

THEOLOGY AND CULTURE AT MID-CENTURY: THE EXAMPLE OF HENRI DE LUBAC

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THE ESSAY that follows is part of a larger attempt to understand the achievements and the impact of the Second Vatican Council. This has required me to place the council in the context of the Roman Catholicism that had developed in the previous 150 years. Elsewhere I have described this as the construction of a particular subculture which, while antimodern in its interpretation of the principles and movements which produced a world in which Christianity no longer had a monopoly on cultural definition and legitimation, was quite modern in the structures it developed for its own self-reproduction and activity in the world.¹

This modern Roman Catholicism was served and legitimated by a domesticated theology. What was promoted and rewarded as safe theology was domesticated in two senses: first, it was under the closest supervision and tightest control which theologians had ever experienced in the history of the Church, and, second, it was a discipline which was taken seriously only or at least chiefly within the Catholic subculture. The questions it asked, the language it used, the methods it employed, the controversies it considered were all peculiar to Catholic theologians. To use a variety of metaphors, theology was in a state of emigration or exile from the modern cultural world, off in an intellectual ghetto.²

The Second Vatican Council has in fact been followed by the rapid collapse of the preconciliar social form of the Church which I have called modern Roman Catholicism. Differing interpretations and evaluations of the council largely rest upon the explanation and assessment of this postconciliar phenomenon. My own view in brief is that both as an event and in its documents Vatican II posed major challenges to the attitudes and strategies that defined the preconciliar subculture, so that even if it cannot be made consciously responsible for all that has happened since, neither is it wholly without responsibility for it.³

¹ J. A. Komonchak, "The Enlightenment and the Construction of Roman Catholicism," *Annual of the Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs* 1985, 31-59.

² J. A. Komonchak, "The Cultural and Ecclesial Roles of Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 40 (1985) 15-32.

³ J. A. Komonchak, "Interpreting the Second Vatican Council," *Landas: Journal of Loyola School of Theology* 1 (1987) 81-90.

For the council was a drama, and its main plot was a debate precisely over the adequacy of the Church's decision to confront modernity by constructing its own subculture. It was not the first time in the last two centuries in which that question had been posed, but all previous challenges—from Lamennais's attempt to reconcile Catholicism and modern democracy to the Modernists' effort to reconcile dogma and critical history and religious experience—had failed; and the special world of Roman Catholicism had emerged from the battles stronger than ever.

To approach an answer to the question why this did not prove the case at the Second Vatican Council, it is helpful to study what might be called a dress rehearsal for the conciliar drama. I refer to the controversy over the so-called "*nouvelle théologie*" which exercised Catholics in the last half of the 1940s. The term "the new theology" was coined by its opponents, who saw in a variety of theological efforts a revival of the intellectual and pastoral challenges which the Church had been repudiating for the previous 150 years. The controversy appeared to have come to an end with the publication in 1950 of the encyclical *Humani generis*; and one could be excused for believing that "the new theologians" would simply join the ranks of the other unsuccessful challengers of the logic and dynamic of modern Roman Catholicism.

Less than a decade after *Humani generis*, however, Pope John XXIII announced an ecumenical council, at which, it would turn out, while the plot was much the same and many of the protagonists re-entered the scene, the denouement was different. Vatican II is unintelligible without an understanding of the controversy over "*la nouvelle théologie*."

I offer here a first part of an analysis of this controversy, presenting "the new theology" as at heart an effort to bring theology back from its cultural exile. I focus on the thought of one of the chief participants in the debate, the French Jesuit Henri de Lubac, whose own fortunes, as the accused leader of the allegedly "new" theology, as one who suffered official disciplining because of his views, as a rehabilitated expert at the council, and as a man honored with the cardinalate since the council, recapitulate the larger history I am studying.

If a single work was considered to typify the "new theology," it was de Lubac's *Surnaturel*.⁴ Even then, this was not an easily accessible book. It presumed an acquaintance with many little-known authors and with apparently esoteric questions and developments in theology. Since then

⁴ Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Etudes historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946). For the background and history of this work and the controversy it caused, see de Lubac's *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits* (Namur: Culture et vérité, 1989) 21–22, 33–36, 61–80, 187–92, 203–26, 250–309. For a schematic indication of its textual history, see Karl H. Neufeld and Michael Sales, *Bibliographie Henri de Lubac S.J., 1925–1974* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1974) 63–65.

the bibliography on the central question it addressed—the relationship between nature and the absolutely unmerited destination of us to the face-to-face vision of God—has diminished considerably in volume. While this may indicate that people think the question has been definitively settled, it is a mistake to think that it is not still a crucial question.

In fact, I believe that the heat generated by the book is only explicable if it is read against the broader backdrop to which I have been alluding: the relationship between church and culture in the modern era. I will (1) locate de Lubac's effort in the larger context of his analysis of the exiled theology, (2) describe his explanation of how and why this theology went into exile, (3) explain how he attempted to make theology culturally significant once again, and (4) show how his theology grounded his own practical commitments at a dramatic moment in modern history.

THEOLOGY IN EXILE

De Lubac's interest in the question of the supernatural went back to the time of his earliest philosophical and theological studies. To offset the "rear-guard" Suarezianism of his teachers of philosophy,⁵ he devoted himself to the study of the thought of Maurice Blondel, Pierre Rousselot, and Joseph Maréchal, which earned him a reputation as a "Thomist," which, de Lubac says, then meant "not maintaining the doctrines of the Society."⁶ The basic orientation he adopted from this study he found confirmed when during his theological studies he discovered how much the question of the supernatural was in the air, not only because of new historical studies of the tradition but also because of the pertinence of the question to the problem of modern unbelief.⁷ A first sketch of

⁵ *Mémoire* 15, 17, 40, where de Lubac speaks of "the courses of philosophy, especially those of Fr. Pedro Descoqs, during which I sometimes scribbled notes that were not very conformist. They were inspired more by St. Thomas than by my Suarezian instructor, whose combative teaching was a constant invitation to react." On Descoqs see *Letters of Etienne Gilson to Henri de Lubac* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) 30, 41–43, 50–53 (this translation is often seriously incorrect, and readers should consult the original, *Lettres de M. Etienne Gilson adressées au P. Henri de Lubac et commentées par celui-ci* [Paris: Cerf, 1986]), and Etienne Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology* (New York: Random House, 1962) 205–6.

⁶ *Mémoire* 147. This may refer to the letter of the Father General, Wladimir Ledochowski, July 15, 1920, which declared Rouseelot's writings dangerous and forbade the teaching of eleven theses and the reading of seven of Rousselot's writings; see *Acta Romana Societatis Jesu* 3 (1920) 229–33, as well as the same general's earlier statement about adherence to St. Thomas within the Society, which made a vigorous defense of freedom against those who proposed a very strict application of the famous "Twenty-four Theses"; see *Acta Romana Societatis Jesu* 2 (1915–18) 315–69, and *Letters of Gilson to de Lubac* 43–45. For Descoqs's view of Rousselot, see *Mémoire* 17; on p. 12, de Lubac tells the story of the visitation of Fr. Bulot to the Jesuit scholasticate at Louvain. Asked what he thought of Rousselot's "Les yeux de la foi," Bulot replied: "I've come to put them out."

⁷ *Mémoire* 33.

Surnaturel was undertaken at this time, whose purpose is briefly described in an exchange of letters with Blondel in 1932. In a recent book of Blondel de Lubac had read a significant paragraph:

People are afraid of confusing things, when they should be afraid of not uniting them sufficiently. . . . It is when people don't know how to unite things properly that they are afraid of confusing them. If too often today the general life of humanity is withdrawing from Christianity, it is perhaps because too often Christianity has been uprooted from the inner vital organs of man.⁸

De Lubac described his own historical work as an effort to show how this cultural alienation of Christianity was in part caused by a theology which defended the gratuity of the supernatural by a theory of "pure nature," of a hypothetically possible state in which we would not be supernaturally destined. "Is not this system," he wrote, "in large part still responsible for the evil of a 'separated theology,' from which we are still suffering today? Is it not always this that dams up any effort at Christian thought?"⁹

What de Lubac meant by a "separated theology" is indicated in his earliest articles. He described how a narrow and extrinsicist apologetics, convinced that it could "prove" the foundations of Christian faith, had swamped theology:

What a shabby theology it is that treats the object of faith as an object of science, that does not know how to discern religion in its inner and universal reality and so sees it only as a system of truths and precepts, imposing themselves only on the basis of a certain number of facts! It confines dogma to the extremities of knowledge, in a distant province, out of touch with other provinces. It makes dogma a kind of 'superstructure,' believing that, if it is to remain 'supernatural,' it must be 'superficial' and thinking that by cutting it off from all human roots, it is making dogma all the more divine. As if God were not the author of both nature and grace, and of nature in view of grace.

"A shabby theology," he remarked, "that is not even traditional. A separated theology, in the wake of a separated philosophy."¹⁰ All encounter between faith and the world outside the Church was assigned to apologetics, while theology itself was considered "the science of revealed truths," for which an understanding of the faith was a matter of drawing ever more numerous and ever more remote conclusions, but was no longer

⁸ Ibid, 189.

⁹ Ibid. 188.

¹⁰ "Apologetics and Theology," in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989) 94-95; this article was originally published in 1930. (Note: Whenever I have had access to the French originals of works quoted, I have taken the liberty of altering and correcting the available English translations.)

an understanding of all reality *through the faith*.¹¹ To suggest that theology and apologetics were integrally related, that theology must seek to display the inner intelligibility and beauty of Christian doctrine and its ability to interpret all of reality, was to risk being accused of naturalism and of confusing the natural and the supernatural.¹²

In 1942, during the Nazi occupation of France, de Lubac was asked to address the topic "The Internal Causes of the Attenuation and Disappearance of the Sense of the Sacred."¹³ He identified four of these causes, all of them related to the state of theology. The first was the contrast in many people between their secular knowledge and their religious instruction. This affected not only some individuals but whole generations, and he placed the blame on theologians who made no effort to keep their reflections abreast of contemporary cultural and scientific developments. The second was the degree to which the theological enterprise was defined by opposition to heresies and errors, often those of a long-distant past, with the result that the full breadth and rich nourishment of the faith were betrayed. The fourth cause was the rationalist spirit or atmosphere dominant in "those who are said to 'know their theology,' " who were

somewhat like curators in a museum, a museum in which we have inventoried, ordered, and labelled everything; we know how to define all the terms, we have answered all objections, we bring the precise and needed distinctions to bear. Everything is obscure there for the profane, but for us everything is clear, everything explained. If there is still a mystery there, at least we know exactly where to place it, and we can point with our fingers to where exactly it lies. We are aware of being specialists at knowing what the average Christian does not know, just as the specialist in chemistry or in trigonometry knows what the average student does not know.¹⁴

The third cause which de Lubac isolated brings us to the heart of our issue: the duality, even the separation, of nature from the supernatural. This theology so insisted on the radical distinction between nature and grace that it lost the sense of their intimate relationship, of the finality

¹¹ *Theological Fragments* 98; see also "Le mystère du surnaturel," *RSR* 36 (1949) 81–82. In "Sur la philosophie chrétienne: Réflexions à la suite d'un débat," *NRT* 63 (1936) 246–47, de Lubac remarks that "in its current meaning . . . the word 'theology' evokes a more specialized knowledge. It is not at all the understanding of the faith and still less understanding through the faith. It is the science of revealed truths; it is not the science of all things under the light of faith."

¹² See *Theological Fragments* 101–3, where de Lubac feels obliged to defend himself against these accusations.

¹³ "Causes internes de l'atténuation et de la disparition du sens du Sacré," in *Théologie dans l'histoire. II. Questions disputées et résistance au nazisme* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1990) 13–30.

¹⁴ "Causes internes" 23.

of nature for grace. It thus provided others the opportunity to separate the supernatural off into a distant realm, into an exile where Christians might care for it, while they proceeded to construct the world on "natural," that is, secular, grounds. When the thirst for the sacred inevitably arises again, people now look for it elsewhere than where it can really be found. "There was a sort of unconscious conspiracy between the movement which led to secularism and a certain theology, and while the supernatural was exiled and proscribed, we began to think that the supernatural was thus placed beyond the reach of nature, in the one realm where it must reign."¹⁵

Surnaturel was in part an effort to uncover the origins of this "timid theology, doubly extrinsicistic, which would cast dogma outside of thought and the supernatural outside of nature, in the illusory intention of maintaining them better above nature and above reason."¹⁶ "The work was," he has recently remarked, "a sort of effort to re-establish contact between Catholic theology and contemporary thought, or at least to eliminate one basic obstacle to that contact, not for the sake of some 'adaptation' to that thought, but rather to enable a dialogue with it."¹⁷

CAUSES OF THE EXILE OF THEOLOGY

As indicated above, de Lubac did not believe that the blame for the cultural alienation of religion and theology could simply be laid at the feet of the rationalist and secularizing philosophers; and *Surnaturel* can be read as an effort to uncover what responsibility theologians themselves had. In the book in which after the council he republished his argument, he quoted with approval a judgment of Adolphe Franck:

"Some of the ideas for which reason and philosophy are most bitterly criticized and which are usually regarded as an invention of philosophers of the eighteenth century"—and [de Lubac adds] already of the seventeenth and even the sixteenth centuries—were "first maintained and spread by theologians." The separated philosophies, which had themselves become separated theologies, owe much to separated theology.¹⁸

The separated theology at fault was what de Lubac called "the system of pure nature." *Surnaturel* was essentially a historical study of when and how this system had come to dominate in Catholic theology, followed by a brief argument that it was not necessary in order to maintain a Christian anthropology.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 19–21.

¹⁶ *Surnaturel* 437.

¹⁷ *Mémoire* 34–35.

¹⁸ Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965) 296. De Lubac's argument here illumines, and is illumined by, Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University, 1987).

The central thesis of the book is that in the whole Catholic tradition down to the 16th century an idea of man as the image of God had prevailed for which he was essentially constituted by a desire for the vision of God. The Fathers had expressed this in terms of the biblical phrase "the image and likeness of God." The image of God had been inscribed at creation on the human spirit so that we might actively strive to become the likeness of God through the vision of His glory. In St. Thomas this theme had been transposed into Aristotelian terms as the natural desire for the beatific vision. Neither the Fathers nor the great scholastics had ever envisaged the possibility of a purely natural destiny for man, something short of the beatifying vision. There is only one "order," this concrete world in which God has made us for Himself, in which our "nature" had been created for, and is therefore intelligible only in view of, its divinizing destiny.

It was only in the 16th century that this unified vision began to dissolve. Early in the century Cajetan argued that when St. Thomas spoke of a natural desire to see God, he was speaking as a theologian and not as a philosopher. He meant, that is, that the desire arises as a result of and in response to God's revelation of our supernatural destiny.¹⁹ Within a half century the necessities of opposing the naturalism of Baius and of Jansenius and of securing the gratuity of the supernatural led theologians to the convenient device of imagining a "state of 'pure nature'" within which man might have been created with a destiny proportionate to his natural powers and thus short of the beatific vision. This hypothetical state was built upon a systematic neglect of the distinctive difference of created spirit from all other natures. A "materialization" of spirit now conceived it as simply another nature whose desires had to be measured by an ironclad metaphysical law, so that the very idea of a natural desire for what surpasses nature's powers began to be considered absurd.²⁰ Although at first this theory was recognized as a novelty,²¹ in time it came to be taken for granted by almost all theologians (excluding an Augustinian tradition which, de Lubac takes pains to point

¹⁹ In *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* 126-27, de Lubac will argue that whereas earlier Denys the Carthusian had already consciously disagreed with Aquinas on the question, Cajetan would "put forward his thesis as an explanation of the thought of St. Thomas. From Denys to Cajetan, in the space of less than half a century, a complete reversal took place."

²⁰ *Surnaturel* 137-39. See *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (Montreal: Palm, 1967) 181-85.

²¹ In the light of the accusations that de Lubac's thesis represented an example of "*la nouvelle théologie*," it is ironic to see the number of times in which the proponents of "pure nature" were described by contemporaries as "*moderniores*," "*recentiores*," "*neoterici*," etc.; see *Surnaturel* 105, 122, 124, 163, or *Augustinianism* 269, 272, 277, 290. De Lubac even speaks of it here and there as "*la nouvelle théologie*;" see 125, 140, 147.

out, was never condemned by the Church). By the 19th century it had hardened into a disjunction between two orders, one natural and one supernatural. By the 20th century it was even being considered so necessary that to reject it was to deny the gratuity of the supernatural.

The result was a confusion of the "supernatural" with the "miraculous," something added on (*superadditum*) to nature, related to nature by nothing greater than a "nonrepugnance" or by an "obediential potency" which does not differ in kind from the obediential potency of Balaam's ass to speak. It was now a realm accessible only by revelation from without, while the "natural" realm could be explored, explained, and, eventually, directed by reason alone. Some theologians were even maintaining that so little was there any inner connection between God's destining us for a supernatural end and the created world that if another destiny had been given us, "natural realities would remain exactly what they now are."²² The two orders were related only by God's extrinsic decree, and the passage from one to the other was mediated primarily by rational arguments demonstrating the existence of that God and the fact of that decree.

The consequences of this development were many and great. It split the study of man into two, with the desire to see God no longer the keystone of a philosophical anthropology. Philosophy could now proceed separately without taking any account of religion. The originally merely hypothetical possibility of a "pure nature" gradually was taken to be real possibility. Theologians themselves increasingly stressed what man could do by his own natural powers, and this acknowledgment gave ever more room for secularized constructions of the human world. The more stress was placed on the natural, the less pertinent the supernatural seemed.

Who can fail to see the advantages "separated philosophy" could draw from this? It was all very well to talk of a historical and concrete supernatural order: the futurible that had at first been imagined was to be found whole and entire, without essential modification, within this order. It alone became the legitimate subject of thought. Nature and "supernature" were paired off in such a way that the second came to seem to jealous reason as nothing but a vain shadow, a sham adornment. To the degree that the one became a complete system, the other, correlatively, became, to the eyes of the thinker, something superfluous. Christianity took on an artificial character, and the bread of doctrine was presented as a stone.

But the theologians were caught in their own game. By them as much as by the philosophers, the supernatural had to be in some way thrust aside, exiled, hemmed in. In rational speculations nothing must be allowed even to suspect its presence or possibility, not even in the way in which a void suggests the idea that it might be filled. Any philosophical reflection that risked half-opening the spirit

²² "Le mystère du surnaturel" 98, quoting Billuart, with whom Garrigou-Lagrange agreed.

to mystery was proscribed. The slightest sign of it had to be extirpated, the most timid of its appeals in nature deafened. That is how Christians, in the ardor of a sacred zeal, with their own hands destroyed the magnificent edifice which the centuries of faith had left them to guard. . . .²³

But de Lubac's historical analysis of the causes of the cultural alienation of theology led him back further, to the theological achievements of the Middle Ages. Against his critics, he would later argue that his chief aim was to vindicate the genuine teaching of St. Thomas against its corruption into the system of pure nature. He argued that Thomas still maintained the traditional doctrine of the human spirit as the image of God. He denied that Aquinas ever entertained the hypothesis of an order of "pure nature." He insisted that an interpreter must accept as equally certain two elements of Thomas' thought: that man has a natural desire for the beatific vision and that this destiny is utterly beyond his natural powers. His essential criticism of later scholastic theologians was that they had failed to keep these two doctrines in balance, or in healthy tension, but, out of fear of compromising the gratuitous character of the supernatural, had watered down or explained away the Thomist doctrine of the natural desire.

But it is also clear that de Lubac felt that St. Thomas had introduced an approach, a method, a set of assumptions which made it possible, even if certainly not necessary, for later thinkers to misinterpret his thought. Two great and related movements are brought under analysis: the introduction of Aristotle's thought and the move from symbolism to dialectics.

Throughout *Surnaturel* de Lubac describes the tension, if not inner contradiction, between the patristic "image of God" and Aristotle's "nature." For the Fathers the created image of God that is the human spirit is ever striving to become God's likeness through the vision of His infinite glory. This view was based upon "the essential difference between the beings of nature, whose end is proportionate to their natures, and the spirit, which is open to the infinite."²⁴ But what the Fathers contrasted, in Aristotle was only analogous, so that it was possible to speak in connection with man, as with other beings, of a nature considered as a principle of operations defined by a set of powers.

For the "nature" to which he [Aquinas] refers, as spiritual as it was, did not differ essentially from the other natures of which the universe was composed. It was that "philosophical" nature as conceived by the Ancients, who did not believe in a Creator God, although corrected from without by the intervention of the idea of creation. It was no longer quite that Image of God whose traits the Fathers of the Church, inspired less by Plato than by the Bible, had so powerfully asserted:

²³ *Surnaturel* 173-75; cf. *Augustinianism* 292-95.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 117.

that being which is essentially alienated from itself in two ways, as a creature and as a spirit: the nothing from which the Creator could draw as He pleased, the divine reflection whose nobility is perpetually assumed, the creation of the Breath which never solidifies into an independent "nature." For the Fathers there is no *nous* without an anticipatory participation, ever gratuitous and ever precarious, in the one *pneuma*. For Aristotle nature was a center of properties and a source of strictly delimited activity, shut up within its own order. Now throughout St. Thomas' writings these two conceptions of Aristotelian *nature* and of the patristic *image* intermingle, without it being possible to say whether they truly are combined or if they clash with one another, nor which of the two will in the end succeed in subjugating the other. As vigorous as was his synthetic mind, he did not always succeed in bringing the elements received from the two different traditions into a perfect unity.²⁵

Because Thomas attempted to give the desire to see God a grounding in nature, defined in Aristotelian terms, his thought contained an inner tension and even instability. He was "a transitional author," faithful heir of the earlier tradition but by his Aristotelian transposition also providing the opportunity for his thought later to be misrepresented in a way that would depart from that tradition. In St. Thomas the desire is natural and the fulfillment supernatural. This had, almost inevitably, to give rise later to an objection which led to the misinterpretation of Thomas' thought. The desire of nature would no longer be seen as "a response to the divine invitation," as "the human side of a divine initiative [*l'envers humain d'un endroit divin*]," so that it had to be denied that it stretched towards God Himself.²⁶ De Lubac's argument here is not that St. Thomas was incorrect in rooting the desire to see God in human nature, but that his use of Aristotle to explain the operations of the latter provided the opening for later thinkers to reduce the desires of nature to what can be accounted for in an Aristotelian nature.

De Lubac then extends his argument into a consideration of the general movement of thought in the Middle Ages. He compares Anselm and Aquinas, whose works "mark the two chief steps in the historical transformation of Augustinianism which was to end in the establishment of a perfectly autonomous philosophy within Christian thought." Anselm did this on the level of theological method, transforming Augustine's "spiritual" understanding into a "dialectical understanding." Aquinas "intellectualized and 'naturalized' St. Augustine by borrowing his doctrine on

²⁵ Ibid. 434-35; see 259: "It is the whole problem of the Christianization of Aristotle that is raised here. While others went off on crusades against the Philosopher, St. Thomas undertook to baptize him. Like every baptism, the baptism of profane philosophers always leaves traces of sin. To recognize the persistence of serious difficulties, then, is not to condemn the effort nor to claim that it failed."

²⁶ Ibid. 435-36.

the desire for God." The two moves entail parallel difficulties. Anselm's logic, pushed to its limits, makes it difficult to retain the supernatural and mysterious character of dogma. If Thomas' doctrine is similarly pushed and "compensating elements" are neglected, it becomes difficult to retain the supernatural and absolutely gratuitous character of the beatific vision. Neither medieval theologian made these mistakes, but their positions represent a "twofold warping [*gauchissement*] of Augustinian thought" which would later be so exaggerated as to threaten orthodoxy and provoke by reaction the extrinsicistic theology which removed dogma beyond thought and the supernatural outside of nature.²⁷

De Lubac does not want his critique of the openings which Anselm and Aquinas gave to later unfortunate developments to lead to a wholesale repudiation of their effort. The difficulties they raised "are the inevitable price of an evolution—many people have called it a revolution—which effected, we repeat, a certain progress. It is the same for almost any great thought. This is how the spirit makes its way through history." Recovering the earlier synthesis does not mean dismissing what followed it. The widespread call today for a Christian anthropology will have to take account of both the medieval achievements and the results of contemporary scientific investigation. But if de Lubac agrees with modern scholastics that it would be vain "to want simply to return to some pre-Anselmian or pre-Thomist theory," he also thinks it no less vain to attribute to Anselm or to Aquinas "that somewhat monolithic fulness, that simplicity of conception, that absence of even virtually divergent tendencies, or that balance achieved without internal pressures, which it is not man's to enjoy and which are incompatible with life."²⁸

Not only does the medieval achievement not represent the impossible ideal of a perfectly balanced, definitive stage of theology; it was also purchased at a high cost. De Lubac refers to a chapter in his great work *Corpus mysticum*²⁹ in which he traced the movement in the Middle Ages "From Symbolism to Dialectic." This describes the shift in the notion of theology from that spiritual understanding of the faith characteristic of the Fathers, "those geniuses of ontological symbolism," to the "Christian rationalism" foreshadowed in Berengarius, carried on in Abelard and Anselm, vainly resisted by Bonaventure, but triumphant in St. Thomas. The enthusiasm for the new questions revealed "a renewed, transformed ardor oriented quite differently than the religious contemplation of mysteries." In time this new orientation would become so pervasive that Augustine's mystical understanding would come close to being considered

²⁷ Ibid. 436-38.

²⁸ Ibid. 438.

²⁹ *Corpus mysticum: L'Eucharistie et l'église au moyen âge: Etude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944; 2nd ed., 1949). The imprimatur for the first edition was given in 1941.

a contradiction in terms. While de Lubac speaks of the necessity of this development in order to meet new challenges, one also senses a regret about all that was lost when "symbolic inclusions" became "dialectical antitheses."³⁰

Appreciation of predialectical Christian thought was being impeded by a naive and peculiarly modern notion of the history of theology which regarded earlier stages as a sort of "prescientific" stage of theology, which only reached maturity in the Middle Ages. The move to dialectic was necessary and represents a progress, but only *secundum quid*.

The dialectical mode of thought has so imposed itself in modern times that people have wound up thinking that it defines thought itself, that before its appearance there was only an era of "compilation," that without it, in any case, intelligence could not have been truly active and "creative." . . . In reality, the dialectical theology of the Middle Ages at its acme replaced another mode of thought which, if it too is taken at its acme, should not a priori be declared to be inferior: the symbolic theology of the Fathers. One theology succeeds another, and, inevitably, in accord with the laws of life, it is unjust or uncomprehending towards it. But, despite what is naively thought, it is not simply *theology* which is born after the incubation of a long "prehistory."³¹

If the medieval gain also represents a certain loss, it is also clear that what has followed it does not always represent simple progress. The development of dogma must be distinguished from the development of theology. While dogma is irreversible, "many of the concepts that ripened in the vast field of theology do not represent indisputable acquisitions. One or another of them may have played an important, even necessary role, without for all that obtaining a right to eternity. One or another of them may have helped to conceal for a time certain aspects of the total truth which were only rediscovered later, at the cost of those concepts."³² *Surnaturel* is one long argument that the idea of a state of "pure nature" is one of these concepts, helpful at a time but also distorting.

A great deal, then, is concentrated in this book. *Surnaturel* represented not only a historical analysis and critique of the notion of "pure nature," but also a critique of the notion of theology and of its history, reservations about the medieval achievement, including that of St. Thomas, an analysis of the causes of the modern exile of theology and its cultural

³⁰ *Corpus mysticum*² 248–77.

³¹ *Corpus mysticum*¹ 366–67. In the second edition of this work, de Lubac added after the words "secundum quid" in this quotation: "It would be puerile to explain everything, for example, by a passage from the confused to the distinct. No doubt there is always a point of view from which this may be true, but it is the exclusive choice of this point of view that is arbitrary and mutilating. It supposes that one is retaining from earlier efforts of the mind only what can be considered as a preparation of the new systems" (366).

³² *Surnaturel* 5–6; see also 181.

consequences, and an at least implicit proposal of what is necessary if theology is to regain cultural relevance. The remainder of this paper will be devoted to showing how de Lubac's whole theological program relates to this analysis and how in one dramatic moment it led him to demonstrate this in practice.

RECOVERING THE BREADTH AND DEPTH

By 1946, when the troubles over "*la nouvelle théologie*" broke out, de Lubac had published five major works: *Catholicism*, *Corpus mysticum*, *De la connaissance de Dieu*, *Surnaturel*, and *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*. It perhaps schematizes only a bit to say that the first four of these attempt to recover the breadth and depth of the Catholic tradition, while the last demonstrates the tradition's contemporary urgency.

De Lubac's first book was *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme*.³³ Put together in 1938, at the urging of Yves Congar, out of bits and pieces which de Lubac had published or delivered previously, it responded, as he put it, to "the air of the time."³⁴ It was aimed at an attitude expressed in two quotations, one saying of the Christian that "in his blessedness he passes through the battlefields with a rose in his hand," the other Renan's comment that Christianity is "a religion made for the interior consolation of a few chosen souls."³⁵ These two quotations represented in part a failure of Christians themselves to appreciate the richness and power of their own tradition. During the War, de Lubac would describe a twofold failure on the part of Catholics: their contentment with a purely habitual, traditional, conservative faith, which had lost a capacity for life and innovation and even had hypocritically made Christianity a socially useful "religion for the people," and their restriction of the power of Christianity to the merely private sphere, "as if Christianity were deprived of principles to direct either the life of states or business."

³³ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme* (Paris: Cerf, 1938). The third, revised and expanded edition was translated into English as *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958). For the central importance of this book in de Lubac's theological vision, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Achievement of Henri de Lubac," *Thought* 51 (1976) 7-49, and George Chantaine, "Esquisse biographique," in H. U. von Balthasar and G. Chantaine, *Le cardinal Henri de Lubac: L'Homme et son oeuvre* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1983) 11-41.

³⁴ *Mémoire* 25. Marie-Dominique Chenu, in a series of interviews published as *Un théologien en liberté: Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu* (Paris: Le Centurien, 1975) 64-85, discusses how many of the ideas and movements which were to mark the Church through the 1960s germinated during the 1930s in France. For some sense of the atmosphere of crisis in France during the 1930s, see Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes des années 30: Une tentative de renouvellement de la pensée politique française* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

³⁵ *Catholicism* viii, 161.

It was . . . the age of Machiavellianism in politics and then of liberalism in economics. By a real "betrayal of the clerks," the best of the religious life too often tended to take refuge in a sort of disembodied mysticism, leaving the "world" to go on the road to perdition. Justice and charity were considered to be no more than purely individual obligations. The profound sense of the Church as a fraternal community was lost.³⁶

To meet these mistaken judgments, de Lubac set out to show from the Tradition how one of the central meanings of the Church's catholicity is precisely that it addresses *all* aspects of human life, including the social and historical, and that without acknowledging these aspects one cannot fully grasp the mystery of Christ and the Church. De Lubac here displays his incredible erudition as he shows by a host of quotations how genuinely Catholic, *inclusive*, was the vision of the Church which inspired the Fathers especially but also other great figures of the Tradition. It was not this Tradition which was socially and historically irrelevant, but what had replaced it when theologians ceded the "world" to secularism by the dualism they defended with their theories.³⁷

The recovery of the full breadth of the Tradition was also the aim of *Corpus mysticum*, a study of the relations between Eucharist and the Church in the medieval period. Here de Lubac's study of the term "Mystical Body" showed how in the earlier patristic and medieval period Eucharist and Church were understood in function of one another, in a dynamic vision which moved from the physical body of Christ raised from the dead, to its mystical presence in the Eucharist, to the "true" Body of Christ which is the Church brought together in and by that Mystery. In later, dialectical theology, this dynamic unity was lost as attention shifted from the relation between the Eucharistic body of Christ

³⁶ "Explication chrétienne de notre temps," in *Théologie dans l'histoire* 2:234.

³⁷ "Thus the supernatural, deprived of its organic links with nature, tended to be understood by some as a mere 'supernature,' a 'double' of nature. Furthermore, after such a complete separation what misgivings could the supernatural cause to naturalism? For the latter no longer found it at any point in its path, and could shut itself up in a corresponding isolation, with the added advantage that it claimed to be complete. No hidden dissatisfaction could disturb the calm of its splendid equilibrium. . . . Such a dualism, just when it imagined that it was most successfully opposing the negations of naturalism, was most strongly influenced by it, and the transcendence in which it hoped to preserve the supernatural with such jealous care was, in fact, a banishment. The most confirmed secularists found in it, in spite of itself, an ally" (*Catholicism* 166-67; see also 203: "But an anxiety to make a clear distinction between the two orders, natural and supernatural, must not prevent faith from bearing its fruit. Faith is not a repository of dead truths which we may respectfully set aside so as to plan our whole lives without them. If in the upward direction a discontinuity between the natural and the supernatural is fundamental, there must be an influence in the downward direction. Charity has not to become inhuman in order to remain supernatural; like the supernatural itself it can only be understood as incarnate").

and his ecclesial Body to that between his physical body and the Eucharist. The effect was a serious impoverishment of the Tradition³⁸ which had also left Catholics powerless to appreciate the social and political implications of their Catholic community.³⁹

Recovering the breadth of the Tradition, then, was not simply an exercise in nostalgia or in archaism; it was also an attempt to recover a Christianity intellectually rich and spiritually powerful enough to be impatient with the marginal role with which too many theologians had become content and to be eager to exercise a redemptive role in all of human life. But recovering this Catholic breadth meant also recovering its spiritual depth. *Catholicism* itself contained an important chapter entitled "Person and Society," in which de Lubac insisted that, unlike many modern theories, the Catholic understanding did not require one to choose society over the person, the collectivity over the individual. Catholic inclusivism insists upon both Person and the Whole. As he would write during the War:

The Catholic Church, in accord with the very etymology of the two words, is *the one which calls all men to reunite in a single spiritual whole* in which they will find life and salvation. It is equally concerned with the person of each individual and with the unity of the whole. And it is not enough to say that it is concerned with both. Person and Whole: not only does it refuse to sacrifice one of these values to the other, it realizes and exalts the one through the other.⁴⁰

The key to realizing the infinite value of the person is the recognition that he is created in the image of God. This is the ground of his claims to dignity and freedom against all totalitarian claims. But it is also the basis for the claim that religion and God are not peripheral adornments added on to a life lived substantially according to natural or secular

³⁸ See also his remarks during the War: Our theology of the Eucharist "was constructed against Berengarius and then against the Protestants. The idea of the 'real presence' dominates almost everything, and its explanation is more 'scientific' than religious. Is this not somewhat excessive? There is hardly anything in our books on the place of the Eucharist in the total economy of the Christian Mystery, on its spiritual meaning and its essential fruit, which is the unity of the Church, on the crowning it contributes to man's whole religious effort. . . . How many of the quite explicit riches of the Tradition are thus practically lost to most priests and, a fortiori, to most of the Christian people!" ("Causes internes" 18-19).

³⁹ See "Patriotisme et nationalisme," *Vie intellectuelle* 19 (1933) 283-300, where de Lubac took explicit issue with Charles Maurras's elevation of nationalism into an absolute principle, resulting in the domestication of religion into "an instrument in the service of national passions." Among the causes of the exacerbated nationalism in both Germany and France he mentions, for Catholics, the fact that "we do not always grasp the bond of a common faith and the same baptism." "When will we rediscover a sense of the Catholic community?"

⁴⁰ "Explication chrétienne de notre temps" 243.

principles. This is what was forgotten by the secularism of the modern age and the dualistic theology which was its unwitting ally. Once again de Lubac drew out the implications during the War:

Nature is made for the supernatural, and without having any rights over it, it cannot be explained without it. Thus the whole natural order, not only in man but in man's destiny, is already penetrated by a supernatural which works upon him and draws him on. When it is absent from him, this absence is still a sort of presence. In other almost equivalent words, it is no doubt true that we have to distinguish in the totality of things and in human life a twofold zone: the zone of the "profane" and the zone of the "sacred"; it is no doubt true that certain things we know and use, that certain activities we engage in, considered in themselves, are purely profane. But we have to add that, in a sense, this is an abstraction. In concrete reality, nothing is purely "in itself." To a degree and on grounds which can indeed vary but which are never negligible, everything is sacred in its destiny and must begin to be so by participation.⁴¹

We find echoed here the central argument of *Surnaturel*: the recovery of the dynamic and catholic power of the notion of the image of God, restored precisely to defend the sacred or religious character of all human life. This same notion guides de Lubac's little book *De la connaissance de Dieu*,⁴² whose central argument is the primacy of the knowledge of God implicit in the dynamics of a human spirit created in the image of God. The book is an attempt to move back beyond proofs for the existence of God to an original experience which undergirds them and which intimately links the search for God with the deepest springs of human inquiry and effort. In that sense it can be said to correspond to the effort to overcome the dualism for which the relationship between nature and the supernatural was merely extrinsic and mediated principally by way of reason and formal authority.

This brief review, I hope, displays the coherent unity of de Lubac's theological project. It was at bottom an attempt to go beyond the narrow limits within which much modern theology had confined theology. On the one hand, this would be accomplished by a recovery of the full breadth of the Catholic vision and of its profound depths in the human spirit. On the other hand, this accomplished, a way could be found to show that Catholicism should not be content with the peripheral and extrinsic role in individuals and in society with which that exiled theology had grown content. Catholicism means not only spiritual inclusivism but social and historical comprehensiveness as well.

⁴¹ "Causes internes" 20-21.

⁴² *De la connaissance de Dieu* (2nd ed.; Paris: Témoignage Chrétien, 1948). The imprimatur for the first edition, unavailable to me, was given in 1941.

RETURN OF A REDEMPTIVE THEOLOGY

This effort, however, was to be illustrated in particularly dramatic ways in a dimension of the debate about the supernatural which has not received a great deal of attention, but which it is difficult to believe was not part of de Lubac's intention from the beginning. I refer to the relationship between that theological question and the political options of Catholics, particularly in France, during the first half of the 20th century and most dramatically during the Second World War. Unable to develop the argument in full detail, let me simply set out the elements which lead me to advance the hypothesis of this relationship.

I referred earlier to de Lubac's reading of Blondel, Roussetot, and Maréchal as an antidote to the Suarezianism of his philosophy professor Pedro Descoqs. Ten years before de Lubac sat in his classes, Descoqs had engaged in a vigorous public debate with Blondel over the affiliation of Catholics with the Action française movement, led by the agnostic positivist Charles Maurras.⁴³ Descoqs argued that Maurras's political views were independent of his views on religion and that they coincided with Catholic social teaching, so that with proper precautions Catholics could associate themselves with his movement. Maurras's mistake about the supernatural did not prevent his analysis of the natural from being quite accurate. Many other Thomists of the time came to a similar conclusion, carrying on the unfortunate alliance between neo-Thomism and right-wing politics which had its roots in the 19th century and would compromise Thomism for decades afterwards.⁴⁴

⁴³ Pedro Descoqs, "A travers l'oeuvre de M. Ch. Maurras: Essai critique," *Etudes* 120 (1909) 153-86, 330-46, 593-641; 121 (1909) 602-28, 773-86. In the course of his controversy with Blondel and Laberthonnière, Descoqs defended and expanded his argument, eventually publishing it in two volumes, *Monophorisme et Action française* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1913) and *A travers l'oeuvre de M. Ch. Maurras* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1913). Blondel's response was published in a series of articles, "La semaine sociale de Bordeaux et le monophorisme," which ran from October 1909 to May 1910 in the *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*; they were published separately in 1910. On this work of Blondel, see Alexander Dru, "From the Action française to the Second Vatican Council: Blondel's *La semaine sociale de Bordeaux*," *Downside Review* 81 (1963) 226-45. On the dispute see Michael Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism and Catholicism: The Politics of Charles Maurras and French Catholics, 1890-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982) 107-201; René Virgoulay, *Blondel et le modernisme: La philosophie de l'action et les sciences religieuses (1896-1913)* (Paris: Cerf, 1980) 149-77, 455-501; and *Letters of Gilson to de Lubac* 41-43.

⁴⁴ See Dru's article, which can now be supplemented by Pierre Thibault, *Savoir et pouvoir: Philosophie thomiste et politique cléricale au XIXe siècle* (Quebec: Université Laval, 1972); James Hennesey, "Leo XIII's Thomistic Revival: A Political and Philosophical Event," *Journal of Religion* 58, Supplement (1978) S185-S197; Emile Poulat, *L'Eglise, c'est un monde: L'Éclésiologie* (Paris: Cerf, 1986) 211-40; and Luciano Malusa, *Neotomismo e intransigentismo cattolico: Il contributo di Giovanni Maria Cornoldi per la rinascita del Tomismo* (Milan: Istituto Propaganda Libreria, 1986). This last book is particularly impor-

Blondel agreed with Descoqs only on the point that the basic issue was the relationship between nature and the supernatural. In Descoqs's conclusion he saw a perfect illustration of the theological extrinsicism which made the supernatural simply a superficial addition to the natural order, leaving the latter essentially untouched and related to the supernatural only by an external decree of God. For Blondel nature was made for the supernatural, and a failure to recognize that sublime destiny could not leave one's analysis of the natural laws of society unaffected. He called himself an "integrist" precisely because religion is comprehensively, inclusively pertinent to the human condition. Even more seriously, Descoqs had allowed Maurras's insistence on order and submission to evacuate his notion of Christianity itself, to the point that Descoqs was content with "a Catholicism without Christianity, a submissiveness without thought, an authority without love, a Church that would rejoice at the insulting tributes paid to the virtuosity of her interpretative and repressive system." "To accept all from God except God, all from Christ except His Spirit, to preserve in Catholicism only a residue that is aristocratic and soothing for the privileged and beguiling or threatening for the lower classes—is not all this, under the pretext perhaps of thinking only about religion, really a matter of pursuing only politics?"⁴⁵

The controversy eventually died down, although Descoqs was to continue to stress the political relevance of the question of the supernatural in later writings, even after the condemnation of Action française.⁴⁶

De Lubac retains today a vivid memory of the dispute between Descoqs and Blondel.⁴⁷ It appears to have been also part of the larger context in which in the 1930s, in the wake of the condemnation of Action française, he addressed the question of the role of the Church in modern political

tant for the early development of that "paleo-Thomism" which would prevail in certain Roman circles up to the eve of Vatican II and which, in the view of Fernand van Steenberghen, is still in evidence there: see "Comment être thomiste aujourd'hui?" *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 85 (1987) 171-97. André Laudouze, *Dominicains français et Action française 1899-1940: Maurras au couvent* (Paris: Ouvrières, 1989) 217-24, has some useful remarks on the question.

⁴⁵ Blondel, text cited from Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism and Catholicism* 156.

⁴⁶ In his *Praelectiones theologiae naturalis: Cours de théodicée 2* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1935) 293-97, 307-10, Descoqs added to his critique of Blondel's argument from action to the existence of God two excursuses, of which the first recalls the earlier dispute and repeats his arguments against a Blondelian interpretation of the papal condemnation and the second discusses Blondelianism and politics. At the end of the latter excursus, Descoqs expresses his agreement with Maritain's comment that "the problem of the *Christian lay State* is not unrelated to that of *Christian philosophy*" and immediately adds an appendix on the latter question, pp. 311-15. Unfortunately, I have not been able to make use of Descoqs's book, *Le mystère de notre élévation surnaturelle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1938).

⁴⁷ See his notes in *Letters of Gilson to de Lubac* 41-43, 47-53.

societies.⁴⁸ In 1933, during a period of exacerbated tensions between France and Germany, he wrote an essay on patriotism and nationalism in which he explicitly criticized Maurras's absolute nationalism and contrasted to it the transnational community of Christians.⁴⁹ It may be that it was such political positions that led to de Lubac's first delation to Rome in 1935.⁵⁰

But the issues at stake were soon to be seen in brutal clarity when Nazi Germany defeated and occupied France. From Vichy, the capital of the "free zone," Marshal Pétain launched his "national revolution," to be based on France's repentance of its materialism and hedonism and a renewed respect for the triple ideal of "Work, Family, and Country." The prestige Pétain had gained in the First World War, his appeal to traditional values, and his highly favorable attitude towards the churches help to explain the massive allegiance given him, following the lead of their bishops, by Catholics and especially by adherents of Action française, which had itself recently been rehabilitated by Pius XII.⁵¹

De Lubac was not among the supporters of Vichy. His reading of the situation is most clearly set out in a letter which he sent to his Jesuit superiors on April 25, 1941.⁵² The letter is essentially a cry of alarm, an

⁴⁸ See "The Authority of the Church in Temporal Matters" and "The Church's Intervention in the Temporal Order" in *Theological Fragments* 199-233; for the relevance of the question of the supernatural, see 212, and for the larger context, *Mémoire* 22-23.

⁴⁹ "Patriotisme et nationalisme," *Vie intellectuelle* 19 (1933) 283-300.

⁵⁰ In *Mémoire* 46-47, de Lubac briefly discusses one of the unfortunate results of the passions stirred by the condemnation of Action française: "A certain Scholastic conservatism, in all good faith confusing itself with the tradition itself, was terrified by any appearance of novelty. A sort of self-styled 'Thomist' dictatorship, which had more to do with government than with the intellect, attempted to stifle any effort at freer thought. A network of some professors and their former students throughout the world were distrustful of anything which came into existence outside of it. Thus already, as in the era of 'intégrisme,' denunciations again began to pour down." De Lubac was one of the ones affected, apparently with the collaboration of Fr. Pègues, who had earlier in the century offered for the services of Action française an article demonstrating that the movement's view of politics was exactly the same as St. Thomas'. It may be, though de Lubac does not allege it, that Pègues's part in the delation of de Lubac in 1935 was related to the articles on the Church and politics which he had published slightly earlier. For the crisis caused by the condemnation of Action française, see Laudouze, *Dominicains français et Action française*, esp. pp. 93-121, which are devoted to Pègues.

⁵¹ For a brief and clear exposition of the initial relations between Vichy and the leaders of French Catholicism, see Jean Chelini, *L'Eglise sous Pie XII: La tourmente (1939-1945)* (Paris: Fayard, 1983) 179-209, and Xavier de Montclos, *Les chrétiens face au nazisme et au stalinisme: L'Épreuve totalitaire (1939-1945)* (Paris: Plon, 1983) 232-37. Both works continue to refer to Jacques Duquesne, *Les catholiques français sous l'Occupation* (Paris: Grasset, 1966), and provide the extensive recent bibliography.

⁵² The full text is printed in Chelini, *L'Eglise sous Pie XII* 1:293-311, and now also in *Théologie dans l'histoire* 2:220-31; the circumstances in which it was written are described by de Lubac in *Résistance chrétienne à l'antisémitisme* (Paris: Fayard, 1988) 23-36.

attempt to alert his superiors to the true nature and depths of the threat which Hitler's anti-Christian revolution represented and which he believed was not being recognized by Catholics because the Vichy censorship was preventing them from learning the horrors being committed by the Nazis, because the techniques of propaganda were so insidiously effective, and because Pétain's clever appeal to traditional values was seducing some of them into a "worship of the state" and an interpretation of the moment as uniquely "providential" for France and for the Church. De Lubac tried to counter these perceptions by recalling the fundamentally anti-Christian character of the Nazis' neopaganism and anti-Semitism, the religious persecution they had introduced wherever they were triumphant, and the real danger that Catholics would be led from economic and political collaboration to a cultural collaboration which amounted to apostasy.

De Lubac took a vigorous part in the spiritual and theological *Résistance*.⁵³ To evade Vichy's censor, he used lectures apparently devoted to innocent theological topics to deliver fundamental critiques of Nazi racism and anti-Semitism.⁵⁴ Several of the essays that would later be published as *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* were published under the occupation.⁵⁵ De Lubac took an active part in the founding and direction of *Témoignage chrétienne*, the clandestine journal to which he contributed several essays.⁵⁶ His activities, which included serving as a liaison between Cardinals Gerlier and Saliège, involved him in serious danger, and he had to leave Lyon, under a false name, for six months. And anyone who may at times feel lost in the massive erudition of *Surnaturel* might be fortified by the knowledge that it was in such circumstances that de Lubac used his exiles to make it ready for publication.⁵⁷

⁵³ See *Mémoire* 47–49; *Résistance chrétienne à l'antisémitisme*; and Renée Bédarida, *Les armes de l'Esprit: Témoignage chrétienne (1941–1944)* (Paris: Ouvrières, 1977).

⁵⁴ Several of these are now gathered in *Théologie dans l'histoire 2*: "Causes internes de l'atténuation et de la disparition du sens du Sacré" 14–30; "Action catholique" 31–33; "Le fondement théologique des missions" 159–219; "Explication chrétienne de notre temps" 232–49; "Un nouveau 'front' religieux" 250–81; "Le combat spirituel" 282–95; "*Homo juridicus*" 296–99.

⁵⁵ See the preface to the third French edition, *Le drame de l'humanisme athée* (Paris: Spes, 1945) 11–12, and *Mémoire* 38–39. The English translation (London: Sheed and Ward, 1949) does not indicate from which French edition it was made; there are some textual differences between the two editions cited here, and the English edition omits or abbreviates many of the footnotes.

⁵⁶ According to Bédarida, *Les armes de l'Esprit* 44, "on the intellectual level, Fr. de Lubac was the closest and most important collaborator" of Fr. Chaillet, the Jesuit founder of the journal.

⁵⁷ *Mémoire* 33–34. He worked on the dossier while absent from Lyons when the Germans first arrived and then again in 1943, when the Gestapo was looking for him. That is why the text could appear so soon after the Liberation.

The central arguments of the major theological works which de Lubac had already either published or readied for the printer recur in the lectures and essays with which he sought to combat the influence of the Nazi ideology and its echoes at Vichy. For example, to defend French Catholics from racism and anti-Semitism, he appeals to Catholic inclusiveness and to the image of God inscribed in every human soul, the source of all those riches in every race and culture which the gospel must embrace and bring to Christ.⁵⁸ Two essays at interpretation of the general religious and political situation unsparingly draw out the responsibilities of a dualistic and sclerotic theology.⁵⁹

But it is particularly the reading of *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* which benefits from knowing the dramatic and dangerous circumstances in which its chapters were first delivered and published. The critique of Feuerbach and Nietzsche addresses the roots of Nazi neopaganism, while the chapters against Comte surely have in mind the positivism that underlay the collaborationists of Action française. If the Nazi symbols and myths were so seductive, it was in part because people were weary of a world rationalized down to its smallest parts, because Christianity had often been turned into a "system,"⁶⁰ and because all life seemed to have departed from a Christianity which had been clericalized, formalized, quenched, and hardened.⁶¹ The Blondelian critique of the accommodationism of Catholic adherents to Action française is echoed for the benefit, one suspects, of those being courted by supporters of Vichy:

They pay homage to Catholicism; but in varying degrees and often without being clearly aware of it, their purpose, in accordance with Comte's intentions, is to rid it more effectively of the Christian spirit. They depend upon the elements of superstition which still subsist in a body as large as the Church, and which it is so easy to overexcite, especially in periods of trouble. It sometimes happens that churchmen, paying too little heed to the gospel, let themselves be caught by this. Only quite poor observers of our times will fail to see that positivism is thus gaining ground, as its founder repeatedly predicted, far less by any conquest over former "metaphysicians" or "revolutionaries" than by a slow and imperceptible dechristianisation of a large number of Catholic souls. The "accommodations" and "alliances" favored by Comte are bearing their fruit. They are followed by a period of spontaneous assimilation, and the faith which used to be a living adherence to the Mystery of Christ then ends by being no more than attachment

⁵⁸ De Lubac, "Le fondement théologique des missions."

⁵⁹ "Causes internes" and "Explication chrétienne de notre temps."

⁶⁰ See *Drama* 55, where he describes Kierkegaard's indictment of Hegelian systems, but where one suspects that he is thinking also of the attitude of some theologians, which is "comfortable since in advance it immunizes them from martyrdom."

⁶¹ *Drama* 71, a description which follows this question: "Are not impatience of all criticism, incapacity for any reform, fear of intelligence—are not these manifest signs of this?"

to a formula for social order, itself twisted and diverted from its purpose. Without any apparent crisis, under a surface which sometimes seems the reverse of apostasy, that faith has slowly been drained of its substance.⁶²

To both Nietzschean myth and Comtean positivism de Lubac counterposed the novels of Dostoyevski, in which the drama of the relation between the human soul and God is played out, the Grand Inquisitor represents the triumph of positivism's "final order," and Dostoyevski proves his boast, "I am a realist in the highest sense of the word, that is to say, I show the depths of the human soul."⁶³

Within the Church de Lubac saw hopeful signs in the efforts to link up again with "a more substantial tradition." The return to "the golden age of medieval thought" "is gradually restoring the climate of 'mystery' which was eminently the climate of patristic thought. We are relearning, if not the use, at least the understanding of 'symbols.' In every province we are feeling the need to go back to the deep springs, to investigate them with other instruments than clear ideas alone, to re-establish a life-giving and fruitful contact with the nourishing soil." In these and in the remarks that immediately follow, it is not hard to hear echoes of his critique of an overly rationalized theology:

We are recognizing also that "wine has to ferment before it becomes clear," and that "rationality at any cost" is "a dangerous force which saps life." We know that mere abstract principles are no substitute for a mystique, that the most penetrating criticism does not produce an atom of being, that an endless exploration of history and human diversities does not suffice for that "promotion of mankind" which is the goal of every culture. We no longer want a divorce between knowledge and life.⁶⁴

This does not mean that Christians must surrender their ideal of reason and truth, confusing "vertigo with ecstasy"; but they do have to re-establish in themselves the sense of mystery. "May that be the chief effort of those among us who are believers; may they show themselves more concerned to live by the mystery than anxiously to defend it with

⁶² *Drama* 157-58. In *The Un-Marxian Socialist: A Study of Proudhon* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1948), a book which originated as a course given in Lyons in 1941-42, de Lubac includes criticisms of the politicized and deistic Catholicism against which much of Proudhon's critique was directed.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 164-246.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 43-44. This appeal recalls both de Lubac's attempt to recover the world of symbolism in which Christian thought reveled before the "Christian rationalism" of medieval scholasticism and his effort to relegitimize the spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures alongside their literal interpretation. See his prefaces to several volumes of the *Sources chrétiennes* series, later gathered and expanded in his *Histoire et esprit: L'Intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1950).

formulas or to impose its shell; and the world, impelled by its instinct for life, will follow them."⁶⁵

In these essays, then, and in the more practical activities in which he engaged, de Lubac was demonstrating both in word and in deed the power and light which the recovered breadth and depth of the Catholic tradition could bring to the darkest and most dangerous of situations. This theology was anything but "separated," and the faith on which it reflected anything but "extrinsic." It was convictions about its most traditional and most sublime and supernatural character that enabled him to argue for the utterly contemporary and concretely redemptive relevance of Christianity and to attempt to demonstrate that relevance in activities which required a courage most theologians never are called upon to demonstrate.

An apparently unexplored area of research remains the relationship between these writings and activities of de Lubac during the Second World War and the difficulties he was to encounter a year after its end. There are enough indications already to support investigation of the role played in the controversy over "*la nouvelle théologie*" by the political differences over Vichy. One of the Jesuit superiors in Rome who was critical of his theological views in 1946 had been quite critical of his opposition to Vichy.⁶⁶ Garrigou-Lagrange, who was one of the first and most vigorous critics of "*la nouvelle théologie*," had long supported the Action française, and his defense of Vichy had reached the point of accusing anyone who supported de Gaulle of mortal sin.⁶⁷ Garrigou was

⁶⁵ *Drama* 44, 49. One may compare here also the insistence on anagogy into the mystery of God in *De la connaissance de Dieu*.

⁶⁶ In 1941, Fr. Norbert de Boynes, Jesuit Assistant for France, came to Lyon, where he criticized Fourvière's lack of support for Pétain and de Lubac's ideas in particular, accusing him of basing his opposition to Vichy on merely political grounds and for the same motives that had led him to support the "Reds" in Spain; see *Mémoire* 61 and 249-51 for de Lubac's vigorous response. Five years later, when the theological troubles of the Fourvière Jesuits were becoming critical, de Boynes would express grave reservations about the Jesuits there; see *Mémoire* 255-57.

⁶⁷ See John Hellmann, "Yves R. Simon's Lonely Fight against Fascism," the introduction to the new edition of Simon's *The Road to Vichy: 1918-1938*, but also published in *Crisis* 6 (May 1988) 30-37, and in *Notes et documents* 24/25 (1989) 78-91. I owe to the kindness of Mr. Anthony Simon copies of two letters of Jacques Maritain to Garrigou-Lagrange, Dec. 12 and 19, 1946, in which Maritain vigorously defends himself against Garrigou's use of the word "deviation" to describe Maritain's opposition to Franco. The second letter includes the following comments: "Whatever our political differences may be, you have no right to use them to cast suspicions on my doctrine. When you took the side of Marshal Pétain to the point of stating that to support de Gaulle was a mortal sin, I thought that your political prejudices were blinding you on a matter serious for our country, but I never considered suspecting your theology nor criticizing you for a deviation on a matter of doctrine." On Garrigou-Lagrange's support for Action française, see Laudouze, *Dominicains français et Action française*.

also very close to Léon Bérard, who had served as the Vichy ambassador to the Holy See and had sent back a notorious dispatch in which he not only stated that the Vatican had no major objections to the Vichy anti-Jewish legislation but defended it by citations from St. Thomas, which de Lubac believes were contributed by "Thomists," either in Rome or in France.⁶⁸ Many of the theologians who would be lumped together as leaders of "*la nouvelle théologie*" had been active participants in the Christian resistance to Nazism and to Vichy. Beyond this I cannot yet go, but the linkages are well worth further research.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

What I have presented here is only a piece in a large and complex mosaic. De Lubac was not the only theologian involved in the controversy over "*la nouvelle théologie*," nor were his own historical analyses and theological proposals the only ones which were to challenge the domesticated conciliar theology and the subculture in which it operated. Other essays are needed to describe, first, the analyses and proposals of other challengers; second, the criticisms which they all received from defenders of the domesticated theology; third, the renewal of the controversy at Vatican II; and, finally, the way in which the tensions and differences, not only between challengers and defenders, but also among the challengers themselves, affected the conciliar debates and the development of theology after the council.

For the moment it is perhaps enough to have shown that the issues at stake in the controversy over "*la nouvelle théologie*" were anything but narrow, Church-internal controversies over esoteric issues. In fact, one might even say that the issue was precisely a challenge to a narrow, Church-internal, esoteric theology. That was what made this theology "new" in the minds of domesticated theologians. To show that it was the latter who, set in the context of the whole history of theology, were the "new theologians," content with an alienated and exiled theology, might be said to have been the chief purpose of de Lubac's work. The inclusive, world-embracing, history-defining, and redemptive role of theology was precisely what he tried to recover and what he demonstrated in his own courageous activities both in the Church and in the world.

⁶⁸ See *Résistance chrétienne à l'antisémitisme* 93-97.



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