sought and done, and evil to be avoided.” Aided and impelled by this same

³⁶ *STh* 1-2, q. 94, a. 2: “Sicut autem ens est primum quod cadit in apprehensione simpliciter, ita bonum est primum quod cadit in apprehensione practicae rationis, quae ordinatur ad opus.” On the necessity of speculative adequation for practical reasoning see Steven A. Long, “Natural Law or Autonomous Practical Reason: Problems for the New Natural Law Theory,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas and the Natural Law Tradition: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. John Goyette, Mark S. Latkovic, and Richard S. Myers (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 165–93.

disposition (that is, synderesis), we also grasp certain general but indemonstrable rules which follow from the first, unfolding these in our understanding as we consider how to achieve the different sorts of goods to which we are naturally inclined: first, the good of self-preservation (to which all beings are inclined); second, the goods of animality, such as the rearing of children and the flourishing of our species; and third, the goods of rationality, like knowing “truths about God and about living in society.” All these things, and those which follow from them, are the content or precepts of the natural law.³⁷

³⁷ See *STh* 1-2, q. 94, a. 2, resp.: “Dicendum quod . . . praecepta legis naturae hoc modo se habent ad rationem practicam sicut principia prima demonstrationum se habent ad rationem speculativam: untraque enim sunt quaedam principia per se nota . . . Sicut autem ens est primum quod cadit in apprehensione simpliciter, ita bonum est primum quod cadit in apprehensione practicae rationis, quae ordinatur ad opus. Omne enim agens agit propter finem, qui habet rationem boni. Et ideo primum principium in ratione practica est quod fundatur supra rationem boni; quae est, bonum est quod omnia appetunt. Hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum; et super hoc fundatur omnia alia praecepta legis naturae, ut scilicet omnia illa facienda vel vitanda pertineant ad praecepta legis naturae quae ratio practica naturaliter apprehendit esse bona humana Secundum ordinem inclinationum naturalium est ordo praeceptorum legis naturae. Inest enim primo inclinatio homini ad bonum secundum naturam in qua communicat cum omnibus substantiis, prout scilicet quaelibet substantia appetit conservationem sui esse secundum suam naturam Secundo inest homini inclinatio ad aliqua magis specialia secundum naturam in qua communicat cum caeteris animalibus; et secundum hoc dicuntur ea esse de lege naturali quae natura omnia animalia docuit, ut est commixtio maris et feminae, et educatio liberorum, et similia. Tertio modo inest homini inclinatio ad bonum secundum naturam rationis quae est sibi propria: sicut homo habet naturalem inclinationem ad hoc quod veritatem cognoscat de Deo, et ad hoc quod in societate vivat; et secundum hoc ad legem naturalem pertinent ea quae ad huiusmodi inclinationem spectant, utpote quod homo ignorantiam vitet, quod alios non offendat cum quibus debet conversari, et caetera huiusmodi quae ad hoc spectant.”

Now, if we are following St Thomas, we must affirm two things about this natural law, features which many philosophers and theologians consider contradictory. First, we must affirm of the moral law which we *naturally* understand in its general principles (as the very name “*natural law*” signifies), that it is primarily, principally, and supereminently in God, as eternal law. It is God who ordains all things and by whose power all creatures exist and move. As prime mover, God is at work in all beings and all created agencies, including free agencies like our own: “in any series of subordinate agents the energy of those that are secondary flows from the energy of the prime mover, since unless it sets them going they do not act.”³⁸ Lest we have any doubt that the motion of the human free will is included, we may recall this earlier apposite passage from the *Summa*:

Like the mind that . . . is moved by its object and by the one who endowed it with the power of understanding, so too the will is moved by its object, the good, and by him who has created the power of willing. As by its object, the will is open to being moved by any sort of good, but is sufficiently and effectively so moved only by God. For nothing has the power to move a moveable subject unless the [mover’s] active power surpasses or at least equals the passivity of the movable subject.

Here, we may notice, Thomas indicates the scope of human freedom. No created, particular good can compel us to choose it freely. There is no question of our lacking

³⁸ See *STh* 1-2, q. 93, a. 3, resp.: “In omnibus autem moventibus ordinatis oportet quod virtus secundi moventis dirivetur a virtute moventis primi, quia movens secundum non movet nisi in quantum movetur a primo.” See also *STh* 1, q. 105, a. 5. This is, of course, an extraordinarily vexed point. See chapter five, below, on the related early modern controversies, and, among many useful sources, the works of Steven A. Long in this dissertation’s bibliography.

the freedom to choose (or not choose) any particular good: only the universal good, God himself, is absolutely compelling. Continuing, Thomas notes why this is so:

Now the receptivity of the will extends to good as a whole; universal good is the will's object [Since] God alone is the universal good . . . , he alone . . . fulfils the capacity of the will, and so he alone as object moves it sufficiently. Similarly, as to the power of willing, God is its sole cause. For the act of willing means precisely a responsiveness to the will's object, the universal good. To make anything responsive to the universal good belongs to the first mover, to whom alone the ultimate end is properly commensurate.³⁹

The second affirmation we must make is that human beings participate in God's eternal law, yet neither as rivals to, nor ciphers for, the divine legislator. Because the intellectual light of God is "signed upon us," we share—in a lowly, often befogged, and always imperfect manner—in God's own knowledge of how the world really is. Free and intelligent creatures, who exercise a creaturely providence of their own under the government of God's perfect providence, "join in and make their own the Eternal Reason through which they have their natural aptitudes for their due activity and purpose," and "this sharing in the Eternal Law by intelligent creatures is

³⁹ *STh* 1, q. 105, a. 4, resp.: "Sicut intellectus . . . movetur ab objecto et ab eo qui dedit virtutem intelligendi, ita voluntas movetur ab objecto quod est bonum et ab eo qui creat virtutem volendi. Potest autem voluntas moveri sicut ab objecto a quocumque bono, non tamen sufficienter et efficaciter nisi a Deo. Non enim sufficienter aliquid potest movere aliquod mobile, nisi virtus activa moventis excedat vel saltem adaequet virtutem passivam mobilis. Virtus autem passiva voluntatis se extendit ad bonum in universale; est enim ejus objectum bonum universale Solus autem Deus est bonum universale. Unde ipse solus implet voluntatem et sufficienter eam movet ut objectum. Similiter autem et virtus volendi a solo Deo causatur. Velle enim nihil aliud est quam inclinatio quaedam in objectum voluntatis quod est bonum universale. Inclinare autem in bonum universale est primi moventis, cui proportionatur ultimus finis"

what we call ‘natural law’.”⁴⁰ God’s rule of law is present and active in us in our practical reason, yet not in a way that prevents our reasoning from being genuinely ours: thus Thomas can say that the natural law “is something constituted by reason, after the fashion that a proposition is a work of reason,”⁴¹ and that the judgements of our practical reasoning truly have the character of law⁴²—albeit a law that is (like intelligence itself) more God’s than ours.⁴³

With providence and freedom, eternal law and participated natural law in mind, then, we continue with Thomas’s description of the natural law’s quality and content. “The precepts of natural law,” writes Aquinas, “are to human conduct what the first principles of thought are to demonstration.”⁴⁴ We frame these practical, general precepts because we are intelligent agents, hungry for the good, and because

⁴⁰ See *STh* 1-2, q. 91, a. 2, resp.: “Inter caetera autem rationalis creatura excellentiori quodam modo divinae providentiae subjacet, in quantum et ipsa fit providentiae particeps, sibi ipsi et aliis providens. Unde et in ipsa participatur ratio aeterna per quam habet naturalem inclinationem ad debitum actum et finem, et talis participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura ‘lex naturalis’ dicitur.”

⁴¹ *STh* 1-2, q. 94, a. 1, resp.: “lex naturalis est aliquid per rationem constitutum, sicut etiam propositio est quoddam opus rationis.”

⁴² See *STh* 1-2, q. 90, a. 1, ad 2: “et hujusmodi propositiones universales rationes practicae ordinatae ad actiones habent rationem legis.” On our autonomy (or, as he prefers, “autonomous theonomy”) under God, see Rhonheimer, *Natural Law*, 64–5, 142, 181, 203–56.

⁴³ See *STh* 1-2, q. 91, a. 3, especially ad 2; and Russell Hittinger, “Thomas Aquinas on Natural Law and the Competence to Judge,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas and the Natural Law Tradition: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. John Goyette, Mark S. Latkovic, and Richard S. Myers (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 261–84.

⁴⁴ *STh* 1-2, q. 94, a. 2, sed contra: “praecepta legis naturalis in homine quantum ad operabilia sicut se habent prima principia in demonstrativis.”

we have a powerful innate disposition—a natural *habitus*—for doing so. (Since we are not God, we cannot know all the details of everything that pertains to the universal common good; but we can at least articulate the general principles of right action.) We may say that this innate disposition, *synderesis*,⁴⁵ comes to the help of our desire for the good.

Now although our practical reason is essentially independent of other people's reasoning, nevertheless we all (according to Thomas Aquinas) reach the same general conclusions of practical moral reason,⁴⁶ even as we all inevitably recognise the same axioms of logic. We can expect the greatest agreement about the natural law's primary and most general norm, "do good and avoid evil." A range of slightly more specific, secondary commands likewise enjoy universal acceptance: these pertain to three sorts of good for which human nature has a natural appetite. First, there is the good of self-preservation (to which all beings are inclined); second, the good of our species (a good sought by all reproducing creatures, which includes "for instance, the coupling of male and female, the bringing up of the young, and so forth"); and third, there is an appetite for the good of our rational nature (which includes things like knowing the truth, living in society, and developing the virtues).⁴⁷ The natural law pertaining to these goods must always take the form of a generalisation. Unlike the eternal law in God, the law in us (natural law) is composed of generalities. Hence prudence and conscience are needed to apply the law to particular circumstances; so although a

⁴⁵ See *STh* 1, q. 79, a. 12.

⁴⁶ See *STh* 1-2, q. 94, aa. 4 and 6.

⁴⁷ See *STh* 1-2, q. 94, a. 2, resp., and q. 94, a. 3.

general understanding of natural law can be shared, people are always liable to disagree about particular cases.

In questions of action, practical truth and goodwill are not the same for everybody with respect to particular decisions With respect to specific conclusions come to by the practical reason, there is no general unanimity about what is true and right, and even when there is agreement there is not the same degree of recognition.⁴⁸

b. Comparing the Laws of Nature and Grace

Having traced the main contours of Thomas's natural law theory, we now turn to explore two finer clarifications which appear in the *Summa theologiae*'s treatment of the law of grace. This law is that of the New Covenant, which Aquinas also calls *lex Christi*, *lex evangelii*, *lex libertatis*, and *lex nova*. It, too, is an ordination of reason, promulgated for the common good; it, too, is a purposeful arrangement, a measure and principle for realising an end. But while "grace and virtue imitate the order of nature,"⁴⁹ the *lex gratiae* is rather unlike what we usually mean when we speak of law. This is because, when we speak of it, we are speaking of "the law of the

⁴⁸ *STh* 1-2, q. 94, a. 4, resp.: "In operativis autem non est eadem veritas vel rectitudo practica apud omnes quantum ad propria [Q]uantum ad proprias conclusiones rationis practicae, nec est eadem veritas seu rectitudo apud omnes; nec etiam apud quos eadem est aequaliter nota."

⁴⁹ *STh* 2-2, q. 31, a. 3, resp.: "gratia et virtus imitantur naturae ordinem."

Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” which “has set [us] free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). The new law is, in truth, “the very grace of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁰

For the present study, our interest lies with two particular points which Aquinas makes about the natural law while discussing the new law of grace in *STh* 1-2, qq. 106–114. These have to do with the place of love for God in the natural law, and with the senses in which the *lex gratiae* and *lex naturae* are each said to be within us.

c. Loving God, Naturally?

We have already seen that Thomas Aquinas describes the natural law as ordering our pursuit of three kinds of goods, namely the goods of existence, animality, and rationality. In this context, when speaking of the good that belongs to our nature as human (that is, the good of the specifically rational animal), he makes no mention of the beatific vision. Although he has already, in the *Prima-Secundae*, affirmed that our perfect and ultimate happiness lies in seeing God, the first cause,⁵¹ Thomas does not refer to a personal communion with God in the context of the natural law. Since Aquinas thinks “everything to which man is set by his very nature

⁵⁰ See *STh* 1-2, q. 106, a. 1, resp.: “Id autem quod est potissimum in lege Novi Testamenti, et in quo tota virtus ejus consistit, est gratia Spiritus sancti, quae datur per fidem. Et idea principaliter lex nova est ipsa gratia Spiritus sancti, quae datur Christi fidelibus.”

⁵¹ *STh* 1-2, q. 3, a. 8, resp.: “Ad perfectum igitur beatitudinem requiritur quod intellectus pertingat ad ipsam essentiam primae causae.” On the precise nature of our desire for the beatific vision, see Feingold, *Natural Desire*; and Thomas Gilby, “The Vision of God,” in *St Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologiae*, vol. 16 (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969), 153–55.

belongs to the natural law,”⁵² we might suppose that he has made an unhappy omission in describing the scope of the *lex naturalis* without referring to the law of supernatural love.

We have already seen (in chapter three, above) that Aquinas believes we need the infused virtues and gifts for personal communion with God, since this union is a good which exceeds the measure of our nature. On that account, we may acquit Thomas of the error of omission in *STh* 1-2, q. 106, a. 1 (where he describes the range of goods to which natural law pertains). Yet it still remains for us to see whether rational creatures can be ordered to the supreme good (God) and to beatitude, except in manner which involves supernatural communion.

This matter is taken up at the end of Thomas’s questions on law. He asks in *STh* 1-2, q. 109, a. 3 whether human beings can love God above all things without grace, and through the endowments of nature alone. Aquinas begins to address this point by adducing three objections. The first objection is that, since it belongs to charity to love God above all things, and since charity is a supernatural endowment, loving God above all things must be beyond our natural powers: and therefore, to love God above all is a supernatural activity. The second objection invokes the axiom that no nature can rise above itself: since God is above us, it must be that we are powerless to rise up to love him more than anything. The third objection is that the love we owe to God is a perfect, supreme love (since God is the perfect, supreme

⁵² *STh* 1-2, q. 94, a. 3, resp: “ad legem naturae pertinet omne illud ad quod homo inclinatur secundum suam naturam.”

good); and if we could love God this way naturally, grace would be superfluous—which, of course, no one wants to say.

In reply, Thomas turns immediately to the idea of pure nature. “Some,” he writes, “hold that the first human being was constituted in his natural endowments alone.” Thomas himself does not think anyone ever lived in this state (*in solis naturalibus* or *in statu naturae integrae*, as he writes in this article), but surely he would not cite and build on this opinion if he considered the very idea of pure nature utterly inconceivable (or, *a fortiori*, if he never considered the idea in any way at all).

Referring to this supposed initial state of pure nature, Aquinas continues:

It is clear that, in this state, he [i.e., Adam] loved God in some way. But he did not love God equally with himself or less than himself, because then he would have sinned. Therefore he loved God above himself. Therefore by his natural endowments alone, man can love God more than himself and above all things.⁵³

Repeating a remark made in the *Summa's Prima pars* (q. 60, a. 5), Thomas goes on to explain that “in the state of intact nature, man could perform by virtue of his own nature the good which is connatural to him, without the supplement of a gratuitous gift.” Loving God above all else, Thomas insists, is connatural to all beings whatsoever—even inanimate objects love, in a manner proper to their mode of being.⁵⁴ It is not because we are human, or creatures, that we fail to love God above

⁵³ *STh* 1-2, q. 109, a. 3: “Sed contra, primus homo in solis naturalibus constitutus fuit, ut a quibusdam ponitur; in quo statu manifestum est quod aliquantulum Deum dilexit. Sed non dilexit Deum aequaliter sibi, vel minus se, quia secundum hoc peccasset. Ergo dilexit Deum supra se. Ergo homo ex solis naturalibus Deum potest diligere plus quam se et supra omnia.”

⁵⁴ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XXII.7 (1072a19–1073a13).

all things, but because our nature has been partially corrupted: “in the state of spoiled nature man falls short” of loving God above all, and fails to order all loves toward God. We pursue private goods rather than the common *summum bonum* that is God.

Therefore, argues Aquinas,

our conclusion must be that in the state of intact nature (*in statu naturae integrae*) man did not need a gift of grace supplementing his natural endowments in order to love God naturally above all things But in the state of spoiled nature man also needs for this the assistance of grace healing nature.⁵⁵

Throughout this entire article (1-2, q. 109, a. 3), Thomas appeals to the idea of the state of pure nature, arguing about what was and was not possible for Adam in that state of ungraced, integral nature; and nowhere in this article does he mention that it is a state in which no one has actually existed. On the contrary, here the idea of pure nature is put to good use to explain how grace restores nature. To love God above all things in a way that corresponds to our nature now, thanks to our fall in Eden, requires supernatural aid. Yet grace, of course, is greater still: it does not restore us to the *status naturae integrae*, nor leave us *in solis naturalibus constitutus*, but elevates us further. All three objections in *STh* 1-2, q. 109, a. 3, then, are variations on a single mistake, the confusion of natural and supernatural modes of love. It is

⁵⁵ *STh* 1-2, q. 109, a. 3, resp.: “Unde homo in statu naturae integrae dilectionem sui ipsius referebat ad amorem Dei sicut ad finem, et similiter dilectionem omnium aliarum rerum; et ideo Deum diligebat plus quam seipsum et super omnia. Sed in statu naturae corruptae homo ad hoc deficit secundum appetitum voluntatis rationalis, quae propter corruptionem naturae sequitur bonum privatum, nisi sanetur per gratiam Dei. Et ideo dicendum est quod homo in statu naturae integrae non indigebat dono gratiae superadditae naturalibus bonis ad diligendum Deum naturaliter super omnia Sed in statu naturae corruptae indiget homo etiam ad hoc auxilio gratiae naturam sanantis.”

perfectly true that charity is beyond our nature, but charity is not the same as loving God most and above all—charity is loving God in a divine mode, with divine motivation, and in a communion with the divine persons which all natural love lacks.⁵⁶

For the purposes of the present study, the more immediately important and arresting point to be made about q. 109, a. 3, is that it is an instance of Thomas’s constructive invocation of the idea of pure nature. It is also, if more generally, important that in q. 109, a. 3, ad 3, Thomas so carefully discriminates between natural and supernatural love. While “nature loves God above all things, in so far as he is the source and end of natural good,” infused charity loves God above all things “inasmuch as he is the object and source of blessedness, and inasmuch as man has a certain kind of communion with God.” Here again, in contrasting the natural and the supernatural, Thomas shows us the proper place of the idea of pure nature. To appreciate how this is done, however, it will be best to review the comparison Thomas makes between the inwardness of the natural law and the inwardness of the new law of the Spirit.

d. How the Laws of Nature and Grace are in us

Our second reflection on St Thomas’s contrasting of the laws of nature and grace has to do with the manner in which each law is within us. In question 106 of the

⁵⁶ See *STh* 1-2, q. 109, a. 3, ad 1: “caritas diligit Deum super omnia eminentius quam natura. Natura enim diligit Deum super omnia, prout est principium et finis naturalis boni; caritas autem, secundum quod est objectum beatitudinis, et secundum quod homo habet quamdam societatem spirituales cum Deo.”

Prima-Secundae, Thomas begins his remarks by inquiring as to what kind of thing this new law is. He asks, in particular, whether it is something written (*inscripta*) or something “within” (*indita*).⁵⁷ The new law, of course, is not primarily a text: if Christians themselves are “a letter from Christ . . . , written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God” (2 Cor 3:3), then surely the law which makes them so must also be more spiritual than textual.

If the new law is within us, however, how does it differ from the natural law? This is the question framed in *Prima-Secundae* 1-2, q. 106, a. 1, obj. 2: “if the Law of the Gospel were within, it would not differ from the natural law.”⁵⁸ In answer, Thomas distinguishes two modes of being “within.” He writes:

Something may be inward to man in two ways. Firstly, with reference to human nature; in this sense the natural law is inward to man. Secondly, something may be inward to man as though added on to nature by the gift of grace. It is in this sense that the New Law is inward to man⁵⁹

Implicit in this reply is the idea of pure nature, for if grace is in us “as though added on to nature,” then it must be possible to think of nature without that addition.

More importantly, however, this reply, taken in connection with Thomas’s theory of

⁵⁷ See *STh* 1-2, q. 106, prol: “qualis sit, utrum scilicet sit scripta, vel indita.”

⁵⁸ See *STh* 102, q. 106, a. 1, obj. 2: “Praeterea, lex indita est lex naturae, secundum illud *Rom.* (2:14), *Naturaliter ea quae legis sunt, faciunt, qui habent opus legis scriptum in cordibus suis.* Si igitur lex Evangelii esset lex indita, non differret a lege naturae.”

⁵⁹ *STh* 1-2, q. 106, a. 1, ad 2: “Ad secundum dicendum quod dupliciter est aliquid inditum homini. Uno modo, pertinens ad naturam humanam, et sic lex naturalis est lex indita homini. Alio modo est aliquid inditum homini quasi naturae superadditum per gratiae donum, et hoc modo lex nova est indita homini”

natural law, implies that our supernatural finality is ours, like grace, “as though added on to nature.” Were a supernatural *telos* ours naturally—that is, were it part of the definition of our species,—then the *lex gratiae* would indeed be in us in a mode pertaining to our nature. By teaching that the new law is not in us in a connatural mode, Thomas effectively teaches that the *lex nova* is not only distinct from the *lex naturae*, but is also “in” us in the manner of a condition or order which, while within, is not essential. We have returned, in other words, to Thomas’s distinction between nature-as-essence (“What is this?”) and nature as non-constitutive condition or principle (“What manner of man is this?”). This distinction is absent from de Lubac’s interpretation of Aquinas. Its chief relevance to us, however, is simply in its dependence upon the concept of pure nature. From the perspective of the history of ideas, it seems simply incorrect to aver that the idea of pure nature is alien to, or absent from, the theology of St Thomas.

With these reflections rounding out our examination of Aquinas’s presentation of the natural law, then, we may proceed to our next topic, his epistemology. We shall begin with his programmatic definition of sacred doctrine itself in *STh* 1, q. 1, and move on to his more detailed account of the epistemology of the sciences in the commentary on Boethius’s *De Trinitate*.

3. Theology as a Subalternated Science

The sixth and last topic in Aquinas that we shall examine for its bearing on the discussion of pure nature is Thomas’s identification of sacred doctrine as a

subalternated science. This portion of our exploration is primarily relevant, not to Henri de Lubac's own critique of pure nature, but to the development of his work by John Milbank and by the larger Radical Orthodoxy family of theologians. This development is examined in detail below, in chapter seven. For the moment, it suffices to say that Milbank raises the stakes of de Lubac's controversial reading of Aquinas by arguing that Thomas ultimately sees theology (sacred doctrine) as eliminating and replacing philosophy, and indeed all claims to non-theological understanding. For Milbank, authentic knowledge comes by faith alone; but this is by no means a judgement shared by Aquinas.

“Subalternation” is not a term found in everyday language. It belongs to classical logic, and is easily confused with the less precise word “subordination.” To bring out the meaning of subalternation, we may begin with the term's Platonic background.

a. Plato on the Sciences

The first great account of how the sciences, arts, and crafts are related appears in Plato's *Republic*. In his dialogue with Glaucon in *Republic* VII, Socrates argues that the ideal city ought to be ruled by guardian-philosophers: no one else will be

wise enough to act for the common good and to train the next generation of rulers.⁶⁰ The plan for training is all-important: it involves everyone in the city and will simultaneously train philosophers and assign to all others their appropriate role in society. Education in the perfect Socratic *polis* includes music, poetry, gymnastics, military training, mathematics, plane and solid geometry, harmonics, dialectics, practical public service (both civil and military), and philosophy. However, not everyone goes through the entire *cursus*—at every stage, the less able students are sifted out and assigned tasks that correspond to their manifest limitations. Except for philosophy, the supreme discipline, every stage of this education serves two purposes: it trains some (those who go no further) for practical action or, at least, in good morals; and it trains others (who do go further) for a loftier kind of knowledge and for higher responsibilities. According to Plato, it is in leading the better students on to still-higher studies that each field (short of philosophy) has its real identity. All this is implied, for instance, in what Socrates says of arithmetic:

Therefore, Glaucon, we ought to provide for this subject in our legislation, and to persuade the people who are going to undertake our community's most important tasks to take up arithmetic. They shouldn't engage in it like dilettantes, but should keep at it until they reach a point where they can see in their mind's eye what numbers really are, and they shouldn't study it as merchants and stallholders do, for commercial

⁶⁰ Plato, *Republic* 521a and 540b–c. All quotations from the *Republic* are from Robin Waterfield's trans., *Plato: Republic, A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). I do not contest any scholarly interpretation of Plato and his real intentions, but am only trying to review the stated epistemology in Socrates's plan for his city. If Plato was being ironic or intended so convey something different, it is at least true that the later West generally took his social and epistemological prescription at face value.

reasons, but for the sake of warfare and in order to facilitate the mind's turning away from becoming, and towards truth and reality

Now that arithmetic has been mentioned . . . , it also occurs to me how neatly it fits in the context we're getting at, and how commonly it could be used by anyone who applies himself to it for intellectual rather than commercial purposes . . . , because it's particularly good at guiding minds upwards—which is what we're talking about—and forcing one to discuss numbers in themselves. It excludes the slightest hint, in a discussion, of numbers which have attendant visible or tangible material objects⁶¹

In the same way, geometry, astronomy, and indeed all the necessary disciplines suit the same Socratic purpose: they are all either practically useful or morally formative, and they are also all stepping-stones by which the nobler souls will mount up toward higher interests.⁶² It follows, then, that as individuals reach their natural levels of development, the number of those climbing upwards will decrease—only a few will get to the very top, philosophy. Yet overall no one will have wasted his efforts, since every occupation somehow uses all the studies that lead up to it. Plato assumes here that everyone has a single proper career: “every single member of the community . . . has to dedicate himself to the single job for which he is naturally suited.”⁶³

Except for the philosopher-guardians, no one in the city will understand why this programme of studies will work, for the simple reason that, to non-guardians, all

⁶¹ Plato, *Republic* 525b–d.

⁶² See all of book X, *Republic* 521c–541b.

⁶³ Plato, *Republic* 423d.

studies higher than their own will be completely opaque. If the lower orders could see and appreciate the supreme good as it is contemplated by the philosophers, they could rule themselves; which, to Plato's mind, they cannot.

From the philosopher-guardian's vantage point, all knowledge and learning are intrinsically linked, not only by political or pedagogical utility, but also by virtue of their contemplative correspondence to the unity of the whole cosmos. The "Many" exist and are intelligible because they each participate in "the One." All the intelligibility of the manifold things, and all disciplines and fields of knowledge, are, because of this participation, strictly subordinate to the supreme good. In a sense, therefore, the Good itself is the object of *all* science, of every art and *techne*. If the practitioners of a discipline fail to attend to this ultimate orientation, their science is intrinsically imperfect. This is why Socrates corrects Glaucon in Book X, when the latter praises astronomy for drawing our gaze to the higher world of the visible heavens. Plato (or Socrates) argues that the concern of the true astronomer is not the mobile and visible sky, but the invisible, unchanging reality which the sky represents: "if we don't ignore the heavenly bodies, we'll never be engaged in true astronomy."⁶⁴

Plato allows that some people will be occupied with the stars merely for practical matters like navigation and time-keeping. The true astronomers, however, will care about the intelligible realm of which stars are only shadows. While it may seem, initially, that Plato values all sorts of disciplines (gymnastics, music, mathematics, etc.), in fact he holds that only the Good is of intrinsic and ultimate

⁶⁴ Plato, *Republic* 530c.

value. The instances of “the Many” are not really good at all, but are only signs pointing to the one Good.

b. An Alternative to Plato: the Sciences in Aristotelian Logic

Aristotle approaches the matter differently, blazing a trail Thomas Aquinas will follow. Both resist the Platonic view of all sciences as subdivisions of the knowledge of the Good. Aristotle’s crucial insight in this matter has to do with his development of classical logic, and with the recognition of subalternation relationships.

Subalternation is a logical relationship, less well known than contradiction, contrariety, or subcontrariety. It exists between the universal and particular forms of an affirmation or negation; for example, between “All dogs bark” and “This dog barks.” If we know that the universal proposition is true, then it follows that the particular is also true. However, merely knowing the particular does not let us infer the universal: knowing “this dog barks” does not prove “all dogs bark.”

The relevance of this logical relationship to greater questions of epistemology is established in a terse passage from Aristotle’s *Categories* I.3, which begins:

When one thing is predicated of another, all that which is predicable of the predicate will be predicable also of the subject. Thus, ‘man’ is predicated of the individual man; but ‘animal’ is predicated of ‘man’; it will, therefore, be predicable of the individual man also: for the individual man is both ‘man’ and ‘animal.’⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Categories* I.3 (1b10–15). Trans. E. M. Edghill, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).

Here Aristotle's first point is about syllogistic inference. "When one thing is predicated of another" (for example, *this animal is a tiger*), "that which is predicable of the predicate" (for example, *tigers are carnivorous*) "is predicable also of the subject" (so, *this animal is carnivorous*). Aristotle is going to show that all genuinely scientific conclusions—i.e., all conclusions expressing real knowledge, and not just opinion, hypothesis, or probability—are organically related because they are all about some aspect of the single whole, reality. Now this unity of sciences does not appear when we compare disciplines which are not subalternated one to the other. As Aristotle says in 1b16–20,

If genera are different and [not subalternate], their differentiae are themselves different in kind. Take as an instance the genus 'animal' and the genus 'knowledge'. 'With feet', 'two-footed', 'winged', 'aquatic', are differentiae of 'animal'; the species of knowledge are not distinguishable by the same differentiae. One species of knowledge does not differ from another by being 'two-footed'.⁶⁶

To appreciate the point being made, we must here recall that Aristotle considers all reality intelligible and that, unlike Plato, he does not affirm the existence of a higher world of forms. So when he says, "if genera are different . . . , their differentiae are different in kind," he is not implying that knowers recall species and genera from an earlier life with the All-Soul. Instead Aristotle thinks we arrive at a knowledge of these things by abstraction: genus and species are, so to speak, intelligible dimensions of the primary substances (real things) encountered here and

⁶⁶ Aristotle, *Categories* I.3 (1b16–20). Edghill translates *me hypallela* as "not coordinate" in 1b16, but *hypallela* as "subordinate" in 1b21. I have replaced "not coordinate" with "[not subalternate]" to make the logical term of art apparent in 1b16.

now, in this world. The Aristotelian knower, moreover, does not abstract from a known being an idea of that individual as such, but only of that individual as belonging to a particular kind or type. Indeed, a primary substance is understood as belonging to many genera, inasmuch as it is potentially understandable under various formalities. This requires a further word of explanation.

Every field of human inquiry or understanding examines its subject-matter under some particular formality. Human beings themselves, for example, may be studied by medical science (which considers health), or by economics (which “studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses”⁶⁷), or by chromatics (which considers people as things that have colour). Inasmuch as people can be considered under many formalities, they belong to many genera (e.g., the healthy, the economical, the coloured), and hence to many sciences.

If we bear in mind that a single material object can be considered under many formalities, Aristotle’s point in 1b16–20 comes more sharply into focus. When fields of knowledge are *not* in a relationship of logical subalternity, they will not use the same standards (*differentiae*) to describe and distinguish their subject matter. Medicine is concerned with digestion, for example, but chromatics is not. The colour saturation of one’s irises is of interest to chromaticists, but not to economists. An economist will care if the French enjoy a comparative advantage relative to the Swiss in steel production, but this is of no interest to medicine. Yet sometimes some

⁶⁷ Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1945), 16.

scientific disciplines will overlap: one will be subalternated to another, and in such cases the disciplines may share differentiae. This is the very next point Aristotle makes in the passage we are tracing:

But where one genus is [subalternate] to another, there is nothing to prevent their having the same differentiae: for the greater class is predicated of the lesser, so that all the differentiae of the predicate will be differentiae also of the subject.⁶⁸

So, for example, a person wishing to throw things may draw on geometry and aerodynamics to classify items as more or less suited for throwing. The thrower need not worry about proving *why* a symmetrical object is more aerodynamic than an asymmetrical one, but can adopt the conclusions of the higher disciplines (geometry and aerodynamics) in a syllogism, like this:

This apple is symmetrical and compact.

A symmetrical and compact object is good for throwing.

Therefore: This apple is good for throwing.

“The differentiae of the predicate” (*symmetrical and compact*) “will be differentiae also of the subject” (*this apple*) in the view of the subalternated science (the study of the throwable), because “when one thing” (*good for throwing*) “is predicated of another” (the *symmetrical and compact*), “all that which is predicable of the predicate” (*the symmetrical and compact object is good for throwing*) “will be predicable also of the subject” (*this apple is good for throwing*).

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Categories* I.3 (1b21–24).

Aristotle's own examples of subalternated sciences include the subalternation of optical theory with plane geometry,⁶⁹ harmonics with mathematics,⁷⁰ mechanics with stereometry (i.e., solid geometry),⁷¹ and astronomical observation with theoretical astronomy.⁷² In the same treatise (the *Posterior Analytics*) we learn that the only science to enjoy "universal sovereignty"⁷³ is the field Andronicus of Rhodes would later call *Metaphysics* and which Aristotle himself names *first philosophy* or *theology*.

Unlike Plato, who, at least in the *Republic*, seems to have had little appreciation for any science except insofar as it mounted up toward a knowledge of the supreme good, Aristotle insists that every science is properly concerned only with a single genus of conclusions: this, he says, is what makes one science different from another. Subalternation is the key to explaining how a science can be dependent on a superior discipline yet, within the scope of its own conclusions, properly autonomous. For even if we grant Plato's claim that existing things are all good in virtue of their

⁶⁹ See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I.7 (75b14–17) and I.13 (78b36–37). See also *Meteorology* III.5 (375b16–377a28) for the discussion of rainbows, where meteorology appears as subalternated with optics, and optics with geometry.

⁷⁰ See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I.7 (75b14–17), I.9 (76a8–10), and I.13 (78b38–39).

⁷¹ See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I.13 (78b37–38).

⁷² See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I.13 (78b39–79a5). "Here it is the business of the empirical observers to know the fact, [but] of the mathematician to know the reasoned fact; for the latter are in possession of the demonstrations giving the causes, and are often ignorant of [some particular empirical] fact: just as we often have a clear insight into a universal, but through the lack of observation are ignorant of some of its particular instances."

⁷³ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I.9 (76a18), "kai episteme he ekeinon kyria panton."

participation in a higher reality, we need not join him in thinking that knowledge of a higher discipline always and necessarily includes a knowledge of the lesser disciplines which depend on it. As Aristotle explains, each discipline is only able to reach conclusions about those aspects (formalities) of material objects that belong to the discipline's defining competence. According to Aristotle, for example, medical science is concerned with producing bodily health.⁷⁴ The medical scientist is not interested (at least in his expert capacity as a physician) in the soundness of the patient's golf strategy, fashion sense, or monetary policy. All these matters are extraneous to the business of producing bodily health, so the physician can and ought to leave them aside in the work of medicine. To know the healthy as such or the health-producing as such is not the same as knowing the athletic, or aesthetic, or economical; these categories may overlap in a certain sense (as, for example, when physicians prescribe physical therapy or general exercise, or when they consider the economics of public health), but to be an expert in medicine does not in itself include scientific knowledge in these other fields. Aristotle insists that those with knowledge must be careful not to jump beyond their real sphere of competence: "We think we have scientific knowledge if we have reasoned from true and primary premises. But that is not so: the conclusion must be homogeneous with the basic facts of the science." When this homogeneity is lacking, the conclusion is logically invalid (though it may still happen to be true).⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See Aristotle, *Topics* VI.ii.12 (1495b and following).

⁷⁵ This is a form of the fallacy of accident. See Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations* 5 (166b29–36).

c. *Sacra doctrina* as a Subalternated Science

With the classical arguments before us, we now turn to the programmatic first question of the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas to see whether *sacra doctrina* can be expected to make philosophy obsolete.

Question 1, article 1, poses the question of whether another doctrine, besides philosophy, is necessary. It seems, suggests Aquinas in the role of an objector, that philosophy is enough, since all things known to human understanding are already treated in philosophy and in its real or potential dependent sciences. Moreover, first philosophy considers all things inasmuch as they *are*. Since each and every being is studied, then, and since they are all studied under the wide heading of *being*, additional doctrine would seem to be superfluous.

According to St Thomas, what makes a further human discipline, beyond philosophy, both possible and expedient is the bible. Where others might have said “God,” “Christ,” “revelation,” “the Church,” or “religious experience,” Aquinas says *Scriptura, autem divinitus inspirata*. His evidence is a half-sentence from the New Testament: “All Scripture is inspired of God and profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). This divinely inspired scripture does not belong to any of the philosophical disciplines; and that, says Thomas, is the reason we have *aliam scientiam divinitus inspiratam*. The existence of a *scriptura inspirata* means there is also a *scientia inspirata*—and, as Thomas will make clear, these two, scripture and doctrine, are in fact one.

In the response of *STh* 1, q. 1, a. 1, Thomas gives two reasons for our need of a doctrine concerning what “God has revealed, in addition to the philosophical researches pursued by human reasoning.” We chiefly need a body of sacred teaching because human beings are “ordered by God to an end which exceeds the comprehension of reason,”⁷⁶ and because we will be unable to intend and act for such an end unless we recognise it—which we certainly will never do if we are not apprised of the divine intention by revelation. Furthermore, revelation establishes the certainty⁷⁷ of some truths which human reason might discover by its own powers, but which, without revelation, would in fact only be discovered by “a few, and after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors.”⁷⁸

Thomas’s replies to the initial objections repay close scrutiny. Recall the first objection, namely that no science beyond philosophy is needed, since *all objects known to reason* are already treated by philosophy (and by its dependants, all the other natural intellectual disciplines). Here Aquinas does not respond by denying the value of reason or by confusing the first objection with the second—there is no hint that theology *replaces* (let alone *evacuates*) metaphysics. Rather, Aquinas attends closely to the precise heart of the objection, and for this purpose cites the text, “*Plurima supra sensum hominum ostensa sunt tibi*” (Ecclus 3:25), remarking, “*Et in*

⁷⁶ My trans. of “homo ordinatur a Deo ad quemdam finem qui comprehensionem rationis excedit.”

⁷⁷ The correct reading of the text is uncertain: revelation either advances our salvation *communius et securius* (more communally and safely) or *convenientius et certius* (more fittingly and surely).

⁷⁸ My trans. of “a paucis, et per longum tempus, et cum admixtione multorum errorum.”

his sacra doctrina consistit.” Since objection 1 has to do with the range of matters or objects known to human reason, the fitting reply likewise concentrates on that range of things: we need an additional science because the things known to our natural human sensibilities are not the only things that are real. There are *plurima supra sensum hominum*—that is, *many things* or *many aspects of things* above the sense of human beings. A new and hitherto unsuspected reality is being revealed, a new formal objectivity.

In this way the road is paved for Thomas’s reply to the second objection. Here the objection is not that all existing objects (material objects) are already studied by philosophy and its subalternant disciplines, but that all aspects of things are already studied—all formal objects. Hence Thomas replies by noting that revelation is a new light, bringing out a new formality to be known. To explain this, Thomas reaches for an unmistakable example of subalternation from Aristotle’s *Physics*: two scientists, one an astronomical observer (a *naturalis*) and the other a mathematical or theoretical astronomer (an *astrologus*) will both be able to demonstrate that the earth is round. The astronomical observer reaches this conclusion by observing physical bodies (lunar shadows, the masts of ships on the horizon, etc.), while the mathematician proceeds *per medium mathematicum* (that is, by measurement, calculation, and geometry). Both scientists know the world is a sphere; both can show sufficient reason for their conclusions; both have genuine understanding, *scientia*. Nevertheless both scholars do not consider this matter in the same light (that is, under the same intelligible aspect): one considers the globe visibly, the other mathematically.

Likewise, writes Aquinas, the fact that first philosophy (metaphysics) already considers all beings inasmuch as they *are* does not disprove that there is a further, heretofore unrecognised formality under which an additional science may proceed to consider the same objects. This further science is *sacra doctrina* (which we call theology). Whereas philosophy studies all things *secundum quod sunt cognoscibilia lumine naturalis rationis*, sacred doctrine proceeds *secundum quod cognoscuntur lumine divinae revelationis*.

This leads directly to the core of article 2: mention of a divine light in which things may be seen raises the question of whether sacred doctrine is, in fact, a science. In this context, of course, “science” does not mean what it does in modern English: *scientia* or *episteme* means true understanding or knowledge of why things are the way they are. *Sacra doctrina*, it would seem, cannot be a science because it depends on faith. In this same article Thomas also considers what looks like a merely semantic objection, namely that a proper science deals, not with particulars as such, but with things according to their kind and quantity: *sacra doctrina*, in contrast, treats of peculiar cases—of “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the like.”

After a cursory appeal to the authority of St Augustine for calling *sacra doctrina* a science, Aquinas uses a refined understanding of subalternity to explain what sacred doctrine is and how it relates to the other sciences. (Here it is convenient to use the word *theology* as a synonym for *sacred doctrine*, though in St Thomas’s day *theologia* could also mean what we would now call a philosophical discourse about God.) There are, Aquinas observes, two kinds of sciences: those which use

axioms recognised in the natural light of human understanding (such axioms as, for example, the principles of non-contradiction, identity, consistency, etc.), and those which use axioms recognised in the light of a yet higher science (as, for example, when mathematics or biology draws on logic). *Sacra doctrina* is a science of the second type. The superior science from which it derives its principles is, Thomas boldly declares, nothing less than the *scientia divina* itself, God's very own understanding, which is communicated to the angels and saints in the beatific vision. I would stress that Aquinas never says theology is the highest science: rather, the *scientia dei* is supreme. And, here on earth, we may possess that science partially by revelation and faith, thus appropriating the principles of sacred doctrine.

This means that the first objection in q. 1, a. 2 has a certain legitimacy. Theology is unlike other sciences. With all the others one can, in principle, prove or immediately comprehend the axioms on which the science is founded. With sacred doctrine, however, one *cannot* always say *why* things are the way they are. This is because the superalternate science, God's own knowledge, is not communicated to us in all its fullness. Instead we see only *per speculum, in enigmate* (1 Cor 13:12), and are not yet *comprehensores* of God. Only the blessed in heaven have such a vision, and such an understanding. On earth we are supplied with a more limited grasp of the *scientia divina*: it is as if certain conclusions of the divine science were revealed to us, but without the reasons for each and every one. Accordingly, sacred doctrine speaks not so much of what *must* be, but of what appears to be fitting (*conveniens*) in view of what human reason and the divine Word tell us. So, for example, there is never any

question of theology's proving, *a priori*, that water is necessary for sacramental Baptism. Instead theology's occupation, given the knowledge that Baptism does require water, is to consider the ways in which this divine arrangement is fitting. There is no pretence of deducing, from any premise, that God *had* to make the sacramental economy as he did. All the believer knows is that God has spoken and acted; and that this is not the work of an utterly arbitrary divine will, but of God's infinite wisdom and perfect judgement. The higher science on which theology depends for its principles is this same divine wisdom, hidden from "this age" and "the rulers of this age," but revealed to us "through the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:6, 10).

In light of what Thomas has already said about scripture in *STh* 1, q. 1, a. 1, the confirmation of sacred doctrine's scientific status in q. 1, a. 2 presents the reader with a special form of the scandal of particularity: what kind of science (understanding of *why* things are so) can be gained from the bible, which is often concerned with temporal particulars? For the moment, in q. 1, a. 2, ad 2, Aquinas is content to say that the things which happened to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were set out "both to introduce them as examples for our own lives, as is the wont of moral sciences, and to proclaim the authority of the men through whom divine revelation has come down to us, which revelation is the basis of sacred Scripture or doctrine." An extremely important and interesting bundle of claims is delivered in this remark. First, it is said that the narrated events of the bible are themselves revelatory examples. Second, Thomas indicates that the very authority of the human instruments of revelation is itself something revealed. Third, Thomas treats "sacred scripture" and

“sacred doctrine” as two names for the same reality. (This last point, made only casually and by-the-way, was a mediaeval commonplace,⁷⁹ and amplifies and easily-overlooked point in the *sed contra* of q. 1, a. 1.⁸⁰ Thomas elaborates in *STh* 1, q. 1, a. 8 but here uses merely the conjunction *seu*, signalling that the two names are being given to a single object.)

Having established that sacred doctrine is necessary (article 1) and that it is a *scientia*, a field of genuine understanding (article 2), Thomas turns to the defining unity of theology in article 3. Now, in a superficial reading, it might seem that the specific occupation of *sacra doctrina* has already been given in article 1. After all, in that first article we were told that it is the existence of scripture that makes a doctrine beyond philosophy necessary; perhaps theology is the study of the bible. This interpretation would be understandable, but incorrect—“Sacred scripture or doctrine” *is* the “doctrine beyond philosophy.” As explained above in the example of the multiplicity of ways to understand a human being (as healthy, as economising, as coloured, etc.), every *scientia* is defined by what it understands: not by its material

⁷⁹ See Thomas Gilby, “The *Summa* and the Bible,” Appendix 11 in vol. 1 of the Gilby *Summa theologiae*.

⁸⁰ In the Gilby *Summa* this passage reads: “Sed contra est quod dicitur II ad Tim., *Omnis Scriptura divinitus inspirata utilis est ad docendum, ad arguendum, ad corripiendum, ad erudiendum ad justitiam*. Scriptura autem divinitus inspirata non pertinet ad philosophicas disciplinas quae sunt secundum rationem humanae inventae. Utile igitur est praeter philosophicas disciplinas esse aliam scientiam divinitus inspiratam.” By swapping the first and second sentences, one sees the syllogism: (1) Beyond philosophy is scripture, (2) Scripture is useful, therefore (3) Something beyond philosophy is useful. Note that “inspired scripture” and “inspired *scientia*” are used interchangeably, and denote only one thing—namely “an understanding inspired by God.”

object (any particular being it examines, such as an octopus) but by its formal object (a certain aspect of *whatever* the science examines).

We find in article 3 an instructive example to remind us what formal objects are: Aquinas notes that the formal object of human eyesight is “the coloured” (*colorati*). In English we would be tempted to say “the visible” are the object of sight, but Thomas is kept from saying this by the fact that calling *visibilia* the object of *visio* would be tautological. Therefore he says, “the coloured,” as we might say, more specifically (and with a modern view of how eyesight works), that the formal object of vision is the quality of reflecting or emitting light in the red-through-violet spectrum (which is what constitutes visibility). All the many things we see are the material objects of sight; what they all have in common is the one formality of visibility.

As for *sacra doctrina seu Scriptura*, it has, like eyesight, many material objects: God, angels, human beings, and so on. Indeed, this multiplicity of objects is urged as a reason to deny that theology is *one* science, in *STh* 1, q. 1, a. 3, objections 1 and 2. Considered formally, however, sacred doctrine has only one object; and this is why it is but one science. And that formal object, says Thomas, is “the revealable”—just as eyesight examines all that is coloured, so sacred doctrine looks at

all that is *revelabile*.⁸¹ Notice, with respect to creatures, that *revelabilia* are not substances, exactly, but an aspect of substances: only God knows them fully, as they are; and only God is represented fully by a Word or revelation.

By identifying *sacra doctrina* as the science of all things *qua* revealable, Aquinas answers the objection that theology cannot be a single science—because it considers both God and creatures, who fall into no common genus⁸²—by stipulating that theology is principally concerned with God, and looks to creatures only inasmuch as they are related to God. That is to say, theology considers creatures only inasmuch as they are created by God and returning to him, “*ut ad principium vel finem*.”⁸³ The second objection in q. 1, a. 3 is that *sacra doctrina* cannot be one science because it considers both spiritual creatures and material creatures, and thus should, like philosophy, be divided into several distinct disciplines. Thomas resolves this difficulty by pointing out that the formality under which sacred doctrine views its

⁸¹ There is an important but confused argument in Milbank and Pickstock’s *Truth in Aquinas*, the burden of which is to show that *sacra doctrina* is “the true transgeneric science of *esse*” and that it alone judges and can revise the conclusions of all other sciences because “although it deals with the real under the aspect of the *revelabile* . . . , when anything discloses God it must, since it has its entire being from God, disclose itself more intensely and *without remainder*” (p 42, italics mine). But Aquinas explicitly distinguishes between the formal and material objectivity of sacred doctrine’s understanding, and the material objects (the real substances) exceed their formality as *revelabilia*. If this were not the case, and if *sacra doctrina* knew all things as they are, then *sacra doctrina* would no longer be subalternated to the *scientia dei*—it would itself be the *scientia dei*.

⁸² It might seem that God and creatures come under the common head of *being* (see Thomas Aquinas, *In metaphysicorum Aristotelis* IV.2, columns 458–63), but being is not a genus. To know something’s existence (that it is) is not yet to know its essence (what it is). See also *STh* 1, q. 1, a. 3, obj. 1, response and ad 1.

⁸³ *STh* 1, q. 1, a. 3, ad 1.

objects (i.e., revealability) is, unlike any genus known to Aristotle, broad enough to include every kind of created being. Since all beings, spiritual as well as material, are known perfectly by the *scientia dei*—as is, besides, the divine essence itself—the revelation of the divine Word supplies the faithful with a unique, single light in which God and all creatures may be known. Because it is subalternated to the divine understanding, theology is the highest of all human wisdoms; it remains a single science embracing all substances (under the formality of the revealable) through a simultaneously practical and speculative understanding in the light of faith.⁸⁴

With regard to the conclusions of the natural sciences (philosophy and all the other fields of human technique, art, and understanding), *sacra doctrina* enjoys only a limited competence of judgement. Like every other science, theology can judge only those conclusions which belong to the same genus as its own determinations—in this case, conclusions which involve *revelabilia*. For the most part, the natural disciplines will provoke theological attention only when they overreach their proper scope and begin to make claims which contradict what is known by faith.

d. The Epistemology of the *Super Boetium*: Philosophy and Theology

Further insight into St Thomas's epistemology of the sciences may be gained from the study of his incomplete *Expositio in Boethii de Trinitate* (also called the

⁸⁴ On the place of theology as the highest wisdom (*inter omnes sapientias humanas*), see *STh* 1, q. 1, a. 6. On the simultaneously practical and speculative nature of theology, see *STh* 1, q. 1, a. 4.

Super Boetium), which dates from the late 1250s.⁸⁵ This work survives in autograph form and is remarkable for being the only known commentary on the *De Trinitate* from the 13th century. More importantly, is also Thomas's single most developed account of his epistemology of the sciences.⁸⁶

Introducing the commentary, Thomas contrasts the theological understanding of God (the kind of understanding Boethius will relate) with that of philosophers. More so than in the first question of the *Summa theologiae*, however, Aquinas, in the *Super Boetium*, is concerned with affirming the power and dignity of natural human reason. This affirmation is the principal burden of question 1, but recurs throughout the work. After citing some common biblical texts which relate to the ability of natural reason to know about God—Romans 1:20, Wisdom 13:5 and Job 36:25 (Vulg.)⁸⁷—Thomas remarks on how fitting it is that God should provide us with a more secure and profound knowledge through faith. He compares the two ways of

⁸⁵ The text of the *Super Boetium* is taken from Bruno Decker's critical edition, *Expositio Super Librum Boethii De Trinitate* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965). Unless otherwise noted, the translation is from Armand Maurer's *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason and Theology, Questions I–IV of his Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius* (Toronto, PIMS: 1987) and *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Division and Methods of the Sciences, Questions V and VI of his Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, revised edition (Toronto: PIMS, 1963).

⁸⁶ See Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, 67. See also Lawrence Donohoo, "The Nature and Grace of *Sacra Doctrina* in St. Thomas's *Super Boetium de Trinitate*" (*Thomist* 63 [1999]), 343–401 and Leo Elders, *Faith and Science: An Introduction to St. Thomas' Expositio in Boethii De Trinitate* (Rome: Herder, 1974).

⁸⁷ "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:20). "For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator" (Wis 13:5). "Omnes homines vident eum, unusquisque intuetur procul" (Job 35:25 Vulg).

knowing, the natural (philosophical) and the supernatural (Christian and theological), and tells us that each has its own method:

[J]ust as our natural knowledge begins with the knowledge of creatures, obtained by the senses, so the knowledge imparted from above begins with the cognition of the first Truth bestowed on us by faith. As a result the order of procedure is different in the two cases. Philosophers, who follow the order of natural knowledge, place the science of creatures before the science of God, that is to say, natural philosophy before metaphysics, but theologians follow the opposite path, placing the consideration of the creator before that of creatures.⁸⁸

Thomas explicitly affirms that the power to have *some* intellectual grasp of God is operative in both of these sciences, the natural (philosophical) and the supernatural (theological). After a prologue emphasising the strength and necessity of faith, which is not surprising since the ostensible topic is the Holy Trinity, Thomas begins the body of the *Super Boetium* with a question with no direct connection to Boethius's text—he asks whether the human mind can know anything at all, ever, without the addition of a new intellectual light from God.

Here we draw attention to the context in which Thomas elaborates his position. In mediaeval psychological anthropology, the popular and broadly Augustinian view was that the human mind requires fresh assistance from God, a

⁸⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boetium de Trinitate* (hereafter “*Super Boet*”), prolog., 1: “Sicut ergo naturalis cognitionis principium est creaturae notitia a sensu accepta, ita cognitionis desuper datae principium est primae veritatis notitia per fidem infusa. Et hinc est quod diverso ordine hinc inde proceditur. Philosophi enim, qui naturalis cognitionis ordinem sequuntur, praeordinant scientiam de creaturis scientiae divinae, scilicet naturalem metaphysicae. Sed apud theologos proceditur e converso, ut creatoris consideratio considerationem praeveniat creaturae.”

divine illumination, for each new act of knowledge. Following Averroes, some of Thomas's contemporaries in Paris (most famously Siger of Brabant) went so far as to suppose that the human mind has practically nothing of its own, and that, in fact, we all know things by receiving the fruit of a single universal intellect.⁸⁹ Against all psychological theories of supernatural illumination, Thomas insists that the natural human intellect is itself the means by which God creatively and providentially endows us with understanding. Our nature, he insists, is sufficient for its own intellectual activity: no further intervention or illumination is needed for our natural knowing.

Thomas never forgets, of course, that our natural reason is a gift from God, as well as the means by which God providentially enlightens us. Thus he says, "the human mind is *divinely* illuminated by a *natural* light, according to Psalm 4:7: 'The light of your countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us'."⁹⁰ This natural, God-given light—the agent intellect, in Aristotelian psychological parlance—is innately proportionate to whatever is intelligible.⁹¹ For this reason, even the intellects of fallen human beings are capable of what must be called natural reasoning or human

⁸⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, *De Unitate Intellectus*. The Leonine text of this work, an English translation, and excellent historical and interpretive supplements are all included in Ralph McInerny's *Aquinas Against the Averroists: On There Being Only One Intellect* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1993).

⁹⁰ *Super Boet* q. 1, a. 1, sed contra: "mens humana illustrata est divinitus lumine naturali, secundum illud Psalmi (4,7): 'Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, domine'." Italics mine.

⁹¹ See *Super Boet* q. 1, a. 1, sed contra 2: "[M]ens nostra habet in se unde possit facere intelligibile actu, scilicet intellectum agentem, et tale intelligibile est ei proportionatum."

philosophy. The integrity of the intellect is steadily defended by Thomas, even though he will often acknowledge our need for a higher and more certain wisdom if we are to know God and the way to salvation. Defending the natural intellect and its ability to operate within a natural human ambit, Thomas argues:

Although inferior bodies have need of superior bodies for their operation, to the extent that they must be moved by them; nevertheless, for the perfect accomplishment of their proper functions, they do not need to receive from these superior bodies any new forms. And in like manner it is not necessary that the human mind, which is moved by God, should be endowed with any new light in order to understand those things that are within its natural field of knowledge.⁹²

Thomas's affirmation of our innate intellectual power is clear in his *Super Boetium*, as it is.⁹³ A matter of particular importance in this defence of natural reason is the context. It occurs within an extended reflection on the service theology and philosophy render to each other in the intellectual life of the believer. As Lawrence J. Donohoo observes, this work shows us Thomas the theologian considering how "a thinking steeped in faith knows the limits and limitations of philosophy in a way hidden from philosophy itself,"⁹⁴ so that both philosophy and theology are clarified and assisted by their mutual encounter. Each way of wisdom helps the other find its

⁹² *Super Boet* q. 1, a. 1, ad 5: "Ad quantum dicendum quod corpora inferiora, quamvis indigeant ad hoc quod operentur ut moveantur a corporis caelestibus, non tamen indigeant ad proprias operationes efficiendas quod novas formas ab eis recipiant. Et similiter non oportet quod mens humana, quae movetur a deo ad cognoscendum naturaliter cognita, nova luce perfundatur."

⁹³ For example, see *STh* 1, q. 84, a. 5 and *De Veritate* q. 11, a. 1.

⁹⁴ Donohoo, "Nature and Grace," 345.

own peculiar boundaries and strength, and on some occasions either science may draw on the other for certain kinds of guidance.

Both philosophy and theology attain to a knowledge of God, even though it is plain that their methods, the extent of their understanding, and their reliability are unequal. The line dividing these two ways of knowing is drawn in *Super Boetium* q. 1, a. 2. A duality analogous to that distinguishing faith and reason is to be found within natural knowing itself, marking the limits of philosophical knowledge. Thomas writes:

It must be said that there is a twofold way in which anything is known. One manner is through its proper form, as the eye sees a stone through the species of the stone. Another way is through some other form similar to it, as a cause is known through the similitude of its effect, just as man is known through the form of his image. Moreover, through its own form a thing is also known in two ways. One way is the following: when knowledge is through the form which is the thing itself, as with God who eternally knows His own essence, and as an angel knows itself. According to another mode, knowledge is through a form which is other than the thing: either when the form has been abstracted from a thing—in which case the form is more immaterial than the thing itself, as is the form of a stone abstracted from the stone itself—or when the form is impressed on the intellect by a thing, as occurs when a thing is more immaterial than the similitude by which it is known;

thus, as Avicenna says, we know intellectual beings through their impression on us.⁹⁵

If we know spiritual realities through their impression on us, then we know them less well and more distantly than we know mere material things. The example of immaterial intelligences who know their own essence directly, and not via abstraction, is less persuasive today, compared to the 13th century, when Jewish, Muslim and even non-religious Aristotelians shared an intellectual conviction regarding the existence of God and of angels. Thomas continues:

Therefore, since our intellect has, in our present state of wayfaring, a determined relation to forms abstracted from sensible things (since it is dependent upon phantasms in the same way as sight is upon colors, as is said in III *De anima*), it cannot know God in this life through that form which is His essence; though it is in this way He is known by the blessed in heaven. No similitude, however, of whatever kind impressed by Him upon the human intellect, would suffice to make His essence known, since He infinitely transcends every created form; consequently God cannot be made accessible to the mind through created forms Nor, in this present state, can God become known to us even through the species of things which are purely intelligible, which have in a certain way a likeness to Him, because our intellect is connaturally related to phantasms, as has been said. Therefore it remains

⁹⁵ *Super Boet* q. 1, a. 2., resp.: “Dicendum quod dupliciter aliqua res cognoscitur. Uno modo per formam propriam, sicut oculus videt lapidem per speciem lapidis. Alio modo per formam alterius similem sibi, sicut cognoscitur causa per similitudinem effectus et homo per formam suae imaginis. Per formam autem suam aliquid dupliciter videtur. Uno modo per formam quae est ipsa res, sicut deus se cognoscit per essentiam suam et etiam angelus se ipsum. Alio modo per formam quae ab ipso, sive sit abstracta ab ipso, quando scilicet forma immaterialior est quam res, sicut forma lapidis abstrahitur a lapide; sive sit impressa intelligenti ab eo, utpote quando res est simplicior quam similitudo per quam cognoscitur, sicut Avicenna dicit quod intelligentias cognoscimus per impressiones earum in nobis.”

certain that it is only through the forms of His effects
that He is known.⁹⁶

Even without faith, a person may possess a knowledge of God that is purely natural—that is, purely the fruit of the natural (and, of course, God-given) intellectual faculty. Yet natural knowledge does not make the divine essence itself known to us “as it is.” Although it is true that God is intrinsically infinitely intelligible, although we are creatures made in the divine image, and although we are naturally constituted for knowing what is intelligible, the divine essence remains beyond our natural human capacity because ours is a human mode of knowing. Our natural knowledge comes by means of abstraction from phantasms. And since no phantasm is uncreated or infinite, no phantasm can convey the divine essence. In other words, when St Thomas teaches, following scripture, that people can attain to some knowledge of God (for example, that He exists, is simple and good, etc.) from the forms of His effects, there is no suggestion that we can naturally know God by His own form. To know God in that way, according to His essence or form, would be to enjoy the beatific vision. The metaphysical continuity between creatures and the Creator is such, says Thomas, that though a knowledge of created essences cannot lead to a

⁹⁶ *Super Boet* q. 1, a. 2., resp.: “Quia igitur intellectus noster secundum statum viae habet determinatam habitudinem ad formas, quae a sensu abstrahuntur, cum comparetur ad phantasmata sicut visus ad colores, ut dicitur in III De anima, non potest ipsum deum cognoscere in hoc statu per formam quae est essentia sua, sed sic cognoscetur in patria a beatis. Similitudo enim quaecumque impressa ab ipso in intellectum humanum non sufficeret ad hoc quod faceret eius essentiam cognosci, cum in infinitum excedat quamlibet formam creatam, ratione cuius intellectui per formas creatas pervius non potest esse deus Nec etiam in statu huius viae cognoscitur deus a nobis per formas pure intelligibiles, quae sint aliqua similitudo ipsius propter connaturalitatem intellectus nostri ad phantasmata, ut dictum est, Unde relinquitur quod solummodo per effectus formam cognoscatur.”

knowledge of the divine essence itself, it does lead to forms of knowledge by way of analogy. As “in imperfect things there is found some imitation of the perfect,” so “in those things known to natural reason there are certain similitudes of the truths revealed by faith.”⁹⁷

These two imperfect ways of knowledge, faith and reason, are different in kind. They are not, *pace* Milbank, varied intensities of a single light.⁹⁸ This point is raised in the *Super Boetium* in q. 1, a. 3, ad. 1, after the objector argues that God is the first object known by our mind, saying,

we know first that in which everything else is known and through which we judge about everything we know, as the eye perceives light before it perceives what is seen by the light, and the intellect knows principles before conclusions. But everything is known in the first truth [God], and we judge everything by means of it, as Augustine says [in *De Trinitate* IX.vii.12 and XII.ii.2, and in *De vera religione* 31.57].⁹⁹

Thomas’s response to this objection begins with two pieces of evidence showing that we are indeed all ignorant of the divine essence in this life: first, we are not in the state of bliss; and second, people err in speaking about God. Both of these show that we do not already, here and now, grasp the divine essence. The first truth, God, is not

⁹⁷ *Super Boet* q. 2, a. 3, resp.: “Sed magis cum in imperfectis inveniatur aliqua imitatio perfectorum, in ipsis, quae per naturalem rationem cognoscuntur, sunt quaedam similitudines eorum quae per fidem sunt tradita.”

⁹⁸ See John Milbank, “Intensities,” *Modern Theology* 15 (1999), 445–97.

⁹⁹ *Super Boet* q. 1, a. 3, obj. 1: “Illud enim, in quo omnia alia cognoscuntur et per quod de omnibus quae cognoscimus iudicamus, est primo cognitum a nobis, sicut lux est primo nota oculo quam ea, quae per lucem videntur, et principia intellectui prius quam conclusiones. Sed omnia in prima veritate cognoscuntur et per ipsam de omnibus iudicamus, ut Augustinus dicit in libro De trinitate et De vera religione.”

the first object of our understanding: rather, each agent intellect makes intelligible those forms it abstracts from phantasms, and whatever forms are abstracted first are necessarily the first things known by the mind. Hence,

It may be said: From the words of Augustine and from other similar sayings, it is not to be understood that the uncreated truth itself is the proximate principle by which we know and judge of things, but that through the light conferred upon us, which is a similitude of that truth, we have cognition and judgment. Nor would this light have any efficacy except from the First Light: just as in methods of demonstration second principles would have no certitude unless founded upon the truth of first principles. Nevertheless it should not be thought that even this (natural) light is the first thing known by us. For we do not know other things by means of it, as if it were a medium for cognition of the knowable, but because (as agent) it makes other things knowable. Wherefore it could not itself be known unless it were contained among knowable things; even as light could not be seen by the eye unless manifested in color itself.¹⁰⁰

This characteristic text demonstrates the confidence in the power of natural human reason that is typical of Aquinas. It contrasts, however, with much present-day

¹⁰⁰ *Super Boet* q. 1, a. 3, ad 1: “Ad primum ego dicendum quod ex verbis illis Augustini et similibus non est intelligendum quod ipsa veritas increata sit proximum principium, quo cognoscimus et iudicamus, sed quia per lucem, quod est eius similitudo, nobis inditum cognoscimus et iudicamus. Nec hoc lumen habet aliquam efficaciam nisi ex prima lux; sicut in demonstrationibus secunda principia non certificant nisi ex virtute primorum. Nex tamen oportet quod etiam ipsum lumen inditum sit primo a nobis cognitum. Non enim eo alia cognoscimus sicut cognoscibili quod sit medium cognitionis, sed sicut eo quod facit alia esse cognoscibilia. Unde non oportet quod cognoscatur nisi in ipsis cognoscibilia, sicut lux non oportet quod primo videatur ab oculo nisi in ipso colore illustrato.”

religious thinking.¹⁰¹ What is remarkable in the *Super Boetium*, however, is not merely that Thomas tells us why he thinks natural theology is valid and useful. The further noteworthy point is that theology itself is presented as needing to be shaped and instructed by philosophy and by the lower natural sciences.

As the highest natural discipline, philosophy contributes to theology in three ways. First, it can demonstrate the so-called preambles or presuppositions of Christian faith (*praeambula fidei*), “the truths about God that are proved by natural reason, for example, that God exists, that he is one, and other truths of this sort about God or creatures proved in philosophy and presupposed by faith.”¹⁰² Second, philosophy contributes valuable analogies to theology, whereby the theologian can elucidate what is known by revelation. Here Thomas gives the example of St Augustine’s account of the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁰³ Third, philosophy can defend the

¹⁰¹ On this trend see Avery Dulles, “Can Philosophy Be Christian? The New State of the Question,” in *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, ed. David Ruel Foster and Joseph W. Koterski (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 3–21 and Ralph McInerny *Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 35–155.

¹⁰² *Super Boet* q. 2, a. 3, responsio 3: “Primo ad demonstrandum ea quae sunt praeambula fidei, quae necesse est in fide scire, ut ea quae naturalibus rationibus de deo probantur, ut deum esse, deum esse unum et alia huiusmodi vel de deo vel de creatures in philosophia probata, quae fides supponit.”

¹⁰³ It would be interesting to know just which analogies Thomas has in mind when referring to Augustine—but perhaps he does not have a favourite example. See *Super Boet* q. 2, a. 3, resp 3: “Secundo ad notificandum per aliquas similitudines ea quae sunt fidei, sicut Augustinus in libro de trinitate utitur multis similitudinibus ex doctrinis philosophicis sumptis ad manifestandum trinitatem.”

doctrine of faith either by showing how objections against it are false, or at least by demonstrating that they are not *necessarily* conclusive.¹⁰⁴

Philosophy's involvement in theology, and theology's reliance on philosophy, lie at the roots of the science of sacred doctrine. Just as metaphysics arises through reflection on the conclusions of lower sciences such as physics, considering *being* in abstraction from matter and motion,¹⁰⁵ so too does theology arise from lower sciences, drawing observations and principles from more basic disciplines to proceed with its own work of understanding. This is possible, says Thomas, because,

Interrelated sciences are such that one can use the principles of another. Sciences that come later employ the principles of prior sciences, whether the later be higher or lower in dignity. Thus metaphysics, which is the highest of the sciences, makes use of the conclusions established in the lower sciences. Similarly theology [to which all the other sciences are, so to speak, ancillary and propaedeutic in its coming into being, though they are of lesser dignity] can use the principles of all the other sciences.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ See *Super Boet* q. 2, a. 3, resp 3: "Tertio ad resistendum his quae contra fidem dicuntur sive ostendendo ea esse falsa sive ostendendo ea non esse necessaria."

¹⁰⁵ See *Super Boet* q. 5, a. 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Super Boet* q. 2, a. 3, ad 7. The text in square brackets is offset by commas in Maurer's translation, which makes the passage difficult to read. The Latin is, "Ad septimum dicendum quod scientiae quae habent ordinem ad invicem hoc modo se habent quod una potest uti principiis alterius, sicut scientiae posteriores utuntur principiis scientiarum priorum, sive sint superiores sive inferiores; unde metaphysica, quae est omnibus superior, utitur his quae in aliis scientiis sunt probata. Et similiter theologia, cum omnes aliae scientiae sint huic quasi familantes et praeambulae in via generationis, quamvis sint dignitate posteriores, potest uti principiis omnium aliarum scientiarum."

In *Super Boetium* q. 2, Thomas explains, more thoroughly, in fact, than in any later work, his understanding of the origin and scientific character of theology. In his view, and in that of the Thomistic tradition, theology is essential to the mature Christian life: “because our perfection consists in our union with God, we must have access to the divine to the fullest possible extent, using everything in our power, that our mind might be occupied with contemplation and our reason with the investigation of divine realities.”¹⁰⁷ To live such a life of constant occupation with God, both through contemplation and through closely argued understanding, we use two kinds of sacred science, one which “follows our way of knowing, which uses the principles of sensible things in order to make the Godhead known”¹⁰⁸ (that is, philosophy); and another which “follows the mode of divine realities themselves, so that they are apprehended in themselves.”¹⁰⁹ Our grasp of this second science—theology, or *sacra doctrina*—is necessarily imperfect in this life, even as the light of faith is imperfect compared to the vision of glory.

We cannot perfectly possess this way of knowing in the present life, but there arises here and now in us a certain sharing in, and a likeness to, the divine knowledge, to the extent that through the faith implanted in us we firmly grasp the primary Truth itself for its own sake. And as God, by the very fact that he knows himself,

¹⁰⁷ *Super Boet* q. 2, a. 1, resp. 1: “Dicendum quod cum perfectio hominis consistat in coniunctione ad deum, oportet quod homo ex omnibus quae in ipso sunt, quantum possibile est, ad divina admittatur, ut intellectus contemplationi et ratio inquisitioni divinarum vacet”

¹⁰⁸ *Super Boet* q. 2, a. 1, resp. 2: “secundum modum nostrum, qui sensibilibus principia accipit ad notificandum divina”

¹⁰⁹ *Super Boet* q. 2, a. 1, resp. 2: “secundum modum ipsorum divinarum, ut ipsa divina secundum se ipsa capiantur”

knows all other things as well in his way, namely by simple intuition without any reasoning process, so may we, from the things we accept by faith in our firm grasping of the primary Truth, come to know other things in our way, namely by drawing conclusions from principles.¹¹⁰

By infused faith, we participate in God's knowledge in a supernatural manner—which Thomas says is mysteriously akin to God's own self-knowledge. Faith, by which we cling to God as knowers, is quite unlike the discursive or argumentative way of knowing which is natural to us. Our human mode of grasping truth, however, is not done away with—this mode, human reason's way of discursive reasoning (which is refined by sound philosophy), is what produces theology. By adhering to the first Truth in faith, we “come to know other things in our way,” i.e., discursively, “namely by drawing conclusions from principles.” In this way, “the truths we hold by faith are, as it were, our principles in this science [i.e., theology], and the others [i.e., the truths we reach by reasoning from those principles] become, as it were, conclusions.”¹¹¹ Once again, Thomas likens the relationship between God's knowledge and our theology to sciences that stand in the logical relationship of subalternation.

¹¹⁰ *Super Boet* q. 2, a. 1, resp. 2–3: [Scientia secundum modum isporum divinorum] “quae quidem perfecte in statu viae nobis est impossibilis, sed fit nobis in statu viae quaedam illius cognitionis percipatio et assimilatio ad cognitionem divinam, in quantum per fidem nobis infusam inhaeremus ipsi primae veritati propter se ipsam. [3] Et sicut deus ex hoc, quod cognoscit alia modo suo, id est simplici intuiti, non discurrendo, ita nos ex his, quae per fidem capimus primae veritati adhaerendo, venimus in cognitionem aliorum secundum modum nostrum discurrendo de principiis ad conclusiones”

¹¹¹ *Super Boet* q. 2, a. 1, resp. 3: “ut sic ipsa, quae fide tenemus, sint nobis quasi principia in hac scientia et alia sint quasi conclusiones.”

Now, unless *sacra doctrina* is to be merely the repetition of the very words of *sacra scriptura*, Christians will require the assistance of philosophy (and, at least potentially, of all the lower sciences) to articulate the understanding that faith seeks. It follows, therefore, as in *STh* 1, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2, that “different classes of objects separately treated in the diverse philosophical sciences can be combined by Christian theology, which keeps its unity when all of them are brought into the same focus and pictured in the field of divine revelation.”¹¹² It is in being able to form this big picture, so to speak, that theological understanding is analogous to God’s own simple and perfect knowledge. Admittedly, our knowledge, our “big picture” is neither simple nor perfect, but depends radically on faith, actual grace, and correct discursive reasoning.

Our exploration of St Thomas’s treatment of natural and theological science in *STh* 1, q. 1 and in the beginning of his *Expositio in Boethii de Trinitate* leads us to the following conclusion. Far from supposing that theology “evacuates”¹¹³ metaphysics or somehow bypasses the power of natural reason, Aquinas holds that natural reasoning, metaphysics, and philosophy have a foundational role in the development of scientific theology. Though he supposes that faith transcends the power of reason

¹¹² *STh* 1, q. 1, a. 4, ad 2: “Et similiter ea quae in diversis scientiis philosophicis tractantur potest sacra doctrina una existens considerare sub una ratione in quantum scilicet sunt divinitus revelabilia.” See Donohoo, “Nature and Grace,” 366, n. 63.

¹¹³ See chapter 7, below. The expression is John Milbank’s: “the domain of metaphysics is not simply subordinate to, but completely *evacuated* by theology” (italics in original); see John Milbank, “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 44. This article was originally published in *New Blackfriars* 76 (1995): 325–42.

alone, Thomas nonetheless holds that our discursive mode of intelligence has a necessary role in the understanding of God's grace and revelation. Certainly, our investigation of the truths of faith is not limited by philosophy, as though we could believe only what natural reason grasps.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, neither are the truths of faith self-explanatory, so that theology would be merely the teacher of the less noble disciplines, and not acknowledge its neediness in the exploration and articulation of what supernatural faith apprehends.

With respect to pure nature, this account of the Thomistic epistemology of the sacred and secular sciences is of special relevance. It cautions us against disdainning the gifts of nature and against presuming to possess the kind of intuitive vision of all truth which is proper to God and the blessed. It follows that there can be little room for epistemological integralism or for the claim that faith replaces or obviates natural or secular reason.

Conclusion

In the last two chapters, we have presented six topics, drawn from the writings of St Thomas, that cast doubt on Henri de Lubac's claim that the idea of pure nature is foreign to genuine Thomism. In treating of human mortality, the necessity of the infused virtues and gifts, limbo, kingship, natural law, and the epistemology of the sciences, Thomas consistently refers to mere natural humanity and to natural human

¹¹⁴ This is explicitly excluded in *Super Boet* q. 2, a. 3, responsio 4, where Thomas identifies two errors made in the theological use of philosophy: first, the use of corrupt philosophy, contrary to the faith; second, the limitation of faith to what may be known with certainty by philosophy.

action, distinguishing these from the elevated life of grace and faith. The idea of pure nature, if not that exact expression, would seem to have a reasonably apparent and firm foundation in the teaching of Thomas himself.

Before we go on to examine de Lubac's integralism and that of Radical Orthodoxy, for further historical background, we first turn in chapter five to Europe's first integralists, the Jansenists.

CHAPTER 5

PURE NATURE, INTEGRALISM, AND JANSENISM

Jansenism and its precursor, Baianism, are the subject of two-fifths of de Lubac's *Surnaturel*, and of one third of his *Augustinisme et théologie moderne*. In both books, de Lubac develops an argument he first articulated in a two-part article which appeared in the Jesuit *Recherches de sciences religieuses* in 1931. That article was entitled "Deux Augustiniens fourvoyés: Baius et Jansenius," and argued, as its title announces, that Baius and Jansen were two "Augustinians astray." His point is that, although they had gone off the rails into heresy, they had nevertheless started from the sound and venerable Catholic tradition represented by St Augustine—who, according to de Lubac, never considered the concept of pure nature. The reason this history interests de Lubac is that it explains how a chasm opened between France (or, more broadly, the West) and Christianity. To examine de Lubac's position in some detail, I will divide the following presentation into two sections:

1. De Lubac's reading of the Jansenist Crisis
2. Jansenism: An Historical Perspective

1. De Lubac's Reading of the Jansenist Crisis

At one level, de Lubac's work on Jansen and Baius was a response to Protestant scholarship in the fields of patristics and church history. It was, in short, a counter-polemic, meant to show that those claiming the support of Augustine's

authority—that is, Baius and Jansen, but also Luther and Calvin—were mistaken in their reading of the great Catholic Doctor of the Western Church.

More profoundly, however, de Lubac's concentration on the Jansenist appeal to St Augustine was intended as a defence against Thomistic and Suarezian criticism of de Lubac's own theology of nature and grace. He wished to show, by repeatedly publishing the same material, that when the Catholic Church condemned Jansenism and Baianism, it condemned not their entire worldview or their entire theological undertaking, but only very specific features of their doctrine. At least until 1965, de Lubac held to this opinion because his own theological anthropology required that he echo a teaching crucial to the Jansenists, but for which they had not been specifically condemned. It was that the idea of pure nature is a distorting and destructive fiction of theologians unduly influenced by Aristotle. Going beyond the Jansenists, de Lubac also argued that the idea of pure nature was alien to Thomas Aquinas.

As studies of Jansenism go, de Lubac's work is not ground-breaking. Taken at face value, its purpose is twofold. First, as mentioned already, it is an apologia for St Augustine against his heretical enthusiasts. Second, it emphasises that the opinions for which Baianism and Jansenism were condemned *did not* include their negative position on the idea of pure nature. In *Augustinisme et théologie moderne*, in fact, the second purpose overshadows the first, so that the overwhelming emphasis is on the theologian's freedom to criticise *natura pura*.

According to de Lubac, an anthropology which precludes the thought of pure nature is a “view that has never been contradicted or modified”¹ by authoritative Catholic teaching. Such an anthropology is considered to be Augustinian—albeit without any clear textual evidence. De Lubac concludes that it is misguided to suppose “that Augustine’s fundamental idea, accurately formulated in all its logical purity” (that is, the idea of a theological anthropology which eschews the notion of pure nature) “leads inevitably to heresy,” or that, “if understood in all the rigor of its terms, it was the begetter of the systems of Luther, Baius and Jansenius.”² This “fundamental idea . . . in all its logical purity” is precisely what de Lubac wishes to vindicate, since it is “a more synthetic mode of thought, . . . more legitimately the heir of the patristic age and of the golden century of Christian theology”³ compared to the later, scholastic tradition. But just how this “more synthetic mode” of doctrine ought to develop is never quite explained.

There is a basic question: Did de Lubac establish convincingly that the heresies of Baius and Jansen did not essentially consist in the denial of pure nature? The answer can only be affirmative, that he did establish this quite convincingly. To

² De Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, xx. French p. 13, “Mais que l’idée fondamentale d’Augustin, exactement dégagée en sa pure logique, mène fatalement à l’hérésie; qu’elle n’ait pas été seulement plus ou moins en fait, mais qu’elle soit en droit, si on la prend dans sa rigueur, génératrice des systèmes d’un Luther, d’un Baius, d’un Jansénius: le paradoxe semble un peu fort.”

³ De Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, xxi. French p. 14, “un mode de penser plus synthétique, plus légitime héritier de l’âge des Pères et du siècle d’or de la théologie chrétienne.”

demonstrate this point, however, requires no very extensive treatment. We may ask, then, why de Lubac published such a lengthy argument, and why he did so three times. Perhaps the best explanation is offered by David Grumett in his recent monograph on the great French Jesuit. Discussing de Lubac's theology of the Holy Spirit, Grumett writes that de Lubac was determined to avoid two opposing heresies in his discussions of grace—on one hand, Pelagianism, and on the other, Jansenism. In Grumett's words,

De Lubac wished to guard against too close an identification of the Holy Spirit with the spirit of God which dwells in humankind [naturally]. After all, Pelagius identifies the spirit of humankind with the Spirit of God as part of his exaltation of humanity above God De Lubac remains equally determined to oppose positions identified in his critique of Jansenism. These tend to the other extreme of identifying the Spirit as a gift extrinsically given to a previously sinful but now elect portion of humanity, thus granting it admission into the kingdom of God.⁴

The “positions identified in [de Lubac's] critique of Jansenism” are not identified by name, either by Grumett or by de Lubac himself; still, Grumett's description points us in the right direction. De Lubac never wants to view “the Spirit as a gift extrinsically given to a previously sinful but now elect portion of humanity,” since this approach runs counter to his preferred description of salvation as a corporate destiny of all mankind.

Granting Grumett's explanation, I think it is also important to consider Jansenism in ways that de Lubac himself did not. Since the publication of de Lubac's

⁴ David Grumett, *De Lubac: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 104.

“twins” in 1965, there has been a renewal of historical interest in Jansenism and a considerable deepening of appreciation for that movement’s popularity and significance. Accordingly, we shall consider some of these new historical insights in the course of offering a narrative of the events (both social and theological). This will provide the light we need to appreciate de Lubac’s rejection of pure nature. Without disputing de Lubac’s explicit conclusion (i.e., that the Holy See never condemned anyone for denying pure nature), I think it is important to trace the history of Jansenism and its world—if only for the light it sheds on the integralist projects of de Lubac and Milbank.

2. Jansenism: An Historical Perspective

By tracing the history of Jansenism, our picture of anti-religious secularism can be clarified. Jansenism’s immediate political and theological context is the rise of royal absolutism and the Catholic Church’s internal conflict over the theology of Luis de Molina. De Lubac’s thorough neglect of this context tends to make scholasticism and its notion of pure nature the cause of French disaffection with the Church. Such an explanation is too simple. A more plausible account of rising French secularism is required. It would need to attend to the intensifying opposition of the French bishops and the higher clergy to the burgeoning middle class and to the independent, liberal aristocracy, an opposition made manifest in support for royal absolutism, in the denigration of commerce and economic improvement, and in promoting the Society of Jesus and its theology. For its part, Jansenism became a major social and political

force in France because it opposed, and was persecuted by, the same ecclesiastical authorities identified by many Frenchmen with absolutism, reaction, and decadence. While the scholastic theology of the time was not notably attractive, it is an oversimplification to blame disaffection from the Church on the scholastic theology of pure nature, or to trace the Church's 20th-century weaknesses to the lack of a more adequate, more Augustinian theological anthropology in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Our historical survey includes two topics omitted altogether by de Lubac—perhaps because of the gap in the historical studies available to him. The first is the political context of Bourbon France. Here, Jansenism drew support from those opposed to the centralising policies of the monarchy. The second is the *De auxiliis* controversy, which sparked the Jansenist fire into life. But we must begin by retracing a theme in de Lubac's own account of the period, namely the theology of Baianism.

a. Michael de Bay and Baianism

When, in 1552, three top officials of the University of Louvain returned home from the second session of the Council of Trent, they found that, in their absence, two professors, Michael de Bay and Jan Hessels, had won the admiration of most of the University with certain anti-Protestant arguments based on the bible and the Fathers. Baius and Hessels were men of conspicuous virtue and erudition, ardently and aggressively devoted to the agenda of Catholic reform.⁵ Like Erasmus and

⁵ On the life and personality of Baius, see G. Fourure, *Les chatiments divins: Etude historique et doctrinale* (Paris: Desclée, 1959), 43–55. See also Stone, “Baius and ‘Pure Nature’,” 54–69.

Renaissance scholars generally, they had no time for scholasticism, and looked upon mediaeval thought as a lapse or corruption. The pure, primitive Christian spirit, it was supposed, could be regained via biblical scholarship and the critical study of patristic texts. Baius himself was, philosophically speaking, a nominalist; theologically, he claimed to be a disciple of St Augustine. Michael de Bay's precise scholarly position and spirituality have received little scholarly attention as yet.⁶ His teachings drew condemnation on seven main counts.

First, Baius defines moral good and evil exclusively in terms of obedience to the will of God. There is precedent for this emphasis in Augustine, certainly, but not for the nominalist extreme favoured by Baius. There is plausible evidence for his being accused of teaching that it is not any intrinsic or objective quality in human acts that makes them good or evil, but only the utterly free divine decision to command or forbid them.⁷

Second, Baius terms *voluntary* whatever a person wills without external compulsion. However, he insists that we are invariably subject to internal compulsion, either by cupidity (which loves to disobey) or by charity (which loves obedience).⁸ Here Baius is maintaining a confusion in Augustine, who failed to

⁶ The last full-scale study seems to have been F. X. Linsemann's *Michael Baius, und die Gundlegung des Jansenismus, Eine dogmengeschichtliche Monographie* (Tübingen, 1867). More conveniently, see G. Fourure, *Les chatiments divins*, and Pieter Smulders in Rahner et al., eds., *Sacramentum Mundi*, s.v. "Baianism."

⁷ See the condemnation of Baianism's complete identification of goodness and obedience: DS 1913, 1914, 1915, 1916, 1942, 1954, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964 and 1969.

⁸ See DS 1935, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949 and 1975.

distinguish the efficacy of God's will from the imposition of necessity, a clarification achieved in the theology of Thomas Aquinas.

Third, Baius argues that, before the fall, Adam and Eve were able to obey or to disobey God as they chose—that is, arbitrarily or indifferently, independent of any emotional or intellectual motive. Hence, Baius does not consider, as Aquinas does, that the human will is specified or shaped by intellectual knowledge or judgement. Adam and Eve, therefore, were free to choose to act in a manner that would result either in their salvation or damnation. This arbitrary condition, Baius allowed, may be called grace (a gift from God) in a loose and improper sense; but, strictly speaking, entry into heaven would have been only a just payment (*merces*) for obedient Adam, not a free gift or grace (*gratia*) properly so called.⁹

Fourth, Baius holds that now, after the fall of Adam, human nature is no longer able to choose between obedience and disobedience. Internally constrained by its own cupidity, it is freely (without external compulsion) intent upon sinning. Thus, unless God comes to the rescue and imposes the opposite constraint (grace), we will act in cupidity and will have absolutely no power to act in obedience. In short, humanity, after the fall, is utterly depraved.¹⁰

Fifth, Baius not only reduces all sin to disobedience but also stresses that charity itself, loving God, is a precept of obedience. For this reason he, like Luther, questions the distinction between mortal and venial sin. All sin is disobedience, as is

⁹ See DS 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1921, 1923, 1924, 1926, 1978 and 1979.

¹⁰ See DS 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1952, 1953, 1965, 1966, 1967 and 1976.

all falling short of perfect charity; and all disobedience merits damnation. Baius does not entertain the idea that concupiscence might diminish moral responsibility in any way: the only consideration is whether one's behaviour is sinful or righteous.¹¹

Sixth, Baius holds that fallen Adam is fully responsible for the sins he commits under the internal impulse of concupiscence—not because he can possibly resist them (he cannot), but precisely because they are nothing but internal characteristics of his will. Thus fallen Adam is forced to sin, and is completely responsible for that compulsion, so that he is liable to be damned for what he cannot possibly choose to avoid doing.¹²

Seventh and finally, Baius insists that, after the fall of Adam, justice (defined as obedience to God) is separable from the remission of sins (which normally only occurs through baptism or sacramental absolution). By separating justice from the forgiveness of sins, Baius means not only that one can merit heaven without forgiveness (in which case one would still be damned on account of the unremitted sins!), but also that one can be forgiven without being justified (in which case one would be damned due to a lack of heaven-earning obedience).¹³

Baianism has a certain reformist appeal, at least if one can tolerate its fearsome severity. Like Pelagianism before it, Baianism is designed to spur human liberty on toward earnest obedience and resistance to sin. It is a simple soteriological

¹¹ See DS 1916, 1920, 1925, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1965, 1967, 1974 and 1975.

¹² See DS 1925, 1927, 1928, 1930, 1934, 1974 and 1975.

¹³ See DS 1910, 1912, 1917, 1918, 1929, 1931, 1932, 1933, 1943, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1970, 1971 and 1977.

scheme in which there is no need for moral reasoning, whether practical or speculative, since every slightest imperfection or transgression of a divine, positive law is a mortal sin. More positively, Baianism seeks to find its centre in love, where a pure and total charity is the goal and fulfilment of law. Clearly, there is a biblical resonance in its teachings. Baius differs from the Protestant reformers in that he held a Catholic view of sacramental efficacy. He may appear as a Pelagian on the question of merit and salvation, and as a Calvinist in regard to freedom, concupiscence and sin; but he appears soundly Catholic in his approach to the sacraments.

In the 1550s, Baius and Hessels increasingly criticised the local Jesuits and Franciscans, especially by denying their customary manner of distinguishing between concupiscence (disorderly emotions and inclinations to sin that affect human freedom) and sin itself. A few of the local religious sided with Baius, but most detected in his theology a Lutheran tendency to identify the Christian as *simul iustus et peccator*. In June 1560 these critics obtained a condemnation of Baius's teaching from the University of Paris. Louvain officials, other involved churchmen, and agents of the Spanish king Philip II (who then ruled the Netherlands) found this strife undesirably disturbing. They prevailed upon Pope Pius IV to silence all the disputants before the impending General Chapter of the Franciscans could become involved, and so make the situation even worse. As a result, the disputants were silenced in August 1561. Baius and Hessels, however, kept their posts and even went to Trent's final

sessions as representatives of Margaret of Parma, King Philip's regent in the Spanish Netherlands.¹⁴

In December 1563, the Council of Trent ended and Michael de Bay returned to Louvain. Though both he and Hessels were supposed to avoid speaking controversially on sin and grace, Baius spoke up, and relit the fires doused in 1561. In 1565, the theology faculties of the Universities of Alcalà and Salamanca condemned various propositions from de Bay's work, and after Pius IV's death late that year. King Philip asked the new pope to resolve the theological dispute dividing his subjects.

The new pope, chosen early in January 1566, was St Pius V, the Dominican Michele Ghislieri. An Inquisitor and Cardinal under Pius IV, he was already somewhat familiar with the clash between Baius and the Franciscans. According to von Pastor, Pius V knew de Bay to be "a learned and cultured man, a priest of irreproachable life, who could do a great deal for the Church, and in any case had a right to be treated with every consideration."¹⁵ So while Pius V was ready to condemn unorthodox and dangerous teachings, he refrained from mentioning Baius or Hessels (who died in November 1566) by name in the bull that appeared on 1 October 1567, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*. Instead the pope proscribed some seventy-six propositions, drawn from the Alcalà and Salamanca condemnations and declared them "heretical,

¹⁴ On the history of the Baianist controversy see Ludwig von Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 17, *Pius V (1566–1572)* (London: Keegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1929), 367–80.

¹⁵ Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 17, 373.

erroneous, suspect, temerarious, and offensive to pious ears.”¹⁶ Unfortunately there were two weaknesses in the bull. First, it did not say exactly which propositions were heretical, which ones merely offensive to pious ears, and so forth. Second, the absence of punctuation enables the conclusion of *Ex omnibus* to be taken in two ways: either as (1) affirming that some of the propositions, despite their proscription, are defensible if taken “*in the strict and proper sense of the words*”(which is how Baius read the bull); or as (2) insisting, on the contrary, that all the propositions are “*in the strict and proper sense of their words . . . condemned as heretical, erroneus, etc.*” (which is how the foes of Baius read it).¹⁷ Due partly to this confusion Michael de Bay continued to season his generally humble submission to the pope with minor outbursts of complaint and self-defence. After a few rounds of censure and reconciliation, he finally kept quiet after 1570 and, as Dean of the Louvain theology faculty, lived peacefully until his death in 1589.

In retrospect one is tempted to say the Baianist controversy was bungled by the Holy See. Perhaps at the time, Baius did not seem a sufficient threat to orthodoxy. However, after his death, his theological sympathisers at Louvain went on to teach a generation that included the young Cornelius Jansen. Not all the opinions of Baius would survive. What did live on was his anthropological emphasis, his devotion to St

¹⁶ DS 1566, my trans.

¹⁷ See DS 1980, note *1980, on the dispute of the *comma Pianum*, so named because it hinges on where to punctuate the text with a comma. See also Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 17, 377, n. 3.

Augustine, his disaffection from mediaeval theology, his nominalist moral theology, and his genuine desire for the Church's renewal.

De Lubac's sympathy for Baius is not the result of anti-mediaevalism or of a simplistic moral theology. It derives, rather, from the shared spirit of *ressourcement* and from the Baianist rejection of scholastic appeal to pure nature. De Lubac's research in this field led him to assert that, in principle, opposition to the idea of pure nature was never condemned in *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*. Hence de Lubac begins his explanation by saying:

For Baius, as for Augustine, it is said, and this is at the origin of the whole question, man is so made that on any hypothesis to fulfill his destiny he has need of God's external help. For both of them, a state in which man would be left to his own wisdom and powers, in which he would have to develop and perfect himself unaided, is quite out of the question. In this sense neither of them has any room for the idea of 'pure nature.'¹⁸

De Lubac concludes his discussion of Baianism by quoting a rhetorical question of Baius which he, de Lubac, takes to be an expression of "Augustine's fundamental idea . . . in all its logical purity," the very insight that he sought to rescue from scholastic decadence.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose that Adam, with his children, had remained just as he was created in the beginning and that he had cultivated God and his fields with equal facility. Who now would conclude that one is natural for us, that is, granted our very generation and birth, but the other is supernatural, that is, not owed

¹⁸ De Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, 1.

to our nature, and by the generosity of the creator, is graciously added to our integrity as an adornment [?]¹⁹

De Lubac's studies on Baius pass seamlessly into his discussion of Cornelius Jansen. If we attend to principles of theological anthropology, says de Lubac, "we shall be obliged to observe that Jansenism is the exact continuation of Baianism."²⁰ Such a version of history makes little sense in view of its 20th century theological aftermath. We note the influence of two events not considered by de Lubac. Both took place in the twelve months before the death of Michael de Bay: the 1588 publication of the *Concordia* of Luis de Molina and the 1589 assassination of France's king Henri III.

b. French Politics after Baianism

The assassination of Henri III, just six weeks before Baius's death, had notable consequences in theology and in the religious history of France. It brought the Bourbons to the French throne, and this new dynasty made France a centralised state under a single sovereignty.

After the death of his only surviving brother in 1584, the heirless Henri III was obviously going to be France's last Valois monarch. The next in succession would be his distant Capetian kinsman, Henri Bourbon of Navarre—who had become a Protestant. Zealous Catholics among the French nobility were unhappy, and civil

¹⁹ Quoted as "*Baiana*, vol. 1, pp. 60–61" in de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, 30.

²⁰ De Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, 36.

war broke out. The Catholic League rose and rallied around the ambitious Duc de Guise (also named Henri) to keep the crown of Henri III (Valois) from going to Henri (Bourbon) of Navarre. The resulting “War of the Three Henriess” were conducted not only on the battlefield, but also through strategic kidnappings and assassinations.

First, for Christmas 1588, Henri III had Henri de Guise (and, for good measure, his brother, the Cardinal de Guise) murdered. The following summer, 1589, a crazed Dominican friar and Catholic League partisan, Jacques Clément, assassinated Henri III in retribution. Then, after several more years of violence and intrigue, Henri of Navarre in 1593 rejoined the Catholic Church and became Henri IV of France.

A further, theological complication in this complex political situation was the *De auxiliis* controversy, to which we now turn.

c. The *Congregatio de Auxiliis Gratiae Divinae*

In 1588, the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535–1600) published a book he had been working on since the height of the Baianist controversy in the 1550s. Though its effect would belie its title, the *Concordia*,²¹ its aim was to deploy an entirely new and logically satisfying explanation of the Christian doctrines of grace,

²¹ Two complete editions of the *Concordia* appeared in Molina’s lifetime, one (version O) in 1588 and another (version A) in 1595. Most of the *Concordia* was also reprinted in Molina’s 1592 commentary on Aquinas’s *prima pars*. A critical edition of the 1595 *Concordia* was prepared by Johann Rabeneck, SJ, and published in Oña and Madrid in 1953. Today’s Molinists seem most occupied with questions about the divine foreknowledge of future contingents; see Alfred J. Freddoso, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia, Luis de Molina* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988) for a partial translation, introduction and bibliography.

freedom, divine prescience and predestination, and so to replace what Molina held to be the inadequate teachings of earlier Latin theology. Though Molina meant to answer Baius once and for all, he did so in a manner that appeared to many as the repudiation of the whole Latin and Augustinian doctrinal tradition of grace.

Before getting to the content of Molina's proposal, it is worth recalling the state of Europe when the *Concordia* was published. By the summer of 1588, the Council of Trent was over; and large swathes of Europe remained decidedly Protestant. By 1588, Luther, Calvin, Mary Stuart, and Ignatius Loyola (beatified in 1609) were all dead. That same summer, 1588, the Spanish Armada was defeated and the "War of the Three Henrys" intensified in its violence and bitterness. So, when the *Concordia* appeared, the Reformation was already established, and Christian Europe was destabilised on many fronts. Molina's book, to say nothing of his pugnacious and abrasive personality, became a cause of further concern.

Molina's *Concordia* took over the researches of his fellow Jesuit Pedro de Fonseca, "the Aristotle of Portugal,"²² concerning God's "middle knowledge" or *scientia media*. Molina's own theory must be set against the background of Baianism and of the dominant figures of the 16th-century Dominican Thomistic school. Now, in keeping with the Jesuit Constitutions, Luis de Molina identified himself as a theological disciple of Aquinas. Nonetheless, he sought to propose a new solution to the problem of grace and freedom, and rejected the common Thomistic teaching that grace is intrinsically efficacious: that is, that grace does not wait on human choice for

²² See James Broderick, *The Progress of the Jesuits (1556–79)* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1946), 129–30.

its effectiveness, but rather brings about the divinely willed human acts in a manner both infallible and perfective of human liberty. As its adherents admit, this Thomistic view seems to entail a contradiction: it seems to undermine any significant claim to human freedom inasmuch as it describes the human will as subject to a superior cause, namely God. To answer this understandable objection, Thomists and Augustinians generally appealed to two considerations. First, they called for a more careful definition of liberty, to distinguish “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:21) from mere interior self-determination. Second, they cited the transcendence of divine causality in relation to created causes, for God, as the First Cause, can move a created agent in a way that respects the integrity of the second cause (i.e., the human agent), and thus enhances and elevates its activity. To Molina, such theories sounded too much like Protestantism, with its apparent stress on human impotence and its tendency to deny a genuine, free human co-operation with grace. Where Augustinians and Thomists held that grace was intrinsically efficacious, Molina located the effect of grace in God’s foreknowledge (understood as a kind of “middle knowledge”) of exactly how each free agent would react to the offer of divine grace. Grace was, therefore, understood to be humanly conditioned in a way that the previous theological tradition had not allowed.

As James Broderick writes, “it appears that Padre Luis [Molina], a somewhat truculent metaphysician, was distinctly the aggressor in the great fight which followed, but when it came to hard knocks he met his match in Friar Bañes [i.e.,

Dominic Báñez], of the Order of Preachers.”²³ Before long, Molina faced the concerted opposition of the Dominicans, while the Society of Jesus came corporately to his defence. Radical differences between the two orders, on the level of what today we might call “spirituality,” were exposed. Molinism, at least in the form defended by Suárez, was the required doctrine in Jesuit theology classrooms well into the 20th century. To some extent, the Jesuit affinity for Molinism arose from the common experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* and from the optimistic ethos of Ignatian humanism. Today this commitment to formal Molinism is no longer required, though until relatively recently the link between Molinism with Ignatian spirituality was taken for granted. In 1937 the Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu wrote, without meaning it as an insult, that “the grandeur and truth of Molinism are in the spiritual experience of the *Exercises* of St Ignatius.”²⁴ Some years earlier the Sulpician Pierre Pourrat had put it more elaborately, first citing a dictum famously attributed to St

²³ Broderick, *Progress of the Jesuits*, 130, n. 1.

²⁴ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 148–9, my translation. In this passage Chenu avers that Thomism expresses the spiritual truth experienced by St Dominic just as “the grandeur and truth of Bonaventurian or Scotist Augustinianism is entirely in the spiritual experience of St Francis” or as Molinism is in the core experience of Jesuits. This little book of Chenu’s was censored, but it suggests an intriguing study of how Thomas Aquinas and Luis de Molina were related to the founders of their respective religious orders; both thinkers lived in their communities’ “golden ages” and both were for some centuries their orders’ official or normative theologians.

Ignatius, “Work as if everything depends on you, pray as if everything depends on God,”²⁵ and then summarising the Ignatian ethos this way:

In the work of spiritual sanctification, there are two parts—God’s and man’s. Ignatius fixes his attention on the first to urge the importance of prayer for the securing of grace—God’s part—and to call upon us to glorify God for all the good we do through him. He emphasizes still more, perhaps, man’s part—radically eliminated by Luther, as we shall see—and impels us to action, indeed, as if success depended upon ourselves alone. His spirituality, if the anachronism may be allowed, is dynamically molinist²⁶

The association of Molinism with Ignatian spirituality may be found in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius. In the experiential domain of spiritual direction, the discipline involved in the thirty-day programme of methodical meditations is expected to lead to particular experiential outcomes. Significantly, too, the “Rules for Thinking with the Church,” which conclude the *Exercises*, are clearly written with an awareness of the possible dangers in speaking of grace so that “works and free will may receive . . . prejudice or be held for nought.”²⁷ Although Ignatius clearly allows

²⁵ This is how the phrase is usually remembered, but the early Jesuit sources recall a very different saying. See James P. M. Walsh, “Work as if Everything Depends on—Who?,” *The Way Supplement* 70 (Spring 1991), 125–36. Walsh thinks the authentic Ignatian message was, in effect, “Pray as if everything depends on you” (that is, pray desperately, trust God fervently), and “work as if everything depends on God” (work calmly and with detachment).

²⁶ Pierre Pourrat, trans. W. H. Mitchell, *Christian Spirituality*, vol. 3, *Later Developments, Part I: From the Renaissance to Jansenism* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1927). Capitalisation as in original.

²⁷ Ignatius of Loyola, “Rules for Thinking with the Church,” n. 17. From Joseph Rickaby’s *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, Spanish and English, with a Continuous Commentary*, second edition (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1936), 224–5.

“that it is very true that none can be saved, unless he be predestinate, and without having faith and grace,” his warnings in the “Rules” are aimed against the Protestant undermining of the value of “the works that conduce to the salvation of . . . souls.”²⁸ Indeed, Rule n. 18 helped set the classic Jesuit approach on a course that would earn the ridicule of critics like Pascal, who in his tenth “Provincial Letter” satirises the Jesuits as having “dispensed men from the irksome obligation of actually loving God.”²⁹ The relevant rule, clearly meant as an antidote to perfectionism, is this:

[T]hough it be a thing to esteem above all, much to serve God our Lord out of pure love, we ought much to praise the fear of His Divine Majesty: because not only is filial fear a pious and holy thing, but even servile fear, where the man does not attain to anything better or more profitable, is a great help toward getting out of mortal sin; and after a man has got out of that, he easily comes to filial fear, which is as wholly acceptable and grateful to God our Lord as it is at one with divine love.³⁰

These rules, along with the Society’s obedience to the Roman Pontiff and their new, non-monastic style of religious life, highlight the points at which Ignatian spirituality clashed with Jansenism and its attendant reverence for Augustinianism in

²⁸ Ignatius of Loyola, “Thinking with the Church,” n. 15. See also nn. 16–17.

²⁹ Blaise Pascal, Provincial Letters X. From *The Provincial Letters*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth, Middx, UK: Penguin 1967). “C'est ainsi que nos Pères ont déchargé les hommes de l'obligation pénible d'aimer Dieu actuellement.”

³⁰ Ignatius of Loyola, “Rules for Thinking,” n. 18. In his commentary Rickaby appeals to Trent’s remarks on Christian fear in the Decree on Justification (session 6, cap. 6) and opines rather bleakly that charity casts out servile fear only “so long as love is at a white heat of actual perfection. But in this world our love of God cannot be at that white heat permanently. Such perfection of charity as is attainable in this world does not raise us above the occasional and recurrent need even of servile fear.” See Joseph Rickaby, *Spiritual Exercises*, 231.

general. Add to this the Jesuits' conspicuous presence in politics³¹ and the unhappy association of Jesuit moralists with laxist currents in the casuistic applications of moral theology, and one can see some of why the new Society of Jesus was the object of suspicion.

Meanwhile, Jesuit support was not enough to deliver Luis de Molina from his Dominican critics. The academic disputes soon turned into the trial of Molinism before ecclesiastical judges. As Europe watched with increasing interest, the case made its way from the Universities, to the Spanish Inquisition, and then to Rome in 1597 under Clement VIII, who created a curial committee to settle the affair, the *Congregatio de Auxiliis Divinae Gratiae*.³² After a dozen years of bitter controversy, Luis de Molina died in 1600 amid rumours that he had been condemned by the Holy See. The rumours, however, were false, and the dispute between the Jesuits and Dominicans continued at the papal court for another seven years. The trial was inconclusive. After the death of Clement VIII, Pope Paul V finally dissolved the *Congregatio* in 1607, and dismissed the case against the dead Molina. As Hubert Jedin explains, the Holy See favoured the more Augustinian position in the dispute but wanted to avoid any action prejudicial to the Society of Jesus.

³¹ The Jesuits became so involved with the governing elites, not only in Catholic Europe but in the Muslim and pagan Near, Middle and Far East, that Father General Acquaviva issued instructions to the entire Society on how to direct royal consciences. See Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 146–51.

³² According to Anthony Levi, the name of the congregation reflects the fact that the second edition of the Jesuit *ratio studiorum* substituted the word *auxilium* (help) for *gratia* (grace) when naming its plan for the study of grace. See Anthony Levi, *Guide to French Literature, Beginnings to 1789* (Detroit: St James, 1994), s.v. "Jansenism."

While Paul V did not want to diminish the esteem enjoyed by the Jesuits, who had rendered him inestimable political services, he was nonetheless determined to maintain the fundamental position of the Augustinian-Thomistic system of grace. This is why he allowed the Dominican Diego Álvarez (d. 1635) to publish his monumental treatise *De auxiliis divinae gratiae* (1611) as a work of quasi-official character. In order to prevent works on the same topic by the Jesuits Lessius and Suárez to be published, he had the Holy Office issue a decision (not a decree!), which was communicated to those involved and forbade them to publish anything involving the subject of grace. In spite of this, the faculty at Louvain reaffirmed its censures of the Jesuits Lessius and Hamelius. In December 1641 the Jesuit General Claudius Acquaviva, fearing that the old quarrels would be revived, directed Thomism to be taught in the colleges of the Society. Yet neither Paul V nor Acquaviva succeeded: the Jesuits on the whole continued to defend Molina.³³

Such was the rancour between the Dominicans and Jesuits—and the importance each side attached to this debate—that, beginning in 1611, the Holy See and general superiors of both orders issued instructions to quash debate and prevent the denigration of either position.³⁴ The banning of any reciprocal condemnation of the Jesuit and Dominican positions continued through the 17th century,³⁵ though the conflict took another form in the Chinese Rites controversy, in which Dominicans and Franciscans successfully argued against the Jesuit missionary attempts to

³³ Hubert Jedin, ed., trans. Gunther J. Holst, *History of the Church*, vol. 6, *The Church in the Age of Absolutism and Enlightenment* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 24.

³⁴ See DS 1997, 2008.

³⁵ See Niccolò Del Re, *La Curia Romana: Lineamenti Storico-Giuridici*, 4th edition (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), 364–5, for a summary and bibliography of the Congregation. For a detailed narrative of events see Jedin, *History of the Church*, vol. 6, 24–31; and Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 24, 281–366.

accommodate some traditional elements of Confucianism in the practice of Christian faith in China.³⁶

By dissolving the *Congregatio de auxiliis*, the Holy See hoped to foster peace and unity in the Reformation-scarred Church. However, leaving open a question that exposed such sensitive theological nerves, and then outlawing discussion of that question, was not a successful tactic in the promotion of Catholic unity. Ignoring the problem made it worse. Dominican opposition to Molina was nominally ended after 1607. This meant that the Dominican Thomists, already in one of the Order's periodic declines, would be ineffective in responding to the impending crisis of division within the Church, as Augustinian sympathisers rallied around one of Michael de Bay's theological heirs, Cornelius Jansen. In this situation, the remaining Thomists of Augustinian sympathies, whether they were Dominicans or not, were left in an indefensible position. They could continue to teach the intrinsic efficacy of grace, but could not teach that the opposite was wrong. As a result, a critical discussion of fundamental issues relating to grace and freedom was stymied. In contrast, the Jesuit Molinists were triumphant. Since they had escaped ecclesiastical condemnation, they felt that they had been vindicated: their goal had been merely to be allowed to hold their theological opinion. For the Jesuits, then, Paul V's decision to leave the question

³⁶ See David E. Mungello, *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning* (Chicago: Loyola, 1995) and *The Great Encounter of China and the West*, second edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), as well as Fidel Villarroel, "The Chinese Rites Controversy: Dominican Viewpoint" (*Philippiniana Sacra* 28.82 [1993]), 5–61.

open was a welcome development.³⁷ Thereafter, Jesuits and Jansenists could agree that the human will could be the decisive, primary agent in meritorious human acts. The issue on which they would disagree concerned how such moral freedom was to be interpreted—i.e., whether this view represented our present state or that of prelapsarian Adam. At this point, de Lubac, in his version of the historical narrative, ignores the older Thomistic position, and thus sees Jansen as picking up immediately where Baius left off.

d. Jansenism

France's Henri IV (Bourbon) shared the fate of his predecessor Henri III (Valois): he was assassinated by a fanatical Catholic enraged by the king's weak opposition of Protestantism. Henri IV was succeeded by his eight-year-old son, Louis XIII, whose mother, Queen Marie de Medici, then ruled as Regent from 1610 to 1617. Aldous Huxley writes, "The portraits of Marie de Medici reveal a large, fleshy, gorgeously bedizened barmaid; and the records of her administration prove her to have been even stupider, if possible, than she looked."³⁸ Her extraordinarily baleful influence on the Dauphin Louis has been long recognised.³⁹ As King, Louis XIII was

³⁷ The observation that Paul V's dismissal of the *Congregatio de auxiliis* affected the Jesuits and Dominicans very differently is made by Leopold von Ranke, trans. E. Foster, *The History of the Popes* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848), vol. 2, 130–1.

³⁸ Aldous Huxley, *Grey Eminence: A Study in Religion and Politics* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1944), 97.

³⁹ See Elizabeth Wirth Marvick, *Louis XIII: The Making of a King* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) and Lloyd de Mause, "The History of Child Abuse," *The Journal of Psychohistory* 25 (1998), 216–36.

thoroughly dependent upon his chief minister, the wily but devout Cardinal de Richelieu. Under the influence of the cardinal, France became a centralised state and Louis XIII an absolute monarch.⁴⁰ But the spiritual unity of France was compromised.

It was Richelieu's intention to see the French Church reformed in the spirit of Trent. He continued the Valois policy of welcoming agents of reform in the shape of new and fervent religious communities. France embraced the Jesuits, Capuchins, and Discalced Carmelites, all founded abroad, and produced her own purely French communities, such as the Oratorians, Sulpicians, and Calvarian nuns. This *parti dévot* was averse to Bourbon centralisation and to the displacement of the hereditary nobility with ennobled bourgeois functionaries. It was likewise uncomfortable with Richelieu's alliances with Protestant powers against the Habsburgs. Nonetheless, King Louis and Richelieu appreciated the affective and humanistic piety of these reformers, and hoped to use them to reform and unify France.⁴¹ From this cluster of reformist institutes, a "French school" of spirituality emerged, and enjoyed official favour. Broadly speaking, these religious institutes shared a commitment to

⁴⁰ See Anthony Levi, *Cardinal Richelieu and the Making of France* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2000). Richelieu even managed to make Louis XIII a father, though whether in the natural way or by fiction is not certain.

⁴¹ In reformed French theology, a Thomistic method or style was popular and Aquinas was held to be a great authority. His core teaching on grace, however, was left out: "it was above all the Jesuits who worked to re-impose the authority of Thomism in France in every matter except that of divine grace" (Edward Jones Kearns, *Ideas in Seventeenth-Century France: The Most Important Thinkers and the Climate of Ideas in Which they Worked* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), 10).

methodical spiritual exercises, to an appreciation of individual mystical experience, and to an ascetical abnegation of the human will in the spiritual life.⁴²

By today's standards, these 17th-century *dévots* may seem dour and pessimistic. They stressed the need for vigorous action against the loathsomeness of sin and its infernal consequences. Yet they were also humanists, not only in their cultural taste and learning but also in the spiritual emphasis they placed on human striving, choice, experience, and willpower. With their radical opposition to Lutheran "grace alone" theology and to Calvinist predestination, proponents of this new spirituality were, in Jordan Aumann's words, inclined "to soften the Augustinian and Thomistic emphasis on predestination and the gratuity of grace in order to emphasize man's freedom and the necessity of his co-operation with grace."⁴³ But this was not sufficient to effect the religious unification of their country.

Opposition came especially from what is now known as "Jansenism." We need continually to remind ourselves that there is no easy definition of this movement. The Jansenists had, as Robin Briggs writes, the "particularly tiresome characteristic [of resisting] any attempt at close definition."⁴⁴ Hence, there is some

⁴² See Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1985), 218–28.

⁴³ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 229.

⁴⁴ Robin Briggs, *Communities of Belief: Culture and Social Tensions in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 339. In this valuable book see pp. 339–80 on Jansenism. See also William Doyle, *Jansenism: Catholic Resistance to Authority from the Reformation to the French Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 2000); and Dale K. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560–1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

truth to the 17th-century Cardinal Giovanni Bona's quip that Jansenists were merely "fervent Catholics who do not love the Jesuits."⁴⁵

More to the point, the "Jansenists," so-named by their opponents in the 1640s, were associated with the theology of Cornelius Jansen the Younger (1565–1638).⁴⁶ He was a Dutch priest and professor at Louvain who, in the last two years of his life, had been Bishop of Ypres. Educated by students of Baius, Jansen became devoted to St Augustine and to the strict moral and sacramental discipline of the early Church. He considered himself a foe of scholastic rationalism—and, of mediaeval developments generally. In 1635, from the safe distance of the Low Countries, he wrote a pamphlet against Richelieu's Protestant anti-Habsburg alliances. Like all Catholics in the counter-reformation, Jansen rejected the theory of justification by faith alone, insisting that faith needed living charity to be salvific. Again like his Catholic contemporaries, he considered visible membership in the Catholic Church necessary for salvation. However, unlike many other counter-reformers, Jansen rejected high or ultramontanist views of the papacy, and insisted on the doctrine of total human depravity apart from grace. Moreover, for fear of sacrilege, he argued for sterner strictures on the reception of the sacraments.

⁴⁵ Quoted from Augustin Gazier's *Histoire générale du mouvement janséniste depuis ses origines jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1923) in English, but without any page number, by Stephen Wagley, "A Jansenist Collection at Newberry Library," *French Historical Studies* 9 (1975), 183. Nigel Abercrombie identifies Bona (1609–1674) as a leading theological Augustinian in Rome; see his *The Origins of Jansenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 225. See also *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton, 1907), s.v. "Bona, Giovanni."

⁴⁶ He was the nephew of Cornelius Jansen the Elder (1510–1576), Bishop of Aix, who had written to Rome as a character witness for Baius.

Jansen died respected, not having incurred any ecclesiastical sanction. In fact, his particular views on efficacious grace were not broadcast until his immense book, *Augustinus*, was published by his bereaved friends and admirers in 1640. It contained studies on the pre-lapsarian state, original sin, post-lapsarian humanity, and grace. Though it seems that very few “Jansenists” had read the book in question, there grew up a network of sympathetic Catholics calling themselves “The Friends of the Truth.” It seems also that few of these had much interest in the questions of predestination, grace, and *liberum arbitrium* that exercised the leaders of the movement, such as the

Arnaulds,⁴⁷ Saint-Cyran,⁴⁸ Pascal⁴⁹ and later Quesnel.⁵⁰ Rather, these early Jansenists were devoutly reformist in their religious attitudes.⁵¹ They opposed the fusion of sacred and secular authority in Bourbon France and in papal Italy; they admired the persecuted nuns and recluses of Port Royal; they were hostile or ambivalent toward capitalism; they were opposed to real or imagined Jesuit laxity in the confessional;

⁴⁷ Sometimes the Jansenist controversy seems like a fight between the Jesuits and the Arnauld family. The key family members were the lawyer Antoine Arnauld (1560–1619) and his children Antoine (1612–1694, “*le grande Arnaud*,” who taught at the Sorbonne) and Jacqueline-Marie (1591–1661, who became Mother Angélique, abbess of Port Royal and a penitent of St Francis de Sales). Seven more of the twenty Arnauld children were actively involved with Port Royal. See Levi, *Guide to French Literature, Beginnings to 1789*, s.vv. “Jansenism,” “Port-Royal,” and “Saint-Cyran.”

⁴⁸ Jean-Ambroise Duvergier de Hauranne, abbé de Saint-Cyran (1581–1643), studied under Jansen and was involved in the publication of *Augustinus*. He worked as a spy for Richelieu, effectively led Port-Royal as its confessor from 1633–1636, and was imprisoned by the Cardinal in 1638 after denying that attrition (sorrow for sin, but not with love for God) suffices for absolution. See Levi, *Guide to French Literature, Beginnings to 1789*, s.v. “Saint-Cyran.”

⁴⁹ On the involvement of Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) in Jansenism see Jan Miel, *Pascal and Theology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1969) and Richard Parish, “Pascal’s *Lettres provinciales*: from flippancy to fundamentals,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, ed. Nicholas Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 181–200. See also the shifting opinions of Leszek Kolakowski in *God Owes Us Nothing: A Brief Remark on Pascal’s Religion and on the Spirit of Jansenism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and “A Layman Pronounces Upon the Catechism,” in *My Correct Views on Everything*, ed. Zbigniew Janowski (South Bend, IN: St Augustine’s Press, 2005), 141–9.

⁵⁰ Pasquier Quesnel (1634–1719), a French Oratorian and friend of Antoine Arnauld (the younger), may have been more a Jansenist than Jansen. His *Réflexions morales sur le Nouveau Testament* (1692) was the source of one hundred and one heretical propositions condemned by Clement XI in *Unigenitus* (1713). See the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Quesnel, Pasquier.”

⁵¹ Here the valuable and influential book by Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion, with Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), seems not to be supported by more recent scholarship.

and they objected to what we would today call the daring efforts at “inculturation” in the Jesuit East Asian missions. As historians observe, the Jansenists

called upon new knowledge, wanted better education, were against superstition, denounced obscurantism, wished to break the Jesuit stranglehold on higher education and contributed to the fall of the Jesuits, were not friendly to the schoolmen, [and] shared most of the broad intellectual aims pursued by the men of the Enlightenment⁵²

Their ideas of reform were neither those of Trent, nor of the papacy, nor of the Jesuits. As to the eventual outcome of the Jansenist vision, Robert Bireley observes more closely the nature of the conflict:

The Christian’s relationship to the world made up the main issue in the prolonged, painful dispute in France between the Jansenists and the Jesuits In this instance the point was not so much directly whether the Christian could live in the world—many Jansenist figures did so, though they tended to withdraw to their retreat at the female Cistercian convent of Port Royal outside Paris—but the value of human activity *vis-à-vis* divine action and the need for the church to adapt its moral teaching to a changing world

He goes on to remark its consequences in the realm of moral and pastoral theology:

[Casuistry] that focussed on the approval or disapproval of individual acts and on minimal obligations under the law . . . was a distortion to which the Jansenists rightly called attention. Yet a main function of the casuists was a crucial one, the application of traditional principles to a changing society regarding, for instance, the freedom of a girl to choose a marriage partner, attendance at the

⁵² S. J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 168. This excerpt from Barnett appears in quotation marks and is attributed, without further details, to Owen Chadwick. The bracketed word “[and]” appears in Barnett.

theater, or the taking of interest on a loan. Jansenists insisted on the norms of the early church Fathers, whereas many Jesuits argued that new situations required flexibility.⁵³

To the modern mind, “Jansenism” connotes Catholic rigourism, even though, strictly speaking, the name refers specifically to the heresy condemned by Urban VIII’s *In eminenti* in 1642. But in the France of the *Ancien Régime*, “Jansenism” began as a spirituality and became a politically identifiable movement. Theological Jansenism, properly so called, with its heretical teachings on freedom and predestination, was in fact not foremost in the minds of those who were eventually called Jansenists. At least since 1975, historians have recognised that Jansenism played an important role in the alienation of the French middle class from the monarchy and from the Church, thus contributing substantially to the 1789 Revolution and to the rise of French *laïcisme*.⁵⁴

⁵³ Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450–1700* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 187–9. Jansenist resistance to capitalism is especially interesting since so many Jansenists were of the *bourgeoisie*; apparently they wanted modern commerce, interest, entertainment, comforts, etc., but did not want to be told their desires were innocent. On this aspect of early modern French religion see Bernard Groethuysen, trans. Mary Ilford, *The Bourgeois: Catholicism vs. Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).

⁵⁴ The importance and popularity of Jansenism appears first to have been suggested by Bernard Groethuysen (cited above) in 1927, but his work was ignored in France and elsewhere until the 1960s. New and groundbreaking studies on Jansenism, beginning in English with Van Kley, *Jansenists and the Expulsion*, began to appear in the 1970s. See also Van Kley, *Religious Origins*; William Doyle, *Jansenism*; Anthony Levi, *Cardinal Richelieu*; David A. Bell, “Culture and Religion,” *Old Regime France: 1648–1788*, ed. William Doyle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 78–104; and S. J. Barnett, *Enlightenment and Religion*.

Theologically speaking, “Jansenism” was the heresy summarised in the five propositions condemned by Urban VIII’s *In eminenti* in 1642 and again by Innocent X’s *Cum occasione* in 1653. The five propositions are drawn, though not word for word, from Jansen’s *Augustinus*. They are (1) that the just are sometimes unable to obey God because they lack the grace to do so, (2) that in the state of fallen nature there can be no resistance to the interior movements of grace, (3) that, in order to merit, fallen nature only needs freedom from extrinsic constraint, not freedom from inner necessity, (4) that it is semi-Pelagian to say prevenient grace can be resisted or accepted by the human will, and (5) that it is semi-Pelagian to say that Christ died for everyone.⁵⁵

The trouble with using these five propositions to explain Jansenism as a movement or clique in early modern Europe is that the people called Jansenists did not, by and large, see themselves in these terms. Indeed, they felt free to take the oath required without changing their views, especially when, on Saint-Cyran’s authority, they found reason to doubt that the condemned propositions were actually contained in Jansen’s *Augustinus*. By and large, the Jansenists were religious conservatives, clinging to ideas and sensibilities that the new and normative French spirituality and political ideology had passed by. This conservative idealism won them admirers and defenders, even if the stricter way of Christian life they exemplified was not commonly shared.

⁵⁵ The first four propositions are proscribed as heretical, the fifth as untrue. See DS 2001–2007 (*Cum occasione*).

We can get a sense of Jansenism's idealistic appeal—not only to some early modern Catholics but also to Henri de Lubac—from the surviving pamphlets and sermons. Here, for instance, is the Jansenist orator and exegete J-J Duguet (1649–1733) addressing *une dame chrétienne*:

There is nothing purely human, nothing purely political, in a Christian woman; religion is everything, enters everywhere, has control over everything; it is religion that should rule everything, sacrifice everything, ennoble everything. Salvation is not only the most important business, but the only one. One must work towards it independently of everything else, and only apply oneself to other matters with reference to that great purpose. Everything must be adjusted to it, everything respond to it; but it must never be adapted to fit our other purposes.⁵⁶

De Lubac has argued that there was no papal condemnation of Jansenism for its insistence that “everything is religion” and that there is “nothing purely human.” This is not to say that de Lubac liked Jansenism as such, or sympathised with its narrowness, rigorism, or pessimistic spirit. On the contrary, he writes that Jansenism

inherited something of the character of carnal Judaism . . . , namely the fanatical narrowness of one who believes himself to be the Lord's chosen [This] exaggerated [the idea of grace], regarding it as a manifestation of power all the more adorable the more arbitrary and tyrannical it appeared. [Thus Jansenism tended to] dissolve the unity between God and man

⁵⁶ J[acques]-J[oseph] Duguet, *Conduite d'une dame chrétienne pour vivre saintement dans le monde* (Paris, 1724), 316–7, quoted in translation by Robin Briggs in his *Communities of Belief*, 238.

which consists essentially in the mystery of Christ⁵⁷

De Lubac's regret in studying the 16th-century controversies is that "the heavy folio volumes of the Bishop of Ypres [Jansen], no more than the shorter treatises of the theologian of Louvain [Baius], did not succeed in reviving Augustine's teaching."⁵⁸ Consequently,

The foundation stone laid by Jansenius for his doctrinal edifice is also a thesis concerning the primitive state of human nature. In consequence, if in the Jansenist movement we look not merely to its actual inspiration but also to the teaching to which it appeals for its authority, and if in this we make the effort to go back from the consequences displayed throughout it (and often watered down) to the principles succinctly enunciated in the first work [namely *Augustinus*], we

⁵⁷ De Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, 32–3. See French pp. 50–1, "Jansénius, lui, semblerait avoir hérité plutôt d'un caractère du judaïsme charnel, qui fut aussi celui de Mahomet: l'étroitesse exaltée de celui qui se croit l' élu du Seigneur. Le premier tendait à supprimer, en fait, l'idée de la grâce: le second ne l'exagère-t-il pas en quelque sorte, en la concevant comme une manifestation de puissance d'autant plus adorable qu'elle apparaît plus arbitraire et plus tyrannique? Enfin, si l'un et l'autre tendent également à dissoudre l'union entre Dieu et l'homme en quoi consiste essentiellement le Mystère du Christ, n'est-ce pas que l'un dresse l'homme en face de Dieu dans la réclamation de ses droits, tandis que l'autre l'anéantit?"

⁵⁸ De Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, 31. French pp. 49–50, "En réalité, cependant, pas plus que les légers opuscules du théologien de Louvain, les énormes in-folio de l'évêque d'Ypres ne réussirent à ressusciter la pensée augustinienne."

shall be obliged to observe that Jansenism is the exact continuation of Baianism.⁵⁹

The continuity in question, “a thesis concerning the primitive state of human nature,” is emphatically *not* the Baianist idea that initially Adam and Eve could have chosen good or evil by the natural power of will. On the contrary, Jansen held that the power to obey is not natural (a grace only *secundum quid*, as Baius allowed), but always and only supernatural (grace *per se*). The mistake, according to de Lubac, consisted in failing to affirm adequately the gratuity of that supernatural endowment—of righteousness, charity, freedom from concupiscence, and so on. When de Lubac says that there is continuity between Baius and Jansen, based on a common Augustinian “foundation stone,” he is referring to the exact same “fundamental idea, accurately formulated in all its logical purity” that de Lubac himself read on the first page of St Augustine’s *Confessions*—which he thought would be the antidote to the ills of the modern Church. In essence it was that human nature is essentially ordered to the beatific vision, so that it is unintelligible without reference to that supernatural end.

⁵⁹ De Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, 36. French pp. 54–55, “La pierre d’assise que pose Jansénius en vue de sa construction doctrinale est également une thèse concernant l’état primitif de la nature humaine. En sorte que, si nous n’avons pas seulement égard, dans le mouvement janséniste, à son inspiration concrète, mais si nous considérons la doctrine dont il se réclame, et si dans celle-ci nous faisons effort pour remonter des conséquences partout étalées (et souvent diluées) aux principes condensés dans l’oeuvre initiale, force nous sera de constater que le jansénisme prolonge exactement le baianisme.”

Conclusion

De Lubac discusses Jansenism to establish that the Baianist and Jansenist rejection of *natura pura* was not something for which those heresies were expressly condemned. In this he is successful. However, without forgetting the extremely great difference between this great Jesuit and the Jansenists (the great anti-Jesuits), we may recognise three qualities which they share.

First, both Henri de Lubac and the Jansenists came to reject notions of pure nature in circumstances of unprecedented social and religious chaos. The Jansenists in France were oppressed by an absolute monarchy, disgusted by the Reformation, sickened by years of religious warfare, and convinced that they needed to infuse every aspect of life with adherence to the doctrine of St Augustine, rigorously construed. In a comparable manner, Henri de Lubac endured the threat (and, during the Occupation, the reality) of totalitarian oppression, grieved over religious division (in the form of unbelief, atheism, and harsh anti-clericalism), and was witness to the combined horror of the two World Wars. In the midst of this upheaval, he judged that the remedy the world needed was a return to patristic theology—and specifically to St Augustine's theology of nature and grace, even if he and the Jansenists differed basically over just what Augustine meant and what aspect of his theology was to be recovered.

The second similarity to be noted between de Lubac and the Jansenists has to do with their approaches to scholasticism. Both come to scholastic theology from the outside; that is, without having imbibed that particular tradition in any thorough

fashion. Consequently, both display impatience and antagonism in their readiness to generalise about scholastics—as if, for instance, Thomists and nominalists were cut from the same cloth. Rather than examining specific theologians closely, both de Lubac and the Jansenists oppose the large and varied scholastic tradition as a whole, and by appealing to an expertise developed through the critical reading of patristic sources. Both, accordingly, seem to resent the scholastic tradition and its methods, even to the point of blaming scholastic theologians, as a class, for the world’s moral problems and irreligion. It is, however, also true that the major Jansenists were, like the late Cardinal de Lubac, men of exemplary life and impressive erudition: these qualities gave them a personal authority which to some extent is independent of the intrinsic validity of their theological arguments.

The third important similarity is that both de Lubac and the Jansenists assume that distilling the “essence” of St Augustine’s thought is not only possible, but something they have already accomplished—whether in *Augustinus* or *Surnaturel*. Both, accordingly, consider themselves “traditional,” even while eager to erase centuries of *traditio*. In both cases, it was assumed that historical reconstructions could take the place of the patiently systematic and critical elaboration of Catholic doctrine.

Looking back on the great Catholic controversies over grace in the 16th and 17th centuries, it can be argued that French disaffection from the Catholic faith is more reasonably traced, not to the idea of pure nature, nor to scholasticism as such, but to other, more obvious factors: the church’s alliance with royal absolutism, its

neglect of the growing middle class (as detailed by Groethuysen), and to its failure to resolve the popular theological questions raised by Molinism and the new moral casuistry.

We must also admit that change is the rule of history, so that religiosity may rise and fall in response to factors that seem unconnected to religion. These may include the effects of wars, trade, legal development, technology, science, urbanisation, and economic growth.⁶⁰ An exclusively theological account of secularisation is surely simplistic.

Rather than citing the notion of a purely natural sphere of thought and action as a *cause* of the loss of religiosity in France, we may suppose that it was the very lack of an adequately developed idea of pure nature, and of shared, merely human values, that helped make conflict between the Church and the Republic so intractable. Like the absolutist union of throne and altar, the absolutism of the Revolution brooked no dissent. As Dale Van Kley argues, the Revolution imitated the Church, insisting that beyond its own boundaries there was no salvation.⁶¹ Both sorts of absolutists (religio-royalist and republican) refused to allow for any neutral public space, any natural basis for shareable human values. Both were intent upon total victory over one another.

⁶⁰ See Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification in Western Europe, 1250–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Nathan Rosenberg and L. E. Birdzell, Jr., *How the West Grew Rich: The Economic Transformation of the Industrial World* (New York: Basic, 1986).

⁶¹ See Van Kley, *Religious Origins*, 375.

We turn now to de Lubac's crusade against the idea of pure nature in the 20th century. It has resulted in a theological contestation that continues into the present. The immediate purpose of the next chapter is to present the ideas and motives behind de Lubac's rejection of the notion of pure nature and his concern to construct a new theological anthropology. Necessarily, we must set such an exploration in the context of his life and times.

CHAPTER 6

HENRI DE LUBAC AND PURE NATURE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

As the preceding chapters show, there is ample reason to assume that Christian theology has long been at home with the theory and practice of considering human nature apart from the gifts of grace and without reference to any supernatural *telos*. In early modern times, however, and in the wake of the upheaval of the Reformations, the Jansenist movement, as we have indicated, came to mistrust scholastic distinctions between human nature in itself and human nature in relation to the life of grace. At issue was the technical notion of pure nature, as well as the Baianist proposition that, before the sin of Adam, our first parents lived in graceless existence in which they could, by the exercise of their natural powers alone, merit heaven or hell. In condemning Baianism and Jansenism, the Catholic Church—as de Lubac rightly observes—did not approve any scholastic terminology of pure nature, or even forbid the rejection of such theological language. Henri de Lubac’s dispute with this terminology centres around the historical question of whether notions of pure nature were authentically traditional and Thomistic, and on whether such ideas do or do not contribute to anti-religious secularism.

For a further evaluation of de Lubac’s position, three considerations are necessary: first, the acknowledgement of his theological aims; second, his interpretation of Thomas Aquinas; and third, the historical context of his thought. The

last of these is of the greatest importance, since, at the end of the day, de Lubac was most interested in changing his world and culture.

1. De Lubac's Theological Aims

The general aim of Henri de Lubac's life's work was, by his own account, to make the treasures of the Catholic past known and appreciated in the modern world. As he wrote in a 1975 memoir, "Without claiming to open up new avenues of thought, I have sought rather, without any antiquarianism, to make known some of the great common areas of Catholic tradition. I wanted to make it loved, to show its ever-present fruitfulness."¹

To a marvellous extent, de Lubac was successful this purpose. He called the Church to acknowledge its Jewish origins, and to a new respect for the Jewish people. His *Corpus Mysticum* furthered liturgical renewal and infused ecclesiology with a fresh sense of the ancient doctrine that the Eucharist constitutes the Church. Through his scholarly research, he helped spark interest in patristic and mediaeval exegesis, contributed to the rehabilitation of Origen, and initiated the production of *Sources chrétiennes*, one of the century's greatest patrological resources. His books on all these topics have been widely read and widely translated, influencing educated Catholics and at least two popes: his *Catholicisme* recently received the extraordinary accolade of being singled out in a papal encyclical, Benedict XVI's *Spe salvi*, for

¹ De Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 143. French p. 147: "Sans prétendre frayer de nouvelles avenues de pensée, j'ai plutôt cherché, sans aucun passéisme, à faire connaître quelques-uns des grand lieux communs de la tradition catholique. J'ai voulu la faire aimer, en montrer la fécondité toujours actuelle."

reminding the Church of the communal nature of salvation.² To these achievements must be added his witness of tireless fidelity and self-sacrifice, including his personal bravery in opposing anti-Semitism during the German occupation of France during World War II.

Despite all this, it must be admitted that de Lubac's scholarship was often flawed. This is not surprising when we consider that he did not have the benefit of any instruction beyond his ordination studies, and that his scholarship tended to be more broad than it was deep. As de Lubac himself says, his life's task "called more for a reading across the centuries than for a critical application to specific points."³ Unfortunately, he was frequently impatient with specialists and more rigorous scholars who opposed his interpretations. In his haste to communicate his discoveries, he sometimes gave very partial readings of textual evidence.⁴ We find him, on a number of occasions, using quotations which seem to prove his arguments but which,

² See Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, nn. 13–14.

³ De Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 143. French p. 147: "Pareille tâche comportait plus de lecture à travers les siècles que d'application critique à des points déterminés."

⁴ For example, de Lubac's landmark study *Histoire et Esprit: L'intelligence d'Écriture d'après Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1950) was a spur to Origen studies and made the crucial importance of Origen plain; but de Lubac was often hasty, forcing texts to fit his own theories—see R. P. C. Hanson's *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SCM, 1959, 2002), especially part 3, "Origen as an Allegorist." See also Joseph W. Trigg's introduction to the 2002 edition of Hanson, especially pages xi–xii, on de Lubac's unfortunate "minimiz[ing] or explain[ing] away" of evidence contrary to his own views.

in their original contexts, do not support him.⁵ It might be conceded that de Lubac, on such occasions, intends his quotations for merely rhetorical effect; but, still, quoting authorities out of context does tend to give false impressions.

With respect to the idea of pure nature, de Lubac's purpose was twofold. First, he meant to promote an alternative to the scholastic theology of his time, which he considered dualistic or extrinsicist in its account of human nature. The alternative was what some now call an "integralist" vision—which de Lubac certainly promoted as a part of normative Catholic tradition. Instead of treating grace as a transcendent gift, as a naturally unexpected and essentially accidental (in the Aristotelian sense) elevation of human nature, de Lubac insists that human beings are essentially ordered to the beatific vision, and that grace, while gratuitous (in the sense that God is not obliged to confer it), is yet in a sense *natural* to us. Like food or air, albeit less obviously, grace and heavenly beatitude are realities for which we were made, and which we require for our natural flourishing. In keeping with this view, Christian faith may not countenance any domain of an autonomous philosophy or autonomous humanism in the Christian world. Any claims to such autonomy, at least from within Christian or previously Christian societies, are fundamentally erroneous. Consequently, faith so transforms intellectual culture and society that a neutral or purely natural philosophy,

⁵ Compare, for example, de Lubac's quotation of Bernard of Clairvaux in *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 46 (French p. 71), with the saint's text (*De consideratione* 5.3.27). De Lubac is following the late sixteenth-century Jesuit commentator Gabriel Vasquez, who uses this line from Bernard to make a point quite unrelated to that actually being discussed in the *De consideratione*. From de Lubac's writing, one infers that St Bernard's remark is both relevant and supportive of his own opinion. See also de Lubac's misleading use of the words "*mundus reconciliatus, ecclesia*" from Augustine's *Sermon* 96, noted above on page 64, n. 62.

or metaphysics, or anthropology, or humanism becomes impossible: not only is “a Christian philosophy . . . better than another,” but also “only a Christian philosophy can be truly, wholly philosophy.”⁶

The starkly confrontational aspect of de Lubac’s approach to scholasticism follows from the alternative he proposed. He was not criticised merely for holding that Christian theology has no need of any category regarding pure nature. On the contrary, de Lubac’s “integralist” alternative was intended to replace scholastic theologies that had incorporated the idea of *natura pura*. De Lubac’s quarrel with his opponents over *Surnaturel* was not over the legitimacy of pluralism in theology—that is, whether the integralist theology, which de Lubac claimed to derive from the Fathers, could be allowed to co-exist with other theological approaches. Rather, it was about the legitimacy of modern scholasticism itself, or, at least, of Thomism as understood after Denys the Carthusian and Cajetan.

Between such radically opposed readings of theological tradition there could be no middle ground. From de Lubac’s point of view, modern scholastic “extrinsicism” was a fundamental distortion of Christian theology. It arose from an innovation which betrayed the original tradition and contributed to the worst evils of modern times. His scholastic opponents, for their part, looked on de Lubac’s thesis as a dangerous mistake. It called into question what was regarded as fundamental to the Thomist tradition, and thereby proposed a radical overhaul of Catholic theology. De Lubac seems never to have recognised any possibility of danger or presumption in

⁶ De Lubac, “On Christian Philosophy,” 486. In this context “philosophy” refers to metaphysics.

replacing a traditional theology of long standing with something doctrinally and methodologically new—or, at best, newly-recovered from the remote past. Whether he recognised these problems or not, he believed that the spiritual and theological renewal of the Church depended on a recovered patristic theology.

Finally, in de Lubac's writing on the theme of nature and grace, his clear intention was to repudiate the atheistic humanism which he saw as the great evil of the 20th century. In *Le drame de l'humanisme athée*,⁷ he wrote of it as a drama, unfolding from the First World War in successive acts, beginning with the rise of Marxism in Russia and culminating in the totalitarianism of the Nazis. At the heart of this dark drama, de Lubac saw a fundamentally theological mistake, namely the theological justification of autonomous and merely natural humanity. As a consequence of this mistake, Comte, Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche had misled Europe into an age of unparalleled violence and perversion. The more Europeans had striven to organise their world "without God," the more inhumane their world became.⁸ The tragic irony of this drama lay in the fact that Christian theology itself had helped plant the seeds of atheistic humanism by developing the idea of pure nature.

⁷ (Paris: Spes, 1945).

⁸ See Henri de Lubac, trans. Edith M. Riley and Anne Englund Nash, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 15: "It is not true, as it is sometimes said, that man cannot organize the world without God. What is true is that, without God, he can ultimately only organize it against man." This celebrated quotation is from de Lubac's preface, dated Christmas 1943. See the French 4th ed. (1950), p. 10: "Il n'est pas vrai que l'homme, ainsi qu'on semble quelquefois le dire, ne puisse organiser la terre sans Dieu. Ce qui est vrai, c'est que, sans Dieu, il ne peut en fin de compte que l'organiser contre l'homme."

Henri de Lubac's aim, then, was threefold. He wished to make patristic theology well-known, to contribute to a Christian social renewal, and to end Catholic theology's complicity in its own marginalisation by secularism. For most of his life, however, he pursued this triple goal in a theological world dominated by scholasticism. His heroes and his theological opponents were all, in some sense, Thomists; and so a considerable amount of de Lubac's effort was applied to questions about Aquinas. The quality of de Lubac's Thomism therefore calls for some comment.

2. De Lubac's Reading of Thomas Aquinas

Henri de Lubac knew that St Thomas effectively affirms "that man may be considered in his nature independently of his relationship with God."⁹ However, de Lubac insisted that, rightly understood, Thomism actually excluded the idea of pure nature from theology.

The Thomism of de Lubac requires a word of explanation. He was a Thomist in the sense that he respected and read from the Angelic Doctor's works, gleaning insights which he would combine with what he gathered from an array of other sources, including the published and unpublished writings of such creative and modern Thomistic philosophers as the Jesuits Joseph Maréchal and Pierre Rousselot. It was because of his attachment to these scholars that some of de Lubac's confreres

⁹ De Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, 190. French p. 232, "Saint Thomas disait: on peut considérer l'homme dans sa nature, indépendamment de son rapport à Dieu."

had labelled him a Thomist, even in the scholasticate (where that name was not by any means a compliment).¹⁰ As his scholarship matured, de Lubac remained attached to the Thomism of this creative and flexible kind, and maintained ties with a number of Thomists. He was on cordial terms with Étienne Gilson,¹¹ and was befriended by Dominican progressives Yves Congar and Étienne Hugueny. He became acquainted with Dominican Thomists in Lyons and Toulouse, and was occasionally asked to lecture at the Lyons Dominican *studium*.¹² De Lubac was aware of the varieties of Thomism flourishing at Louvain, the Gregorianum, Le Saulchoir, the Institut Catholique in Paris, and elsewhere.¹³ In the many reviews of *Surnaturel* he found not

¹⁰ See De Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 144. French p. 147: “Au sortir du Jersey (j’avais alors vingt-sept ans), où régnait encore l’esprit suarézien, j’avais été noté sévèrement comme thomiste (d’un thomisme, il est vrai, revivifié par Maréchal et Rousselot). C’était ce que l’on appelait de ce temps-là «ne pas tenir les doctrines de la Compagnie». Je n’ai jamais abdicé cette orientation fondamentale. Je crois même avoir travaillé (avec plus ou moins de succès) à remener les esprits au saint Thomas authentique, comme à un maître à penser toujours actuel.”

¹¹ See Henri de Lubac, *Letters of Étienne Gilson to Henri de Lubac: With Commentary by Henri de Lubac*, trans. Mary Emily Hamilton (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988). As Ralph McNerny has recently shown, de Lubac found in Gilson the confirmation of his own scholasticate study of Cajetan; see McNerny’s *Praeambula Fidei*, especially chapters 1 and 2.

¹² See de Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 22, 28, 30, 194.

¹³ The diversity of Catholic theology, especially among the Jesuits, from 1850 to 1950 has been ably explored by Gerald A. McCool in his three histories, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism, From Unity to Pluralism* and *The Neo-Thomists*. On McCool’s omission of the more traditional Thomism, especially of Toulouse, see Romanus Cessario, “An Observation on Robert Lauder’s Review of G. A. McCool, S.J.,” *Thomist* 56 (October 1992), 701–10.

only criticism but also support for his interpretation of Aquinas's teaching.¹⁴ In Catholic theology, the authority of Thomas was almost universally invoked, so that, taking the broad view, one might even say that before the Second Vatican Council most Catholic theologians were, in some sense, Thomistic.

On the other hand, de Lubac did not assimilate Thomism as a system, nor was he receptive to the contemplative and sapiential dimensions of Thomas's theology. On the contrary, de Lubac evidently saw Thomism as an inflated currency. It connoted too many schemes, technicalities, and contrary systems for him to take it seriously as a creative source of renewal in theology.¹⁵ For these reasons, de Lubac considers Aquinas more as just one among many Fathers of the Church. The Thomists of a more scholastic ilk seemed to him far too rigid, and too little like Thomas himself. To the further consternation of his critics, de Lubac regularly relies upon striking and

¹⁴ De Lubac does overstate the support of his reviewers, unfortunately. Compare, for instance, de Lubac's allusions to Victor White (*The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 33, 50, 234) with the review itself (*Dominican Studies* 2 [1949]: 62–73). White has sympathy for de Lubac's desire for theological renewal, but faults him on detail and logical argument ("logic is not P. de Lubac's strongest point," 66), ultimately accusing de Lubac of twisting the text of Aquinas to suit his own views (68).

¹⁵ See de Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 144. French p. 147: "Quant au «thomisme» de notre siècle, j'ai trop souvent trouvé en lui un système à la fois trop rigide et trop peu fidèle au Docteur dont il se réclamait. Je l'ai vu aussi trop souvent arborer (avec une bonne foi entière) comme un pavillon couvrant les marchandises les plus diverses, pour pouvoir le prendre tout à fait au sérieux. J'ai connu un thomisme traditionaliste à la Bonald, un thomisme patronnant «l'Action française», un thomisme inspirateur de la Démocratie chrétienne, un thomisme progressiste et même néo-marxiste, etc."

suggestive remarks in the works of St Thomas rather than on Thomas's systematic pedagogy or his metaphysics.¹⁶

Although Aquinas is frequently mentioned by de Lubac in connection with the theology of nature and grace, one does not find an extended, critical study of Thomas's philosophy or theology among de Lubac's works. Instead, de Lubac calls on Thomas as on one of many witnesses to the Augustinian insight into human restlessness and our desire for the divine. Consequently, de Lubac's main interest in Aquinas is in his affirmation of our natural desire to see God, and it is to this interest that we must now look.

a. The Natural Desire to See God

In putting his case against the theology of pure nature, Henri de Lubac puts great stock in the fact that Thomas spoke not only of a *desiderium naturale* (natural desire) to seek God, but of a *desiderium naturae* (a desire of nature) for that end. De Lubac takes Thomas to mean that our human nature itself is ordered to deification and to the beatific vision in virtue of its essential constitution, and not in virtue of the supernatural finality added to our nature by grace. Because this orientation is essential or innately present in human existence, de Lubac reasons, our nature cannot be conceived as existing without it; hence, there is no justification of any notion of pure nature, nor, consequently, for a humanity not ordained to the beatific vision.

¹⁶ Thomists today, of course, are coming to terms with the extensive biblical commentaries and sermons of Aquinas, which reveal Thomas himself in a new light and promise to enrich our reading of the better-known *Summae* with the wealth of his scriptural commentaries and their many references to patristic sources.

Admittedly, de Lubac does not argue that all people are aware of this innate desire to see God. Rather, he holds that it is a desire hidden in the depths of human nature, so that it is only by going into the depths of the human heart and experience that one can discover this desire, and recognise it for what it is.¹⁷ De Lubac makes no claims about the scope of human reason or the psychology in which it operates. On the contrary, he is clearly intent on staking out a theological claim in regard to one of the great mysteries of faith. If this makes sense to human experience or to reason, such a congruence occurs only in retrospect—that is, after grace has already lead one to respond to the actuality or possibility of ultimate union with God.

Nor does de Lubac speak of a vague “wish” for union with God through the vision of the divine essence. Some Thomists had allowed that such a wish or velleity might have its origin in our spiritual nature. In such a case, the wish would be merely for something one might imagine, given the rational and natural affirmation of the existence of God. For his part, de Lubac speaks of a natural desire in a more proper sense, a desire or appetite for a good in which our nature reaches its own defining *telos*.

The beatific vision is our end (*telos*), our common “essential finality”¹⁸ de Lubac insists, simply in virtue of our constitution as human beings. Human nature is

¹⁷ See de Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 207–21. French pp. 257–72.

¹⁸ De Lubac, “Mystery of the Supernatural,” 295. French p. 95, “nous avons tous la même essentielle finalité.”

indistinguishable from our “concrete nature,”¹⁹ our “individual being,”²⁰ our “historical nature,”²¹ as we find it existing in the actual arrangements of divine providence. To imagine someone in the state of pure nature is to imagine “another humanity, another human being, and, if one could say so, another me”²²—which would be an exercise utterly irrelevant to the reality of our situation. De Lubac writes,

It is thus within the existing world, which is to say, within a world of supernatural finality that is, not possible, but existing, that I must find . . . an explanation of the gratuity of the supernatural, without having recourse to any supposition that makes me leave this world. Now this is what the hypothesis of “pure nature” does not succeed in doing. For it does not in fact show, as one seems to believe and as it should, in the logic of the theory, that I could have had another more humble, wholly “natural” destiny. It only shows . . . that, in another universe, another being than I, possessing a nature analogous to mine, would have had this more humble destiny. But . . . what does this other being have to do with me? What do I have to do with it?²³

¹⁹ De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 54. French p. 80, “nature concrète.” See also “Mystery of the Supernatural,” 294, French p. 94.

²⁰ De Lubac, “Mystery of the Supernatural, 295. French p. 95, “mon être individuel.”

²¹ De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 71. French p. 100, “nature historique.”

²² De Lubac, “Mystery of the Supernatural,” 293. French p 93, “une autre humanité, un autre être humain, et, si l’on veuille ou non, une autre moi.”

²³ De Lubac, “Mystery of the Supernatural,” 294. French p 94, “C’est donc à l’intérieur du monde existante, c’est-à-dire d’un monde à finalité surnaturelle non pas possible mais existante, que je dois trouver . . . une explication de la gratuité du surnaturel, sans recourir à une supposition quelconque qui me fasse sortir de ce monde. Or c’est à quoi ne réussit pas l’hypothèse de la «pure nature». Elle montre seulement, à supposer toujours qu’elle soit fondée, que dans un autre univers un autre être que moi, possédant une nature analogue à la mienne, aurait eu cette destinée plus humble. Mais cet autre être, encore une fois, qu’a-t-il affaire avec moi? Qu’ai-je affaire avec lui?”

Continuing in the same passage, de Lubac denies that his attention to “individual” nature, rather than to “specific” nature, is “inspired by . . . nominalism.”²⁴ This is a point we shall consider presently. For now, the point requiring our attention is that de Lubac contends that to be called to divine beatitude is not a gift or condition in some sense added to what we are in the largesse of God’s gracious freedom, but a finality which is essential to our existence as human beings. Consequently, the desire for the beatific vision

is not some “accident” in me. It does not result from some peculiarity, possibly alterable, of my individual being, or from some historical contingency whose effects are more or less transitory. *A fortiori* it does not in any sense depend upon my deliberate will. It is in me as a result of my belonging to humanity as it is, that humanity which is, as we say, “called.” For God’s call is constitutive. My finality, which is expressed by this desire, is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God.²⁵

The obvious objection to de Lubac’s position is that it mistakes what essentially belongs to God with what naturally belongs to us as human beings. God alone exists, by nature, in Trinitarian communion and beatific bliss. If an orientation

²⁴ See de Lubac, “Mystery of the Supernatural,” 294. French p. 95, “Peut-être quelqu’un dira-il que ces raisonnements s’inspirent d’un nominalisme qui refuse toute réalité spécifique à la nature en ne voulant voir que le moi concret.”

²⁵ De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 54–5. French p. 81, “C’est que ce désir n’est pas en moi un «accident» quelconque. Il ne me vient pas de quelque particularité, peut-être modifiable, de mon être individuel ou de quelque contingence historique aux effets plus ou moins transitoires. A plus forte raison ne dépend-il aucunement de mon vouloir délibéré. Il est en moi du fait de mon appartenance à l’humanité actuelle, à cette humanité qui est, comme on dit «appelée». Car l’appel de Dieu est constitutif. Ma finalité, dont ce désir est l’expression, est inscrite en mon être même, tel qu’il est posé par Dieu dans cet univers.”

to divine beatitude is ours by nature, then it would follow that there is no need of the further grace emanating from the depths of the divine freedom. Instead of being by nature human, we would be quasi-divine. Needless to say, de Lubac anticipates this objection. He responds to it by asserting that the gratuity of grace lies in God's freedom to give or withhold it from us at will: it is not a debt which God owes to us, but a gift he wishes to give, and for which he made us in the first place. The gratuity of grace is not, therefore, compromised. Indeed, de Lubac never entertains any suggestion that humanity has a right to this God-ordained fulfilment as a matter of justice. Nonetheless, human beings are, so to speak, "naturally supernatural," in the sense of being naturally reliant upon supernatural elevation for the attainment of our intrinsic and essential heavenly *telos*.

The basis for de Lubac's view in the theology of Aquinas is, it must be insisted, not extensive. This is the main point of his many critics. In fact, de Lubac appeals to actual texts of Aquinas very infrequently, and never enters into a close discussion of any particular passage in its context. His most extensive coverage of St Thomas occurs in the appendices to *Surnaturel*, and even here de Lubac's review of Aquinas is bare and cursory.

With regard to the natural desire for God, de Lubac's understanding of Thomas's teaching is largely based on the phrases *desiderium naturale* and *desiderium naturae*. These he reads through the lens of the famous motif of Augustine's *Confessions*, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless

until they rest in you.”²⁶ De Lubac takes this to mean not only that the human heart is restless when it is not *ad Deum*, but also that our nature is essentially oriented to God in such a way that nothing less than the beatific vision can satisfy it. This *telos* is “inscribed” in human nature in such a way as to be constitutive of it: without it, we should not be the creatures we are. Thus, de Lubac refuses to distinguish between a purely natural desire, which might be fulfilled by the exercise of our natural powers, and a supernaturally elevated desire, elicited and fulfilled only through divine grace.

b. Knowing God: One Knowledge or More than One?

In de Lubac’s judgement, to suggest a distinction between knowing God naturally (as first cause, through metaphysics) and knowing God supernaturally (through deification, personal communion, and vision of the divine essence) is a distinction with no real foundation. In *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, he attributes this spurious distinction to the Dominican commentator, Sylvester of Ferrara (1474–1528), and to his own least-favourite teacher Pedro Descoqs, SJ (1877–1946), only to reject it out of hand. De Lubac explains that,

St. Bernard gave the answer to them both [i.e., Sylvester and Descoqs] long ago, when he said that only someone who does not yet see can think in terms of such distinctions: “many are the words, many the paths, but only One is signified by them, only One is sought.” And [Gabriel] Vasquez [SJ, 1549–1604], speaking of Sylvester, made no bones about calling them “frivolous”: “For, since the clear vision of God is one, single and indivisible and the blessed cannot by it

²⁶ *Conf* 1.1.1. “Tu excitas, ut laudare te delectet, qui fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.”

distinguish in God diverse attributes and predicates, the whole supernatural vision will consist precisely in its clarity, and from a supernatural principle, without a doubt proceeding from the light of glory.”²⁷

This supposedly frivolous distinction, however, seems to be reasonably well-founded in the writings of Thomas Aquinas himself, as we have seen in Thomas’s proposals regarding limbo, the powers of *homo in solis naturalibus constitutus*, the need for infused virtues, and the identification of sacred doctrine as a science *praeter philosophicas disciplinas* in *STh* 1, q. 1. It is a basic affirmation of Christian thought, both in philosophy and theology, that God is one. But by no means does this entail that our human knowledge of God is also one, in an undifferentiated sense, so that our knowledge is nothing but the beatific vision. At least, no such position can be attributed to St Thomas.

c. Natural Desires and the Metaphysics of Individuation

De Lubac’s handling of the natural desire to see God has been criticised by some more traditional Thomists for its implicitly Scotist or Suarezian assessment of *nature*. That is to say that, to Thomistic metaphysical realists, de Lubac allied himself

²⁷ De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 46. French p. 71: “Mais à l’une et à l’autre saint Bernard avait déjà répondu que seul celui qui ne voit pas encore peut opérer de telles distinctions: «voces diversae, semitae multae, sed unum per eas significatur, unus quaeritur». Et Vasquez devait, sans ménagements, à propos de Sylvestre, les traiter de «frivoles»: «nam, cum visio clara Dei sit una simplex et omnino individua, nec beatus per eam distinguat in Deo diversa attributa et praedicata, tota visio erit supernaturalis hoc ipso quod clara est, et ex principio supernaturali, nempe ex lumine gloriae profecta».”

too closely with the decadence of nominalist scholasticism. In a 1949 passage which we have already cited, for example, de Lubac writes,

It is said that a world could have existed in which man . . . had restricted his reasonable ambitions to some inferior beatitude [i.e., inferior to seeing God]. But that being said, one is, indeed, obliged to concede that in our actual world, in fact, the ambitions of a man cannot be so limited. Then this word “ambitions” is undoubtedly no longer suitable—but neither is the word “limits.” In me, a real, personal human being, in *my* concrete nature, the “desire to see God” could not be eternally frustrated without essential suffering. Is this not the very definition of the “punishment of the damned”? And consequently, it seems, the good and just God could not frustrate me in this way if it were not I who, by my own fault, freely turned away from him. The infinite seriousness of this desire placed in me by my Creator constitutes the infinite importance of the drama of human existence. It is of little importance that, in the actual circumstances of this existence, [the desire for God] is not objectively perceived in all its force; it will be so in any case when my entire being will have become clear, when my nature will appear to me in its innermost depths. This is because this desire [to see God] does not come to me from any modifiable particularity of my individual being or from some historical contingency to more or less transitory effects. It is in me from the fact of my belonging by nature to actual humanity. For my finality, of which this desire is the expression, comes to me from my nature. And I do

not have any other real end, that is to say, any other end actually assigned to my nature, except to “see God.”²⁸

In this passage, the references to “*my concrete nature*” and the “particularity of my individual being” cannot but draw criticism from metaphysical Thomists habituated to more refined distinctions in this context. As we have mentioned, de Lubac himself denies that his language is “inspired by nominalism.”²⁹ Nonetheless, his position seems to connote a nominalist understanding, especially in regard to the individuation of human beings in the concrete.

In St Thomas’s view, the principle by which corporeal creatures are individuated can lie only in their particular or signate matter (*materia signata*). That is to say, when we see many similar beings and recognise these similar entities as cats

²⁸ De Lubac, “Mystery of the Supernatural,” 291–2. French pp. 91–2, “On dit qu’un monde aurait pu être, dans lequel l’homme, sans préjudice peut-être d’un autre désir, eût borné ses ambitions raisonnables à quelque béatitude inférieure. Mais après qu’on a dit cela, on est bien obligé de concéder que dans notre monde actuel, en fait, les ambitions de l’homme ne peuvent être aussi limitées. Alors ce mot d’ambitions ne convient sans doute plus, —mais pas davantage celui de limites. En moi, être humain réel et personnel, en *ma* nature concrète, le «désir de voir Dieu» ne saurait être éternellement frustré sans une souffrance essentielle. N’est-ce pas la définition même de la «peine du dam»? Et par conséquent, semble-t-il, le Dieu juste et bon ne saurait m’en frustrer, si ce n’est pas moi qui par ma propre faute me détourne librement de Lui. Le sérieux infini de ce désir mis en moi par mon Créateur fait le sérieux infini du drame d l’existence humaine. Peu importe que, dans les conditions actuelles de cette existence, il ne soit pas objectivement perçu selon toute sa force : il le sera en tout cas lorsque mon être tout entier me sera devenu clair, lorsque ma nature m’apparaîtra telle qu’elle est jusqu’à son fond. C’est que ce désir ne me vient pas de quelque particularité, peut-être modifiable, de mon être individuel, ou de quelque contingence historique aux effets plus ou moins transitoires. Il est en moi du fait de mon appartenance de nature à l’humanité actuelle. Car ma finalité, dont ce désir est l’expression, me vient de ma nature. Et je n’ai pas d’autre fin réelle, c’est-à-dire réellement assignée à ma nature, que de «voir Dieu».” Italics in original.

²⁹ See note 23, above.

(for example), the Thomist tradition would assume that the specific nature (“cat”) is indeed shared by the class so designated. However, the members of this particular class of beings are individuals, not in the realm of nature—for one specific feline nature is shared by all—but because the universal and specific essence of “cat” has a material embodiment in each instance. Given such an understanding of individuation, it is philosophically confused to speak in this context, as de Lubac does, of an individual human nature— “*my concrete nature*” or the “particularity of my individual being.” Whatever his intention, de Lubac’s words sometimes seem to suggest that “humanity” is made up of many natures, one for each individual. For the Thomist, however, all human beings share in a single, universal nature, being a series of individual creatures who each occur in his or her own particular material embodiment.

This view of individuation is not shared by the great Franciscan philosopher-theologian, Blessed John Duns Scotus. To return to our feline example, for Scotus, the recognition of many things as cats is explicable only by supposing that while there is indeed a single common nature (“cat”), there is added to this nature a particular, individual mode of being to make *this* or *that* cat, without reference to its individuation in matter. The implication is that a universal essence and individual mode of being are two real ingredients that go into the make-up of each individual, without reference to its material substrate and embodiment. Aware of the defect in the theory of this “dematerialised” mode of individual, and unsatisfied with Thomas’s

more “realist” account, the great Jesuit scholastic thinker, Francisco Suárez, sought to refine the Scotist position.

In the Suarezian perspective, the recognition of many cats does not posit the *addition* of anything real to the intelligible form of “cat” in each individual instance.³⁰ Nor, in reaction to Scotus, are there any grounds for supposing that a single form determines the species of being individuated by signate matter.³¹ Instead, Suárez considers that nature and individual differ only “conceptually.”³² In regard to individuation, each individual is one through its own entity or act of being, so that there is no real nature beyond or outside this individual.³³

Such metaphysical niceties regarding individuation are of no concern to de Lubac, and he never refers to them. Nevertheless, he clearly disallows any real

³⁰ See Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* V, 2.

³¹ See Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* V, 3.

³² On the Thomistic metaphysics of individuation see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 351–75. On the wider range of theories of individuation see Jorge J. E. Gracia, ed., *Individuation in Scholasticism: The Later Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation, 1150–1650* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994); and Peter King, “The Problem of Individuation in the Middle Ages,” *Theoria* 66 (2000): 159–84.

The departure of Suárez from Aquinas is partly explained by the Jesuit Constitutions’ requirement (presently *Constitutions* IV, 358) that the Society’s theologians teach the “more secure” and “more approved” view on any disputed question; some elements of Thomism seemed too close to Protestant and too far from the nominalist consensus theology to be “safe.”

³³ See Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, V, 6. An English translation of *Disputation V*, with explanatory materials and useful notes, is provided by Jorge J. E. Garcia in his *Suárez on Individuation: Metaphysical Disputation V, Individual Unity and Its Principle* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982).

distinction between human nature and the concrete individual. By so doing, whether deliberately or not, he removes much of the occasion and justification for speaking of *natura pura*. Because he is so intent on “my nature,” “my individual being,” he is unable to see how a “system of pure nature” is anything more than an imaginative exercise.

By uncritically assuming that no real distinction obtains between essence and existence, that is, between the kind of being a particular reality is, on the one hand, and the actual existence of each individual, on the other, de Lubac is led to hold that a desire to see God is “essential”—that is, that it pertains to human nature as such, and not to the contingency of actual and individual existence. As a result, our supernatural orientation to God is not seen to lie in the “modifiable particularity of my individual being” as a higher gift coming to an already-constituted nature.³⁴ Against his Suarezian background, essences are only *conceptually* distinct from existents—who are simply what they are. To think in terms of nature is a distraction from concrete factual existence, and an unwarranted indulgence in abstractions.

The controversial point, given the abstruse nature of such considerations, lies in de Lubac’s appeal to Augustine and to Thomas Aquinas to justify his particular view of the metaphysics of human nature and human finality. “As for Saint Thomas Aquinas,” de Lubac tells us, “it is basically the same for him [as for Augustine]. When he deals with problems relating to our final end, he does so both by analysing the essence of the created spirit and by remaining within our universe whose finality

³⁴ For Thomas, grace is a quality. See *STh* 1 2, q. 110, aa. 1–2.

is supernatural.”³⁵ De Lubac considers, therefore, that both Thomas and Augustine limit their thoughts about human nature to the “concrete nature” of those called to communion with God—which, in de Lubac’s perspective, is the nature of the whole existing human race. Were this the case, then any reading of Augustine or Aquinas would show them refusing to consider human nature, human action, or human understanding except in relation to grace and glory. But, as we have already seen, but as we have already seen, neither Augustine nor Aquinas limits himself to such an exclusively supernatural perspective.

For all this, de Lubac was not being disingenuous when he described himself as a Thomist—or, for that matter, an Augustinian. In contrast to the integrists of the early 20th century and to various more conservative Thomists, he was happy to read Aquinas and the Fathers without himself attempting to recover or develop an extensive systematic theology (and philosophy) from those sources. He was, moreover, convinced that Rousselot and others were right in combining various Thomistic insights with the concerns of new philosophers, especially the important French thinkers Bergson and Blondel. Given the freedom of his approach, de Lubac was in large measure impervious to close criticism by his more conservative interlocutors. Their appeals to the fine points of metaphysics and anthropology passed him by. Indeed, he resented such criticism as holding him back from his own

³⁵ De Lubac, “Mystery of the Supernatural,” 295. French p. 96, “Quant à saint Thomas d’Aquin, malgré le tour indéniablement plus abstrait de sa pensée, il en va au fond de même pour lui. Lorsqu’il s’occupe de problèmes relatifs à notre fin dernière, il le fait toujours à la fois en analysant l’essence de l’esprit créé et en se maintenant à l’intérieur de notre univers dont la finalité surnaturelle.”

integralist project in the service of a new Christian anthropology and of a Christian social renewal.

3. De Lubac's Theological and Historical Circumstances

Henri de Lubac's reading of Thomas Aquinas was affected by the historical context in which he lived and worked. His standpoint was inevitably conditioned by his experience and by his great goal of making certain "treasures" of Catholic tradition known and effective in his contemporary milieu. In referring to these treasures, de Lubac meant not only textual resources (say, the works of the Fathers), but also the ideas and perspectives he discerned in the formative stages of Catholic understanding. These, he held, needed to be reclaimed if theology—and, above all, Christian anthropology—were to recover their health and to assist the Church in addressing contemporary needs. Accordingly, these ideas and critical perspectives were at the heart of the disputes between de Lubac and his critics. To appreciate his outlook, especially in his work on the relationship of the natural to the supernatural, we turn now to examine the social and intellectual climate which shaped his concerns and the "new theology" associated with his name.

Henri de Lubac was born in 1896, in the France of the Third Republic. His country was enjoying the twenty-fifth year of peace since the Franco-Prussian war and the violence of the Paris Commune. That peace would last almost another twenty years, and the Third Republic would last until 1940. The time of de Lubac's youth

would be remembered as *la belle époque*, the golden age of modern France. However, even this idyllic time was marked by tensions between the Republic and the Church. These were evident in outbursts of anti-clericalism and of anti-republican nationalism throughout the years of de Lubac's youth, and came to a head, notoriously, in the Dreyfus Affair of 1894–1906. These tensions were overcome, at least temporarily, in the terrible afflictions shared by all parties in the First World War.

As noted in chapter one, de Lubac grew up in Lyons and joined the Jesuits at seventeen years of age, in 1913. He began his novitiate, but temporarily withdrew owing to his enlistment into the army to fight in the Great War. Gravely wounded, he returned to the novitiate to recover. His wounds were a shadow of the suffering of France as a whole.

In a manner now hard to fathom, France welcomed the Great War, wrongly believing that her army was the best in Europe, and that by fighting Germany she would recover both her lost glory and the territories yielded to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. It was widely believed, even by the Officer Corps, that sheer *élan vital*, the *furia Francese*, would ensure victory. At least in 1914, this extreme optimism showed itself in the military's reliance on bayonet charges, vividly colourful uniforms, and highly mobile (therefore, small) field pieces—none of which were suited to the realities of the new war.

When the carnage ended in 1918, France shared in the victory, but as a country bled dry by casualties that were proportionally more severe than those suffered by any other combatant nation except Serbia. There were 1.4 million French

military deaths, 1.1 million men permanently maimed, and 2.15 million men otherwise wounded. Fully half of all French males living at the time had been mobilised, and of these 20% were killed. The age cohort which suffered most heavily was de Lubac's own. Of the generation born between 1891 and 1897, a horrific 26% were consumed in the conflagration.³⁶ Immediately following this gruesome victory, a further 155,000 to 280,000 French citizens, half of them adults of twenty to forty years of age, were killed by the terrifying 1918–20 influenza pandemic.³⁷ In short, the generation to which France looked for strength and life had been largely destroyed. Similar conditions prevailed across Europe.

The post-war world was to embrace an artistic and intellectual movement, begun in the last decades of the previous century, which is commonly referred to in the umbrella term *modernism*. It seemed to many people, after the war, that the old and respectable 19th-century assumptions were no longer to be trusted. These traditional ways of life and thought seemed responsible for the flood of pain and death that had swept the continent. In place of the old artistic forms and ideological verities came artistic, scientific, philosophical—and, in time, political—revolutions. It was the age of Einstein and Freud, Proust and Kafka, *The Waste Land* and Bauhaus

³⁶ See Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 11–13. See also John Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1998), chapter 1, esp. pp. 6–7.

³⁷ See Jean Guénel, “La grippe espagnole en France en 1918–1919,” *Histoire des sciences médicales* 38 (2004), 165–75; Niall P. A. S. Johnson and Juergen Mueller, “Updating the Accounts: Global Mortality of the 1918–1920 Spanish Influenza Pandemic,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 76 (2002), 105–115; and Jeffery K. Taubenberger and David M. Morens, “1918 Influenza: the Mother of All Pandemics” *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 12.1 (January 2006), 15–22.

and jazz. It was also the age of Bolshevism and Mussolini. In politics and economics, the new fashion called for authoritative, centralised direction, while liberal democracy and free markets fell into disrepute. Throughout the Western world this broad cultural movement became dominant, and was strengthened by the global Depression of the 1920s and 30s.

In effect, the Great War created sympathy for cultural modernism and for the rejection of the past. In Ezra Pound's words, a generation had died for "an old bitch, gone in the teeth,/ For a botched civilization."³⁸ Yet the post-war generation of survivors felt a stirring of hope and fresh resolve: the tragedy they had witnessed seemed to demonstrate that it was possible and necessary to organize a new civilisation. "Ours is essentially a tragic age," wrote D. H. Lawrence, "so we refuse to take it tragically."³⁹

As a scholastic in the 1920s, de Lubac appears as one sharing the iconoclasm and optimism of his contemporaries. He was not unaffected by the general inclination to debunk received opinion, and to trust in new patterns of organisation leading to the creation of a new world.⁴⁰ In de Lubac's case, however, this is not to be diagnosed as

³⁸ Ezra Pound, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), part I, poem V ("There died a myriad"). Taken from Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems: 1908–1969* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), 101.

³⁹ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), chapter 1. This is the novel's opening sentence; Lawrence considers this optimism a good thing.

⁴⁰ On the larger artistic and intellectual crisis see especially Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1989) and Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy, from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008). On Catholic Paris see Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*.

mere rebellion or utopianism. His reaction arose from his deep faith, tested through his war-time experience, and formed by the attitudes and teachings of particular Jesuits whom he admired.

The ecclesiastical and theological world of this time was familiar with modernism of a different kind—that condemned by St Pius X in *Pascendi* in 1907. This encyclical's indictment of theological modernism exaggerated the coherence of what it condemned. As a result, modernism was considered to be the “synthesis of all heresies,” which implied that theological modernism was a fully integrated, systematic doctrine. To accept one point of this heretical body of teaching supposedly involved holding it *in toto*.⁴¹ Moreover, when *Pascendi* described modernism as though it were an organised conspiracy of some kind, it gave proponents of this widespread, many-sided, and always-elusive movement more credit than they deserved. Agnosticism, vitalism, evolutionism, immanentism, historicism, relativism—all these and more were said to be combined in a programme of deliberate subversion. In his response to this omnipresent danger, Pope Pius X called for vigilance against all traces of modernism, and, in 1910, he required all clergy, pastors, superiors, preachers, and seminary professors to take the “Oath against Modernism.” It entailed a repudiation of the various errors listed in the encyclical, and affirmed the immutability of Catholic doctrine against claims that the faith should adapt itself to the culture of each age. Responses to the anti-modernist programme varied, and

⁴¹ Pius X, *Pascendi dominici gregis*, n. 39. Taken from *Lettres Apostoliques de S. S. Pie X, Encycliques, Motu Proprio, Brefs, Allocutions, etc.*, vol. 3 (Paris: Maison de la Bonne, n.d.), 146.

reached a feverish extreme in the spy network known as *Sapinière* or the *Sodalitium Pianum*.⁴² Historical studies cast doubt on the view that Modernism was as organised and uniform as the Holy See had supposed. There is no consensus, however, either on just what elements of theological modernism were truly dangerous, or on how the Catholic Church ought to meet the various challenges of modernity. More certain, however, is that, among Western artists and scholars—religious scholars included—there was a movement away from received and customary standards in pursuit of the new. The inter-relationship of the varieties of modernism has not received a great deal of scholarly attention. We confine ourselves to the following two observations.

First, artistic and theological modernism arose and developed in the very same time and place, namely early twentieth-century Paris.⁴³ By the century's end, both had given rise to major reactions: namely "fundamentalism in religion and post-modernism in philosophy and the arts."⁴⁴

⁴² On the *Sodalitium Pianum*, which was run by a Vatican Undersecretary of State, see Gerald J. O'Brien, "Anti-Modernism: The Integralist Campaign," *Continuum* 3 (1965), 187–200. On the oath and anti-modernism generally, see Daly, *Transcendence and Immanence*; Gary Lease, "Catholic anti-Modernism: The Ecclesial Setting," in *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context*, ed. Darrell Jodock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 56–87; and Michael J. Kerlin, "Anti-Modernism and the Elective Affinity between Politics and Philosophy," in *Catholicism Contending with Modernity*, 308–36. On Jesuit anti-modernism and tensions within the Society, see Dulles, "Jesuits and Theology," 524–38; and David G. Schultenover, *A View from Rome: On the Eve of the Modernist Crisis* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993).

⁴³ See Malcolm Bull, "Who was the first to make a pact with the devil?," *London Review of Books*, 14 May 1992, 22.

⁴⁴ Bull, "Who was the first?," 23.

Second, some French Catholics of de Lubac's time may be understood as *social modernists* but not as *doctrinal modernists*. That is to say, they sought social reorganisation in terms of progressive, egalitarian, even socialist arrangements, but without wishing for any particular developments in theology or for the revision of the Creed. A "social modernist," obviously, could favour doctrinal or theological changes as well; but there was no necessary connection between the two sorts of reform. Indeed, some who were labelled "social modernists" by their opponents declared that they were, in fact, the true *integralists* (or *integrists*)—not because of some detailed doctrinal or theological intransigence, but because they wished to establish a new and "integrally Catholic" social order based on Catholic social teaching.⁴⁵ The revolutionary and egalitarian implications of this idealism unsettled Church authorities—despite the fact that they were often the very same men who had articulated the social teachings in question.

For the young Henri de Lubac, the crisis of Catholic theological modernism was not of immediate concern. The anti-modernist campaign had been relaxed by Benedict XV upon his election in 1914, and the Great War with all its implications would naturally dominate European and Vatican attention. In some of the seminaries

⁴⁵ See Peter Bernardi, "Social modernism: The case of the *Semaines sociales*," in *Catholicism Contending with Modernity*, 277–308. The name "social teaching" or "social doctrine," here, is somewhat awkward, since Church injunctions about society have varied considerably, even in the 19th and 20th centuries. See Christopher Clark, "The New Catholicism and the European culture wars," in *Culture Wars: Secular–Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11–46); Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe*; and Jay P. Corrin, *Catholic Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democracy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

and universities, however, a more subdued engagement with the vision and values of modernism continued. If Catholic theology in general remained more conservative until the 1950s or 1960s, it is nevertheless true that in the inter-war years not a few scholars pursued, albeit cautiously, a more progressive agenda.

After his course in Arts, which was conducted by the Jesuits at Canterbury, de Lubac was sent to Jersey in 1920 for courses in philosophy. There he studied under some of the Province's more strict and conservative Suarezians, the chief among whom was Pedro Descoqs. De Lubac found the coursework tedious, but also found his professors' political views disturbing. His own political sympathies lay with the Left, so much so that he would later write a laudatory book on the anarchical socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.⁴⁶ But many of his older confreres inclined to the political Right: they were anti-Dreyfusards, nationalistic, militarist, and sometimes anti-Semitic in their views. In the years to come these men would support Primo de Rivera and Franco in Spain, and Pétain in France, much to the dismay of de Lubac and of other Jesuits of the Left. It was the younger party of more "socially modernist" and

⁴⁶ Without ignoring Proudhon's atheism or expressly defending the economic theories of mutualism, de Lubac argues that Proudhon is vital for articulating "the eternal problems" of anguished humanity. See de Lubac's *Proudhon et le christianisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1945), published in English as *The Un-Marxian Socialist: A Study of Proudhon* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1948).

innovative Jesuits, progressives in politics and scholarship alike, who befriended and attracted de Lubac.⁴⁷

Amongst those of his order whom de Lubac most admired were the young palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Victor Fontoynt (who taught de Lubac Greek), Joseph Huby (who encouraged him to critique Cajetan), Auguste Valensin (who supplied him with the works of Rousselot), and Gaston Fessard (an older Jesuit who would take an heroic role in the French Resistance). Kept from regular attendance at lectures by his debilitating war injuries, de Lubac immersed himself deeply in the work of these daring intellectuals and in the writings of the Church Fathers.⁴⁸ Describing his studies, de Lubac makes a typical reference to his heroes, to the shadow of the War, and to Rome's opposition to theological adaptation or "updating":

Among the contemporaries studied during my formation, I owe a particular debt to Blondel, Maréchal and Rousselot. I did not have the opportunity to know Father Pierre Rousselot personally. He was killed at Eparges, near Verdun, in the spring of 1915, at the very place where I was to be one year later. On the other hand, from 1919 on, I had access to all his papers,

⁴⁷ The varieties of 20th-century French politics and theology defy brief description. See Tony Judt, *Marxism and the French Left: 1830–1981* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) and *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1933–1956* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Jean Lacouture, *Jesuits: A Multibiography*, trans. Jeremy Leggatt (London: Harvill, 1996; original French 1991), 381–441; Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*; Michael Sutton, "Conservatives and Conservatism: Early Catholic Controversy about the Politics of Charles Maurras," *Journal of Contemporary History* 14 (1979), 649–74; and Eugen Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962).

⁴⁸ See de Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 15.

which had been entrusted at the time to Father Auguste Valensin⁴⁹ in Lyons An attempt has been made at least three times to collect Rousselot's scattered and unpublished writings Each time, "Rome" stood in the way This long and dramatic "Rousselot affair," launched in the summer of 1920, is one of the principal examples of the impossibility encountered, all during the first half of the twentieth century, of any adaptation or [thorough] updating of doctrine and classical teaching in the Church. Attempts, however, were not lacking.⁵⁰

The reference to "Rome" in this passage may refer to opposition by his Jesuit superiors in the General Curia or to influential Jesuit theologians teaching in Rome, rather than simply to the Vatican. As Avery Dulles explains, by the late 1920s

a cleavage was developing between two major tendencies in Jesuit theology. The neo-scholastics, continuing in the life of Counter-Reformation dogmatics, based their theology on natural reason and on the authority of papal and conciliar documents. A second group, out of favor in Rome, sought to connect theology more intimately with prayer and the

⁴⁹ Auguste Valensin, SJ (1879–1953), studied under Blondel, taught at Fourvière and is one of the forgotten fathers of *la nouvelle théologie*. Valensin was de Lubac's mentor and a friend and confidant of Teilhard de Chardin.

⁵⁰ De Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 19–21. French pp. 16–17: "Parmi les contemporains fréquentés au temps de ma formation, j'ai une dette particulière envers Blondel, Maréchal et Rousselot. Je n'ai pu connaître personnellement le Père Pierre Rousselot, tué aux Eparges, près de Verdun, au printemps de 1915, à l'endroit même où je devais me trouver un an après. En revanche, dès 1919, j'ai eu communication de tous ses papiers, dont le Père Auguste Valensin avait alors le dépôt à Lyon A trois reprises au moins, une tentative a été faite en vue de recueillir les écrits dispensés ou inédits de Rousselot «Rome» a fait chaque fois barrage Cette longue et dramatique «affaire Rousselot», déclenchée dans l'été 1920, est l'un des principaux exemples de l'impossibilité à laquelle on s'est heurté, pendant toute la première moitié du vingtième siècle, d'une adaptation et d'une actualisation approfondie de la doctrine et de l'enseignement classique dans l'Eglise. Les efforts ne manquèrent pourtant pas."

experience of the Holy Spirit. Both groups considered themselves to be faithful to the Jesuit sources The Ignatian synthesis between mysticism and obedience to hierarchical authority was in danger of falling apart.⁵¹

As we have already seen, and as his Herculean labour to produce *Sources chrétiennes* testifies, de Lubac favoured a theological *ressourcement*, a renewal of doctrine (and indeed of church life generally) through a return to the “treasures” of the Catholic tradition. Although de Lubac avers that he was “never . . . tempted to any kind of return to the sources that would scorn later developments and represent the history of Christian thought as a stream of decadences,”⁵² this *ressourcement* was sought precisely because its promoters, not least de Lubac, found scholastic theology wanting. A return was demanded, because there had been an earlier departure. Clearly, the proponents of *ressourcement* were not merely dissatisfied with poor seminary manuals or with this or that feature of neo-scholasticism. Instead they believed, as Daniélou put it, that certain insights gained from various Fathers and from modern existentialists would enable Catholic theology to embrace “historicity and subjectivity,” thus escaping from “the static world of Greek thought.” In the process, Catholics would embrace “the perception of [corporate human]

⁵¹ Dulles, “Jesuits and Theology,” 531–2.

⁵² See de Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 144. French p. 147: “n’ai-je jamais été tenté par je ne sais quel «retour aux sources» qui ferait fi des développements postérieurs et qui se représenterait l’histoire de la pensée chrétienne comme une cascade de decadences” Here de Lubac either overstates his immunity to temptation or employs a restrictive definition of development.

coexistence . . . common to Marxism and existentialism,”⁵³ a view favoured by progressive opinion in the 30s and 40s.

If de Lubac did not consider the entire modern history of doctrine a “stream of decadences,” he was nonetheless explicit in identifying one product of “decadence” which had, for at least four centuries, been sapping the life out of Catholic theology. He wrote in 1932, “every effort of Christian thought” is blocked by “the evil of ‘separated theology’,” an evil that largely resulted from “the ‘system of Pure Nature’

⁵³ Jean Daniélou, “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,” *Etudes* 249 (April 1946), 14. A trans. in Peddicord, *Sacred Monster*, 151, from M.-M. Labourdette, “Le théologie et ses sources,” *Revue thomiste* 46 (1946), 359, n. 1. (This page number is misprinted in Peddicord’s note; the correct page is 359, not 36.) Daniélou writes: “Ces deux abîmes, historicité, subjectivité, auxquels il faut ajouter la perception de la coexistence par laquelle chacune de nos vies retentit dans celle de tous les autres et qui est commune au marxisme et à l’existentialisme, ces deux abîmes obligent donc la pensée théologique à se dilater. Il est bien clair en effet que la théologie scolastique est étrangère à ces catégories. Le monde qui est le sien est le monde immobile de la pensée grecque, où sa mission a été d’incarner le message chrétien. Cette conception garde une vérité permanente et toujours valable en tant du moins qu’elle consiste à affirmer que la décision de la liberté de l’homme ou la transformation par lui de ses conditions de vie ne sont pas un commencement absolu par lequel il se crée lui-même, mais la réponse à une vocation de Dieu dont le monde des essences est l’expression. Mais par ailleurs elle ne fait aucune place à l’histoire. Et d’autre part, mettant la réalité dans les essences plus que dans les sujets, elle ignore le monde dramatique des personnes, des universels concrets transcendants à toute essence et ne se distinguant que par l’existence, c’est à dire non plus selon l’intelligible et l’intellection, mais selon la valeur et l’amour ou la haine.”

born from the womb of decadent Scholasticism.”⁵⁴ In consequence, the first step toward renewal would be to discredit the notion of pure nature. Once this fundamental distortion had been remedied, Christian theology could recover its relevance to the contemporary world, drawing intellectuals back to the Catholic faith and inspiring a profound societal renewal.

a. De Lubac’s Career

After his ordination and tertianship (the prolonged further period of retreat and formation following ordination), Henri de Lubac was awarded a doctorate by his Father General and sent to teach at the Institut Catholique in Lyons. As he recalls,

I did not in fact receive any specialized formation at the outset . . . [or] go through the salutary testing of a doctoral thesis. One fine day, Father General Wladimir Ledochowski granted me (that is the right word) a doctoral diploma from the Gregorian University, in which I had never set foot and where no one knew me,

⁵⁴ See Henri de Lubac, letter of 3 April 1932, quoted by de Lubac in *Service of the Church*, 184–5 (appendix I:7), French p. 188 (appendix I:g): “Si maintenant nous interrogeons la Tradition, nous verrions ce qu’on peut appeler le «système de la Pure nature» naître au sein de la scolastique décadente. Il semble qu’on puisse dire, en gros, que c’est là un de ces «morceaux de scotisme» que le grande fleuve de la tradition thomiste se mit lui-même à charrier inconsciemment . . . Mas saint Thomas ne le connaît pas. Quant à saint Augustin, il ne saurait absolument pas s’en accommoder. Enfin, ce système ne serait-il pas en grande partie responsable du mal de la «théologie séparée», mal dont nous souffrons encore grandement aujourd’hui? N’est-ce pas toujours lui qui oppose une digue à chaque effort de pensée chrétienne?”

because they needed me to fill a gap at the Theology Faculty of Lyons.⁵⁵

Within a year of his arrival in Lyons, the young professor was publishing articles based on research he had begun privately under Joseph Huby as a scholastic at Ore Place. These were his articles on Cajetan, pure nature, and the supernatural, which would reappear with further revisions in *Surnaturel* in 1946 and again in *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* in 1965.⁵⁶ Although teaching at the Institut, de Lubac lived with his Jesuit confreres, including his mentor Valensin, at the scholasticate of Fourvière.

Life at Fourvière meant not only scholarly encouragement and the company of his Province's progressive elite, but also greater exposure to ordinary people and to the wider intellectual world. He was confronted pastorally and academically with the anxiety and bitter disillusion of France's "hollow years." In the 1930s, the global economic depression, which some thought France would escape, took hold as the country sank beneath its war debts. "Ineffective politicians grappled with insoluble problems in the France of the 1930s . . . : refractory economy, intractable immigration, rising unemployment, rabble-rousing xenophobia, swelling taxes, and a

⁵⁵ De Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 143. French p. 146: "je n'ai reçu au départ aucune formation spécialisée . . . , je n'ai pas passé par la salutaire épreuve de la thèse de doctorat. Un beau jour, le Père Général Wladimir Ledochowski, m'a octroyé (c'est le mot juste) le diplôme de docteur de l'Université grégorienne, où je n'avais jamais mis les pieds, où j'étais inconnu de tous, parce qu'on a eu besoin de moi pour boucher un trou à la Faculté de théologie de Lyon"

⁵⁶ See page 15, n. 22.

contracting tax base.”⁵⁷ Nostalgia for a romanticised rural past became popular in some quarters, while brooding over all was the spectre of another war.

Like many of his contemporaries worldwide in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, de Lubac was eager for a new and deliberately engineered social order. During these decades, it was commonly held that society ought to be more than a legacy from the past, a product of national genius, or an accident of evolution: it ought, instead, to be the product of human design and mass mobilisation. As Tony Judt writes, “Left and Right alike felt a distaste for the lukewarm and were fascinated by the idea of a violent relief from mediocrity . . . Proudhon and Péguy were icons for the [Left and Right] alike because they had addressed . . . the limitations and frustrations of parliamentary republicanism”⁵⁸ and of the received liberal, “bourgeois” culture. What distinguishes de Lubac’s political idealism is that he imagined a society organised on the basis of *catholicisme*. This difference is neatly expressed in the two sentences for which de Lubac is perhaps most famous:

It is not true, as it is sometimes said, that man cannot organize the world without God. What is true is that, without God, he can ultimately only organize it against man.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Weber, *Hollow Years*, 5.

⁵⁸ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 18. Cited in Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 158.

⁵⁹ De Lubac, *Drama of Atheist Humanism*, 15. The quotation is from de Lubac’s preface dated Christmas 1943. French p. 10, “Il n’est pas vrai que l’homme, ainsi qu’on semble quelquefois le dire, ne puisse organiser la terre sans Dieu. Ce qui vrai, c’est que, sans Dieu, il ne peut en fin de compte que l’organiser contre l’homme.” (From the Christmas 1943 preface.)

The keyword here is *organise*, which suggests, not that society is organic or an organism, but that society is an organisation—an arrangement that may be changed and adjusted, a mechanism.⁶⁰ In imagining a new Catholic society, of course, de Lubac was not alone. “The wider trend in much of post-war intellectual life away from liberal positivism towards a renewed interest in mysticism and the irrational, as well as the influence among Catholic intellectuals of neo-Thomist theology . . . , encouraged the Catholic intelligentsia to think of Catholicism as providing a comprehensive answer to the problems of contemporary society.”⁶¹ The attraction that such a vision of society exercised on de Lubac was not associated with any theological hypothesis on his part, but reflected a widespread social and political theory. Still, this social outlook had theological consequences for de Lubac’s work and for the Church at large.

Published in 1938, de Lubac’s *Catholicisme, Les aspects sociaux du dogme* emphasised the social and corporate nature of the Church in response to “the social

⁶⁰ See Stephen Cummings and Torkild Thanem, “Essai: The Ghost in the Organism,” *Organization Studies* 23/5 (2002): 817–39, esp. 824–5; and Friedrich A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, vol. 1, *Rules and Order* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1973), 52–4.

⁶¹ Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe: 1918–1945* (London: Routledge, 1997), 43. On Catholic political mobilisation in France, see Jean-Claude Delbreil, “Christian Democracy and Centrism: The Popular Democratic Party in France,” in *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–45*, vol. 1., ed. Wolfram Kaiser and Helmut Wohnout (London: Routledge, 2004), 116–35; and Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 114–66. On the French Left’s version of fascism, see Robert Soucy, “French Fascist Intellectuals in the 1930s: An Old New Left?,” *French Historical Studies* 8/3 (1974): 445–58.

pre-occupations of French Marxists.”⁶² Though *Catholicisme* may be seen as a corrective to modern individualism, it is an expression of de Lubac’s confidence in the Catholic faith’s potential to serve as the foundational theory of a new, reorganised society. This optimistic view was taken up by many Catholics, as was evident in the enthusiasm of youth movements, rallies, and mass mobilisation favoured by the Church since the late 1800s.⁶³ When de Lubac’s *Catholicisme* appeared, France’s young Catholic intellectuals were already committed to the forging of a new “Christian civilisation.” For example, the young Emmanuel Mounier (the “Father of Personalism”) founded the successful periodical *Esprit* in 1932, a publication which “claimed to reject conventional political divisions and spoke grandiloquently of how Catholicism offered a ‘third way’ (*une troisième voie*) . . . [*Esprit* called for] a new political and social order inspired by Catholic values.”⁶⁴

By the early 1940s, de Lubac and his confreres in the progressive city of Lyons had become known as champions both of *ressourcement* and of radical social reconstruction along the lines of Catholic “social modernism.”⁶⁵ With regard to neo-

⁶² Gregory Baum, “The Impact of Marxist Ideas on Christian Theology,” *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 178.

⁶³ See Christopher Clarke, “The New Catholicism and the European Culture Wars,” in *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11–46; and James MacMillan, “Priest Hits Girl: On the Front Lines in the War of the Two Frances,” in *Culture Wars*, ed. Clark and Kaiser, 77–101.

⁶⁴ Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe*, 53.

⁶⁵ See Pierre Vallin, “Les jésuites à Lyon et la question sociale,” in *Les jésuites à Lyon, XVIe–XXe siècle*, ed. Étienne Fouiloux and Bernard Hours (Lyons: École normale supérieure, 2005), 175–88.

scholasticism and the theology of the contemporary schools, de Lubac and his associates showed increasing impatience. As Avery Dulles writes, “De Lubac, Daniélou, and their colleagues . . . were convinced that the abstract conceptual theology of late scholasticism was based on an outmoded rationalism and was unsuited to the modern mind. The warmer, more devotional theology of the Fathers, they believed, could speak better to contemporary readers.”⁶⁶ As de Lubac saw matters, the greatest obstacle to belief among his contemporaries was Catholic doctrine’s irrelevance, especially in its scholastic formulations, to modern social concerns. The force of this question was deeply felt: “How can a religion which apparently is uninterested in our terrestrial future and in human fellowship offer an ideal which can still attract the men of to-day?”⁶⁷

b. *Surnaturel* (1946) and *Humani generis* (1950)

The peak of de Lubac’s controversial career came with the publication of *Surnaturel* in 1946. The book had actually been completed in 1942, receiving its *nihil obstat* from Joseph Huby, who had supervised de Lubac’s initial work on this topic in the scholasticate. The disruptions of the Second World War made publishing difficult in France, but de Lubac was, for the most part, able to continue his scholarly work. The first volumes of *Sources chrétiennes*, for example, were published in 1942, and de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum* appeared in 1944. With other Jesuits in Lyon, de Lubac

⁶⁶ Dulles, “Jesuits and Theology,” 532.

⁶⁷ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1950), viii.

contributed also to the “spiritual resistance” in France, by issuing tracts against anti-Semitism and the Nazi invaders. Pursued by the Gestapo, de Lubac spent some months in hiding before the Allied invasion liberated France in 1945. After returning to Lyon, he was soon able to publish the book already mentioned so often in the present study, *Surnaturel*. It brought together a series of old and new studies concerned with the doctrines of nature and grace.

Surnaturel is arranged in four sections. The first part, “*Augustinisme et Baianisme*,” is an interpretation of the theology of Baius and Jansenius. This was related to the author’s historical and theological claims concerning “the system of pure nature” and the meaning of the papal condemnations of the two heresies. (This portion of *Surnaturel* was later to reappear in *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* in 1965.) We have already discussed in chapter five the burden of this section of *Surnaturel*, in which de Lubac argued that the rejection of the scholastic idea of pure nature was not proscribed, either implicitly or explicitly, in the condemnations of Baianism and Jansenism.

The second section, “*Esprit et Liberté dans la tradition théologique*,” considers some highlights of the Latin patristic and scholastic theology of human nature, freedom, evil, and sin, and concludes with a chapter on the eclipse of some elements of this tradition in early modern scholasticism. There is, however, in this treatment no close analysis of any patristic or mediaeval author, but a more general and impressionistic overview is offered, deriving from de Lubac’s reading. The third part of *Surnaturel* discusses the development of the idea of the supernatural and of the

theological use of the expressions *supra naturam*, *supernaturalis*, and *superadditum naturae*. Finally, the book's fourth part, "Notes historiques," presents in the form of six appendices a set of very brief textual studies and references to the writing of Thomas Aquinas. Though these appendices are brief (44 pages in a 494-page book), they have a special importance in that they are as close as de Lubac comes to an encounter with the writing of Aquinas.

Not unexpectedly, *Surnaturel* infuriated many Thomist scholars, especially when it accused them of infidelity to Aquinas on what was ostensibly very flimsy evidence. As his reviewers justifiably complained, the French Jesuit had been hasty and careless. Moreover, *Surnaturel* was presented as an historical work, and not, therefore, as the work of a philosopher or theologian. It seemed unacceptable, granting the divisions of theological labour generally accepted in the 1940s, for an historical study to pass judgement on the truth of any theological system. When theological methods had yet to appreciate the relationship between historical research into previous understandings of Christian doctrine and systematic reflection on such doctrines in the present, the appearance of *Surnaturel* occasioned mutual incomprehension between de Lubac and his Thomist critics. More to the point, our author's book assumed something of a symbolic status as a radical document, attacking the theological establishment and calling for theological revolution. Victor White, an English Dominican, was among those early readers who recognised what was at stake. In his review of *Surnaturel*, he wrote that it "challenges [the theologian]

to a radical reorientation of his thought and a critical reconsideration of his assumptions and methodology.”⁶⁸

De Lubac sought to respond to his critics in an article, “The Mystery of the Supernatural,” published in 1949. But in mid-1950, he was removed from Fourvière along with several other progressive Jesuit professors. *Surnaturel* and some of his other books were removed from the open shelves of all Jesuit libraries, unsold copies of these same works were withdrawn, and de Lubac was required to send all future theological writings to the Generalate for censorship. Under a cloud of suspicion, he was moved to Paris, where upon arrival he received the new encyclical *Humani generis*. Although it did not explicitly refer to de Lubac or explicitly endorse the notion of pure nature, this papal document was sufficiently unfavourable to the critics of modern scholasticism as to leave de Lubac thunderstruck. Writing to a colleague on 9 September 1950, he spoke of his Paris assignment and of the encyclical as a pair of “shocks that assaulted me from without [and] troubled my soul to its depths.”⁶⁹

The pertinence of *Humani generis* to the work of Henri de Lubac has sometimes been denied, usually on the grounds that, long after the fact, de Lubac wrote that the encyclical had practically vindicated his own position on the supernatural. This interpretation, however, does not seem well founded. The clear intention of Pius XII in writing *Humani generis* was to defend scholastic theology—

⁶⁸ White, *Dominican Studies* review of *Surnaturel*, 71.

⁶⁹ Letter to François Charmot, SJ, cited in Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac*, 73. Voderholzer notes (n. 13) that this letter was later published in the *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 94 (1993), 54f.

not merely its essential doctrines or mediaeval foundations, but in its modern form and with its received terminology and concepts.⁷⁰ As remarked in chapter one, the encyclical was directed against those theologians who were “daring seriously to question whether theology and its methods, as are found and approved in theological schools, should not merely be perfected but rather entirely reformed.”⁷¹ Echoing the instructions he had already given to the Jesuit and Dominican authorities in two audiences of 1946, Pius obliged bishops and religious superiors to intervene against efforts aimed at “free[ing] dogma from terminology long received in the Church and from the philosophical notions of Catholic doctors.” He did not accept that “in the exposition of Catholic teaching there might be a return to the mode of speaking used in holy scripture and by the saintly Fathers.”⁷²

Notwithstanding the stern and explicit tone of such papal pronouncements, neither de Lubac nor many of his interpreters have considered that *Humani generis* was anything but a positive endorsement—indeed, a reiteration—of de Lubac’s own position. The case for this interpretation of the encyclical appears thin, and attends only to n. 26, which condemns theologians who “compromise the gratuity of the supernatural order by saying that God cannot create intellectual beings without

⁷⁰ See *Humani generis* nn. 11 and 14, quoted above. See p. 18, n. 25, and p. 19, n. 27, respectively.

⁷¹ See *Humani generis* n. 11: “[. . .] ita hodie non desunt qui eo usque procedere audeant ut serio quaestionem moveant num theologia eiusque methodus, quales in scholis ecclesiastica approbante auctoritate vigent, non modo perficiendae, verum etiam omnino reformandae sint, ut regnum Christi quocumque terrarum, inter homines cuiusvis culturae vel cuiusvis opinionis religiosae efficacius propagetur.”

⁷² *Humani generis* n. 14, quoted above. See p. 19, n. 27.

ordering and calling them to the beatific vision.”⁷³ Both Michael Sales, de Lubac’s editor, and Rudolf Voderholzer⁷⁴ follow de Lubac’s own eventual interpretation, namely, that *Humani generis* n. 26 is, in fact, tantamount to an endorsement of *Surnaturel* and “The Mystery of the Supernatural” because it uses an unidentified phrase similar to that used by de Lubac, and inasmuch as the notion of pure nature is not expressly mentioned.⁷⁵ Even if *Humani generis* n. 26 had been omitted from the encyclical, the papal defence of modern scholasticism (including its customary concepts and terminology) is unambiguous. Likewise, the validity of any theology wishing to replace scholastic methods with a more patristic theology, better adapted to modern needs, is clearly called into question. Hence, the Pope’s support for neo-scholasticism and his stern discouragement of renewal based on *ressourcement* makes de Lubac’s favourable reading of the encyclical seem exaggerated.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that our author did have some reason for confidence. Pius XII had twice signalled his personal esteem and appreciation for de Lubac and his work: once in person (when de Lubac was presented to him in 1946

⁷³ *Humani generis* n. 26, quoted above. See p. 20, n. 30.

⁷⁴ See Michael Sales’s introductory note for “Mystery of the Supernatural” in *Theology in History* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996), 281; also Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac*, 70–73.

⁷⁵ See De Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 71 (French pp. 72–3) and *Entretiens autour de Vatican II* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 13–14. The latter passage is rather haughty, delighting as it does in the “disappointment” de Lubac’s enemies presumably felt when *Humani generis* did not condemn him directly. See the translation with Sales’s argument in *Theology in History*, 281, note. See also Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac*, 71: “But behold, despite the one-sidedness and the basic apologetic approach that de Lubac noted in the text [of *Humani generis*], not one single sentence could be understood as being formulated against him directly.”

with the rest of the Jesuits at the 1946 General Congregation), and again through a letter from the papal confessor, Augustin Bea, SJ, shortly after the publication of *Humani generis*.⁷⁶ In any case, de Lubac was never disciplined by the Holy See, never asked to retract any of his views, and never deprived of his teaching position at the Institut Catholique in Lyons—even during his sojourn in Paris. He returned to Lyons in 1953, resumed lecturing, and wrote three books on Buddhism, assiduously avoiding the theological questions that had caused such a great deal of conflict.

c. After *Humani generis*

The years immediately following *Humani generis* are sometimes described as a kind of martyrdom for de Lubac.⁷⁷ He was inconvenienced, indeed humiliated, but not silenced. During these years he continued writing and rewriting books, having them published, editing *Sources chrétiennes*, and giving public lectures, even in Rome,⁷⁸ right up to the day in 1959 when he was summoned by Pope John XXIII to

⁷⁶ See De Lubac, *Entretiens autour de Vatican II*, 13–14, quoted by Sales in *Theology in History*, 281, note.

⁷⁷ A dramatic account is given by Hans Urs von Balthasar in *Henri de Lubac: Sein organisches Lebenswerk* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1976) (trans. Joseph Fessio and Michael Waldstein, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991], 63): “With *Surnaturel* . . . , a young David comes onto the field against the Goliath of modern rationalization and reduction to logic of the Christian mystery. The sling deals a death blow, but the acolytes of the giant seize upon the champion and reduce him to silence for a long time.” An essentially similar interpretation is given by Joseph Komonchak in “Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac” (*Theological Studies* 51 [1990]), 579–602 and by Stephen Schloesser in “Against Forgetting: Memory, History, Vatican II” (*Theological Studies* 67 [2006], 275–319).

⁷⁸ See de Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 67, 88, 90–1, etc.

serve as a *peritus* in the ante-preparatory work of Vatican II. De Lubac then remained in Rome, working for the Council until its conclusion in 1965.

While in Rome de Lubac was assigned first to the Theological Commission headed by Cardinal Ottaviani, then to the subcommissions working on the documents which would become the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” (*Gaudium et Spes*) and the “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” (*Dei Verbum*). On the subcommission preparing *Gaudium et Spes* he worked alongside the future Pope John Paul II, becoming an admired friend of the young Polish Archbishop. In 1964, de Lubac was assigned to the Secretariat for Non-Christians, and in the following year, to the Secretariat for Non-Believers. In his work on the Secretariat for Non-Believers, de Lubac is said to have had a significant influence on Franz Cardinal König, the Austrian prelate who was an architect of *Nostra Aetate*, the council’s 1965 “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christians.”⁷⁹

In 1964, toward the end of the council, the Jesuit General Jean-Baptiste Janssens died and was succeeded by Pedro Arrupe. De Lubac was consequently at full liberty to return to the *Surnaturel* controversy, which he did in 1965 with the publication of two new books on the matter. These were his “twins,” *Le mystère du surnaturel* (a major expansion of the 1949 article of the same name) and *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* (an expanded version of *Surnaturel*). The substance of de Lubac’s position and argument was unchanged, but he was able to

⁷⁹ See Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac*, 83–8.

update his bibliographies and to respond to criticism from the perspective afforded by the passage of twenty years since the original controversy. Neither volume received much attention in theological circles, not merely because the “twins” were essentially a return of the previous suspect, *Surnaturel*, but also because the council had brought so much new theological ferment and change in church life. With the decline of neo-scholasticism, de Lubac’s critique of Cajetan and the Thomistic schools had lost its interest, if not its relevance.

In 1969 de Lubac was named to the newly constituted International Theological Commission. In this role, he developed texts which he would shape into his *Petite catéchèse sur Nature et Grâce*, published in 1980. De Lubac became a cardinal in 1983. He lived to the age of 95, and died in 1991.

In the final decades of his life, de Lubac was troubled by what he identified as secularism and as the obscuring of transcendence and of the supernatural within the Church. He was also unhappy with the rise of theologies with too little respect for Catholic tradition, as though Vatican II had been a great divide separating the “new church” from that of previous ages. In this regard, he forged alliances with his brilliant student, Hans Urs von Balthasar, with Joseph Ratzinger, and with others, resulting in the founding of the journal, *Communio*. He was conscious that within the Society of Jesus, he was now being considered as an obsolete and too-conservative thinker. To de Lubac’s eyes, the Church and theology were missing the opportunity to stem the spiritual decline of the world which had begun in the terrible drama of the Great War. Instead of profiting from the patristic *ressourcement* and occupying itself

with a radical, spiritual renewal, the church seemed to be struggling with its own identity and its declining ability to shape the world.⁸⁰

4. De Lubac's Critique of Pure Nature: An Evaluation

The historical accuracy of Henri de Lubac's case against scholastic understandings of pure nature, as we have already suggested, is not without its problems. Moreover, his denial of continuity between the actual teaching of Aquinas and the subsequent Thomistic traditions seems, in the end, to be a serious overstatement. As we have sought to demonstrate, there is every reason to affirm that Thomas, and other thinkers before him, recognised the intelligibility of human nature as constituted solely in its natural powers and without reference to the added *telos* of trinitarian beatitude.

This is not to deny, however, the value of de Lubac's *Surnaturel* and his subsequent writings. On the contrary, they remain provocative for the very reason noted by Victor White in 1949 in his review of *Surnaturel*, namely, that they challenge the presuppositions of theology.⁸¹ Whether Thomas Aquinas entertained the notion of pure nature or not, the question still remains as to the legitimacy and usefulness of such a category for theological reflection. If the idea of pure nature is theologically acceptable, then it may follow, indeed, that Christianity itself is a

⁸⁰ See Robert F. Gotcher, "Henri de Lubac and *Communio*: The Significance of his Theology of the Supernatural for an Interpretation of *Gaudium et Spes*," (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University), 102–3 and 145–80; and Christopher J. Walsh, "De Lubac's critique of the postconciliar Church," *Communio* 19 (1992), 404–32.

⁸¹ See p. 246, n. 13, above.

critical source of genuine secularity—even if the recognition of the value and forms of such secularity has had an uneven history in the development of theology. On the other hand, if de Lubac’s basic theological point is correct, and the idea of pure nature is not legitimate, then theology and the Church itself are called to a much wider responsibility than they have heretofore been ready to accept. Because of this second possibility we turn, in the next chapter, to John Milbank and the Radical Orthodoxy movement. We will see how de Lubac’s principles led to the conclusion that Christian believers must assume responsibility for shaping the whole of culture and society.

Not only is de Lubac’s work on nature and grace provocative, it is of fundamental importance in establishing the place of historical research in any critical theological method. Though the rhetoric of *ressourcement* may sound like a summons to forget the inheritance of scholasticism, it is nonetheless clear that the scholastic systematisation of Christian doctrine can be enriched and purified by attending to its varied historic circumstances. Indeed, it is thanks to historical studies that the Thomism of today has developed a fresh appreciation for the biblical, patristic, philosophic, and contemplative sources from which it arose. Research into “the Aquinas of history,” that is, Thomas in his mediaeval setting, has brought a new flexibility into the different ways in which the Thomist inheritance can be appropriated and developed. In other words, there is not one Thomism—to be adhered to in a fundamentalist fashion—but many forms of thought that can rightfully claim to be called “Thomistic.” At the same time, de Lubac’s advocacy of *ressourcement* raises important questions about the possibility and limitations of a

present return to past sources, and how it might be conducted. Valuable work has been done under the rubric of historical theology, but the nature and place of this discipline deserve ongoing inquiry.

There is a third but perhaps unintended value in de Lubac's effort to explore the Jansenist crisis more thoroughly. It is true that his main concern in treating the heresies of Baius and Jansen was to show that, although they drew ecclesiastical condemnation, theologians remained free to accept or reject the notion of pure nature. But there is a larger consideration: de Lubac throws light on an early modern anticipation of integralism, and the questions that arise when society and the church are no longer practically coextensive. What is the appropriate reaction of Christians to such a new cultural situation? The Jansenist solution insisted on the all-determining relevance of Christian faith to all areas of life. As Christians we believe that "all things hold together" in Christ (cf. Col 1:17), and that there is a divine plan "for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10). But this does not allow us to envisage how or when this eschatological fulfilment will occur. In the meantime, we live in a world far more extensive than the Church. It comprises the worlds of art and science, politics and economics, with all the varieties of cultures, religions, and societies that are part of the pluralism of our day. How, then, is Christian theology to recognise, in a critical way, this immense "other," and yet remain in a positive, supportive relationship to it, without some sense of what human nature is, in itself? The world may not be Christian, but, as Christians, we can recognise that there is a shared natural field of communication between

Church and world that enriches the realities of both. This is not to deny the supernatural gift of grace; and here de Lubac's investigations into Jansenism invite theology into a profound consideration of what is meant by the "gratuitousness" of the gift of God, the integrity of human freedom, the transcendence of divine freedom, and the intention of God "who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4, NRSV).

In short, in his treatment of nature, grace, and their inter-relationship, Henri de Lubac has left us with questions rather than systematic answers. It is true that we have faulted his interpretation of St Thomas, scholastic Thomism, and some aspects of the early modern religious and cultural history of France. Nonetheless, his theology will remain as a remarkable achievement when placed in the larger context of his life and works. Like the rest of us, de Lubac has his own prejudices and standpoint, and he imbibed the concerns of his era. But—unlike most of us—he accomplished immense good in his dedication to the service of the Church. One has only to refer to the *Sources chrétiennes*, to the renewal of attention to the Church's communal life that he inspired, to the revival of interest in mediaeval exegesis, or to his heroic opposition to anti-Semitism and to the Nazi police forces in occupied France to appreciate that the late cardinal and his lifetime of historical and theological work ought to be held in honour.

But not everyone has detected the flaws in de Lubac's achievement which we have had to mention in the course of this study. It will be instructive, therefore, to see now how they have extended some of our author's original and radical positions into

the integralist approach of what we now call “Radical Orthodoxy.” In the work of the Anglican theologian John Milbank, we will see how post-modernism has given new life to de Lubac’s vision, both by demanding a radical restructuring of human society and by challenging the Catholic Church to weigh again the controversial notion of “merely natural” humanity.

CHAPTER 7

DE LUBAC'S HEIRS: RADICAL ORTHODOXY

“Outside the teachings of religion there is no answer to the problems of life.”¹

Henri de Lubac would not have disagreed, and neither would de Lubac's most controversial and stimulating interpreters, the theologians of Radical Orthodoxy (RO). Radical Orthodoxy is chiefly associated with the Anglican theologians John Milbank (b. 1952), Catherine Pickstock (b. 1970), and Graham Ward (b. 1955).

Variouly termed a “movement,” “programme,” “project,” “tendency,” and “sensitivity” by its participants, RO is an informal but vigorous theological school with an ecumenical reach. It is mainly active in the English-speaking world, but has drawn wider interest, including the sympathetic interest of the Holy See.² Besides being ecumenical, RO is decidedly post-modern, being sceptical of Enlightenment

¹ Calvin Coolidge, Calvin Coolidge Says, *New York Herald Tribune*, 3 April 1931. Reprinted in *Calvin Coolidge Says*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (Plymouth, VT: Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation, 1972).

² See the message of Cardinal Poupard, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, read at the opening of Milbank's new Institute of Theology and Philosophy on 1 September 2005, “Opening of New Culture Centre,” <http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk> (accessed 1 February 2007). See also the remarks on that occasion by Bishop Donal Murray, at <http://www.limerickdiocese.org/Publications/Reflections/140.htm> (accessed 22 February 2007) and the address of Archbishop Javier Martínez (at the October 2004 “Russia Cristiana” conference in Bergamo, Italy), “Beyond Secular Reason: Some Contemporary Challenges for the Life and the Thought of the Church, as Seen from the West,” at <http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers.php> (accessed 21 February 2007). In contrast, see Francis Cardinal George, “Catholic Faith and the Secular Academy,” *Logos* 4 (2001), 73–90.

rationalism and liberalism, closely attuned to politics, and critical of the normal scholarly ideals of detachment and objectivity.

For John Milbank, the best-known theologian of the RO movement, Henri de Lubac's opposition to scholastic notions of pure nature is crucially important because it strikes at the heart of liberalism and secularism. Milbank considers de Lubac "one of the two truly great theologians of the twentieth century,"³ on the grounds that his thesis concerning grace and the idea of pure nature subverts all affirmations that would limit or domesticate the Gospel. Following de Lubac, RO attributes the decline of faith and the rise of secularist ideologies to what is considered the erroneous and early modern notion of *natura pura*. But RO goes beyond de Lubac. It combines his concerns for *ressourcement* and his antipathy toward the idea of pure nature with wide-ranging social and cultural critiques, and with the epistemological solvents of postmodernism.

Sharing the fate of Henri de Lubac, RO has attracted harsh criticism because of its critique of current theology and accepted theological standards. Like de Lubac, RO's agenda includes social reform. And like de Lubac, RO invokes Augustine and Aquinas to endorse its core ideas. The importance of this movement for our investigation lies both in its serving as an illustration of the implications of de Lubac's anthropology and in its appeal to a significant number of committed Christian thinkers. RO signals the need for a closer theological attention to a number of fundamental questions about Christian theology and Christian life.

³ Milbank, *Suspended Middle*, 104.

The present chapter is concerned with RO and its reading of de Lubac. From there, we can move on to our concluding chapter to summarise the findings and arguments of this dissertation and to propose a theological resolution to the questions raised in these pages.

Although Radical Orthodoxy is the shared work of many theologians, we shall focus our attention on this school's leading author, relying on his works, on certain published interviews, and on texts that he co-authored with Pickstock and Ward. I do not wish to imply that Milbank's every word is attributable to the Radical Orthodoxy movement as a whole. On the other hand, the entire project is so influenced by Milbank that his work can be considered its mainspring. I shall venture to refer to Milbank's theology as "Radical Orthodoxy," though RO is neither entirely nor only his work.

Our account of Radical Orthodoxy and its view of pure nature is presented under six headings:

1. The Aim and Method of Radical Orthodoxy
2. The Origins of Radical Orthodoxy
3. John Milbank on de Lubac and the "Integralist Revolution"
4. John Milbank and Thomas Aquinas
5. Radical Orthodoxy's Theology of Knowledge
6. An Evaluation of Radical Orthodoxy

1. The Aim and Method of Radical Orthodoxy

Radical Orthodoxy sets a very high goal for itself: it wants “to reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework.”⁴ We draw attention to three aspects of this aspiration.

First, Radical Orthodoxy is making a claim. The very activity of RO’s theological discourse is itself expected to be transformative. Although RO does not tell us exactly by what steps its all-embracing claim will make practical differences to culture and society, the movement’s theologians are confident in the power of artful discourse and performance. They identify these activities—and, above all, the discourse and performance of the sacramental liturgy—with *poiesis*, “an integral aspect of Christian practice and redemption. Its work is the ceaseless re-narrating and ‘explaining’ of human history under the sign of the cross.”⁵

Second, RO intends to reclaim something that has been lost. And what has been lost is the vision of all reality as an integral whole. Consequently, RO is largely occupied with telling the story of how Christendom suffered a late mediaeval “fall from intellectual grace.”⁶ We fell, as it were, when we began to think of human nature

⁴ John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, “Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.

⁵ John Milbank, “A Critique of the Theology of Right,” in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 32. This is a pervasive theme in RO, but see also John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 263–77, and “The Linguistic Turn as a Theological Turn,” in *The Word Made Strange*, 84–113, esp. 110–3.

⁶ Milbank, “Alternative Protestantism,” 26.

(and, indeed, of anything) without reference to grace: in short, Christendom's great intellectual sin has been to entertain the idea of pure nature. Because of this distortion, Christians came to consider some disciplines (such as philosophy and sociology) and some areas of life (such as politics and government) in purely natural terms, without reference to faith or to the supernatural. As a result, Christianity was doomed to withdraw more and more from its former position as an animating and pervasive influence, with a consequent loss of credibility at this critical stage in world-history. At this point, Radical Orthodoxy appeals explicitly on Henri de Lubac, even while augmenting his historical accounts and putting more blame on the papacy for the regrettable course of Christian theological history.⁷

Third, RO is reclaiming "the world," which is to say, everything—every activity, and every field of understanding. Indeed, RO does not even allow that there are many areas of life or fields of understanding: rather, all is one in Christ. RO's central tenet with regard to the world is that "once there was no 'secular',"⁸ no field of thought or action which was understood by Christians as being purely natural, or religiously neutral, or independent of theology. RO wishes to reclaim all these abandoned domains, and to restore them all to an integrally theological order.

⁷ On the blame due to the papacy, see John Milbank, "The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming (Aldershot, HAM, UK: Ashgate, 2000), 36, and John Milbank, "Intensities," *Modern Theology* 15/4 (1999): 445.

⁸ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 9.

In pursuit of this theologically ambitious goal of reclaiming the world, RO addresses an extremely wide range of topics. Again, however, we must observe that RO prefers to treat everything within a single vision, for all matters fall, at least in principle, within the ambit of theology. Consistent with this view, Milbank recognises only the “narrative knowledge”⁹ of Christian story-telling (“the ceaseless re-narrating and ‘explaining’ of human history under the sign of the cross”) as knowledge. He recognises knowledge of no other sort, insisting upon “knowledge by faith alone.”¹⁰ At the same time, Milbank denies that this “narrative knowledge” is objectively true or verifiable: this is why he describes his own theology as “an exercise in sceptical relativism.”¹¹

In any attempt to describe Radical Orthodoxy, the movement’s philosophical and political interests must not be overlooked in this description. Since RO understands all aspects of life as properly theological, all matters must be treated, to use scholastic language, as “integral parts” of a unitary theological vision of human existence. That is, they are not separable components, but essentially inter-related aspects of a whole. And the whole to which this politics, metaphysics, cultural criticism, and historical narrative belongs constitutes RO as theology. When critics of RO approach these aspects as separable components, any discussion with its proponents is curtailed: criticism of that kind effectively denies a major premise of

⁹ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 263.

¹⁰ John Milbank, “The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi,” in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 23.

¹¹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1.

RO, namely, that everything is theological. And because there is no non-theological or “neutral common topic,” RO eschews dialogue and considers it more honest to “replace dialogue with mutual suspicion.”¹² Milbank proposes that there ought still to be “conversation” between persons of different religions, but he does “not pretend that this proposal means anything other than continuing the work of conversion.”¹³

Finally, Radical Orthodoxy “mingles exegesis, cultural reflection and philosophy in a complex but coherently executed *collage*.”¹⁴ Any appreciation of John Milbank’s theology must take this into account. This “collage” aspect of Radical Orthodoxy is not explained by the obvious fact that a number of different authors have been responsible for the various studies which comprise the growing bibliography dealing with RO. Instead, this “collage” analogy refers to RO’s distinctive *modus operandi*. Taking a post-modern approach, RO always combines elements, which would usually be considered heterogeneous as pertaining to differing domains of knowledge and the respective concerns of different disciplines, into a discursive unity. The unity of vision is maintained by the theological perspective and artistry of each RO author. Beneath the heterogeneity of different textures, so to speak, of exegesis, politics, metaphysics, etc., RO envisions a necessary homogeneity. All of created reality depends on God, and so all created realities are rightly considered integral to the whole within the horizon of a single, theological

¹² John Milbank, “The End of Dialogue,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 190.

¹³ Milbank, “The End of Dialogue,” 190.

¹⁴ Milbank, Ward and Pickstock, “Suspending the Material,” in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 2.

understanding. Where other theologians would argue that such a panoptic vision or omniscience belongs to God alone, RO considers that faith has given believers a participation in God's knowledge, thus to regard all of reality in its comprehensive theological unity.

Reactions to RO have tended to be rather strong. As one of John Milbank's reviewers observes, "Radical Orthodoxy is somewhat like Marmite: you either love it or hate it."¹⁵ To the frustration of critics, RO is practically impervious to criticism. It acknowledges no neutral position or rational common ground from which its theology can be evaluated. Further, RO denies the very possibility of demonstrable and objective truth: it has no expectation that its claims can be verified or falsified. In addition, Radical Orthodoxy is ecumenical in its Christian membership, and that membership is mainly composed of academic theologians. Thus, RO operates without disciplined accountability to any particular Christian communion or hierarchy. Nonetheless, it shows a distinctive vitality within the Anglophone theological landscape. In some respects it follows de Lubac's approach to theology, "reading across the centuries" and rescuing ancient treasures to enrich Christianity today.

2. The Origins of Radical Orthodoxy

Before turning to Milbank's interpretation of Henri de Lubac, it is helpful to recall something of the genesis of Radical Orthodoxy in the world of Christian theology. It arose in response to circumstances both in the academic field of theology

¹⁵ Russell Re Manning, "A Shadow for Modernity," *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 September 2006, 26.

and in politics. Because RO is concerned *ex professo* with politics and with the purging of theological distortions, these circumstances of its origins offer some insight into its vision and method.

We note, first of all, that the political origins of Radical Orthodoxy are socialist and anti-Thatcherite.¹⁶ In the preface to the second edition of his *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank emphasizes that this book, the first in the Radical Orthodoxy canon,

was written in the middle of the Thatcherite era, out of the conviction that a theological vision alone could challenge the emerging hegemony of neo-liberalism. This did not mean, as some have suggested, that I sought to instrumentalize theology and religion. To the contrary, I sought to show why, for reasons quite exceeding the political, a Catholic Christian account of reality might be entertained as the most finally persuasive one. But then, for both theological and historico-philosophical reasons, I sought also to argue that only a new embracing of such an account could free us from our contemporary historical deadlock.¹⁷

¹⁶ On British politics under Thatcher see David Marquand, “Democracy in Britain,” *Political Quarterly* 71 (2000): 268–76. Marquand thinks some reforms were necessary but complains on p 272 that “Mrs Thatcher was to the court [i.e., Whig and Tory] tradition what Mr Toad was to motor cars. She drove it so hard that she smashed it up” by concentrating power at Westminster and weakening “intermediate institutions operating by non-market rules.” Critics on the Left and Right complained that the Thatcher government was destroying Britain, and many opposed her foreign policies as well. For more favourable reading of the Thatcher years, see *Margaret Thatcher’s Revolution: How it Happened and What it Meant*, ed. Subroto Roy and John Clarke (London: Continuum, 2005).

¹⁷ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, xi.

As Milbank goes on to say, the retirement of Margaret Thatcher from British politics has not meant the end of neo-liberalism but only a passing of the baton.¹⁸ Today the neo-liberal hegemony is, in Milbank's judgement, realised in the United States of America, which he says has launched "a new mode of political tyranny" since September 11, 2001.¹⁹ Elsewhere Milbank writes that America is at heart a "neo-imperialist" and "relatively genocidal" country, and that its recorded atrocities are "almost on a level with the Holocaust and the Gulags."²⁰

This extreme indignation, whether appropriate or not, marks Radical Orthodoxy as a child of Karl Marx. It was Marx, more than anyone, who made moral outrage a common starting point for reflections about the order of human society.²¹ Though the Anglican trio of Milbank, Pickstock, and Ward obviously do not subscribe to Marx's atheism, all three tell us that their political orientations are

¹⁸ Here "liberalism" (or "neo-liberalism") refers to a Whiggish preference for free market capitalism, national and individual independence, and equal legal and political opportunity for all citizens. Today, liberalism's opponents are not partisans of aristocracy or monarchism, but (usually) proponents of social and economic planning, of shared responsibility (whether among nations or among individuals), and of achieving more or less equal social and economic results for all. Confusingly, what was once called "liberalism" (free markets, etc.) is now called "conservatism" in the USA and UK—mostly because it wants to *conserve* social structures and mores. Even more confusingly, British and American *opponents* of this "conservative" agenda are called "liberals"—meaning "progressive" or "liberating."

¹⁹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, xi.

²⁰ John Milbank, "Sovereignty, Empire, Capital and Terror," 321. Milbank also likens US President George W. Bush's 20 September 2001 address to Congress to "Hitler's announcement of the Third Reich" (pp 309–10).

²¹ See Baum, "Impact of Marxist Ideas," 175–6.

“distinctly to the left.”²² Catherine Pickstock describes herself as the daughter of “Methodist-Socialist” upbringing. Graham Ward comments that “most of us are from some sort of Christian socialist background.”²³ And Milbank himself, before the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, appears to have been a committed student of orthodox Marxist political and economic theory.

Milbank’s earliest works show not only a serious commitment to Marxist theory but also a more conventional understanding of theology, compared to that which RO would later promote. This Marxist orientation appears, for example, in an article written in 1986. There, we find him lamenting the free market’s theft of “surplus value,” proclaiming the imminent death of “international Capitalism,” and assuming that everyone believes “automation is likely to result in massive structural unemployment on a world scale.”²⁴ He sees these negative influences at work even in what one might have supposed were innocent household appliances: “[A]utomation is also intruding . . . in the long-term replacement of domestic labour by household appliances Cleaning carpets, which was once an innocent extra-market activity is now for sale, in the form of a commodity, the vacuum-cleaner.”²⁵ In regard to

²² John Milbank, interview with Rachel Kohn, ABC Radio National (Australia), *The Spirit of Things* episode 9944, 7 November 1999, “Rejecting Modernity: Radical Orthodoxy” (transcript). Available online at <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/spiritofthings/stories/1999/65224.htm> (accessed 1 February 2007).

²³ Graham Ward, quoted in Jeff Sharlet, “Theologians Seek to Reclaim the World With God and Postmodernism,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 23 June 2000, p. A20.

²⁴ John Milbank, “The Body by Love Possessed: Christianity and Late Capitalism in Britain,” *Modern Theology* 3 (1986): 43.

²⁵ Milbank, “Body by Love Possessed,” 47.

theology, this same early work reveals that Milbank did not always describe theology's competence in the all-embracing manner typical of his later writings. For example, he writes that if "theology is to have the right to speak in the socio-economic domain then it has to earn such a right" in dialogue with economics.²⁶ Indeed, he refers to an "economic sphere" which is not theology's "specific concern."²⁷ Here he is employing a language of specific and independent disciplines in a way that RO would soon repudiate.

Around the time of the 1989 Revolutions, Milbank's vision of society became less Marxist in tone and more intensely and exclusively theological.²⁸ For instance, in *Theology and Social Theory* (1990), he has come to the conclusion that "it is impossible for anyone to accept *any longer* that socialism is simply the inevitable creed of all sane, rational human beings."²⁹ Instead, socialism is described as essentially and distinctively Christian. It is nothing less than the way in which "the peace of the Church [is going to be] mediated to and established in the entire human community."³⁰

There was a further development to occur in the political stance of RO. Over time, Milbank, in his account of Radical Orthodoxy, has shown an increasing receptivity to the idea of theocratic government. The context is this: by the

²⁶ Milbank, "Body by Love Possessed," 35.

²⁷ Milbank, "Body by Love Possessed," 39.

²⁸ On neo-Marxism in theology (with particular reference to RO) see Stephen H. Webb, "New Theology, Old Economics," *First Things* 172 (April 2007): 11–13.

²⁹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 208. My italics.

³⁰ Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 162.

mid-1990s, RO had rejected the assertion that its approach required a theocratic form of government and style of politics. At that time, Milbank argued that theocracy could not be a genuine theological option; and for this he gave two reasons. First, RO could not be theocratic because it is theology, and theology, uniquely and by definition, is “committed to non-mastery” and not to domination.³¹ Second, he argued that RO must be non-theocratic because it denies an essential premise of theocracy: “theocracy is predicated upon the very dualism [that RO] denies: for the sacred hierophants to be enthroned there must be a drained secular space for them to command. But for Radical Orthodoxy there is no such space.”³² By the year 2000, however, Milbank was prepared to acknowledge that an “anarchic theocracy”³³ or “democratized, anarchic theocracy”³⁴ really is the kind of social arrangement which Radical Orthodoxy favours and advocates. The desired polity would not be oppressive or alienating, though it would not be predicated upon a refusal to distinguish between religious and secular spheres of activity.

In the peaceful society that Radical Orthodoxy envisages, Christians would live in small, relatively self-sufficient communities. Government would be democratic inasmuch as a “shared overarching global polity would embody [an]

³¹ John Milbank, quoted in Sharlet, “Theologians Seek to Reclaim,” A20.

³² Milbank, “Programme of Radical Orthodoxy,” 36–7. See also Milbank, “Intensities,” 445–6.

³³ John Milbank, quoted in Sharlet, “Theologians Seek to Reclaim,” A20.

³⁴ John Milbank, quoted in Ben Suriano, “An Interview with John Milbank,” *The Other Journal* 5 (n.d.), <http://www.theotherjournal.com/article.php?id=76> (accessed 20 February 2007).

intimation [of eternal divine justice] in continuously revisable structures dedicated to promoting the common good insofar as this can be agreed upon.”³⁵ The state, however, would not disappear:

[because] the state has [to] set up a framework of laws [for the] regulation of things like profits, very strict regulations to ensure that people aren’t simply making money for the sake of making money[;] and to some extent [a state may be needed for] the organization of . . . education and . . . welfare.³⁶

By the standards of liberal democracy, such a state sounds extraordinarily oppressive, especially as Milbank proposes a “very strict” policing, not merely of economic activities, but even of human motives on the part of the government. The assumption throughout, however, is that RO’s peaceable “anarchic theocracy” would be supernaturally constituted: it would be Eucharistic in form, with a liturgical rhythm and a spiritual motivation pervading its system of peaceful sharing.³⁷ RO does not pretend to know how this Christian society can be created. Still, it hopes to contribute to the building of such a society, both by its criticism of liberal arrangements and by witnessing to its hope that human affairs can be radically reorganised into a newly just and peaceful order.³⁸ We may say that the movement

³⁵ Milbank, “Sovereignty, Empire, Capital, and Terror,” 323.

³⁶ John Milbank, in Suriano, “An Interview with John Milbank.”

³⁷ See Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 138–211, especially 180–6. RO’s Eucharistic theology has been articulated mainly by Catherine Pickstock; see especially her *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Routledge, 1997).

³⁸ On the other hand, these conversations could be a naïve distraction from constructive efforts to improve the society that already exists. See Mary Doak, “The Politics of Radical Orthodoxy: A Catholic Critique,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007), 368–93; and Nichols, “Non Tali Auxilio,” 326–32.

belongs, then, to the tradition of Christian socialism that has flourished in Anglo-Catholic circles since the mid-1800s.³⁹ However, like some of these earlier movements, Radical Orthodoxy has also developed not only in response to economic and political liberalism, but to theological liberalism as well. This is the second feature we must note in reference to the context of RO.

Especially in the Anglican world, the name *liberal theology* has meant different things at different times. In the 1800s, “liberalism” could refer to “a form of solipsism, a conviction that truth, especially in matters of religion, is ultimately a private affair.”⁴⁰ More recent theological liberalism may be defined as a readiness to “[shape] Christian practices and teachings . . . on the basis of . . . modern philosophies, cultures, and social practices.”⁴¹ By this criterion, however, almost anything adapted to the present can be called *liberalism*, and what one person considers prudent adaptation, another may view as wanton infidelity.

For Radical Orthodoxy, it is not adaptation *per se* which is objectionable. For example, John Milbank believes that “[t]here need be no problem whatsoever with the idea that homosexual practice is part of the richness of God’s Creation (nor with

³⁹ See Edward R. Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). On this tradition’s development in the twentieth century, see Jay P. Corrin, *Catholic Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democracy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 82–187, and Dennis Hardy, *Utopian England: Community Experiments, 1900–1945* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁴⁰ Terrence Merrigan, “Newman and Theological Liberalism,” *Theological Studies* 66 (2005), 608.

⁴¹ James J. Buckley, “Revisionists and Liberals,” in *The Modern Theologians*, 3rd ed., ed. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 213. See also Peter Sedgwick, “Anglican Theology,” in *Modern Theologians*, 3rd ed., 179–93.

co-habiting gay clergy).⁴² Indeed, he favours instituting a new Christian sacrament to hallow same-sex unions.⁴³ For her part, Catherine Pickstock is prepared to allow the ordination of women to the priesthood.⁴⁴ Clearly, such views are not those of intransigent traditionalists. Similarly, RO does not object to the theological use of modern scholarly disciplines *per se*—for example, RO can call on modern historical studies, non-Christian philosophy, textual criticism, and socialist economic theory. Its conceptual range is not limited to unambiguously Christian sources. Indeed, Radical Orthodoxy obliges itself to abjure doctrinal change and the use of “non-theological” learning only when these threaten theology’s hegemony, or tempt theology to deny its own commanding relevance to all of human life and knowledge. As long as the all-seeing perspective of theology is maintained, new conceptions of ecclesiastical democracy, anarchism, and homosexual unions can find a place within the ambit RO. What matters is that there be “no entirely autonomous realms of secular discourse (even where these do not directly concern God or redemption).⁴⁵ Only through theological thinking are the principles governing all thought and practice to be found.

Radical Orthodoxy, then, is shaped by its reaction to a practice which it sees as essentially modern and, indeed, heretical: that is, treating philosophy, politics,

⁴² Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 207–8.

⁴³ See John Milbank, PBS Radio (USA), *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* 707, 17 October 2003, “Commentary: The Anglican Communion’s Argument Over Homosexuality” (transcript), online at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week707/p-commentary.html> (accessed 1 February 2007).

⁴⁴ See Catherine Pickstock, interviewed by Stratford Caldecott, http://www.catholicculture.org/docs/doc_view.cfm?recnum-4174 (accessed 17 March 2007).

⁴⁵ Milbank, “The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy,” 34.

science, and culture as non-theological, “autonomous and immanent secular realms.”⁴⁶ RO views any self-limiting theology—all liberal theology—as colluding in its own marginalisation. Radical Orthodoxy intends to reverse this marginalisation by proclaiming theology’s true scope, and by insisting on theology’s relevance in determining the validity of all modes of human discourse. The establishment of the commanding position of theology over all other modes of knowledge, and in regard to all other scholarly and scientific discourse, will thus be a step toward the building of a new Christian modernity. The hope of RO is that this new modernity will be one in which divine wisdom and peace reign over all.

3. John Milbank on de Lubac and the “Integralist Revolution”

Henri de Lubac has a twofold importance in John Milbank’s theology. First, de Lubac offers an account of how modern theology went astray; and, second, he suggests a corrective course through certain orientations in the theologies of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Since the most eminent RO theologians are Anglicans, they naturally do not subscribe to every detail of de Lubac’s Roman Catholic thought. Since they are post-modernists, these authors do not share de Lubac’s belief that his historical research disclosed any objective truth—for, as we have already noted, RO holds for “narrative knowledge,”⁴⁷ and, eschewing both

⁴⁶ See John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 19.

⁴⁷ See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 263.

objectivity and subjectivity, insists that no discourse “tells us what reality is like. [Rather,] objects and subjects are [only] as they are narrated in a story.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, RO finds the French Jesuit’s work attractive and convincing, and an extremely valuable resource for the kind of theology they wish to develop.

In *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank identifies de Lubac as one of the principal architects of the “integralist revolution” allegedly embraced by Vatican II.⁴⁹ This revolution consists in the espousal of “the new theology of grace” which recognised that “in concrete, historical humanity there is no such thing as a state of ‘pure nature’. [Instead] every person has always already been worked upon by divine grace, with the consequence that one cannot analytically separate ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ contributions to this integral unity.”⁵⁰ According to Milbank, the council was impeded from teaching this new doctrine properly by the unhappy necessity of distancing itself from earlier integrism. The error Vatican II had to avoid was the viewpoint that “had insisted upon a clerical and hierarchic dominance over all

⁴⁸ John Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty-Two Responses to Unasked Questions,” in *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 265. Originally published in *Modern Theology* 7 (1991): 225–37.

⁴⁹ See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*. As a general caution see John F. Kobler, “Were Theologians the Engineers of Vatican II?” (*Gregorianum* 70 [1989]), 233–50. Milbank’s claim of an “integralist revolution” at Vatican II is not uncontroversial; a closer study would have to weigh the same council’s references to the autonomy of the temporal order. See *Apostolicam actuositatem* n. 7 (“non privat ordinem temporalem sua autonomia”) and *Gaudium et spes* n. 36 (“De iusta rerum terrenarum autonomia”). See also Neil J. Ormerod, “Mission and Ministry in the Wake of Vatican II,” *Australian E-Journal of Theology* 1 (2003), see <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal> (accessed 1 February 2008).

⁵⁰ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 206.

the affairs of secular life” and was “founded upon a ‘totalizing’ theology which presents a complete system whose details cannot be questioned without compromising the whole.”⁵¹ After the council, however, the new theology of grace was not prevented from unfolding itself more fully. Among the first to seize upon the new conciliar insights were Latin America’s liberation theologians—chiefly Gustavo Gutiérrez, Juan Luis Segundo, and Clodovis Boff.

Milbank credits liberation theology and “the experience of lay apostleship” in the *comunidades de base* with showing how, since “the whole concrete life of humanity is always imbued with grace,” it is “not possible to separate political and social concerns from the ‘spiritual’ concerns of salvation.” However, he faults these innovators, and Karl Rahner with them, for developing “a mediating theology, a universal humanism, a *rapprochement* with the Enlightenment and an autonomous secular order.”⁵²

Liberation theology’s *rapprochement* with the heresy of secularism is evident when theologians take their founding principles or too much of their orientation from Marxism, or from other secular social sciences. In so doing, they omit the supernatural and inevitably go astray in their visions of social organisation. What they thereby overlook, according to RO, is the fact that that there can be no purely natural, secular, or autonomous sphere of thought or action. Unless the political reality is conceived in theological terms, it will be conceived unworthily. Liberation theologians have mistakenly supposed that they could learn from a science which

⁵¹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 206–7.

⁵² Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 207.

does not take humanity's supernatural *telos* into explicit account. They have built on sand, that is, "upon pre-theological sociology or Marxist social theory,"⁵³ with ultimately unsatisfying results. In reaching these conclusions, Milbank is distressed not only by the failures of liberation theologians, but also by the realisation that some of his views "coincide with those of reactionaries in the Vatican."⁵⁴

In the perspective of Radical Orthodoxy, the only way to appropriate Vatican II's new theology of grace is by means of a radically Christian politics. Otherwise, no adequate answer to any social question will be found. Liberation theologians, along with Karl Rahner, have constructed their respective theologies on the mistaken supposition that there is "something universal in each individual," such as "his psychology, or rather the epistemic structure of his knowing."⁵⁵ In contrast, from Henri de Lubac theology, every science learns to build on the rock of grace, because "one can only specify human nature with reference to its supernatural end."⁵⁶

Much as RO owes to de Lubac, he does not escape from Milbank's scrutiny unscathed. Milbank faults de Lubac for "capitulation" to the papacy, for developing an ecclesiology that is tinged with dualism, and for not being a feminist.⁵⁷ Striking

⁵³ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 208.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 221.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Milbank writes that the charge of dualism refers to de Lubac's (and Balthasar's) habit of "distinguishing between a lay, receptive, mystical, cultural 'Marian' aspect [of the church] and a more legal, regulative, intellectual, abstract 'Petrine' aspect." For all three complaints, see Milbank, *Suspended Middle*, 42–7, 104–8.

more deeply, Milbank complains that de Lubac holds back when faced with the political implications of his denial of pure nature. In this regard, Milbank points out that, although de Lubac's *Catholicisme* strongly affirms "the social and historical character of salvation," it refuses to address "the political, [trying instead to] insulate the Church from wider social processes."⁵⁸ Milbank considers that de Lubac's persistent affirmation of the traditional Roman Catholic distinction between the Church and the *saeculum* effectively "rediscovers the evasive spark of purely psychic [i.e., purely natural] life" and so "actually implies—like Weberian sociology—that there *is* a realm which is merely 'social' [or secular] and which the individual [here, the Christian] might stand outside."⁵⁹

Milbank faults de Lubac further, and von Balthasar along with him, for failing to face up to the radical demands of genuine "Christian aversion to the existing secular order." Both fall short in their understanding of "the humanly constructed character of cultural reality."⁶⁰ In other words, the French Jesuit remains unwisely wedded to existing social structures—"the existing secular order"—and to naïve ideals of objectivity.

As far as Milbank is concerned, these shortcomings undermine de Lubac's otherwise valuable repudiation of pure nature. Even to those who are not post-modern radicals, de Lubac's rejection of the notion of pure nature must seem at variance with his conviction that the Church ought to stand aloof from politics. If human beings can

⁵⁸ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 228.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Italics in original.

⁶⁰ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 209.

be understood only as creatures ordained to a supernatural end, and if salvation is inherently social, then surely it is remiss of Christians to leave politics, or allow any political influence, to those lacking faith. Apart from theology, politics has no way to consider humanity's true good, the supernatural *telos* to which all are destined.

4. John Milbank and Thomas Aquinas

As we have already seen, Radical Orthodoxy adopts and builds upon Henri de Lubac's account of Thomism, crediting *Surnaturel* with the exposure of *natura pura* as a distortion in Catholic theology.⁶¹ Milbank has not yet written in any detailed way on the history of Thomism, nor has he been engaged in a close reading of Thomistic texts. Nevertheless, St Thomas is often invoked by RO. Milbank himself, and in collaboration with Catherine Pickstock, has presented a stimulating interpretation of Aquinas's teaching on the relationship between theology and philosophy, and between faith and reason.

The word "interpretation" must be emphasised and explained when it comes to Milbank's treatment of Aquinas. As one who rejects "accepted secular standards of scientific truth or normative rationality"⁶² and denies that truth is a correspondence between the intellect and extra-mental reality,⁶³ Milbank insists that "the point [of theology] is not to represent . . . externality, but just to join in its occurrence; not to

⁶¹ This is not to say that Milbank is unaware that the "integralist revolution" has enemies. See his remarks on "liberals," "conservatives," "arch-conservatives" and "reactionaries" in *Suspended Middle*, 26–7, n. 10.

⁶² Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism," 265.

⁶³ Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism," 275.

know, but to intervene, originate.”⁶⁴ Accordingly, his recourse to Aquinas is not a work of exegesis, but a project of creative expression: “exegesis is easy; it is interpretation that is difficult, and Aquinas, more than most thinkers, requires interpretation.”⁶⁵ This explains why Milbank holds that, even if the actual text of St Thomas “appear[s] incontrovertibly to refute my reading,”⁶⁶ that reading itself should not be subjected to conventional scholarly critique. Milbank’s theology, we must recall, is *poiesis*, which is to say that it is an artistic “making” or “begetting”—it is neither *praxis* (practical action) nor *theoria* (contemplative knowledge)⁶⁷—and has its own validity as an act that constitutes or “originates” reality.⁶⁸ “Objects and subjects are, as they are narrated in a story,”⁶⁹ and so, as far as its narrators are concerned, Radical Orthodoxy remains impervious to “objective” or factual (non-narrative) critique.

This ostensibly post-modern approach to sources has predictably occasioned intense criticism. Informed scholars have described Radical Orthodoxy’s interpretations as “gnostic idealism,” “blithely imprecise, ideologically driven

⁶⁴ Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,” 266.

⁶⁵ Milbank, “Intensities,” 447.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ For the classical threefold division of *praxis*, *poiesis*, and *theoria*, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IV.3–4 (1139b14–1140a24). Since Milbank denies that *theoria* is possible (see Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,” 266), he is left with the “narrative knowledge” of story-telling (*poiesis*) and with *praxis*.

⁶⁸ See Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,” 266.

⁶⁹ Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,” 265.

historical revisionism,” “free-floating, self-perpetuating insularity,”⁷⁰ “opaque [sentences] drifting [in] conceptual murkiness,”⁷¹ “sophistical legerdemain,”⁷² “blatant misreading . . . that ignores the ordinary canons of scholarly enquiry,”⁷³ and “[not] just wrong, [but] laughable, though not amusing.”⁷⁴ Milbank’s vague and sometimes even inaccurate footnotes do not help his cause.⁷⁵

In Milbank’s defence, one can say only that RO had disclaimed the canons of scholarly objectivity and verifiable accuracy right from the beginning. Radical Orthodoxy sets itself to challenge all settled theological opinion, and pretends no

⁷⁰ Paul D. Janz, “Radical Orthodoxy and the New Culture of Obscurantism,” *Modern Theology* 20 (2004): 378, 386.

⁷¹ Thomas Weinandy, review of *Truth in Aquinas* by John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *The Expository Times* 113 (2001–02), 102.

⁷² Anthony Kenny, “Aquinas and the Appearances of Bread,” review of *Characters in Search of Their Author* by Ralph McInerny and of *Truth in Aquinas* by John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Times Literary Supplement* (5 October 2001), 14.

⁷³ John Marenbon, “Aquinas, Radical Orthodoxy and the Importance of Truth,” in *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric and Truth*, ed. Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley (Aldershot, HAM, UK: Ashgate: 2005), 49.

⁷⁴ Bruce D. Marshall, review of *Truth in Aquinas* by John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Thomist* 66 (2002): 634.

⁷⁵ See Neil J. Ormerod, “It is Easy to See: The Footnotes of John Milbank,” *Philosophy & Theology* 11 (1999): 257–64. After checking Milbank’s footnotes in an article about Lonergan, Ormerod writes: “I wonder now what I would have found if I explored [a doubtful Milbank footnote in another work]. I wonder too about the multitude of assertions about the work of others which regularly fly at the reader of Milbank’s work. Would I find in them the same unsubstantiated assertions I found in his treatment of Lonergan? The mass of such assertions and the amount of work needed even to investigate the assertions about Lonergan make me shudder But I think that the little investigation [I have] carried out . . . is enough to make potential readers wary of John Milbank’s footnotes, for [what Milbank says is] ‘easy to see’ may mean hours of work, and at least in Milbank’s case, may not even prove correct.”

dialogical relationship with other views or types of rationality. When considering Milbank's interpretation of St Thomas, the best approach, one might suggest, is to recognise it as something akin to an interpretive dance. It displays an inherently subjective approach, and, in effect, purports to be nothing else. Scholarship of an objective kind must be sought elsewhere.

Milbank's most extensive work on St Thomas is *Truth in Aquinas* (co-authored with Catherine Pickstock). Its main concern is epistemology—or, as Milbank prefers (since he rejects *episteme*), Radical Orthodoxy's ontology or theology of knowledge. *Truth in Aquinas* is best read in conjunction with Milbank's other writings on knowledge, such as "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,"⁷⁶ "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,"⁷⁷ "Knowledge: The Theoretical Critique of Philosophy by Hamann and Jacobi,"⁷⁸ and "Intensities."⁷⁹

Truth in Aquinas begins by stating a problem: the critiques of contemporary philosophy have discredited epistemological realism—that is, the theory (in whatever

⁷⁶ John Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty-two Responses to Unasked Questions," *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 265–78. Originally published in *Modern Theology* 7 (1991): 225–37.

⁷⁷ John Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," in *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 36–52. Originally published in *New Blackfriars* 76 (1995): 325–42.

⁷⁸ John Milbank, "Knowledge: The Theoretical Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 21–37.

⁷⁹ John Milbank, "Intensities," *Modern Theology* 15 (1999), 445–97. Subsequently published as chapter 2, "Truth and Vision," in John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 19–59.

form) that defines *truth* as the adequation or correspondence of one's intellect to extra-mental reality. If epistemological realism is discredited, it might seem that nihilism is our only alternative. However, Milbank and Pickstock propose a third possibility. They begin by correctly acknowledging that Aquinas himself teaches just the sort of correspondence theory of truth which has, in post-modern eyes, become implausible.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, they draw on Thomas, weaving elements of his thought together with disparate themes to create a new performance-theology (*poiesis*) of truth. To signal the creative novelty of their interpretation, we might suitably call it their "Rhapsody on a Theme in Aquinas." In the following section, we offer a brief summary of their work.

5. Radical Orthodoxy's Theology of Knowledge

In the post-modern world, from the perspective of Radical Orthodoxy, "there are infinitely many possible versions of truth, inseparable from particular narratives."⁸¹ Every narrative, as it is told and retold over time, constitutes a community of those who share it. Now, unlike other religions, Christianity is a community that is specially privileged—even if that claim can neither be verified nor disproven objectively. In this privileged community, namely the Church, Christians are united in recounting the divine narrative, which is God's version of truth. This

⁸⁰ Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 1: "This might appear to be an inquiry doomed from the outset, since Aquinas is himself a proponent of just such a theory." (This chapter is by Pickstock.)

⁸¹ Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism," 265.

narrative is not merely a matter of words and propositions, for it derives from Truth in person, present and active as the eternal Logos.

Admittedly, all the versions of truth are told as if they were about reality—as if communicating what reality truly is. In the distinctive Christian narrative, it transpires that what truly is, is God—the one whose very name is “I am” (Exod 3:14). The Christian narrative expands to include the divine creation of the universe *ex nihilo*, revealing that everything that is exists by participation in the divine Being. The minds of created knowers are illuminated by the divine knower,⁸² who, in turn, knows because there is nothing that is not participant in the divine being.⁸³ It follows, therefore, that only God is in a position to tell the true story; and this He does in a single Word—the Word incarnate whom the Spirit makes ever present and active.

By connecting its understanding of narrative with reflection on the Incarnate Word, Radical Orthodoxy concludes that the Christian community is not only uniquely equipped to speak of God, but also uniquely privileged in its comprehension of all created being, which comes from God and is divinely destined to supernatural fulfilment. There is no other narrative that claims to be the narrative of the Word Incarnate. (The case of Islam, with its faith in the “Word made text” in the form of the Koran, has not been pursued by Radical Orthodoxy to date.) Christianity, therefore, is not only uniquely true but also uniquely plausible. It alone, amongst all possible narratives, explains why its faith is not the outcome of just another story. Its narrative is, in origin and content, divine. Therefore, only the Christian narrative escapes the

⁸² See Milbank, “Intensities,” 448–51.

⁸³ See Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 14.

criticism levelled at all human discourses. Unlike other narratives, the Christian story is neither a human fabrication nor a pretendedly objective (epistemologically realist) account.

Given such an exalted Christian claim, namely, that Christian discourse alone enacts and represents the divine Word, how are this discourse's truth claims to be recognised as true in the Christian community of faith? The idea of objective verification or falsification has, in RO's judgement, been discredited. The answer is that Christianity "out-narrates" any rival discourse.⁸⁴ This is to imply that the Christian story, enacted in the community of faith, has a beauty and luminosity which other discourses lack. As a result, it exerts an aesthetic appeal on those touched by it. Once the attractiveness of the divine beauty is experienced, no other arguments or evidence need be considered. Rather, the very suggestion that such other forms of evidence could be considered is a relic of epistemological naïveté. The Christian story "claims no foundation for the truth of Christianity beyond the compelling vision of the story and of the vision it sustains."⁸⁵

Unfortunately, the Church's narrative *poiesis* has long been impaired by theological distortions. The first distortion is the mistaken belief that created things can be considered as independent beings, without reference to their constant participation in God's being. And the second, which compounds the first, is the belief

⁸⁴ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 230. Quoted in Steven Shakespeare, *Radical Orthodoxy: A Critical Introduction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007), 57.

⁸⁵ Shakespeare, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 58.

that creatures can be understood by means of universal and objective reason—that is, by the purely natural capacity of human beings, rather than through supernatural faith. Radical Orthodoxy is, therefore, involved in exposing these two distortions, for the sake of retelling the Christian narrative in its truest sense. There is, however, a third distortion which Milbank and Pickstock propose, most controversially, to expose. This is the distortion caused by the apparent clarity of Thomas’s own exposition: they allege that he is “only *superficially* . . . clear.”⁸⁶

Milbank compares his reading of Thomas’s theory of knowledge to the solving of a mystery. Like Sherlock Holmes, we can find certain tiny but telltale clues which enable us to rule out all the prosaically obvious (but false) solutions to the mystery. The correct solution, however apparently unlikely, is reached by the process of elimination. This “must be accepted in all its implausibility, when other solutions have been shown to be simply impossible.”⁸⁷

By diligent sleuthing, Milbank has discovered what he terms the “arcanum of [Thomas’s] teaching” about human knowledge. This secret teaching, unsuspected by Thomists generally, is that there is really no purely natural intellectual power or

⁸⁶ Milbank, “Intensities,” 447. “Only *superficially* is he clear, but on analysis one discovers that he does not, after all, offer us a decently-confined Anglo-Saxon lucidity, but rather the intense light of Naples and Paris which is ultimately invisible in its very radiance—rendering the wisest of us, for Aquinas after Aristotle, like owls blinking in the noonday.” Italics in original. In *Truth in Aquinas*, this passage appears on p. 20, but the word “superficially” is not italicised.

⁸⁷ Milbank, “Intensities,” 447.

autonomous human reason. This secret rules out the possibility of a sound philosophy independent of *sacra doctrina*.⁸⁸ The clues leading to this solution are not specified.

What Milbank and Pickstock propose is that, despite appearances, Thomas is teaching an epistemology which surpasses even Augustine and pseudo-Dionysius in its illuminism. The two RO theologians interpret Thomas's metaphysics and psychology as meaning that, when knowing created realities, the object of the intellect is not the nature of the reality concerned, but rather that reality's participation in the divine Being. Thus, what the intellect knows is not the nature of some created reality, but a ray (as it were) of the divine light. Catherine Pickstock explains:

[O]ne asks, what is it that we are knowing when we discern the treeness of a tree? For to know such a thing is not to know an isolatable fact or proposition; it seems more to be the knowing of a kind of manner or operation of life. But in knowing the treeness of a tree, we are knowing a great deal more besides. Since the tree only transmits treeness—indeed, only exists at all—as imitating the divine, what we receive in truth is a participation in the divine.⁸⁹

According to *Truth in Aquinas*, then, it is transmitted “treeness,” not the quiddity of the tree itself, which is received and known to the human intellect. We never grasp “phenomena as they are in themselves.”⁹⁰ Since there are no trees which are not

⁸⁸ Milbank, “Intensities,” 447. This explains why the article is called “Intensities;” Milbank is saying reason and faith are two intensities of a single divine light, two “phases in a single extension” (p. 448).

⁸⁹ Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 11–12. This passage is excerpted from the first chapter of *Truth in Aquinas*, which was originally Catherine Pickstock, “Imitating God: The Truth of Things According to Thomas Aquinas,” *New Blackfriars* 81 (2000): 308–26.

⁹⁰ Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 18.

emanations of divine Being, or not illumined by the divine radiance, we know phenomena only “insofar as they imitate God.”⁹¹

Perhaps the most arresting aspect of RO’s reading of Aquinas is its appeal to his Eucharistic theology as the ultimate secure ground for human knowing.⁹² In the quest for the Holy Grail of epistemological certainty, the RO theologians conclude that it is above all in the Mass that the divine Word is enacted and uttered. Not only does the Eucharist constitute the Church, but it also divinely reveals the radical meaning of substance, knowing, and truth. The words of consecration, “This is my body” and “This is my blood,” are not only the high point of the liturgy, but also are the high point of all Christian discourse, shedding a divine light on all reality. The Eucharistic formula is the ultimate divine response to the human desire to know. “Outside the Eucharist, [writes Pickstock,] it is true, as postmodern theory holds, that there is no stable signification, no anchoring reference, no fixable meaning, and so no ‘truth’.”⁹³ The words of consecration, or better, the Eucharist itself, that is, the presence of Christ in the sacrament, in the liturgical rite, and in the Church, ultimately saves and guarantees the validity of all knowledge and language, and the reality of the whole cosmos. Through the divine Word, thus liturgically enacted, we learn what makes things what they are. Indeed, only by our knowledge of that Word can we have any knowledge of the realities that make up our world.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² On this point see also Pickstock, *After Writing*, especially 261ff.

⁹³ Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 109. (This chapter is by Pickstock.)

Though this is a deeply contemplative reflection on the place of the Eucharist in Christian experience, its relationship to Thomas's teaching on knowledge is by no means clear. To ground all possibilities in the doctrine of transubstantiation may invite, not to reverence, but to ridicule of the Christian story. To characterise all knowledge as radically dependent on our hearing the divine Word (or seeing the divine light) is dangerous—if that is not, in fact, what the Gospel tells us. As Anthony Kenny writes,

[Milbank's and Pickstock's] radically orthodox proposal is that those of us who have been cast down by the death of realism should be reassured by the thought that all appearances may be held in existence in a similar manner [i.e., a manner similar to transubstantiation]. This suggests that transubstantiation may not be an exceptional, but a universal phenomenon. To me it seems to increase, rather than diminish, any temptation to scepticism to be told that the socks I am wearing may, for all I know, be Queen Victoria transubstantiated.⁹⁴

Kenny goes on say that he himself has never been “cast down into the abyss of postmodernism,” so that it may be “churlish . . . to sniff at any crumb of comfort that may be offered to those who have suffered that misfortune.” Radical Orthodoxy's interpretation of Thomas bears little objective resemblance to what Thomas wrote, but perhaps this is appropriate since this creative post-modern retelling has pressed Thomas into the service of new concerns.

⁹⁴ Kenny, “Aquinas and the appearances,” 14.

6. An Evaluation of Radical Orthodoxy

Like Henri de Lubac before him, John Milbank finds in the idea of pure nature a corruption of Christian teaching. Also like de Lubac, he proposes an historical explanation of how this corruption began and grew. But unlike de Lubac, Milbank rejects the ideas of objective knowledge, detached reasoning, and universally accessible evidence. Though he refers to historical and textual evidence, such sources are invoked mainly for their value as “actors” in the drama of the RO story. That story appeals to a truth that lies, not in the correspondence of thought to reality, but in the doctrine of the incarnation of the eternal Word in a human discourse. To this degree, the theology of Radical Orthodoxy can admit no dialectic in relation to other approaches, nor invite dialogue with other scholarly perspectives or points of view. It is aware of itself as a kind of narrative enclave; and, since it eschews conventional academic and objective truth-claims, it properly regards itself as a programme of artful *poiesis*. This is to say, RO is a “making” or “fiction.”⁹⁵ John Milbank even goes so far as to write of theology’s need to be “reconfigur[ed] . . . in terms of fairy-tale

⁹⁵ Milbank avers that all human discourses are fictions, inasmuch as all are the fruit of human *poiesis*. In this context, “fiction” does not mean a dissimulation, but simply what is produced by “the action of fashioning or imitating” See the *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “fiction,” and John Milbank, “Fictioning Things: Gift and Narrative,” http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank_FictioningThings.pdf (accessed 15 June 2008).

[or] inner-tribal local folktale.”⁹⁶ For RO, the glad confession of tribal limitation is ultimately liberating, for, despite the pretences of “universal reason,”

we *all* dwell in enclaves, within founding dishonesties and deprivations which no later virtue can truly undo. Christ suffers this enclosure and so loves it and discloses it for us and to us. The enclave is henceforwards our hospital and asylum. Here—nowhere yet—is the Church. Everywhere.⁹⁷

Given that Radical Orthodoxy denies the possibility of objective truth, then, how is its appeal either explicable or sustainable as a communicable body of Christian thought? The “collage” of positions RO presents undoubtedly has its moments of insight and of witness to the aesthetic impact of Christian revelation. As a “fiction,” a work of *poiesis*, RO unfolds in defiance of the limiting visions of scientific modernity, and suggests something of a new catholicity of vision for Christian thought and experience. It exhibits a stimulating ability to make connection between the often self-enclosed worlds of philosophy, theology, literature, history, and social science. While one may well argue about the accuracy of such connections, theology may profit from the challenge to centre its thought more clearly and confidently in Christ, and in his presence in Word and Sacrament. To this degree, RO summons theology to turn from the fragmentation of modernity and to overcome

⁹⁷ John Milbank, “Enclaves, or Where is the Church?,” *New Blackfriars* 73 (1992): 342.

doubt and scepticism with the confidence that faith is truly any experience of divine revelation—and of grace for the world. Though the torrent of RO's erudition and rhetoric may be overwhelming, its core message is simple: the horizon of Christian theology can confidently include everything in its purview, for everything is numinous in a world made for the peace of God in Christ.

This integralist vision must, no doubt, be bracing and sustaining for many in their various encounters with the unprecedented pluralism, confusion, and disillusionment of our age. In this regard, RO vigorously sets itself to reclaim a comprehensive, Christ-centred vision. But such a vision may also invite self-deception. Its ostensible discrediting of correspondence theories of truth is, I would suggest, no more than apparent. Our personal vision may be tested against publicly known realities, against the truth not only of Scripture, ecclesial authority, and tradition, but also of wisdom and learning wherever these are to be found. Such an openness to truth cannot consist in collapsing everything into the doctrine of the incarnation, or into Christ's Eucharistic presence. If it is to serve the world, and even if it is to save the world, doctrine must live with the distinctions between grace and nature, even if it refines them in new ways. If "everything is grace," as RO would understand it, then Christianity departs for an enclave which must become ever more remote. If, on the other hand, "not everything is grace," if there is room for the notion of pure nature, then there are vast possibilities for communication between Church and world, and between faith and all human disciplines—to the benefit of all concerned. Methodological arrogance is hardly a necessary quality of a genuinely

incarnational theology. So intense is the integralist vision of RO that, in the words of Lawrence Hemming, “painstaking study, a knowledge of sources, and a comportment of humility before . . . greater understanding” are neglected.⁹⁸

It may be that RO can itself be more radically converted to that “wisdom from above” which “is first of all pure; then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity” (Jas 3:17). Radical Orthodoxy’s judgements are harsh—against non-socialist societies, liberal governments, and, ultimately, against the real or imagined sins of other people, including those theologians who do not share RO’s vision. In this regard, Radical Orthodoxy is neither pacific nor reconciliatory. Moreover, RO’s sense of its own mission may be too grand. After all, Milbank himself admits, “the theologian feels almost that the entire ecclesial task falls on his own head . . . , as if it is the theologian alone . . . who must perform this task of redeeming estrangement; the theologian alone who must perpetuate the original making strange which was the divine assumption of human flesh”⁹⁹ In the teeming worlds of scholarship and science, to say nothing of the diversity of Christian witness, we must wonder whether it is good for the theologian to feel so alone, and for theology to be so isolated. If a Christian theologian “feels almost” that he bears the whole ecclesial task, that he must

⁹⁸ Laurence Paul Hemming, “*Quod Impossibile Est! Aquinas and Radical Orthodoxy*” in *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry* (Aldershot, HAM, UK: Ashgate, 2000), 78. Hemming is talking about RO’s approach to Aquinas, but the critique applies to RO’s reading of other authorities as well.

⁹⁹ Milbank, *Word Made Strange*, 1.

redeem the world, and perpetuate the presence of the Word made flesh, both theology and the theologian are living in unhealthy solitude.

Radical Orthodoxy represents the latest flowering of Henri de Lubac's thesis on the supernatural. It is the task of our remaining pages to suggest a resolution to the questions opened by de Lubac and to indicate the importance of this matter in the life of the Church.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TOWARD A RESOLUTION

The two major questions that have emerged in the course of this investigation of the theological notion of pure nature are, first, What is the provenance of the idea of pure nature?; and, second, To what extent may the idea of pure nature be a well-founded and a productive notion in theological discourse? Given that Catholic theology can never be removed from the larger tradition, not only of theology, but also of Church life and teaching, the answer to the properly theological, second question will depend to no small extent on the answer we can give to the question of provenance.

1. Summary of Findings

Chapter one, “Pure Nature and the Challenge of Integralism,” introduced our topic, its importance, and the method we proposed for examining it. We first focused our attention on the notion of pure nature itself, that is, on the idea of man *in solis naturalibus constitutus*. Pure nature thus refers to what defines us as human. The expression *natura pura* has been customary in modern scholasticism, and its popularisation has been largely attributed to Cajetan. Henri de Lubac contends that this concept of pure nature is not grounded in the theology of St Thomas Aquinas, and that it is utterly alien to the mind of St Augustine. In de Lubac’s judgement, the notion of pure nature was, in fact, an innovation of the 16th century. De Lubac blames this

innovation for modern Europe's atheistic humanism, which he deplors. In making this case, de Lubac emerges as an advocate of what is now coming to be called "integralism." In our theological context, this word denotes a Christian view of society, conceived as a fundamentally unified order of all things under God in Christ. Religion, government, education, art, labour, and all other aspects of society are deliberately inter-related and integrated within a single practical order and conceptual horizon. This integralist order is meant to be "total," but not totalitarian. In this context, we drew attention to the papal teaching on the character of Catholic theology. Where de Lubac favoured patristic and historical theology over scholasticism, Pope Pius XII favoured the continuance of the scholastic tradition, and expressed caution concerning theological renewal through an historical retrieval of patristic, liturgical, and biblical sources.

Our second chapter, aware of the opinion that both the notion of pure nature and even the expression *natura pura* derived from Cajetan (or one or more of his near contemporaries), sought to present a larger historical perspective. Here, we argued that thinking of human nature apart from grace and from its supernatural destiny was by no means a new phenomenon among Christians, nor, indeed, among Jews. In fact, the various uses of the term *physis* in the Septuagint—to say nothing of the writings of Josephus and Philo—indicate that, by the 1st century, Judaism had to a degree assimilated the emblematically Hellenistic idea of nature. In some cases, the Jewish authors of deuterocanonical and intertestamental literature even contrast nature and Torah in a manner which suggests that humanity can be understood without reference

either to the Law or to the particular, God-given vocation of Israel among the nations. These evidences suggest that Judaism did not consider the Covenant as constitutive of human nature as part of creation, but that it was a further gift in addition to the creation of human beings. In that perspective, Jews belonged to the same natural human order as everyone else, while understanding themselves to be the recipients of a special, additional gift founded upon their election as God's Chosen People and on the revelation of the Torah.

The foundational experience of Israel had its resonances in the New Testament and in early Christian theology. For example, in the New Testament, Christians are distinguished as the people who enjoy the gifts of the Spirit of Christ. They are described as *pneumatikoi* ("spirituals"), living by the Spirit, and not as *psychikoi* ("naturals"), left to their natural resources alone. While living in the world, Christians are, in a peculiar way, pilgrims and strangers in the world (1 Pet 2:11, cf. Jn 15:19, Heb 13:13–14), or even conformed to Christ as "crucified" (Gal 6:14) and "dead" (cf. Col 2:20, 3:3) to the world. Their *politeuma*, that is, their "way of life" or "citizenship," is in heaven (Phil 3:20).

When Christianity became legal in the Roman Empire, Christian authorities distinguished between civic and religious meanings, thus allowing believers to make some accommodation to the Empire's still-pagan public life. For example, the Council of Elvira ruled that Christians could retain the pagan priestly office of *flamen* as long as they hired substitutes to offer the pagan sacrifices. Such a decision showed a readiness to approve a certain duality in Christian life in the world, a duality which

did not assume a total integration of religious and secular realities. By the late 4th century, however, many Christians were coming to believe that the Empire itself could be Christianised so thoroughly that the kingdom of God might be realised politically, on earth, before the Second Coming. For a time, even St Augustine of Hippo entertained this possibility, even if he was later to lead the Church in shaking off this chiliastic error. In doing so, he explicitly affirmed that pagans and Christians share a final human end (*finis*), and that the further end of heavenly beatitude is peculiar only to Christians. This is not to say that Augustine anticipated the much later scholastic debate in all its complexity. Nonetheless, it does appear that neither the idea of a merely natural human finality, nor the idea of human nature as constituted without grace, was alien to him. Radical Orthodoxy in recent times has claimed that the metaphorical location of the sacred and secular in different spheres or spaces is a modern distortion, with its implication of a natural order, intelligible apart from its actual supernatural destiny. We have favoured a contradictory view, since this metaphorically spatial separation can be shown to have been widely accepted in the early Church. It is a commonplace in early Christian discourse concerning the sacred, the Church, and the monastic life.

In chapters three and four we turned to St Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. At this stage in our investigation, we sought to show in detail how Aquinas employs or presupposes the idea of pure nature in his treatment of six different topics. We showed the place of *natura pura* in Thomas's understanding (i) of human mortality, (ii) of the need for the infused virtues and gifts, and (iii) of the limbo of infants in

chapter three. Then, in chapter four, we considered Aquinas's treatments of (iv) kingship, (v) of natural law, and (vi) of the epistemology of the sciences.

A summary word on each of these six topics will not be out of place. First, in regard to human mortality, Thomas maintains that death is at once natural and unnatural: natural with respect to the essentially corruptible body, unnatural with respect to the essentially immortal soul. As beings composed of body and soul, reasons Thomas, our nature, at creation, was becomingly endowed by God with the "supernatural" gift of immortality: to be thus preserved from the dissolution that would naturally follow from the body's decay was a gift to the whole person, body and soul. So, too, was the loss of immortality a punishment to the whole person, after sin—yet, to the body, the punishment lay in the loss of an earlier gift, not in the imposition of something essentially alien. In all this, the idea of pure nature is implicit, inasmuch as, without such a concept, it is impossible to conceive of our initial immortality as anything but natural. To describe our initial immortality as a gift added to nature, as Thomas does, is to imply that our nature can be thought of "by itself," as something that is not specifically constituted by grace.

Second, we saw that Thomas, in insisting on the necessity of the infused virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, clearly considers that our supernatural end infinitely surpasses the scope of human nature. There is a radical disproportion between our natural powers and the supernatural destiny of sharing in the divine life and beatitude. Though our nature is intrinsically related to the supernatural, this does not mean we lack a natural *telos*. The supernatural end, rather, is a new and additional

finality. As it involves the infusion of divine charity and a personal communion with the Trinity, this end differs from the natural human end of knowing God as our first and final cause. The infused gifts and virtues, according to Aquinas, are metaphysically necessary precisely because our supernatural end is not ours by nature. What we have by nature is an end proportionate to our finitude: this natural end is the fulfilment, therefore, of our natural powers of intellect and will in the knowledge and love of God. That natural finality, not the grace of a supernatural destiny, is constitutive of human nature.

An explicit discussion of this point occurs in Thomas's treatment of limbo in *De Malo*, q. 5. Here, as we saw in chapter three, Thomas reflects on the fate of unbaptised innocents, to conclude that they attain natural happiness, but lack the beatific vision. His approach on this matter is intelligible only by holding that the lack (*caerentia*) of supernatural beatitude is not itself a deprivation of what is essential to human nature. In this context, Thomas has occasion to contrast human nature (or, more concretely, *homo*) as supernaturally elevated with *homo in solis naturalibus constitutus*. At such a point, Thomas comes closest, even in his verbal expressions, to the concept framed by later scholasticism as *natura pura*.

Chapter four completes our exploration of the idea of pure nature in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. In this chapter, we saw the pertinence of the *De Regno* to our theme in that there Thomas proposes an entirely natural account of kingship. He stipulates that government (kingship, whether we mean monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, or another form) is necessary because humans are social animals. Some

authority must have care of the terrestrial common good of each society. Kings and governors do not exist, in Thomas's view, for the purpose of achieving any supernatural end. In fact, as Thomas writes in the *De Regno*, that supernatural finality is "extrinsic" to human nature: it does not specify or constitute us as human. As a consequence, supernatural beatitude is a good entirely beyond the purview of government. Only God, who is the universal common good, has the care of the supernatural end, since only God has the power to raise anyone to it. Hence, spiritual government in this realm belong, not to kings, but to God (and, secondarily, to the pope and priesthood). Kingship itself is essentially the same whether the monarch and his or her subjects are Christians or not. *Pace* John Milbank, Thomas never suggests that only a Christian society may be a true commonwealth or justly governed.

Thomas's account of natural law has also proven relevant to our study, and doubly so. We saw, first, that Aquinas makes no mention of the beatific vision when describing the range of goods to which the natural law pertains. This is significant because he insists that the natural law pertains to everything to which we are ordained by nature. The omission is explained in *STh* 1-2, q. 109, a. 3, where Thomas distinguishes between two human ways of loving God above all things, namely the mode of nature and the mode of grace. In the supernatural mode, God is loved with charity as the object and source of blessedness, and in a personal communion. In the natural mode of loving God above all things, humans love him as the source and end of natural good. Of course, it is a consequence of original sin that we cannot, in fact, consistently love God above all things, even in a natural mode: we are injured, and

need God's healing grace. Nevertheless, the notion of an entirely natural love remains intelligible (and, for Thomas, important). In explanation, Aquinas invokes an opinion that he himself does not hold, namely that, before the first sin, Adam and Eve lived without grace in a "state of integral nature" (*status integrae naturae*). Without committing himself to this opinion about our primordial condition, Thomas makes constructive use of the idea of this state of perfect nature in order to affirm that loving God above all things is essentially natural—despite the fact that, historically, no one has ever loved so without grace. Here, as in his theology of limbo, we find Aquinas speaking of pure nature, albeit under another name.

Thomas's account of the natural moral law is also important for our study because it leads him to distinguish between the inwardness of the natural law and the inwardness of the new law of grace. He distinguishes two modes of being "within," one which "pertains to human nature" and another which is "as though added on" to nature by grace. By arguing that the new law is within us as something added to nature, and therefore that the new law is not in us in a connatural mode, Thomas indicates that grace and the supernatural are intrinsic to us ("within") but not essential or constitutive of our nature. In this way he leaves room for the idea of pure nature.

Concluding our study of Aquinas, we also saw that Thomas's epistemology of the sciences contributes to the discussion of pure nature. In particular, this matter bears upon John Milbank's further development of Henri de Lubac's work, and upon his claim that there can be no knowledge apart from the standpoint of faith, no metaphysics or other science that is independent of theology. In this, Milbank's

reasoning is closer to that of Plato in *Republic* VII than it is to Aristotle or to Aquinas. In the first question of the *Summa theologiae* and in his exposition on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius, Thomas teaches that theology and philosophy (and, by implication, all the scientific, artistic, and technical disciplines) retain their proper autonomy. Disciplines may contribute to each other and help each other find their proper limits, but there is no question of metaphysics' being "evacuated" by theology (as Milbank has it), nor of theology's taking over the formal subject matter of other disciplines. While the grace of God occurs as a vocation beyond the sphere of nature alone, it remains a matter of faith and of the theology of the revealed mysteries that faith makes possible. This supernatural vocation does not intrude into the essential activities of any natural art, craft, or science, or undermine the value of their respective objects and concerns. These natural *scientiae* proceed, each independent in its own domain, without any necessary reference to the supernatural. They address created realities as naturally and intrinsically ordered to an earthly *telos*.

In contrast to integralist theologies, which, taking a more Platonic route, would imagine a society in which all affairs are understood and arranged according to the wisdom of a single, panoptic science (whether philosophy, for Plato, or theology, for Milbank), Thomas's doctrine is that no human science affords such a comprehensive vision. Although theology is the highest of all human wisdoms, transcending every other practical and speculative discipline, it is not exhaustive. It draws, rather, on the *scientia dei* (God's own omniscient wisdom) to consider all things under but a single aspect, namely "the revealable." All other formalities remain

outside theology's competence, so that the theologian, as such, is not competent in chemistry, sociology, economics, government, carpentry, music, or any other technical, practical, or speculative field. While truth itself is one, our grasp of truth remains multiple and fragmentary until we become full sharers in the *scientia dei* in heaven. Hence Aquinas's epistemology is not in accord with the integralist presupposition that a society or civilisation may be comprehensively and deliberately ordered by theology.

Chapter five approached the consideration of human nature from another angle, by examining Henri de Lubac's treatment of Baianism and Jansenism. He intended, as we recognised, to defend St Augustine's reputation as a Catholic doctor, rescuing him from his Baianist and Jansenist interpreters—but also from the Lutheran and modern Protestant claim that the Doctor of Grace supported their views. Further, de Lubac sought to show that, in condemning Baianism and Jansenism, Catholic Church teaching did not officially adopt the language of pure nature; nor did it require that theologians do so. Most controversially, de Lubac found in his research into Baianism and Jansenism a putatively Augustinian anthropology as the happy medium for explaining the gratuity of grace: in this reading, grace, as de Lubac argues, is, indeed, gratuitous, for God is never obliged to elevate us to the supernatural life. But such an understanding of the gratuity of grace does not allow any suggestion, either that our human nature is intelligible in itself, without reference to the supernatural, or that, without ceasing to be human, we might have been left with an ordination to an only-natural beatitude.

We detected an irony in de Lubac's position. Though he seeks to get to the roots of the secularism and religious decline of modern Europe, de Lubac overlooks the role of the theological controversies and political events that are the context of the Baianist and Jansenist crises. These theological and political circumstances go a long way toward explaining the isolation of the Catholic faith from the emerging political and social realities, especially in France. Consequently, de Lubac's contention that the idea of pure nature was the seed of anti-Christian secularism and of France's official *laïcité* seems overstated to the point of implausibility—particularly when it is seen that the Bourbons and the anti-bourgeois and royalist sympathies of the ecclesiastical establishment were far more obvious factors in the growing alienation of French society from the Church and from the faith itself. Royal absolutism, unpopular alliances, religious wars, lax moral theology, the unresolved *De auxiliis* controversy, clerical disdain for the 17th-century bourgeoisie, to say nothing of the aftermath of the Reformation, offer a more obvious explanation of the disaffection of large segments of the French population from the Church. This is not to discount the influence of developments in commerce, science, law, and technology. Many factors, too little studied by theologians, contributed to what Robert Bireley termed “the refashioning of catholicism” in early modern Europe. Given the variety and weight of the factors contributing to such a “refashioning,” the ability of any theology or ecclesiastical policy to preserve the vitality and unity of Catholic Europe must remain doubtful. Even if we concede that the notion of pure nature helped make secularisation possible, to make this notion, with its long history in theological

reflection, anything like the single cause or explanation of the evils de Lubac deplures, cannot but appear as an extreme over-simplification. On the other hand, a notion of our shared human nature, along with the natural law embedded in human reason itself, could have opened up for exploration a natural field of communication between Catholic tradition and the emerging cultural and political currents of modernity, for the mutual enhancement of all sides. The patient processes of dialogue based on common acceptance of the integrity of human nature would have been possible, and might at least have mitigated the effects of the destructive, knock-down confrontations that in fact occurred.

Where chapter five tried to give due weight to the influence of de Lubac's research into Baianism and Jansenism, chapter six attempted a more rounded appreciation of his theology in the context of his life and times. While his theology of grace deliberately breaks with the scholastic past, especially with what he perceives as the distortion that entered into it through the notion of pure nature, he does not lack respect for the larger Catholic tradition. On the contrary, de Lubac exhibits an immense love for that tradition, even if he criticises the particular scholastic modes of thought to which he was exposed. In his theology, he appears rather as an indefatigable pioneer of a new kind of explicitly historical theology, trying to arrive at a more original and integral vision derived from ancient sources. Rejecting the analogical approach of the scholastics, de Lubac favoured a methodology which set him at odds, not only with an array of highly differentiated and refined distinctions in discussing the inter-relationship of nature and grace, but also with the systematic

vision of a long-standing theological tradition. He understood himself to be remedying a serious defect in theology, namely the introduction of the idea of *natura pura*, but the integralism of his Christocentric and pneumatological vision presented, and still presents, a radical challenge to Christian theology. Yet the ultimate effectiveness of such a vision is compromised if the realms of nature and grace are confused. The Word assumes our human nature in its natural integrity, just as the grace of the Spirit perfects, heals, and elevates what human beings naturally are: without the notion of pure nature, this natural integrity and natural condition cannot be considered.

Seen in context, de Lubac's discontent with the neo-scholasticism of his day, and with what he perceived as the distortions embedded in its part, was predictable. The theological establishment of his youth was extremely conservative in its opposition to the apparent Modernist novelties in biblical, historical, and scientific studies. Moreover, such opposition was too often allied to politically reactionary and anti-Semitic tendencies. When the scholastic systems lost contact with their mediaeval source roots in biblical commentary and in the contemplative and liturgical dimensions of Christian life, the scholastic tradition became increasingly rationalist in style.

A basic paradox is found in de Lubac's blaming the notion of pure nature for the emergence of theologies isolated from the world and from the present day. It is that de Lubac reflects the radical 20th century sense of society as a malleable entity, subject to the engineering of enlightened organisation. In de Lubac's case, the

principle for organisation was to be *catholicisme* itself. On this issue, the pathos and appeal of de Lubac's vision is most evident, not so much in any discovery within the history of theology, but in a moral sentiment about how the world ought to be in the light of Christian faith. Rather than consider how the notion of pure nature enables theology to find grounds for communication between the Church and the world, de Lubac considered that this notion worked only to constrain and limit the Christian vision of peace, justice, and human solidarity.

Chapter seven turned to a major instance of the influence of de Lubac on our contemporary theological scene, namely, Radical Orthodoxy. In this context, we concentrated mainly on RO's originator and best-known exponent, the lay Anglican theologian John Milbank. RO combines two main elements: the affirmation of Christian orthodoxy as expressed in the early ecumenical creeds, and the moral outrage inspired by radical socialism. This movement developed at Cambridge University amidst Anglican and socialist opposition to the policies of the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. To this group of theologians, Thatcher stood for liberal capitalism, privatisation, increasing the power of government ministers, and concerted efforts to reduce the power of labour unions—while aggressively campaigning against communism and socialism abroad. Partly in reaction to this political situation, RO began to develop its own, alternative vision of what England might be.

More specifically, Radical Orthodoxy developed Henri de Lubac's integralism. Where de Lubac's anthropology claimed that human nature could be

adequately understood only through its orientation to the beatific vision, RO extended this claim to all domains of human knowledge: creation is adequately understood only in reference to its divine origin and eschatological end. Consequently, RO agrees with de Lubac that Christianity is the only true philosophy, but goes beyond him by asserting that this true philosophy cannot be supported by rational argument or any evidence other than its own inner beauty and attractiveness. To this degree, RO accepts the post-modern undermining of all claims to objectivity, opting instead to develop a theological “collage” from those elements that suit its integralist Christian purposes.

As a result, all forms of human inquiry are regarded as disciplines subalternated to theology: to be valid, all must draw their fundamental principles from faith. In that sense, “Everything is theology.” Though a whole array of disciplines exists, none of these can be adequate to its purpose unless it is theologically informed. Hence, RO does not recognise the possibility of any valid secular or autonomous human reasoning. By claiming the world for theology, RO is, however, not aiming at Christian totalitarianism or an oppressive theocracy. But it does aim to call for radical reform in every area of human life and understanding. It therefore advocates a decentralised and anarchic theocracy which will include democratic elements, but not the liberal-capitalist arrangements so repugnant to its social commitments. RO thus understands itself as proclaiming the Christian story in a way that both seeks to address contemporary needs and heralds the coming of the Kingdom in human society.

2. Toward a More Comprehensive Grasp of Tradition

It is plain that Henri de Lubac's and John Milbank's criticisms of the idea of pure nature are also criticisms of modern scholastic theology as a whole. In different ways, each critic highlights the challenges that historical consciousness poses for Christian doctrine. Neither of these important concerns, however, is peculiar to the topic of pure nature. On the contrary, it is possible to discuss scholasticism in its relation to historical consciousness without confining such discussion to questions relating to the natural desire for God, or to the possibility of adequately conceiving of human nature without reference to grace and the beatific vision.

There are several important areas which stand to be directly affected by the way Catholic disagreements on the idea of pure nature are finally resolved. For instance, the integralist party in this debate must inevitably call the traditional notion of "natural law" into question, thus raising doubts about whether anyone not sharing the faith of the Church can really possess an adequate understanding of human nature as a basis for ethical collaboration and dialogue. More broadly, this integralist position casts doubt on the wisdom of the Church's teachings on the natural power of human reason: if human nature can be adequately known only in relation to its supernatural destiny, how can a sphere of natural reason be respected, in regard to human nature itself, and, indeed, in regard to all created reality? The possible resolution of this theological debate on whether or not the notion of pure nature is valid will inevitably determine our appreciation of the intrinsic gratuity of grace.

Different accounts of such gratuity follow from recognising the possibility of the created value and natural finality of human nature considered apart from its supernatural destiny.

At stake, also, in the conflicts surrounding the notion of pure nature, is the possibility and value of a genuine secularity. If human nature is unintelligible without reference to the supernatural, then it must follow that a faith-inspired Christian anthropology must consider itself competent to comprehend the whole human reality without any intrinsic dependence on other scientific or scholarly forms and methods of inquiry. The possibility of a Christian utopianism and, with it, the inability to appreciate the independent value of the secular, has already been anticipated in our treatment of Radical Orthodoxy. Clearly, the debate concerning the relationship of the natural with the supernatural has wide ramifications.

Let us address the two facets of this debate more closely, the historical and the theological. We start with the history of the question of pure nature.

This investigation has not discovered, either in the writings of Henri de Lubac or elsewhere, any evidence to support the thesis that some Fathers of the Church or other Catholic theological authorities denied the possibility of knowing human nature in purely natural terms. Neither have we come across any argument purporting to show that the idea of pure nature was unknown to any particular theologian. Admittedly, de Lubac himself asserts that the idea was unknown, but this does not help us test his assertion against any evidence. Nevertheless, even if we concede, for the sake of argument, that some Fathers and other authorities never imagined *natura*

pura, there is no reason to suppose that they would have rejected it out of hand. In fact, to assert that the idea of pure nature was alien to all, or even most, Christian thinking over the centuries, runs against the evidence. One possible exception is St Irenaeus of Lyon—but we must leave this question to another, more specialised study.¹ Yet this does not weaken our general judgement, namely, that the idea which came to be labelled “pure nature” was indeed circulating in Christian antiquity. It was part of St Augustine’s conceptual repertoire. Most conspicuously, it is present in the theological writings of St Thomas Aquinas. Future studies of the later scholastic and Thomistic commentatorial traditions may well reveal fresh evidence, and so lead to a more qualified assessment of the history of theology on these issues. But what does appear to be irrefutable is that the idea of pure nature was already present in the mainstream of the Latin theological tradition for at least a thousand years by the time Cajetan was born. It is unreasonable, therefore, to credit or blame him for the introducing the idea.

In our sampling of Christian thought and practice, we have found indications of a readiness, even in biblical literature, to employ the notion of pure nature in a straightforward sense, as indicating that which all human beings share—whether or not they are called by God to something more. We cannot but conclude that the theological tradition of recognising the intelligibility of the natural order apart from faith is nothing new. Moreover, Thomas Aquinas, to whom de Lubac appealed for

¹ See Hans Boersma, “Accommodation to What? Univocity of Being, Pure Nature, and the Anthropology of St Irenaeus,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006): 266–93.

justification of his critique of pure nature, is demonstrably a proponent of the very kind of theology of nature and grace which de Lubac found objectionable.

If this debate concerning the validity of pure nature is to be resolved, we must first acknowledge de Lubac's outstanding contributions to Catholic theological anthropology and to the theology of grace. Foremost among these is his insistence that, in the actual divine economy of salvation, no one lives, or has ever lived, in the state of pure nature. Such a view is essential to the Christian tradition, and must remain central to it. Moreover, de Lubac must be credited with challenging Thomism to articulate, more clearly and faithfully, Thomas's own teaching on our natural capacity for receiving the life of grace. Theology, though it may legitimately affirm a certain duality in regard to the realms of nature and grace, can veer too easily toward a simplistic dualism, with the result that the order of nature comes to be treated as having no inner or intrinsic relationship whatsoever to the order of grace. This kind of approach, as de Lubac rightly complained, is a distortion of the Catholic tradition. Even where we critically depart from de Lubac's views, we can still appreciate his contribution to Christian humanism. He provoked a fresh consideration of the manner in which human nature, created in the image of God, is intrinsically suited for elevation by grace to share in the Trinitarian life. He also brought fresh attention to the gratuity of grace. In the domains both of theology and spirituality, Pelagianism is a recurring danger; and the late Cardinal stands out as one who arms Christian life and thought against it.

At the other extreme, de Lubac's writings on the supernatural give a special profundity to the theology of sin, particularly in the larger context of his *Drama of Atheist Humanism*. He makes a powerful point: to sin, to reject our supernatural destiny, results in a violation of our humanity. Sin, in this sense, is not only a turning against our supernatural vocation, but also works to de-nature what we are meant to be as human beings.

Finally, among the virtues of de Lubac's work on the relationship of nature and grace, we must mention his success in encouraging a consideration of human nature from God's point of view. Refined theological distinctions between nature and grace must not be allowed to justify any estrangement or separation of religion from society, of faith from reason, or of God from human history. Although de Lubac's integralist vision has drawn our criticism, it has served as a corrective to dualistic forms of theological thinking, as well as to an excessive anthropocentrism forgetful of the God-centred and God-given orientation of human life that faith brings.

For all the fecundity of de Lubac's work, however, the widespread negative criticism of his integralist vision in the mid-20th century was not undeserved.

First, there are historical difficulties with de Lubac's thesis about the origins of *natura pura*. His appeal to the authority of Aquinas, Augustine, and (somewhat more vaguely) to Irenaeus is not spelled out through a well-documented study of these authors. It seems undeniable that de Lubac was too hasty and apodictic in concluding that the idea of pure nature never crossed Augustine's mind and never had a place in Thomas Aquinas's teaching. Similarly, when de Lubac presents his views as

the distilled essence of Augustinian thought, they would have been more widely received if he had candidly admitted the difficulties involved in determining exactly what Augustine held on such questions. These factors, together with de Lubac's obvious impatience with criticism, reduce the value of his historical research.

More important than the historical case argued by de Lubac is his properly theological proposal. Wishing to do away with the neo-scholastic treatment of nature and grace, which he perceived as dualistic, he proposed instead a unitary and putatively Augustinian anthropological vision. In this new integralist schema, human nature would be treated only in view of its supernatural *telos*. De Lubac's approach would affirm the gratuity of grace and of the beatific vision, but only in the sense that these come to us as divinely ordained gifts, and not as payment or as an endowment which God owes us.

There is, however, a shortcoming in this approach. It describes only one aspect of the gratuity of our salvation. It is true to hold that God never owes us the beatific vision, and that there is no injustice on God's part if anyone lacks this—or, indeed, any—grace. However, the gratuity of grace presupposes something more. Human nature is not incomplete, nor de-natured, nor unintelligible, nor essentially frustrated if its teleology is not supernatural. This point would appear to be what Pius XII means in *Humani generis* n. 26, when he writes that theologians “compromise the gratuity of the supernatural order by saying that God cannot create intellectual beings

without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision.”² If God can create angels and humans without ordering them to the beatific vision, then it follows that the definitions of angelic and human natures do not include ordination to the beatific vision. Rather, those natures are intelligible without reference to the beatific vision, and this is what is preserved and expressed in the theology of pure nature. Henri de Lubac is right to point out the risks attendant upon such a theology—an exaggerated dualism, the marginalisation of the doctrine of the *imago dei*, and so on. But he errs, as I have argued, in holding that *Humani generis* permits theologians to treat of human nature as if it were essentially and by definition ordained to divine beatitude.

The further theological shortcomings of de Lubac’s contribution to the discussion of nature and grace are in consequence of his denial that there can be a valid notion of pure nature—that is, of human nature *per se*, considered only in its natural teleology and powers, and without reference to the supernatural. Here we list five quite serious theological consequences.

a. Pure Nature and Natural Law

First, by repudiating the idea of pure nature we leave theology ill-equipped to affirm the ability of all people, regardless of religion, to reach valid common conclusions about the moral law and human fulfilment. In practice, the Church might still engage in missionary and humanitarian dialogue, but the theological rationale for

² *Humani generis* n. 26, “Alii veram «gratuitatem» ordinis supernaturalis corrumpunt, cum autem Deum entia intellectui praedita condere non posse, quin eadem ad beatificam visionem ordinet et vocet.”

these conversations would be troublesome. Were theologians to insist that human nature can only be understood in reference to the realities known by Christian faith, then non-Christians could not but rightly infer that we consider them hopelessly ignorant of what it means to be human. If the only sound anthropology is Christian theological anthropology, then what soundness can there be in searching for shareable affirmations of human dignity, universal human rights, or a universally knowable moral law? Judaism and Christianity are not alone, after all, in holding that some fundamental moral norms can be known by all people: traditions as distant as those of Greece and China share this affirmation.³ Despite our many differences about the precise meaning or content of the natural law in its application to particular questions and to concrete circumstances, some general agreement is often possible, and, indeed, an urgent consideration at contemporary ecological, economic, and legal crossroads.

If human nature cannot be understood adequately except in reference to the Christian doctrine of the beatific vision, then Christians alone have access to the truth about what constitutes human nature. This conclusion seems inevitable. But in that case, what is the Church's basis for engaging in extra-ecclesial dialogues about natural law, universal rights, or intrinsic human dignity? We might find these dialogues practically expedient, but what could justify them theologically? Without a theologically legitimate notion of pure nature, we must indeed suppose that non-

³ The Greek natural law tradition is well-known. For an introduction to Chinese views see Steven Greer and Tiong Piow Lim, "Confucianism: Natural Law Chinese Style?," *Ratio Juris* 11 (1998): 80–9.

Christians are *ipso facto* ignorant of humanity, and so we could hardly listen to non-Christians as to serious interlocutors.

b. Pure Nature and Human Reason

Repudiating the idea of pure nature also runs counter to the Catholic tradition's respect for the power of human reason. It is an irony of modern times that the Roman Catholic Church, once considered an obscurantist institution by the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment and by the rationalists of the 19th century, is today one of the most vocal and conspicuous defenders of reason in a sceptical, post-modern philosophical age. Yet the Catholic affirmation of the power of reason has a long history. The tradition of natural theology is rooted in the faith of the New Testament, and includes the Pauline insistence that "ever since the creation of the world his [i.e., God's] invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:20). Following this tradition, the First Vatican Council professes that "God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created things by natural human reason."⁴ Will we say, then, that human beings know God's nature by reason, but not their own specific nature? Surely this would be absurd. Instead, it would be fitting to say that, just as we can know God's "eternal power and deity" by reason alone, so, too, can we know the essence of the human being.

⁴ See Vatican I, *Dei filius*, cap. 2: "Eadem sancta mater ecclesia tenet et docet, Deum, rerum omnium principium et finem, naturali humanae rationis lumine e rebus creatis certo cognosci posse."

Admittedly, there are limits to the penetrating power of human reason. Only faith can reveal our supernatural destiny in Christ, and the Trinitarian communion to which we are called. It does not follow, however, that our human nature itself is opaque to rational investigation. There is a theological legitimacy in asserting that unaided human reason must fail to discover everything that is, within the economy of God's gracious providence, true of humanity. But such an admission of limitations does not entail the impossibility of rational public discourse on the essential meaning of human nature itself.

As we have seen, John Milbank seeks to extend de Lubac's denial of pure nature into a denial of all natural understanding. He emphasises the illuminating power of Christian faith in all domains of human knowledge, arguing that nothing is truly known save in its radical relation to the revealed God. De Lubac himself did not go so far, even if, as Milbank suggests, this integralist view of knowledge is implicit in the repudiation of *natura pura*. To dismiss the natural range of human reason and its philosophical search for truth and wisdom would, however, be a departure from the traditional Catholic belief that human reason is a sufficient (and God-given) light for coming to know being as its connatural object, and even to arrive at the infinite creative source of all being (cf. Rom 1:20).

c. Pure Nature and Christian Spirituality

Debates on the relationship between nature and grace have consequences for Christian spirituality. To suppose that human nature is essentially ordered to the

supernatural life, even while recognising that we have no essential right to God's grace, will not leave us in the same posture as will supposing that the very ordination to divine beatitude is itself a super-added gift. As Guy Mansini writes,

The experience [of election] is very much of the sort that "God did not have to choose us; he did not have to choose me." Rather did He choose us purely by his own favor and grace and in no wise because we deserved to be chosen. A necessary element of this experience, however, is that the choice be apprehended as a choice among other possible candidates. So in Deuteronomy, "the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth" (7:6). He could have chosen the Egyptians or the Edomites . . . , [and] in the Psalm, "He rejected the tent of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loves (77:67)" Without this element, without a horizon within which possible objects of choice show up, the gratuity of election relative to the one chosen is not really apprehended. Without the field of objects, choice collapses into simple voluntareity. Election bespeaks gratuity, and this shows up only against the background of a sort of slate of candidates.⁵

With the coming of Christ and the new covenant, of course, it is revealed that it is not only Israel that is chosen, but all flesh. Yet even here, as Mansini points out, the election of all does not render the notions "human" and "chosen" indistinguishable. If we need not contrast the chosen with any real group of those who are not chosen, nonetheless,

another field of objects is projected, in virtue of which the gratuity can be affirmed as still real. It is the field in

⁵ Guy Mansini, "Henri de Lubac, the Natural Desire to See God, and Pure Nature," *Gregorianum* 83 (2002): 107.

which “pure nature” figures. That is, we could have been ourselves without grace. The original form of revelation is therefore preserved. The experience of being chosen from a slate is still veridical, except the horizon has moved just a little. So to speak, if the choice is not from among men, it is still over against the alternative that these men, all of them, but exactly these in their present reality, might none of them have been called. [Thus, revelation includes] a hedge against missing grace, against failing to apprehend it, against confusing it with the natural, and there is built into the history of revelation and the constitution of the covenant a guard against supposing that all is given simply with creation, or against supposing that, discovering ourselves with an intellect whose formal object is being, it must be that we are also called to a supernatural end. The hedge, the safeguard in the very form of revelation is there *because really and truly we could have been ourselves in a graceless world.*⁶

It is precisely this final affirmation which is absent in the theology of Henri de Lubac. Indeed, he rejects it, insisting, as we have seen, that without the ordination to the supernatural we might only speak of “another humanity, another human being, and, if one could say so, another me.”⁷

The spirituality borne of, or expressed by, Cardinal de Lubac’s theological anthropology is not suited to reflection on the fact that “I” might not have been chosen; for if the call of God is constitutive of our being, then only “another me,” as he says, could have been left un-called. Yet we may add to this a further critical remark. While confessing that Christ died for all (cf. 2 Cor 5:15) and that God wills the salvation of all (cf. 1 Tim 2:4 and 2 Pet 3:9), we also affirm that, in fact, “not all

⁶ Mansini, “Henri de Lubac,” 108–9. Italics in original.

⁷ De Lubac, “Mystery of the Supernatural,” 293. French p 93, “une autre humanité, un autre être humain, et, si l’on veuille ou non, une autre moi.”

receive the benefit of [Christ's] death,"⁸ and that "no one, while living this mortal life, should be so presumptuous concerning the hidden mystery of divine predestination as to count himself among the number of the predestined."⁹ In the understanding of Christian faith, election refers not only to the choice of all humanity in Christ, but also to God's particular choice of individuals. This is why those gathered for the Eucharist, who believe that Christ died for all, nonetheless pray, "count us among those you have chosen."¹⁰ Not presumption, but humility and hope are the appropriate spiritual response to the news that God has elected a people from among all the nations. It cannot be assumed that each one of us, by the very fact of being human, is individually destined by God to eternal, supernatural beatitude. Correspondingly, to defend the notion of pure nature, as we have done, is to emphasise the theological virtue of hope, and its allied virtue of humility. It is not only true, as Mansini writes, that we all "really and truly . . . could have been ourselves in a graceless world;"¹¹ it is also true that any of us may, in fact, be ourselves and not be elected for eternal life. Though this realisation may prompt a certain fear, and even an exaggerated anxiety, the point remains. It prompts us to be more grateful for the supernatural gifts we have

⁸ Council of Trent, 6th session, Decree on Justification, cap 3, "Verum etsi ille *pro omnibus mortuus est*, non omnes tamen mortis eius beneficium recipiunt, sed ii dumtaxat, quibus meritum passionis eius communicatur" (DS 1523). My trans.

⁹ Council of Trent, 6th session, Decree on Justification, cap 12, "Nemo quoque, quamdiu in hac mortalitate vivitur, de arcano divinae praedestinationis mysterio usque adeo praesumere debet, ut certo statuatur, se omnino esse in numero praedestinatorum" (DS 1540). My trans.

¹⁰ See *Missale Romanum* (1975), Prex Eucharistica I, n 88 ("Te igitur"), ". . . et in electorum tuorum iubeas grege numerari." This text is the same in the 1962 Missal.

¹¹ Mansini, "Natural Desire for God," 109.

already received; it spurs us on to seek with utter seriousness for the graces of purity of heart and perseverance—for even while living the life of grace, we may mistakenly settle for merely natural goods and for worldly loves that fall short of the life of charity. Facing this possibility is made more difficult if we insist that to be human is to be “destined” to eternal life.

There is a further consequence. To affirm the real possibility of a merely natural existence is to highlight the character of the Christian vocation. If it is assumed that natural human life is essentially ordered to divine beatitude, then the renunciation of natural goods for the sake of the Kingdom becomes problematic rather than advisable. On the other hand, a theological anthropology which affirms the intelligibility and goodness of human nature in itself, without reference to the supernatural, casts a clearer light on the question of Christian vocations.¹² In particular, it allows us to see that our life may be truly good, good according to our nature, and yet insufficiently ordered to the fulfilment of our supernatural *telos*. No matter which particular form our Christian life takes, whether the form of marriage, of religious consecration, or of any of the myriad ways of Christian discipleship, the one great “vocation” to perfect charity is set in contrast to the natural goods of life. To recall St Thomas’s words, Christian fulfilment requires “access to the divine to the fullest possible extent, using everything in our power, that our mind might be occupied with contemplation and our reason with the investigation of divine

¹² On the Thomistic theology of the religious vocation see Richard Butler, *Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961).

realities.”¹³ Whatever their commitments and form of life, Christians may be aided by the recognition that earthly ends and loves are *good enough* to be genuinely tempting, genuine obstacles to perfect charity. At the same time, the affirmation of natural goods, as good in their own right, is crucial if we are to avoid exaggerating our removal from natural concerns. No vocation can be so “supernatural” that the individual or community is plucked from the natural human world, or ceases to share its basic experiences and concerns. We are indeed, as Eugene TeSelle writes, living simultaneously “in two cities.”¹⁴

d. Pure Nature and the Limits of Christian Competence

A repudiation of the idea of pure nature influences the way Christians, and particularly Christian teachers, regard their own competence or expertise in human affairs. If the idea of pure nature is invalid, then, as we have already noted in connection with inter-religious and cultural dialogue, Christians must suppose that they are alone in understanding what it is to be human. It is tempting, if this is the case, to conclude, with John Milbank, that believers alone have a full grasp of any given domain of created reality.

In a particular way, it is a recurrent temptation for theologians, bishops, and even popes to go beyond their actual competence in pronouncing upon secular

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boet* q. 2, a. 1, responsio 1: “Dicendum quod cum perfectio hominis consistat in coniunctione ad deum, oportet quod homo ex omnibus quae in ipso sunt, quantum possibile est, ad divina admittatur, ut intellectus contemplationi et ratio inquisitioni divinorum vacet”

¹⁴ See TeSelle, *Living in Two Cities*.

subjects. This is not to deny that secular realities—say, in economics, politics, or ecology—often have religious or theological implications. Clearly, there is no reason to drive a wedge between moral theology and any kind of human action. Moreover, not all interventions of the Church’s pastors are doctrinal: sometimes they must make juridical rulings and prudential decisions for the Christian community, and in these matters doctrinal competence is generally not at issue. However, there are still a number of questions and issues that would seem to remain entirely beyond the competence of ecclesiastical authority and of Catholic teachers as such. For example, there are questions of natural science regarding the Big Bang, the dangers of global warming, and the evolution of species. Great circumspection and reserve, as well as respect for the rightful autonomy of secular learning, are needed if the Catholic faith is not to be identified with this or that merely human theory. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, in respect to the realms of law, art, business, and so on. The notion of pure nature can act as a brake on the presumption of magisterial or theological expertise, at least by reminding us that the world and humanity are indeed intelligible to merely natural human reason. Faith and theology do not answer all questions, and so authoritative religious teaching must be appropriately limited in its scope.

Conclusion

Isaiah Berlin once suggested that intellectuals tend to be either like foxes or hedgehogs. He was thinking of an obscure fragment of Greek poetry—“The fox

knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.”¹⁵ By implication, some writers are “hedgehogs,” possessing a single, unitary vision into which they fit all their work. Others are foxes, spreading their attention over many concerns, and without explicit systematisation.

Berlin’s division of “foxes and hedgehogs” is not meant to be pressed too far. In fact, his book, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, is about Leo Tolstoy, who fits into neither category very comfortably. Berlin sees Tolstoy as a fox who wishes he were a hedgehog, for Tolstoy is a man of far-flung interests and fox-like activity, but who thinks hedgehogs are superior. Seeing complexity, he suffers because he has “an agonized belief in a single, serene vision, in which all problems are resolved, all doubts stilled, peace and understanding finally achieved.”¹⁶

It seems to me that many modern theologians—including Henri de Lubac and John Milbank—are in Tolstoy’s position. They have sharp eyes and wide, varied interests; they are not inclined to combine their work into a system; yet they feel that things ought to be simple, and should be seen in a single, unified vision. Social and intellectual integralism is attractive because it seems to promise that kind of wholeness—a unity of life and thought, a whole in which everything is Catholic (or, as the case may be, Jewish, or Islamic, or what have you).

The idea of pure nature strikes integralists as a pointless, even dangerous, complication. Nevertheless, the burden of this study has been to show that it is

¹⁵ Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy’s View of History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1953), 1.

¹⁶ Berlin, *Hedgehog and Fox*, 79.

traditional, useful, and even necessary, if we are to respect the complexities of our creaturely existence and of our fallen human state. It is God, and not graced nature, that is simple.

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