

# **Ressourcement Anti-Semitism? Addressing an Obstacle to Henri de Lubac's Proposed Renewal of Premodern Christian Spiritual Exegesis**

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## **Abstract**

Henri de Lubac hoped that his works on premodern Christian exegesis would help the church recover a more holistic Christian approach to Scripture, but the presence of anti-Jewish rhetoric in the tradition, which he reproduces in his major works, is a significant obstacle to any such recovery. While he did not address this difficulty in his major works, his resistance to Anti-Semitism during World War II provides a resource for addressing this problem. His early writings offer principles for a renewed and recentered approach to Christian use and interpretation of Scripture.

## **Keywords**

anti-Judaism, anti-Semitism, Henri de Lubac, Nazi resistance, spiritual exegesis, interpretation of Scripture

**T**he current renewal of interest in premodern Christian engagement with Scripture would be impossible apart from the work of the theologians of the *nouvelle théologie*. Henri de Lubac (1895–1991) holds a place of preeminence among those responsible for the *ressourcement* of patristic and medieval engagement

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with Scripture. De Lubac first engaged the topic of premodern scriptural exegesis in chapters 5–6 of his programmatic early work *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme* (1938).<sup>1</sup> Four shorter essays on traditional exegesis followed in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>2</sup> His two most extensive works appeared in the 1950s and early 1960s. The first, *Histoire et esprit* (1950), is a major treatment of Origen’s theological exegesis.<sup>3</sup> His second major work, the sprawling multivolume *Exégèse médiévale* (1959–64), explores the development of premodern scriptural exegesis after Origen, especially focusing on the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>4</sup> In 1966, de Lubac composed *l’Écriture dans la tradition* as an aid to interpreting *Dei Verbum*.<sup>5</sup> He also wrote a commentary on the preamble and first chapter of that document (1968).<sup>6</sup> Though he was not a biblical exegete, de Lubac devoted more research and writing to the history and theology of scriptural interpretation than to any other topic in his massive literary output.<sup>7</sup>

De Lubac did not undertake those studies with traditionalist or antiquarian intentions. He emphatically stated that Christians should not attempt to resurrect premodern exegetical praxis and theory.<sup>8</sup> He was also a major advocate of the practice of “scientific exegesis” even before it received official sanction in the Roman Catholic Church

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1. See Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Mankind*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 137–216.
  2. “‘Typologie’ et ‘allégorisme’” (1947), “Sur un vieux distich: La doctrine du ‘quadruple sens’” (1948), “Sens spirituel” (1949), and “Allégorie hellénistique et allégorie chrétienne” (1959). “Sens spirituel” is reproduced in its entirety as the conclusion of *Histoire et esprit* (see below). Translations of the other essays appear in *Theological Fragments*, trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 109–196.
  3. See Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et esprit: L’Intelligence de l’Écriture d’après Origène*, Théologie 16 (Paris: Éditions Mouton, 1950), translated as *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007). References in this article are to the Nash translation.
  4. See Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l’Écriture*, Théologie 41, 42, 59 (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1959, 1961, 1964). Eerdmans has published translations of the first three volumes by Marc Sebanc (1998) and E.M. Macierowski (2000, 2009). My citations are of the translations, numbered vols. 1–3 (e.g. *Medieval Exegesis* 2:17), except for those of the final part which I indicate by to their original numeration (e.g. *Exégèse médiévale* 2:2:142).
  5. See Henri de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, trans. Luke O’Neill (New York: Crossroad, 2000). *Scripture in the Tradition* brings together lightly edited sections from *History and Spirit* 428–507 (chap. 1), *Medieval Exegesis* 1:225–67 (chap. 2), *Medieval Exegesis* 2:98–107 (chap. 3.1), *Medieval Exegesis* 3:108–12 (chap. 3.2), *Medieval Exegesis* 3:140–46 (chap. 3.3), *Exégèse médiévale* 2:2, 106–23 (chap. 3.4), and *Medieval Exegesis* 2:197, 201–7 (chap. 3.5).
  6. See Henri de Lubac, “Révélation divine,” in *Révélation divine—Affrontements mystiques—Athéisme et sens de l’homme*, Œuvres Complètes 4 (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 34–231.
  7. The aforementioned works on Scripture will constitute the largest portion—in terms of page numbers—of his collected works, which will number 50 volumes upon completion. See Henri de Lubac, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Cerf, 1998–).
  8. See Henri de Lubac, “On an Old Distich,” in *Theological Fragments*, 109–27 at 124.

in *Divinu Afflante Spiritu* (1943) and *Dei Verbum* (1965).<sup>9</sup> Though he supported the new developments in biblical scholarship, de Lubac did express the hope that his works on premodern exegesis would help Christians of his own day to understand the perennial authority and functions of Scripture in Christian life.<sup>10</sup> De Lubac insisted that the doctrinal foundations of spiritual exegesis possessed “an ever-present importance.” He held that “there *are* constants in Christian exegesis.”<sup>11</sup>

Late in his life de Lubac expressed disappointment that no one had taken up the constructive impetus of his historical works on premodern Christian scriptural exegesis.<sup>12</sup> In the time that has elapsed since the publication of his major works, a number of theologians have produced extremely useful studies of de Lubac’s works on spiritual exegesis.<sup>13</sup> Few of those studies, though, have extensively undertaken the kind of constructive work that de Lubac hoped his work would help facilitate. Rudolf Voderholzer’s assessment still holds: “the fruitful development of the doctrine of the fourfold sense that de Lubac’s scholarship restored to our awareness, the exploitation of its power to relate and to synthesize history, faith, life, and eschatology, is a task that still awaits us.”<sup>14</sup> While I hold that such a recovery is desirable and even imperative for a faithful Christian understanding of the nature and purpose of Scripture, a number of obstacles stand in the way of a responsible and faithful constructive appropriation of what de Lubac thought was the genius of premodern spiritual exegesis. The ubiquity

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9. See 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), 269, and esp. 311–14; Henri de Lubac and Angelo Scola, *A Theologian Speaks* (Los Angeles: Twin Circle, 1985), 30–33; De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 429–30, 483–84n171; De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* 1:xix–xx, 264–67; 2:211–14.
  10. For his assessments of the contemporary value of *History and Spirit* and *Medieval Exegesis*, see Henri de Lubac, *At the Service*, 85, 93 and de Lubac, “Foreword,” in *Scripture in the Tradition*, vii–ix at viii.
  11. De Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, viii; emphasis in original.
  12. See de Lubac and Scola, *De Lubac*, 18–19, 31–33.
  13. Significant monograph-length studies include Marcellino D’Ambrosio, “Henri de Lubac and the Recovery of the Traditional Hermeneutic” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1991); Michel von Esbroeck, *Herméneutique, structuralisme, et exégèse: Essai de logique kérygmaticque* (Paris: Desclée, 1968); Bryan G. Hollon, *Everything is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009); Kevin Storer, *Reading Scripture to Hear God: Kevin Vanhoozer and Henri de Lubac on God’s Use of Scripture in the Economy of Redemption* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014); Rudolf Voderholzer, *Die Einheit der Schrift und ihr geistiger Sinn: Der Beitrag Henri de Lubacs zur Erforschung von Geschichte und Systematik christlicher Bibelhermeneutik* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1998); and Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).
  14. Rudolf Voderholzer, “Dogma and History: Henri de Lubac and the Retrieval of Historicity as a Key to Theological Renewal,” trans. Adrian Walker, *Communio* 28 (2001): 648–668 at 666.

of anti-Jewish language in de Lubac's works on spiritual exegesis, and in the tradition of Christian exegesis of the Old Testament itself, however, is perhaps the most significant moral obstacle to such a recovery.

The casual post-Shoah reader of *History and Spirit* and *Medieval Exegesis* would understandably recoil from the seemingly casual, explicitly anti-Jewish, expressions scattered throughout their pages—both in de Lubac's own words and in quotations drawn from various premodern authors. I must warn readers in advance—this language is quite offensive. In these works, the Jewish people are described as “stupid,” “superstitious,” “obstinate,” “comparable to beasts,” “people of perverse intention and detestable will,” and “spiritually leprous.”<sup>15</sup> The Jewish mind is “darkened,” and a veil covers Jewish hearts.<sup>16</sup> Jews are “incredulous” and “cow-like” (*bovinus intellectus*) in their understanding of Scripture; they read it in a “carnal sense.”<sup>17</sup> They retain a “puerile sense” of the divine plan, and they engage in “useless and vain stupidities” and “sinful infidelity.”<sup>18</sup> Having been “really and truly surpassed,” Jewish exegesis plays in “vain superstition.”<sup>19</sup> The Jews read Scripture arbitrarily, and in doing so “they blaspheme God, ... dishonor the Patriarchs, [and] despise the Prophets.”<sup>20</sup> When read alone in a Jewish manner, the Old Testament is “surpassed, obsolete, outdated—‘antiquated’,” and has become “wretched and sterile,” and “infected with parasites.”<sup>21</sup> The synagogue has been “blind and sterile” since the coming of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

It is necessary to ask whether de Lubac is merely reporting the unfortunate formulations of bygone eras, or if he approves of this harsh language and its theological and ethical import. De Lubac's writing strategy makes it difficult to discern his own perspective. As Lewis Ayres has helpfully noted,

One of the great difficulties in reading De Lubac is his method: the piling up of quotation and allusion along with the very dense footnoting means that isolating his own cast on the material he offers is more likely to involve isolating strategies of quotation, adaptation and compilation than it is a simple process of distinguishing statements which are his from those that are not.<sup>23</sup>

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15. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:271n14; 3:77, 104 (see also de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 144) 74, 77; 79; de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 162.
  16. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:87; de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 191.
  17. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* 2:14; 3:93, 89. See also de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, 2:2:142.
  18. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:107; de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, 2:2:287.
  19. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:150; 3:79, 106.
  20. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:106.
  21. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:228; 3:108, 109.
  22. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:242; 3:106.
  23. Lewis Ayres, “The Soul and the Reading of Scripture: A Note on Henri de Lubac,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61 (2008): 173–90 at 180, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0036930608003943>. For further helpful discussion of this challenging dimension of de Lubac's work, see Joseph F. Flipper, *Between Apocalypse and Eschaton: History and Eternity in Henri de Lubac* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 3–8.

Leo Lefebure distressingly notes that de Lubac reproduces the problematic anti-Jewish language of the tradition of Christian spiritual exegesis “without dissent” and “with no sign of disagreement.”<sup>24</sup> How should its presence in de Lubac’s writings impact the contemporary reception of de Lubac’s works? Beyond their relevance for assessing de Lubac’s legacy, the quotations above pose significant challenges for anyone who wishes to carry forward de Lubac’s project of fostering a renewal of Christian spiritual exegesis. It is even more pressing to ask whether the language reflected in these quotations is a constitutive feature of spiritual exegesis, inextricably bound to the practice at its very foundations.

De Lubac’s active resistance to the racist anti-Semitism of French positivists and to the Nazi regime before and during World War II stands in stark contrast with the apparently anti-Jewish statements in his works on spiritual exegesis.<sup>25</sup> A further question arises, How do his earlier activities relate to his later works on spiritual exegesis? While I will argue below that de Lubac did not adequately address the morally reprehensible language in the tradition of spiritual exegesis in his major works, his embodied and written witness during World War II provides theological resources for combating the tradition of anti-Jewish spiritual exegesis and for establishing a new paradigm for Christian spiritual exegesis.

In what follows, then, I first offer an account of de Lubac’s embodied and written witness against anti-Semitism and racism of all forms during World War II as a resource against his own later reproduction of the harmful language of anti-Judaism in the tradition of Christian scriptural exegesis. I then examine de Lubac’s treatment of the anti-Jewish dimensions of premodern exegesis in his major works *History and Spirit* and *Medieval Exegesis*. I there make the case that de Lubac failed to adequately denounce the anti-Semitism of the tradition in his works on spiritual exegesis and propose possible explanations for that failure. Despite that failure, however, his earlier wartime works indicate de Lubac’s fundamental theological and ethical positions with respect to the Jewish people and thus provide a resource for rightly assessing the harsh language of the tradition. The final major section, then, details the continuity between the fundamental themes of de Lubac’s wartime writings—the ties between Judaism and Christianity, the unity of the human race, the integral value of every human person, and the absolute demands of Christian charity, and de Lubac’s evaluative statements about the genius and value of premodern Christian scriptural interpretation in

24. Leo D. Lefebure, *True and Holy: Christian Scripture and Other Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), 77–78.

25. See Henri de Lubac, *Résistance chrétienne au Nazisme*, pref., intro., and notes, by Renée Bédarida, *Oeuvres complètes* 34 (Paris: Cerf, 2006). The volume consists of 18 articles and a reissue of the longer memoir *Résistance chrétienne à l’antisémitisme* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), translated as *Christian Resistance to Anti-Semitism: Memories from 1940–1944*, trans. Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990). See also de Lubac, *At the Service*, 44–56. A number of the articles from *Résistance chrétienne au Nazisme* appear in English translation in Henri de Lubac, *Theology in History*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996).

*Medieval Exegesis and History and Spirit*. Despite the continuity between de Lubac's early essays and his later works on spiritual exegesis, he did not critically or extensively reflect on how those theological themes should relate to the harsh anti-Jewish language and sentiments of the tradition of spiritual exegesis. I conclude, finally, by suggesting that the aforementioned key themes of de Lubac's wartime writings should serve as foundational and orienting theological affirmations within a contemporary account of Christian spiritual or theological use of Scripture.

## De Lubac's Intellectual and Spiritual Resistance to Anti-Semitism

De Lubac's wartime writings, and his active resistance to Nazi anti-Semitism, have not received as much attention in the secondary literature as his works on grace and nature, ecclesiology, and scriptural exegesis.<sup>26</sup> This is unfortunate, however, because they represent his initial—and at times most explicit and forceful—responses to all of the problems he would address in those later works. In his brief exposition of de Lubac's theology, Hans Urs von Balthasar commented that all of de Lubac's major writings grew out of de Lubac's early work *Catholicisme* (1938) as if “branches from a trunk.”<sup>27</sup> *Catholicisme* itself, however, came together as de Lubac's response to the problems of his own day. Portions of the content of that foundational work appeared in print in periodicals prior to its publication as a monograph.<sup>28</sup> Much of another of de Lubac's other major early works, *Le Drame de l'humanisme athée* (1944) also appeared first in essay form as well.<sup>29</sup> His politically and spiritually charged essays against Anti-Semitism

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26. As David Grumett has noticed; see David Grumett, *De Lubac: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 25–46. See also Joseph Komonchak's now classic article, “Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac,” *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 579–602, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056399005100402>. Helpful treatments of de Lubac's social and political contexts during this crucial time can be found in Renee Bédarida, “Theologie et guerre ideologique,” in *Henri de Lubac et la mystere de l'Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1999), 209–18; Jacques Prévotat, “Henri de Lubac et la conscience chrétienne face au totalitarismes,” in *Henri de Lubac et le mystere de l'Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1999), 183–208; Antonio Russo, *Henri de Lubac: biographie* (Paris: Brepols, 1997), 99–119; Russo, “De Lubac and the Resistance to Anti-Semitism,” *30 Days*, April 1, 1988, 76–78. For a useful assessment of the political significance of de Lubac's attention to Scripture during his early career, see Kevin L. Hughes, “Ressourcement and Resistance: *La Nouvelle Théologie*, the Fathers, and the Bible, against Fascism,” in *Reading Scripture as a Political Act: Essays on the Theopolitical Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Matthew A. Tapie and Daniel Wade McClain (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 219–38.
  27. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview*, trans. Joseph Fessio and Michael Waldstein (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 35.
  28. For the bibliographic information for the earlier pieces of *Catholicisme*, see Karl H. Neufeld and Michel Sales, *Bibliographie Henri de Lubac S. J.: 1925–1974* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1971), 11–12, 62–63.
  29. See *ibid.*, 14–16; Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Edith M. Riley, Anne Englund Nash, and Marc Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995).

were written in the same historical period, from the 1930s through the mid-1940s. In all of these occasional essays de Lubac undertook to directly address grave problems and deficiencies in Christian thought and practice in his own day.<sup>30</sup>

Almost a decade prior to World War II, de Lubac had denounced the deleterious anti-Christian message of the absolute nationalism promulgated by Charles Maurras's *l'Action française*.<sup>31</sup> In the late 1930s, he began to redirect his efforts against the increasingly ominous threat of Nazi ideology. Before and during the War, he wrote against the racist ideology of many Catholics and positivists associated with *l'Action française*.<sup>32</sup> De Lubac had become convinced that the French church had become beset by a deformed individualism and nationalism. His actions during the war especially demonstrate the seriousness of his convictions. As noted above, de Lubac's embodied and written witness against anti-Semitism prior to and during World War II provides a stark contrast with his later discussions of Judaism and Jewish exegesis. Since his activities form the context of these vitally important early writings, it is important to rehearse de Lubac's embodied actions prior to and during the War.

While German propaganda had already reached France before French involvement in the War, the actual German *Blitzkrieg* began at the northeastern border on May 10, 1940. The German army had reached Paris by June 14, and the French surrendered on June 25, 1940.<sup>33</sup> After the surrender, the German army occupied the northern three-fifths of the country, including Paris, and installed a custodial government in the southern "free" zone centered in the resort town of Vichy under the direction of Marshal Philippe Pétain.<sup>34</sup> De Lubac's home city of Lyons became the base of Christian spiritual and social resistance in the southern zone. Thousands of Jewish refugees who had fled Germany poured into France in the years leading up to the war.<sup>35</sup> From October 1940 through the end of the War, the Vichy regime promulgated a number of anti-Semitic laws.<sup>36</sup> The totalitarianism of the Nazi regime that the French had only heard about from a distance became a reality under these laws.

In January of 1941, de Lubac was invited to give two lectures celebrating the endowment of a new chair of missions in the Catholic faculty of Lyons. He utilized

30. See Komonchak, "Theology and Culture at Mid-Century," 597–601.

31. See "Patriotisme et nationalisme," in *Résistance chrétienne*, 11–25. This article originally appeared as "Patriotisme et nationalisme," *Vie intellectuelle* 19 (1933): 283–300. For more on *l'Action française*, see Adrien Dansette, "Contemporary French Catholicism," in *The Catholic Church in World Affairs*, ed. W. Gurian and M. A. Fitzsimons (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1954), 247–249.

32. For de Lubac's efforts against the "French type" of anti-Semitism, see especially his warnings against Maurras's all-consuming nationalism in "Patriotisme et nationalisme" and his extended discussion in "A New Religious 'Front,'" 457–71.

33. For details of the German offensive, see Renée Bédarida, *Les catholiques dans la guerre 1939–1945: Entre Vichy et la Résistance* (Paris: Hachette, 1998), 21–37.

34. See Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida, *Vichy et les Français*, 2 vols. (Paris: Fayard, 1992).

35. See Bédarida, *Les catholiques*, 129, 161, 177; de Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 51.

36. See de Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 50; Bédarida, *Les catholiques*, 163–83.

this speaking opportunity to directly denounce the injustices of the racist anti-Semitic legislation. In the first half of his lecture, he argued that the human race is fundamentally united from creation and that the Christian mission is the promulgation of the Gospel for the restoration of this sin-fractured unity.<sup>37</sup> In the second lecture he directly attacked Nazi blood religion as antithetical to, and incompatible with, Christianity in its mission. The first half of the lecture was published in the journal of the *Union missionnaire du clergé* (January–April 1941), but the Vichy censor blocked the second half.<sup>38</sup> De Lubac expressed his growing concern over the anti-Semitic legislation of the Vichy regime in a confidential memorandum to his superiors on April 15, 1941.<sup>39</sup> In this letter, de Lubac condemns the prejudicial nature of the anti-Jewish legislation and calls for the church to respond. Around the same time, de Lubac's longtime friend Gaston Fessard, who had already written a number of essays directed against the growing threat of Nazism, was preparing a straightforward and severe essay addressing the same issues. This essay, entitled "France, prends garde de perdre ton âme," ("France, Beware of Losing your Soul") would become the first issue of the clandestine *Cahiers du Témoignage chrétien* (*Journals of Christian Witness*).<sup>40</sup> Fessard, Pierre Chaillet, and de Lubac produced and edited this ecumenical journal in collaboration with a number of others, including Reformed Pastor Marc Boegner, from November 1941 through the end of the War.<sup>41</sup> De Lubac's involvement with the *Cahiers* put him in the crosshairs of the Gestapo, and he narrowly avoided being captured by them on multiple occasions.<sup>42</sup>

On June 2, 1941 the Germans enacted a second and more dangerous anti-Semitic law in the northern and southern zones. This law required a census of all native and refugee Jews in France, and would make the later round-ups and deportations much easier for the Nazi forces.<sup>43</sup> De Lubac was among those commissioned to work out a text denouncing the new statutes. Entitled the "Chaine Declaration" after its organizer Joseph Chaine, this document was clear, concise, and uncompromising: the laws promulgated by the occupying forces were repugnant to any professing Christian and could not be accepted or endorsed. Unsurprisingly, the Vichy censors kept it from being published and disseminated. De Lubac and his confreres were unable to distribute the text.<sup>44</sup>

37. See Henri de Lubac, "The Theological Foundation of the Missions," in *Theological Fragments*, 367–427. The first part appeared originally as "La fondement théologique des missions," *Union Missionnaire du Clergé de France* 6 (1941): 124–49.

38. See de Lubac, *At the Service*, 42–43; *Christian Resistance*, 25. The second section finally appeared, together with the first, as *Le fondement théologique des missions* (Paris: Seuil, 1946).

39. See de Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 25–27; "Letter to my Superiors," 428–39.

40. For extracts, see François Bédarida and Renée Bédarida, eds., *La résistance spirituelle 1941–1944: Les cahiers clandestins du Témoignage chrétien* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001).

41. De Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 36–49.

42. See de Lubac, *At the Service*, 35; *Christian Resistance*, 123–28.

43. De Lubac, *At the Service*, 55.

44. See de Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 160.



In October 1941, de Lubac succeeded in getting another important article published, “Explication chrétienne de notre temps.”<sup>45</sup> In this article, de Lubac argued that the weakening of Christian consciences, the rampant individualism of the French church, the withdrawal of faith to the sphere of private life, and the rise of totalitarian substitutes to authentic Christian faith conspired to create the current predicament of the French church. Buoyed by the small success of getting his article published, he drafted a more substantial contribution on the fundamentally religious and anti-Christian orientation of the Nazi Reich. This work, “Pour le Christ et la Bible,” failed to make it through the censor. The first half his essay appeared, curiously, in the June 1942 issue; de Lubac did not know how the journal obtained his manuscript. The second half followed in the September issue.<sup>46</sup> In this essay, de Lubac unmasked the racist anti-Semitism of both the French positivists of *l’Action française* and the Nazi propagandists as incompatible with Christian faith.

As 1942 progressed, de Lubac took on a greater and greater role in the work of the *Cahiers du Témoignage chrétien*.<sup>47</sup> This clandestine journal, as de Lubac notes, “gave most of its space to the fight against anti-Semitism.”<sup>48</sup> De Lubac and Chaillet frequently took great risks to ensure its continued composition, publication, and dissemination.<sup>49</sup> On July 16 and 17, 1942 the worst fears of the resistance were realized—the first groups of Jews were rounded-up and deported from Paris. On August 2, deportations began in the unoccupied southern zone.<sup>50</sup> At first, de Lubac recalls, no one was sure of the precise significance of the deportations; it quickly became clear, however, that the Jews were being deported to be exterminated.<sup>51</sup> De Lubac traveled covertly to Toulouse and worked out a plan with Archbishop Jules-Géraud Saliège to inform the public by secret letter of the circumstances and intentions of the deportations. The letter had a tremendous effect on the French populace.<sup>52</sup> On November 11, 1942, the German army invaded the occupied southern zone where it remained until the liberation in 1944. For the remainder of the war, de Lubac continued his work with the *Cahiers* and published other essays directed towards the edification of those participating in the efforts of resistance and denouncing the evils of Hitlerian ideology. These

45. See de Lubac, “Christian Explanation of Our Times,” 440–56; *Christian Resistance*, 103.

46. See de Lubac, “A New Religious ‘Front’,” 457–87; De Lubac thought the work was dead in the water. On the circumstances of its composition and the difficulties de Lubac experienced in trying to get it published, see *ibid.*, 457; *Christian Resistance*, 103–108.

47. See de Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 126.

48. De Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 123. De Lubac contributed essays to *Cahiers* 6–7 (*Antisémites*, April/May 1942), 8–9 (*Droits de l’homme et du chrétien*, June/July 1942), 10–11 (*Collaboration et fidélité*, Oct./Nov. 1942), and 15–16 (*Les voiles se déchirent*, Aug. 1943). See *La résistance* 400–1.

49. See de Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 134–35. See also de Lubac, *At the Service*, 53.

50. De Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 146–47.

51. De Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 150, also 154.

52. De Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 157–58; *At the Service*, 50.

articles—“La lumière du Christ,”<sup>53</sup> “L’Action catholique,”<sup>54</sup> “Le combat spiritual,”<sup>55</sup> and “Homo iuridicus”<sup>56</sup>—elaborate on the same themes of de Lubac’s other wartime writings and demonstrate the consistency of his witness against racist anti-Semitism throughout the war.

De Lubac and his collaborators could not prevent all of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis against French and refugee Jews during the war, but in their courageous active intellectual and spiritual resistance, they undoubtedly played a significant role in saving countless lives.<sup>57</sup> Some of de Lubac’s friends and coworkers lost their own lives in the effort.<sup>58</sup> Though de Lubac successfully managed to avoid capture by the Gestapo—and thus imprisonment or a worse fate—he lived in a constant state of anxiety during the War. His persistent efforts in the resistance against racist anti-Semitism, despite the prodigious risk they entailed, clearly demonstrate his desire for solidarity with the Jewish people and his rejection of all forms of racist anti-Semitism.

### Anti-Judaism in de Lubac’s Writings on Spiritual Exegesis

In his confidential letter to his Jesuit superiors in April of 1941, de Lubac unequivocally asserted that “the anti-Semitism of today was unknown to our Fathers.”<sup>59</sup> In *History and Spirit* and *Medieval Exegesis*, then, it is unsurprising that de Lubac attempted to make a sharp distinction between what he calls the religious—and therefore *not* socially or racially injurious—anti-Judaism present in the tradition of Christian spiritual exegesis and the racist anti-Semitism of the Nazis.<sup>60</sup> In what follows I will summarize and evaluate de Lubac’s discussions of premodern Christian–Jewish relations in his major works on premodern Christian scriptural exegesis. While de Lubac

53. Henri de Lubac, “The Light of Christ” in *Theology in History*, 200–20. It appeared in 1941 as a pamphlet in a collection put together by the Jesuit house at Fourviere entitled “Le témoignage chrétien.”

54. De Lubac, “Catholic Action,” in *Theology in History*, 241–43. Originally published in *Positions*, June 12, 1943.

55. De Lubac, “Spiritual Warfare,” in *Theology in History*, 488–501. Originally published in *Cité nouvelle II* 65 (1943): 769–783.

56. De Lubac, “Homo Juridicus,” in *Theology in History*, 502–4. Originally published in *Cahiers de notre jeunesse* 17 (1943): 42–43.

57. A number of individuals with whom de Lubac worked, including Boegner, Saliège, and Chaillet, are among the Righteous Gentiles honored at the Holocaust memorial by Yad Vashem.

58. Yves de Montcheuil, a close Jesuit friend of de Lubac and a key figure in the effort to distribute the *Cahiers* in the northern zone, was captured and executed by firing squad on August 10th. See de Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 215–40; Bernard Sesboüé, *Yves de Montcheuil (1900–1944): Précurseur en théologie*, Cogitatio fidei 255 (Paris: Cerf, 2006).

59. De Lubac, “Letter to My Superiors,” 437.

60. For a brief discussion of this element of his work, see Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis in the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 34–35.

does helpfully contextualize the anti-Jewish elements of premodern Christian scriptural exegesis, I will argue that he ultimately does not go far enough in his repudiation of such language given the historical impact that language had in later history.

In the third volume of *Medieval Exegesis*, de Lubac concedes that the traditional development of Christian spiritual exegesis of Scripture “was tainted with a strongly polemical spirit” and “remained combative” from its beginnings in the writings of the apostles Paul and John through the twelfth century.<sup>61</sup> It was, as he notes elsewhere, “often abusive.”<sup>62</sup> In his examination of the historical context of the anti-Jewish exegetical tradition in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, though, de Lubac argues that the harsh anti-Jewish statements characteristic of that tradition were not intended to promote anti-Jewish racism or to instigate Christian persecution or violence against Jewish people. By explaining the everyday dynamics of Christian–Jewish relations in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, de Lubac showed how the social and cultural situation of the church created an environment for these uncouth polemics.

At this time, de Lubac explains, Christianity was constantly “on the defensive in the face of its old ancestral religion.”<sup>63</sup> Christians and Jews lived and worked alongside one another, did business with one another, and befriended one another.<sup>64</sup> Close physical proximity and frequent social interaction between Christians and Jews made the question of the status of the Old Testament for Christian faith a pressing concern for church leaders. De Lubac reports that certain zealous medieval Jews engaged in campaigns of proselytism, and Christian-to-Jewish conversion was not uncommon.<sup>65</sup> In this polemical context, however, de Lubac states that the application of severe language against the Jews was “more collective than individual, more concerned with the leaders of the people at the time of Jesus than with the whole of the Jewish nation, and [defined] a type more than real individuals. More fundamentally: the disapproval [of Judaism was] in principle limited to the mysterious order of the faith.” He continues, “The harsh terms that are not spared for Jewish *perfidia* concern only the relation to God, not human relations. They are not injuries at the social level.” The intended destruction of the faithlessness of the Jews, he insists, was “*in no way of a material order*: it cannot include anything else than their conversion.”<sup>66</sup> As de Lubac helpfully indicates, many of the most vociferous and vulgar tracts against Judaism and Judaizing interpretation from the post-apostolic period through the Middle Ages had *imaginary opponents* as their targets.<sup>67</sup>

De Lubac suggests that these anti-Jewish medieval polemics, like the patristic polemics before them, generally addressed everyday issues that demanded attention

61. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:111.

62. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:53.

63. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:112.

64. See de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:112–13.

65. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:113–14.

66. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:128; italics mine for emphasis.

67. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:115. These followed the precedent set by Tertullian’s *Adversus Iudaeos* and Cyprian’s *Testimonia*.

and commitment. In the conclusion to *History and Spirit* he emphasizes that premodern spiritual exegesis “served as a weapon in a hard combat.” “Circumcision, the sabbath, multiple observances,” he continues, “were not things simply read about, allusions to the past, memories of symbols; they were realities on which it was necessary to declare a decision, on which it was necessary to commit oneself.”<sup>68</sup> De Lubac argues that a renewal of the “spirit” of the Old Testament would give its “shadows”—necessary and salutary for their time but surpassed in Christ—a solidity they should no longer have. “The books of Joshua and Judges ran the risk of turning into codes of holy war,” de Lubac explains, “kings were to be literally new Davids or new Josiahs; the priesthood itself was to use the sword, and so on.”<sup>69</sup> De Lubac, however, does not offer any examples to substantiate his claims that Christians saw a literalizing approach to political and ethical commands in the Old Testament as problematic. In fact, Christians of high standing were happy to utilize both literal and spiritual modes of reading to endorse the temporal power of popes and to argue for the necessity of the crusades.

We should not see de Lubac’s explanations of the historical context of the religious anti-Judaism in the tradition of spiritual exegesis as an attempt on his part to exonerate the Christian exegetical tradition. He saw the presence of such polemical language in the tradition as regrettable. He thought that the violence against the Jewish people such language was invoked to justify, especially in the thirteenth century and beyond, was especially heinous and contemptible. De Lubac insists, however, that the harsh statements he examines took place in a “purely religious argument.”<sup>70</sup> De Lubac thinks that the strong rhetoric of the Christian polemics in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is somewhat more understandable in the light of the challenges the church faced.<sup>71</sup> He overstates the case for the socially and physically harmless nature of the anti-Jewish polemic in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. While de Lubac insists that Christian

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68. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 470.

69. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:112.

70. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:131.

71. For analyses of the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition in the patristic and medieval periods which offer needed nuances to de Lubac’s much less-thorough assessments of the complexity of premodern Christian–Jewish interaction, see Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999); Gilbert Dahan, *The Christian Polemic against Jews in the Middle Ages*, trans. Jody Gladding (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1998); Paula Fredrickson, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2010); Marc Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity* (New York: SUNY, 1996); Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135–425)*, trans. H. McKeating (Oxford: Oxford University, 1986); Matthew A. Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014); Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (1983; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004); Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria’s Exegesis and Theology* (1971; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

violence against the Jews prior to the thirteenth century was extremely rare, it was not totally non-existent. As Jeremy Cohen notes, the first crusaders (ca. 1096 CE) attacked Jews in France and Germany at the instigation of local preaching. This event set a precedent for later Christian violence against the Jewish people.<sup>72</sup>

De Lubac's historical contextualization of the polemic does clearly demonstrate that this aspect of the tradition of spiritual exegesis should not be identified directly with the racist anti-Semitism de Lubac encountered and fought against during the War. For even if both of these forms of opposition to the Jews occasioned violence against them, de Lubac shows that the anti-Judaism inscribed in the Christian exegetical tradition did not attribute the alleged deficiencies of the Jews to their race, but to their lack of belief in Jesus as the Messiah. Furthermore, the anti-Judaism of the patristic and medieval Christian tradition held that Christians and Jews could coexist, while Nazi-inspired anti-Semitism took segregation and separation of Jews from Christians to its most violent and lethal extreme.

Ultimately, however, de Lubac's contextualization of Christian–Jewish polemics is not enough. De Lubac's treatment of premodern Jewish Christian relations in *History and Spirit* and *Medieval Exegesis* is piecemeal and comes across as an ineffective apologetic. Though she perhaps overstates the case, Robin Darling Young has drawn attention to how de Lubac exhibits a tendency towards romanticism in his presentation of the unity and beauty of the premodern church.<sup>73</sup> More thorough accounts of the histories of premodern Jewish–Christian relations have revealed much more complexity in those histories than de Lubac provided.<sup>74</sup> As Jules Isaac has demonstrated, the harsh language of the tradition of spiritual exegesis was utilized to justify not only spiritual violence against Jewish people and the deprivation of their liberties in late medieval and early modern Europe, but was also invoked by modern political leaders as a justification for racist persecution of the Jewish people, most strikingly in one of the largest genocidal campaigns propagated in history, the Shoah.<sup>75</sup> A more definitive repudiation of such injurious language is necessary.

The contrast between de Lubac's early writings and actions and his less than satisfactory denunciation of the elements of anti-Judaism in the tradition of premodern Christian scriptural interpretation in *History and Spirit* and *Medieval Exegesis* is both

72. See Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 150–51, 160, 219, 241, 245–46. See also Lefebure, *True and Holy*, 79–80.

73. See Robin Darling Young, "A Soldier of the Great War: Henri de Lubac on the Patristic Sources for a Premodern Theology," in *After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics*, ed. James L. Heft with John O'Malley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 134–63.

74. See the works of Simon, Dahan, Cohen, and Wilken listed above in note 71.

75. See Jules Isaac, *Has Anti-Semitism Roots in Christianity?* trans. James and Dorothy Parkes (New York: National Conference of Christians and Jews, 1962); Isaac, *Jésus et Israël* (Paris: Michel, 1948), translated as *Jesus and Israel* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964); Isaac, *L'enseignement du mépris* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1962), translated as *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964). For a brief, helpful summary of Isaac's work and its impact, see Lefebure, *True and Holy*, 89–91.

disturbing and perplexing. While he rightly differentiates the anti-Judaism of the tradition from the racist anti-Semitism of the twentieth century in those later works, his earlier writings and actions suggest that de Lubac should have gone further in denouncing the ubiquitous anti-Judaism of traditional Christian scriptural interpretation. Why did he not do so? From our later vantage point, de Lubac simply appears irresponsible. There may be, however, a more simple—though still not entirely satisfying—answer. De Lubac simply ran out of time and space. In his memoir he notes that the Roman censor who approved *Medieval Exegesis* did so under the condition that he provide a “critical restatement” of the substance of the work; he never completed any such restatement.<sup>76</sup> He also indicates that one of the two greatest omissions of *Medieval Exegesis* is a chapter “on the relations between Jewish exegesis and Christian exegesis at that time.”<sup>77</sup> That hypothetical chapter would surely have provided him an occasion to state unequivocally that Christians must repudiate the harsh anti-Jewish sentiments of the tradition and ensure that they have no part in a renewed spiritual exegesis. We must look elsewhere for resources for such a renewed approach to theological exegesis. Thankfully, however, we need not look far.

## Principles for the Renewal of Spiritual Exegesis

In the essays de Lubac wrote during the War, as I have noted above, his intense concern for the issues of his own day comes to the fore more often and more clearly than it does in many of his other works.<sup>78</sup> The themes of his wartime work were the themes of his mission in the world. The following brief survey of some key themes of de Lubac’s wartime writings can therefore serve as a helpful hermeneutic lens for reading and appropriating his other works. For my present purposes, however, I draw attention to these themes because they exhibit de Lubac’s fundamental theological and ethical presuppositions. He restates such presuppositions in his later works *History and Spirit* and *Medieval Exegesis*, but he does not explore their implications for an *aggiornamento* of Christian spiritual exegesis in those works. Such judgments, however, can and should serve as foundational resources for the kind of renewed approach to scriptural exegesis that de Lubac hoped to inaugurate.

In his wartime essays, de Lubac constantly stresses the continuity between the Old Covenant entrusted to Judaism and the New Covenant of Christ and the church. He frequently insists that Christianity cannot be understood apart from its Jewish heritage. De Lubac consequently argues that Nazi anti-Semitism is anti-Christianity. De Lubac states that the anti-Semitism of the Nazi Reich could not oppose the Old Testament without also opposing the Gospel.<sup>79</sup> Any “movement of withdrawal” from the Old Testament, he insists, would unravel the very fabric of Christian faith.<sup>80</sup> Through their

76. De Lubac, *At the Service*, 85.

77. De Lubac, *At the Service*, 84n10.

78. See Komonchak, “Theology and Culture,” 601.

79. De Lubac, “Letter to my Superiors,” 437.

80. De Lubac, “A New Religious ‘Front’,” 486.

shared patrimony, de Lubac insists that Christians are inextricably bound to the people of the Old Covenant.<sup>81</sup> “The God of Jesus,” he repeatedly reaffirms, is “the God of Abraham, Moses, and the Prophets.”<sup>82</sup> Christians and Jews thus share the same history and heritage of faith: “The faith of Abraham is already our faith. In its fundamental precepts, the law of Moses is still our law. The great men of Israel are truly our Fathers. The prophets shake us still today with the great lessons God charges them to give his people.”<sup>83</sup>

In “A New Religious ‘Front’,” de Lubac argues that any defense of Christianity against the neo-paganism and racism of Nazism would be “incomplete” without a concomitant defense of the people who prepared for Christ’s coming. Christ, after all, did not come to abrogate the Law of the Old Covenant but to fulfill it.<sup>84</sup> In his already-mentioned essay “The Theological Foundation of Missions,” de Lubac argues that Christians are bound to the Jewish people because both share the same universal mission.<sup>85</sup> At various points in the wartime works, de Lubac returns to a remark made by Pope Pius XI to a group of Belgium pilgrims in Rome on September 6, 1938 to drive home the unique way that Christians relate to the Jewish people: “Spiritually, we are Semites!”<sup>86</sup> Because Christianity cannot be detached from its Jewish roots, de Lubac repeatedly insisted that any anti-Judaism is necessarily anti-Christianity.

In his wartime writings, de Lubac also regularly insisted that the social goal of Christian faith is the eschatological unification of the human race. Positivist and Nazi racism, de Lubac argues, attacks the “essential doctrine of the unity of the human race.”<sup>87</sup> Prior to the War, de Lubac had already marshaled the witness of the sacraments, the liturgy, Scripture, and the Church Fathers to exhibit the traditional Christian affirmation of the fundamental unity of the human race in *Catholicism*. In his 1941 essay, “Christian Explanation of Our Times,” he returns to this theme to combat the fragmentation of humanity propagated by contemporary ideologies. Repeating the argument of chapter 11 of *Catholicism*, de Lubac argues that Christianity reveals the dual values of person and community in their fullness.<sup>88</sup> In the Christian church, “the two movements of interiorization and universalization by which the human being is personalized always go hand in hand.”<sup>89</sup> In his essay “The Theological Foundations of the Missions,” de Lubac quotes Pope Pius XI’s 1937 encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge* to contrast the agonistic blood religion of the Nazis with Christianity. The pope, he argues, “rose up solemnly against ‘the vain attempt to imprison God, the Creator of the

81. De Lubac, “A New Religious ‘Front’,” 482.

82. De Lubac, “Christian Explanation of Our Times,” 446–47.

83. De Lubac, “A New Religious ‘Front’,” 487.

84. De Lubac, “A New Religious ‘Front’,” 482.

85. De Lubac, “The Theological Foundation of the Missions,” 379, 421.

86. De Lubac, “A New Religious ‘Front’,” 487. See also De Lubac, *Christian Resistance*, 27–32.

87. De Lubac, “Disappearance of the Sense of the Sacred,” in *Theological Fragments*, 240.

88. De Lubac, “Christian Explanation of Our Times,” 451.

89. De Lubac, “Christian Explanation of Our Times,” 452.

Universe, the King and Lawgiver of all peoples, before whose greatness the nations are “like a drop of water in the bucket” (Isa 40:15), in the narrowness of the blood community of a single race’.”<sup>90</sup> For de Lubac Christians must reject anti-Semitism—and by extension all forms of racism—not only because it severs the bond between Christians and their fathers and mothers in the faith, but because it rejects the social implications of the Gospel. Racist anti-Semitism, through denying the value of the Jewish people as human beings, violates the revealed truth of God’s impartiality towards, and love for, all people.

By denying the transcendent God of the biblical tradition, the racist ideologies of both positivism and pagan Nazi ideology are incompatible with the Christian judgment of the integral value of the human person. The revelation of God, first in the Hebrew Bible and then in the New Testament, for de Lubac, “was a promotion of [the human person]: that is inscribed in history.”<sup>91</sup> The integral value of every person is grounded in the affirmation of the Jewish and Christian scriptures that humanity is created in the *imago Dei* (Gen 1:26). “God made [humanity] in his image,” de Lubac writes, “that is, spirit like him, in view of leading [humanity] to his likeness, that is, to make [humanity] participate in his Life. There is, then, in [every person] a sacred part, which by right eludes any enterprise of slavery or monopolization.”<sup>92</sup> Every offense against the dignity of any human person is therefore an offense against Christianity. In an essay in *Cahier VI–VII, Antisémismes* entitled “L’antisémitisme et la conscience chrétienne,” de Lubac drives this point home with great force: “The Christian is the recreated human, restored in Christ, and nothing that is human should be foreign to her. Everything that attacks the person, everything that wounds her honor, her dignity, her reason, her sense of justice, simultaneously attacks and wounds the Christian.”<sup>93</sup>

De Lubac insists that greatest achievements of Western culture have the doctrinal affirmation of the value of the *humanum* as their foundation: “Spirit, reason, liberty, truth, brotherhood, justice: these great things, without which there is no true humanity . . . quickly become unreal when no longer seen as a radiation from God, when faith in the living God no longer provides their vital substance. Then they become empty forms.”<sup>94</sup> De Lubac contrasts the Christian understanding of human nature with the agonistic and atheistic ideologies which undergirded the racism perpetuated by the Nazis. If humanity has no transcendent *telos* in God, de Lubac asks, “where will one find the principle of human dignity, of this infinite price, of this absolute value of each ‘soul,’ correlative to an absolute of truth and justice, which Christianity had revealed to us?”<sup>95</sup> Even the

90. De Lubac, “The Theological Foundation of the Missions,” 419.

91. De Lubac, *The Drama*, 400.

92. De Lubac, “Christian Explanation of Our Times,” 450.

93. “[L]e chrétien est l’homme recréé, rétabli dans le Christ, et rien de ce qui est humain ne doit lui être étranger. Tout ce qui atteint l’homme, tout ce qui blesse son honneur, sa dignité, sa raison, son sentiment de la justice, atteint et blesse du même coup le chrétien.” “L’antisémitisme et la conscience,” 355, my translation.

94. De Lubac, *The Drama*, 70.

95. De Lubac, *The Drama*, 446.



virtues of courage, virility, and heroism rightly affirmed—yet grotesquely disfigured, of course—in German neo-paganism would lose their luster without their transcendent grounding.<sup>96</sup>

De Lubac's conviction of the universality of God's love for the world undergirds the doctrinal affirmations of the continuity and solidarity between Christianity and Judaism, the universal unity of the human race, and the essential value of all human beings. "Nothing has any value except through charity," he argues in "The Light of Christ." "Charity demands all, assumes all. Charity judges all."<sup>97</sup> For de Lubac, the universal unity of the human race and the integral value of every human being are founded upon and perfected in the love of God. All social bonds, de Lubac argues, "which [arise] first from all sorts of natural necessities and then [are] fastened humanly by all sorts of contracts and exchanges, must . . . be made perfect in charity."<sup>98</sup> For de Lubac, the human community of the church is to be the revelation and organ of this perfect universal human unity in charity.<sup>99</sup> It is also "to the Gospel," de Lubac exclaims to his audience, that "we owe our very idea of [the human person]."<sup>100</sup> For de Lubac, the love of God revealed and mediated through Christ and the church grounds the possibility of the unity of the human race and endows every individual person with infinite value.

De Lubac's conviction of the charity of God is grounded, of course, in his emphatic insistence that God has fully and completely revealed God's love for the world through the work of Jesus Christ.<sup>101</sup> De Lubac insists that Christ's deed of charity encompasses and grounds the unity between Jews and Christians, because Christ has fulfilled the entirety of the Old Covenant. Echoing the testimony of the evangelists and of the Apostle Paul, de Lubac states that Christ came not to reject and condemn the Jewish forebears in the faith, but to ensure the success of God's universal covenant with them "by detaching it from its cultural and national connections."<sup>102</sup>

De Lubac's later works on spiritual exegesis also exhibit the aforementioned emphases of his wartime writings. As he writes in the foreword to *L'Écriture dans la tradition*, "the faith which Jesus wants to bring to perfection in us is the faith of Abraham, Moses, and the Prophets."<sup>103</sup> Though de Lubac emphasizes the discontinuity between the testaments in very strong terms throughout the works on spiritual exegesis, he simultaneously insists on the organic and inseparable unity of the covenants.<sup>104</sup> Just as it does not

96. De Lubac, "Spiritual Warfare," 500.

97. De Lubac, "The Light of Christ," 218. See also De Lubac, "Spiritual Warfare," 500; and De Lubac, *Homo Juridicus*, 502–4.

98. De Lubac, "Christian Explanation of Our Times," 454.

99. See De Lubac, "The Theological Foundation of the Missions," 422.

100. De Lubac, "Christian Explanation of Our Times," 446.

101. This is evident throughout the aforementioned wartime essays, but is especially poignant in "The Light of Christ."

102. De Lubac, "Christian Explanation of Our Times," 447.

103. De Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, ix.

104. On the continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments see especially De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:108–12.

demolish the continuity between the testaments, de Lubac insists that the newness of God's self-revelation in Christ does not put an intrinsic barrier between the people of the Old Covenant and the people of the New. The Jewish people had received "the mission to enlighten all others."<sup>105</sup> As de Lubac is clear to state, the church does not replace Israel but is grafted onto Israel in order to carry forward and ultimately fulfill God's plans for the created order.<sup>106</sup>

The themes of the universality of the work of the triune God in the human community and the integral value of individual persons also appear in de Lubac's works on spiritual exegesis. Spiritual exegesis is not a quietistic pious fancy but has profound social and anthropological implications.<sup>107</sup> The mystery of the Gospel, which spiritual exegesis reflects and seeks to express "is at once historical and spiritual, interior and social."<sup>108</sup> As de Lubac clarifies in the preface to the first volume of *Medieval Exegesis*, ancient Christian spiritual exegesis "defines the relationship between historical reality and spiritual reality, between society and the individual, between time and eternity."<sup>109</sup> The spiritual exegesis de Lubac hoped to recover maintained the "the collective destiny of humanity" and insisted on the value of "the interior life of the soul."<sup>110</sup>

De Lubac indicates that the goal of spiritual exegesis is the Christian community's and individual's participation in, and conformity to, the love of the God to whom Scripture testifies. The total unfurling of spiritual exegesis, he writes in the conclusion to *History and Spirit*, "is coextensive with the gift of the Spirit," and thus "with the progress of charity."<sup>111</sup> Authentic Christian spiritual exegesis was thus recognized by both de Lubac and the premodern interpreters whose work he explains as a means of the communication of the universal love of God for all the peoples of the world. De Lubac writes in *Medieval Exegesis* that "the whole essence of the revelation [of Christ] fits within the precept of love."<sup>112</sup>

Despite the continuity between de Lubac's emphasis on the inseparability of Christianity from Judaism, the unity of the human race, the integral value of every human person, and the practice of Christian charity as the pinnacle of Christian love in

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105. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:136. Despite the fact that de Lubac frequently adverts to the traditional recognition that the Jewish people had received God's mission to enlighten the world, this claim is linked to the claim that the Jewish people had failed to fulfill that work. See also *Medieval Exegesis* 1:241. The question of supercessionism looms large here. For an excellent discussion of the theological issues and questions of "supercessionism," see Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church*, 1–24.

106. See esp. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 506.

107. For two explications of this judgment utilizing de Lubac's work, see Hollon, *Everything is Sacred*, 182–97; and Hughes, "Ressourcement and Resistance," 219–38.

108. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:141.

109. See his comments on the comprehensive scope of spiritual exegesis in De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:xiii–xxiii, esp. xix.

110. De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 207.

111. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 448.

112. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:144.

his wartime essays and his major works on premodern Christian exegesis, he did not address how such fundamental presuppositions should impact contemporary Christian use and interpretation of Scripture. He also did not draw attention to the fact that many premodern Christian interpreters were either forgetful of such convictions or were unable or unwilling to allow them to impact their own use and interpretation of the ancient Jewish Scriptures, particularly in their rhetorical and later embodied treatment of the Jewish people with whom they shared those texts. He has left such work for another generation of theologians. His example during the war, however, and the key essays which he wrote in those trying times, provide the kinds of resources necessary for rebuilding a spiritual or theological approach to Scripture both attentive to and appreciative of the achievements of premodern Christians and equally critical of the deficiencies and blindspots in their exegetical and liturgical engagement with those sacred texts.

## Conclusion

To conclude, I offer two brief suggestions for using de Lubac's work in the construction of a contemporary theological account of spiritual exegesis.

First, any attempt to rehabilitate the massive achievements of premodern Christian use of Scripture cannot succeed unless it adapts and transforms the traditional practice so that it both faithfully represents the premodern genius of Christian interpretation and adequately expresses the fundamental convictions of Christian faith in a manner appropriate for our own time. The polemical approach to interreligious relations of the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition is an unavoidable stumbling block in the history of early Christian interpretation of Scripture, and this unfortunate and infelicitous rhetoric paved the way for the abuses of the late middle ages and worse offenses in modernity. It would be exceedingly unfair to blame those who engaged in these unsavory polemics for the horrors perpetrated by the Third Reich. Nevertheless, it is more than regrettable that such language, and the sentiments it reflects, appears in Christian tradition. Any appropriation of de Lubac's work on spiritual exegesis must not only leave such language beyond, but must repudiate it.

Second, any constructive contemporary theological justification of Christian spiritual exegesis must be grounded in and productive of the kind of Christian love evidenced in de Lubac's own efforts on behalf of the Jewish people of France. De Lubac's own convictions concerning the love of the God attested by Jewish and Christian scripture for the whole world motivated and animated his actions on behalf of the Jewish people during the War. He risked his life because of his conviction of his shared patrimony with the Jewish people, because of his affirmation of the unity of the human race and the integral value of all human persons, and ultimately because of his adherence to the charity of God in Christ.

In the conclusion to *History and Spirit*, de Lubac argues that a renewed spiritual exegesis "will remain christological, purely christological—taking care now as always not to neglect any of the dimensions of Christ."<sup>113</sup> This is an admittedly provocative

113. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 491.

claim. As de Lubac writes in “A New Religious Front,” “it is not a trivial or unimportant thing to believe that ‘Christ is Lord’! Christianity is not at all inoffensive. Christianity is demanding.”<sup>114</sup> It might seem paradoxical that de Lubac’s own love of Christ and convictions about Christ’s lordship were the basis of his courageous efforts on behalf of the Jewish people during World War II, especially because of the stumbling block that Christ has been in Jewish–Christian relations historically. De Lubac insists, however—in both his actions and his words during the War—that this christological claim requires a concomitant repudiation of all racism, cultural imperialism, and neopaganism.<sup>115</sup> De Lubac took extensive action on behalf of the Jewish people during World War II because of his fundamental Christocentric convictions. “The whole essence of the revelation [of Christ] fits within the precept of love,” he states in *Medieval Exegesis*, “in this single utterance is contained ‘the whole of the law and the prophets’.”<sup>116</sup> For de Lubac, the infinite love of the triune God is for all peoples. The revelation of God in Israel, Christ, and the church is the revelation of the infinite value of the *humanum* and of the universal destiny of the human community. A renewed spiritual exegesis must ultimately have as its goal the deepening of our understanding of and participation in the different dimensions of this divine love for the world. “Christianity, if we go directly to its essence, is the religion of Love,” de Lubac states in “Spiritual Warfare.” “Any greater awareness of our faith,” he continues, “must make us understand this better.”<sup>117</sup> The work of appropriating de Lubac’s historical work on spiritual exegesis remains. In this essay I have attempted to identify and address a significant obstacle to such work with the hope of making this worthy effort slightly less imposing.

### Author Biography

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114. De Lubac, “A New Religious ‘Front’,” 473.

115. The Church, as the purveyor of the charity of God, “lays no claim to cultural imperialism.” De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 294.

116. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:144.

117. De Lubac, “Spiritual Warfare,” 499.