

# Sacrament and Eschatological Fulfillment in Henri de Lubac's Theology of History

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SACRAMENT AND ESCHATOLOGICAL FULFILLMENT IN  
HENRI DE LUBAC'S THEOLOGY OF HISTORY

by  
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## ABSTRACT

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HENRI DE LUBAC'S THEOLOGY OF HISTORY

Joseph Simeon Flipper, B.A., M.A.

Marquette University, 2012

Henri de Lubac, S.J. (1896-1991) led one of the most important developments within twentieth-century Catholic theology, the movement known as the *nouvelle théologie*. De Lubac's signature move was to return to early church sources to renew contemporary theology. This dissertation explores de Lubac's recovery of patristic eschatology for the contemporary age. While certainly responding to secularization, de Lubac also sought to respond to the "messianic" and apocalyptic shape of modern religious experience and political ideology. He argued that the source of secular messianisms was a dichotomy within Christianity between mysticism and the apocalyptic. The *nouvelle théologie* movement of the 1940s—from the wartime underground journal *Cahiers du Témoignage chrétien* (The Christian Witness Journals) to the post-war controversy over Christianity and communism—witnesses to the clash of differing eschatologies at the heart of twentieth-century Catholicism. De Lubac's response—his recovery of a patristic exegetical hermeneutics—must therefore be examined with an eschatological lens. De Lubac borrowed from Origen to recover an eschatology that synthesizes a transcendent-oriented mysticism with a future-oriented hope. De Lubac then showed how two historical developments—Pseudo-Dionysian spirituality and Joachimite history—diverged from the traditional patristic eschatology. Dionysian mysticism ejected the historical, while Joachimism's apocalyptic theology of history evacuated authentic transcendence. Both lost a dynamic tension inherent in patristic thought. De Lubac argued that the dichotomy between the *invisibilia Dei* and the *futura* lay at the origins of rationalistic and apocalyptic ideologies in the twentieth century. In the end, this study argues, de Lubac creatively appropriated patristic "anagogy" and made eschatology the fundamental structure for his sacramental thinking, his understanding of the church, his Christology, and his mysticism. The dissertation shows that de Lubac's "anagogical" imagination effected a rapprochement between eschatological impulses within the twentieth century and responded to the needs of a divided Catholicism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Henri de Lubac's writings on the history of exegesis (especially *Exégèse médiévale* and *La Posterité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore*) have been enigmatic for historians and theologians alike. The four volumes of *Exégèse médiévale* (1959-1964) cataloged a patristic and medieval biblical hermeneutic of spiritual interpretation that had long been superseded within Protestant exegesis and arguably within Roman Catholic biblical circles as well.<sup>1</sup> “Spiritual interpretation” was a method of finding spiritual meanings beyond the letter of the text. However, at a time when Catholicism was rediscovering the depths of the biblical texts with the help of historical and critical interpretive methods, spiritual interpretation appeared to be a step backward. If intended as an argument for a particular exegetical hermeneutic, *Exégèse médiévale* was never seriously received by biblicalists.<sup>2</sup> Historians of Christian exegesis did not know what to do with *Exégèse médiévale*. It appeared to overlook the irreducible pluralism of patristic and medieval exegesis, over-distilling this pluralism into the “fourfold sense of scripture.”

De Lubac's *La Posterité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore* (2 vols.) (1979-1981) posed a similar difficulty. Analyzing the exegesis of the medieval apocalyptic theologian

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1 I use the French title *Exégèse médiévale* rather than the English *Medieval Exegesis* to refer to the entire four-volume work because volume four of *Exégèse médiévale* has not yet been translated into English. In what follows I depend upon the English translation of volumes one to three and the French version of volume four. For the sake of consistency, I refer to the untranslated volume in the French (Book 2, Part 2) as *Exégèse médiévale* 4.

2 David M. Williams states, “His effect on biblical exegetes, especially those outside France, was at best negligible.” Williams points to several concerns raised by de Lubac’s work for exegetes, above all, “doubts regarding the depth and reality of his commitment to the role of history in biblical interpretation.” David M. Williams, *Receiving the Bible in Faith* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 170.

Joachim de Fiore, de Lubac traced “Joachimite” thought from the medieval period to the contemporary. He employed several criteria for identifying “Joachimite” thinkers: their use of a Trinitarian schema to divide history, the expectation of a new age of the Spirit, and an apocalyptic view of the future age to come. The initial reviewers of *La Posterité spirituelle* differed significantly in their assessments, generally depending upon whether they were historians, theologians, or philosophers.<sup>3</sup> Again, historians primarily objected to the wide net in which de Lubac ensnared theologians, philosophers, political and social theorists, tyrants, and poets. Among those treated as Joachim’s “spiritual posterity” were G. E. Lessing, Friedrich Schleiermacher, G. W. F. Hegel, Hughes Felicité Robert de Lamennais, Adolf Hitler, Jürgen Moltmann, and de Lubac’s former student, Michel de Certeau. To characterize all of them as Joachimite appears unjustifiable in purely historical terms and somewhat rash.<sup>4</sup>

Recent scholarship, however, makes sense of de Lubac’s studies on the history of exegesis by placing them in the context of his theological commitments, and not only his exegetical or historical ones. Kevin L. Hughes, in a recent assessment of *Exégèse médiévale*, explains that de Lubac attempts to recover a theological *mentality* rather than

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3 James Pambrun, a systematic theologian, interpreted de Lubac's books on Joachim as an extension of de Lubac's fundamental theology. James R. Pambrun, “La Posterité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore, vol. 1-2,” *Église et théologie* 16, no. 2 (May 1985): 256–60. Marjorie Reeves, a medieval historian, gave a positive review, but found fault with the criteria for determining who is counted as Joachim’s “spiritual posterity.” Marjorie Reeves, “La Posterité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore, V 1: De Joachim à Schelling,” *Theological Studies* 32, no. 1 (April 1981): 287–94. See also William Kluback, “La Posterité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore, Vol. 2: De Saint-Simon à nos jours,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 15, no. 3 (1984): 192–95.

4 Natalie Zemon Davis, for example, objects to de Lubac’s criticism of de Certeau’s Joachimism. Natalie Zemon Davis, “The Quest of Michel de Certeau,” *New York Review of Books*, May 15, 2008.

a *method*.<sup>5</sup> *Exégèse médiévale* analyzed the history of spiritual interpretation (also called spiritual understanding and spiritual exegesis), the practice of reading beyond the letter of scripture to its depth-dimension. It was believed, for much of the Christian tradition, that the scriptures have spiritual meanings beyond the literal. The fourfold division of the meanings of scripture—historical, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical—exemplified the development of this spiritual sense within the exegetical tradition. Beyond the literal reference of scriptures, the events spoken of in scripture signify future and spiritual realities. Spiritual exegesis embodied a theological understanding of historical events in light of their spiritual depth or purpose. According to Hughes, de Lubac intended to discern a common mentality underlying patristic and medieval exegetical practices rather than to identify a common method of exegesis, which in patristic and medieval thought consisted of a dizzying pluralism. While de Lubac admitted that the exegetical methods of the patristic and medieval periods could not be revived, he argued that something of the spirit of their interpretation should be recovered for the contemporary age.

Hughes's insight may also be applied to *La Posterité spirituelle. Exégèse médiévale* treats the *historical* influence of Joachim of Fiore's exegesis on an exegetical tradition of the literal interpretation of the book of Revelation. *La Posterité spirituelle* takes up aspects neglected, though alluded to, within *Exégèse médiévale*. It proposed to reveal a trajectory inspired by Joachim de Fiore, but not limited to his direct influence or

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5 Kevin L. Hughes indicates the problem of reading *Exégèse médiévale* as a purely historical work, rather than as a theological one. He suggests that de Lubac's intention is to outline a theological "mentality" within the tradition. Kevin L. Hughes, "The 'Fourfold Sense:' De Lubac, Blondel and Contemporary Theology," *The Heythrop Journal* 42, no. 4 (2001): 451–462.

to purely theological expressions of his thought. *La Posterité spirituelle* examines a “spiritual line with numerous ramifications, that of the thinkers or men of action (whether or not quoting him as their authority but all more or less betraying his dream) tend, like him, to conceive of a third age, an age of the Spirit, succeeding that of Christ of which the Church was the guardian.”<sup>6</sup> “Spiritual posterity” signified a lineage *sharing the same spirit*. In addition, “spiritual posterity” refers to those who expected *a new age of the Spirit* that would occur within this world and history. The spiritual posterity of Joachim consists of those who inherited a certain apocalyptic worldview from Joachim. De Lubac's research into Joachim de Fiore investigated a mentality with roots in the practice of spiritual exegesis but in many ways opposed to it.

Both books share a common argument but develop it in different ways. Both aim at discovering a broader worldview or mentality underlying exegetical practices. While *Exégèse médiévale* outlined a mentality that de Lubac wished to recover from the patristic and medieval periods, *La Posterité spirituelle* traced an apocalyptic sense of history underlying dangerous political movements and social philosophies that posed a present threat. As I will argue, de Lubac privileged the mentality characterizing patristic exegetical practices and embodied in the patristic-medieval “fourfold sense of scripture” because he discovered within it an authentically Christian understanding of history.

According to de Lubac, the *ressourcement* of a patristic-medieval understanding

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6 Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings* (San Francisco: Communio Books, 1993), 156. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits*, *Chrétiens aujourd'hui* 1 (Namur: Culture et vérité, 1989).

of history could respond to a modern historical consciousness while affirming the Christian doctrinal tradition. It served to affirm the reality of God's intervention in history, the eternal significance of the present, and a Christian understanding of history's end. It suggested a future fulfillment of God's promises without succumbing to utopias.

The meaning of history and eschatology is a theme found throughout Henri de Lubac's writings and is a central theme within his thought. Through his understanding of history and its fulfillment, de Lubac attempted to respond to some of the most significant controversies affecting French Catholics and French Catholic theology of the twentieth century. Moreover, de Lubac's theology of history and eschatology form the lens through which he developed his understanding of sacramentality, his ecclesiology, his Christology, and his reflections on mysticism.

In what follows, I first outline the obstacles to any reductionistic interpretation of de Lubac's corpus. Second, I examine proposals for understanding the theological unity of de Lubac's work from Hans Urs von Balthasar, Susan K. Wood, Aidan Nichols, Brian Daley, and Hans Boersma. Third, I indicate the unifying role of history and eschatology within de Lubac's work.

### **I. Difficulties for the Interpretation of de Lubac's Corpus**

Many of de Lubac's writings were historical studies with systematic theological intent. They ranged across early church history, medieval history, ecclesiology, the engagement with modern atheistic thought, renaissance studies, and literary criticism.

These studies, however, were far from disengaged narration of the past. De Lubac's initial academic appointment was as a professor of apologetics at the *Institut catholique de Lyon*. His article, "Apologétique et théologie" (1930) was a provocative reconception of the relationship between philosophy and theology, and faith and reason.<sup>7</sup> His controversial work on nature, grace, and the supernatural arose through historical research on the genesis of the idea of pure nature in Scholastic thought. His first book, *Catholicism* (1938), suggested new directions for Catholic ecclesiology through a narration of patristic thought.<sup>8</sup> His book *Corpus Mysticum* (1944) sought a recovery of an ancient notion of church and sacrament for the present day.<sup>9</sup>

While de Lubac's works exhibit an engagement with the problems of his day, these works are notoriously difficult to reduce to clear systematic positions. Establishing the coherence among his various writings remains a problem. De Lubac even characterized his writings as occasional, the choice of topics determined by situations imposed upon him rather than by some preconceived plan.<sup>10</sup> He likened the development of some of his writings to a disorderly evolution or autogenesis. In an interview with Angelo Scola, he admitted that *Exégèse médiévale* grew "in a rather vague order, without any preconceived plan, and with enormous *lacunae*."<sup>11</sup>

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7 Henri de Lubac, "Apologétique et théologie," *Nouvelle Revue théologique* 57 (1930): 361–378.

8 Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988). Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Unam Sanctam 3 (Paris: Cerf, 1938).

9 Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds, C.J., Faith in Reason (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: l'eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen âge. Étude historique*, Théologie 3 (Paris: Aubier, 1944).

10 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 369.

11 Henri de Lubac, *De Lubac: A Theologian Speaks* (Los Angeles: Twin Circle, 1985), 32.

In addition, de Lubac's work is characterized by an idiosyncratic theological method, a characteristic also shared by the *nouvelle théologie* as a whole. The *nouveaux théologiens* generally resisted the neo-Scholastic monopoly on theological method in favor of theological pluralism. In general, they resisted the ahistorical methods of neo-Scholasticism in favor of methods attentive to historicity. These theologians were forced to improvise, drawing resources from the patristic and medieval periods and from the wider Christian tradition. The break with neo-Scholasticism left a vacuum difficult to fill. The apparent clarity of method and sources within neo-Scholasticism, which gave it the appearance of a “science,” is lacking within the *nouvelle théologie*. Marie-Dominique Chenu, Jean Daniélou, Yves Congar, and Henri de Lubac were attentive to historical development and methods of interpreting historical sources. Before Vatican II in particular, the implications of their shifts in theological methodology were uncertain. The problem of coherence within de Lubac's work touches upon the problem of the coherence within the *nouvelle théologie* movement during a time of radical upheaval in theological method.<sup>12</sup>

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12 A growing body of literature attempts to interpret the *nouvelle théologie* as a theological movement. See Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor to Vatican II* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010); Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); A. N. Williams, “The Future of the Past: The Contemporary Significance of the Nouvelle Théologie,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 347–61; Brian Daley, “The Nouvelle Théologie and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and the Science of Theology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 4 (October 2005): 362–382; Étienne Fouilloux, “‘Nouvelle Théologie’ et Théologie Nouvelle (1930-1960),” in *L’histoire religieuse en France et en Espagne: Colloque international, Casa de Velázquez, 2-5 avril 2001: Actes*, ed. Benoît Pellistrand, vol. 87, Collection de la Casa de Velázquez (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2004), 411–425; Agnès Desmazières, “La nouvelle théologie, prémisses d’une théologie herméneutique? La controverse sur l’analogie de la vérité (1946-1949),” *Revue Thomiste* 104, no. 1/2 (2004): 241–272; Aidan Nichols, OP, “Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie,” *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 1–19.

Even in comparison with other *nouveaux théologiens*, de Lubac exhibited a particular allergy to theological systematization and methodological foundations.<sup>13</sup> Scholars have noted that his writing often avoids speaking in his own voice, but rather expresses his own opinions through the explication of the theology of others. Hans Urs von Balthasar explained that de Lubac wanted the voice of the ancient church to have a clear expression within his writings.<sup>14</sup> John Milbank, on the other hand, suggests that de Lubac's writings took on an increasingly historical and third-person form after 1950, when he was removed from teaching and his writings were under suspicion. Milbank develops the theory that de Lubac hid his authentic but heterodox theological opinions under the cover of historical studies.<sup>15</sup> Whatever the underlying cause may be, his third-person voice combined with the sheer diversity of his corpus resists the easy discovery of a unifying method or systematic consideration guiding his work.

A final obstacle to describing a theological unity within de Lubac's work is its incompleteness. In his autobiographical reflection, *At the Service of the Church*, he admitted that the idea at the center of his thought, a projected book on Christ and mysticism, could never be completed:

I truly believe that for a rather long time the idea for my book on Mysticism has been my inspiration in everything. I form my judgments on the basis of it, it provides me with the

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13 David Williams declares that “a less systematic systematician is difficult to imagine.” *Receiving the Bible in Faith*, 132.

14 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, Communio Books, 1991), 26–7.

15 John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 8. I fail to find any evidence for esoterism in de Lubac's work.

means to classify my ideas in proportion to it. But I will not write this book. It is in all ways beyond my physical, intellectual, and spiritual strength.<sup>16</sup>

This admission reflects de Lubac's appropriation of the notion of paradox—that conceptual formulation always falls short of theological truth—and is consistent with his tendencies away from theological system.<sup>17</sup> The heart of his theology remains unexpressed; the center remains empty. The incompleteness of de Lubac's work stands as a caveat against oversystematic interpretations of his thought. At the same time, it proposes something positive about his theological vision: authentic transcendence requires that complete synthesis occur only beyond the present horizon. The incompleteness of his work testifies to its eschatological character and its apophatic tone.

## II. Discovering an “Organic Unity”

Despite obstacles, several authors have helpfully recognized a coherence among the diversity of de Lubac's various projects. There are signs of a consistent theological vision that permeates de Lubac's diverse historical and systematic works.<sup>18</sup>

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16 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 113.

17 It is more than coincidence that his inability to express the center of his own thought reflects his theological anthropology in which the human being, as the Image of God, can only acquire self-knowledge in light of the transcendent mystery. He writes, “[w]e shall understand more and more as we experience it, and as we see better and better that we do not yet understand it, and never shall understand it, what this astounding thing, the discovery of God, means—for it will never cease to astonish us.” Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 166. Originally published as *Sur les chemins de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1956).

18 Rudolf Voderholzer writes, “Henri de Lubac left no masterpiece of systematic theology, no comprehensive summa of his thought. His work is both many-faceted and versatile. His writings do not carry out a long, preconceived plan.” Rudolf Voderholzer, *Meet Henri De Lubac*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 107. Instead of speaking of his “systematic theology,” Voderholzer refers to his “synthetic thinking” and “synoptic presentation.” *Ibid.*, 108–9. Susan K. Wood speaks of an “organic unity.” Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 129. Similarly, Balthasar referred to an “organic unity” amidst a “multiplicity of themes.” Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 10.

### A. Hans Urs von Balthasar: Natural Desire for the Supernatural

Hans Urs von Balthasar's *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (1991) places the organic center of de Lubac's thought in his understanding of the creature's natural desire for God:

De Lubac is not the only great author who understood and experienced all his completed works as an approximation to an ever-unattained center. This form gives the reader a chance of seeing how seemingly disparate elements converge upon a center and thus of grasping them in their secret intention. In the case of de Lubac...an objective fundamental insight corresponds to the subjective admission quoted above, namely, the role of an undeniably positive dynamism in the knowing and willing of the creature that tends through all finite intrawordly reality, but also, through all the negations of a 'negative theology' toward a goal that cannot be reached 'from below' but is nevertheless necessary. Here we have reached the center of de Lubac's principal problem.<sup>19</sup>

Balthasar's brief book offers an overview of de Lubac's major writings and themes, which are systematically connected with the hub of natural desire of the creature for God.

Balthasar connects the natural desire to three theological areas: fundamental theology, the theology of salvation history, and cosmology-eschatology.<sup>20</sup> He explains that the “same fundamental structure [occurs] in the three areas of inquiry.” Balthasar asks how the created order (or the First Testament) can be directed interiorly to its fulfillment in grace (or in Christ), “without in the least possessing this latter in anticipation, that is, without being able to claim it for [itself].”<sup>21</sup> Adding that each theological theme cannot be reduced to another, he contends that all shares a common “structural principle of the divine

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<sup>19</sup> Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 12. The title of the German original is more suggestive of unity within diverse themes: *Henri de Lubac: Sein organisches Lebenswerk (Henri de Lubac: His Organic Life's Work)* (1976). The conclusion of *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* was taken from Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Le cardinal Henri de Lubac, l'homme et son oeuvre*, Chrétiens aujourd'hui (Brussels: Culture et Vérité, 1983).

<sup>20</sup> Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 62.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

plan.”<sup>22</sup> He further notes that, in *Exégèse médiévale*, “the theory of the senses of Scripture is not a curiosity of the history of theology but an instrument for seeking out the most profound articulations of salvation history.” De Lubac wished to illuminate the structure of this divine plan rather than the minutiae of exegetical technique.<sup>23</sup>

### **B. Susan K. Wood: Sacrament and History**

Susan K. Wood extends Balthasar's argument.<sup>24</sup> Like Balthasar, she argues that *Exégèse médiévale* is not primarily about exegesis, but instead concerns a theology of history. She shows that the pattern of salvation history is the basic structure that informs de Lubac's ecclesiology and Eucharistic theology. *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* traces the theological connection between de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum* and *Exégèse médiévale*. Wood demonstrates the parallel between the senses of scripture (literal, allegorical, anagogical), the multiple meanings of the “Body of Christ” (historical, sacramental, ecclesial), and multiple significations of liturgical practice (memorial, presence, anticipation). De Lubac’s theology of scripture, sacraments, and church constitutes expressions of an underlying theology of history in which Christ fulfills what came before him and anticipates the fullness of the kingdom. For Wood, the theology of history forms a structure permeating de Lubac's writings on ecclesiology,

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22 Ibid., 63.

23 Ibid., 76.

24 Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*; Susan K. Wood, “The Nature-Grace Problematic within Henri de Lubac’s Christological Paradox,” *Communio* 19, no. 3 (1992): 389–403; Susan K. Wood, “The Church as the Social Embodiment of Grace in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1986).

scripture, and sacraments. This theology of history functions as a basic method that unites various aspects of de Lubac's thought.

### C. Aidan Nichols: Unite in Order to Distinguish

Aidan Nichols recently observed that despite the diverse array of writings produced by de Lubac, "unity" remains an underlying theme.

Unity, however, is an obvious preoccupation throughout—unity of God with man in *Le Drame* [*The Drama of Atheist Humanism*], of human beings with each other in and through God in *Catholicisme*, the unity of nature and grace in *Surnaturel* and its later refinements, the unity of Scripture in *Exégèse médiévale*, the Eucharistic unity of the Church in *Corpus mysticum*, her mystic and social unity in his other ecclesiological writings, the unity of philosophy and theology in *Pic de la Mirandole*, the unity of salvation history in his critique of Joachimism.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, de Lubac appealed to the "unity" of the diverse "witnesses" of the Christian tradition living by the light of the same Spirit. According to Nichols, de Lubac's work appealed to the unity within a living Christian theological tradition to correct divisions that inserted themselves into modern life and theology.

In the place of the Thomistic axiom "distinguish in order to unite," de Lubac "preferred the more gnostic—paradoxical?—formula *unir pour distinguer*."<sup>26</sup> Nichols explains that although de Lubac's emphasis on unity could partially be "temperamental," it is congruent with the incomplete center of his theology, which always eluded him. Nichols proposes that the *visio Dei* was for de Lubac the mystical center toward which converged the diverse unities within his writings.

In the perspective thus outlined, his total *oeuvre* may be said to represent Hans Urs von

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<sup>25</sup> Aidan Nichols, OP, "Henri de Lubac: Panorama and Proposal," *New Blackfriars* 93, no. 1043 (January 2012): 31.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

Balthasar's "missing" transcendental, for Balthasar's trilogy should really have been a tetralogy, with the same analogical imagination set to work on *unum*, the one, as was shown with *pulchrum*, the beautiful, in the theological aesthetics, *bonum*, the good, in the theological dramatics, and *verum*, the true, in the theological logic.<sup>27</sup>

In Nichols's view, de Lubac's aspiration for unity always escapes formulation, the various elements remaining in tension. Yet, to avoid distortion, it is necessary first to understand philosophy and theology, faith and reason, God and humanity, and salvation history as united.

#### **D. Brian Daley: Spiritual Interpretation in the *nouvelle théologie***

A number of recent studies have examined the unity of the *nouvelle théologie* as a whole movement from historical and systematic perspectives.<sup>28</sup> Daley's "The *Nouvelle Théologie* and the Patristic Revival" argues that the *nouvelle théologie*'s recovery of patristic and medieval exegetical practices—namely, the figural or spiritual interpretation of scripture—was central to its shift away from both neo-Scholastic ecclesiology and theological methodology.

The ecclesiology of neo-Scholasticism and the manualist tradition emphasized the church as institution and its authority in order to defend the church from Protestant critics and attacks from secular governments. According to Daley, beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, there was a considerable shift in Catholic ecclesiology, in part due to the patristic

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie - New Theology*; Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*; Hans Boersma, "Sacramental Ontology: Nature and the Supernatural in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac," *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1015 (2007): 242–273; Daley, "The Nouvelle Théologie and the Patristic Revival."

revival. The *nouvelle théologie* rediscovered, from Gregory of Nyssa and Origen, the sacramental dimensions of the church as a sign pointing beyond itself to the eschatological kingdom.

Moreover, modern neo-Scholasticism conceived theology as a deductive “science” along Aristotelian lines, moving from the data of revelation to more universal and general conclusions. The neo-Scholastics of the twentieth century looked upon medieval Scholasticism as the high-point of a theological evolution whereby theology finally took a “scientific” form. Surveying the *nouvelle théologie*, Daley remarks that its authors departed from the deductive methodology of neo-Scholasticism, instead placing an emphasis on subjectivity, personal faith, and history. Their *ressourcement* of the exiled voices from the Latin and Greek patristic tradition suggested a shift in theological methodology. While many of the *nouveaux théologiens* did not question the idea of theology as “science,” they did recognize that “theological truth was always radically bound up in the historical limits of human language and culture, because God has revealed himself in the events and words of human history.”<sup>29</sup>

Daley concludes that the patristic revival in the *nouvelle théologie* allowed for a broadening of theological methodology and a revival of a sacramental mentality:

the *nouvelle théologie* was really about the rediscovery of sacramental modes of thought, through renewed contact with Christian authors who thought and read scripture in sacramental as well as literal terms....Figural exegesis, in its way of reading all history as really speaking of Christ, was the heart of the *nouvelle théologie*, the greatest lesson it had learned from reading the Fathers.<sup>30</sup>

Daley’s suggestion that the recovery of spiritual exegesis was central to the *nouvelle*

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<sup>29</sup> Daley, “The Nouvelle Théologie and the Patristic Revival,” 381.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 382.

*théologie* is most evident in the work of Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou. The scriptural inspiration of the *nouvelle théologie* also explains its growing appeal to Protestant theologians as a resource for theology and ecumenism.<sup>31</sup>

### **E. Hans Boersma: Sacramental Ontology**

Following Daley, Hans Boersma interprets the *nouvelle théologie* through the lens of its recovery of sacramental modes of thought. He theorizes that the *nouvelle théologie* recovered a metaphysics—possessed by neither Roman Catholic Modernism nor neo-Scholasticism—which functioned as a common systematic method. He labels it “sacramental ontology.”<sup>32</sup> In an earlier article, Boersma identifies “sacramental ontology” as the systematic link between the theology of nature and the supernatural and the theology of the church in de Lubac's thought.<sup>33</sup> He states that sacramental ontology concerns the “sacramental character of all created existence,” which character informs de Lubac's reflections on both ecclesiology and the nature-supernatural relationship.<sup>34</sup> His recent book, *Nouvelle théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery*, expands these ideas in an effort to identify the internal coherence within the *nouvelle*

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31 See Bryan C. Hollon, *Everything Is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009); Bryan C. Hollon, “Ontology, Exegesis, and Culture in the Thought of Henri de Lubac” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2006).

32 Boersma borrows the term “sacramental ontology” from Dennis Doyle, who writes that de Lubac's doctrine of the supernatural “provides an ontology that allows for speaking of knowledge of God in an historical and critical framework,” which assumes that the historical nature of God's revelation does not occlude knowledge of God, but is a means to knowledge of God's self. Dennis M. Doyle, “Henri de Lubac and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 60, no. 2 (1999): 209–227.

33 Boersma, “Sacramental Ontology,” 243.

34 *Ibid.*, 224. He adds that this sacramental ontology contributes to de Lubac's understanding of scripture and non-Christian religions. *Ibid.*, 244, note 5.

*théologie* as a whole.<sup>35</sup> The heart of the *nouvelle théologie* is an account of created, sensible realities as signs, anticipations, and mediations of divine realities.

Boersma suggests that de Lubac's sacramental ontology is characterized by a vertical sacramentalism, which he believes is inspired by neo-Platonism. While other theologians of the *nouvelle théologie* emphasized the divine condescension—Christ becoming human and emptying himself—de Lubac's sacramental ontology focused on the created ascent: “[drawing] on the Greek Church Fathers and the Neoplatonic tradition [he] emphasized the sacramental link in its upward direction: nature pointed upward to the supernatural and made it present.”<sup>36</sup> For Boersma, the most important implication of de Lubac's theology of the supernatural is that God is made present through historical realities. Created realities become signs that mediate God's presence.

Boersma's observation that the key to de Lubac's theology is its sacramental ontology is a significant contribution. He illumines a critical element in de Lubac's thought, namely the “sacramental” relationship between historical, visible realities and the mystical depths of those realities. De Lubac's sacramentalism indicates a correlation between his understanding of history and the capacity of created realities to symbolize and mediate divine realities. However, Boersma may suggest a too-prominent place for neo-Platonist ontology within de Lubac's work, thereby understating the role of his theology of history.

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35 While Boersma admits that the theologians associated with the *Nouvelle Théologie* did not constitute a homogeneous theological school, he contends that their approach to diverse theological problems—including the interpretation of scripture, the theology of history, the development of doctrine, nature and grace, and ecclesiology—evinced an underlying sacramental view of reality.

36 Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 88. I disagree with Boersma's characterization of de Lubac as Neoplatonist, but will take this up in detail in Chapter 2.

## F. Conclusions

Though emphasizing distinct aspects, Balthasar, Wood, Nichols, Daley, and Boersma indicate that the historical economy of salvation plays a significant role in the theological coherence of de Lubac's work. Nichols's suggests "unity" as the inspiration that suffuses de Lubac's writings. I believe that Nichols's insight is substantially correct. A reader of de Lubac will discover a sensibility and yearning for unity in his writings, especially in *Catholicism*. It is not entirely clear how "unity" functions in de Lubac's theological method or in the content of his writings. In other words, while it is clearly elemental to de Lubac's deepest sensibilities, "unity" remains somewhat vague. With the other commentators, Nichols explains that the notion of a unified economy of salvation is important for de Lubac's engagement with the history of medieval thought. Daley, moreover, believes rightly that the engagement with history is central to the methodology of the *nouvelle théologie* as a whole. Balthasar and, to a greater extent, Wood emphasize the historical economy of salvation as a structure that de Lubac analogously applied to fundamental theology, sacraments, and the church. Boersma too recognizes history as central to de Lubac's work, emphasizing history as the sacramental sign that makes present divine realities.

The various emphases of these authors are complementary to an extent. They suggest a certain theological coherence in de Lubac's exploration of the theological meaning of history in his various writings. I take up this direction in chapter two, where I indicate that de Lubac, through his recovery of Origen and patristic theology, intended to

develop a theological understanding of history. Specifically, de Lubac was concerned to articulate the relationship between history and its fulfillment, drawing his inspiration from the spiritual interpretation of scripture in the patristic and medieval period.

### **III. Toward an Eschatological Unity**

While de Lubac's work should not be interpreted in an overly systematic or foundational manner, it is possible to see an “organic unity” among numerous “centers” of his thought. De Lubac's various theological interventions—his understanding of sacramentality, his Christology and ecclesiology, his understanding of mysticism and of nature and grace—evinces a common pattern or structure organized around the relationship between history and its fulfillment:

1. Jesus Christ in his historical reality is the “sacrament of salvation,” that is, the means to the *totus Christus* (the whole Christ), which reaches its perfection at the end of time.
2. The present communion of the church is a sacramental anticipation of the eschatological communion of all humanity.
3. Mysticism—even in non-Christian forms—is an anticipation of the consummation of the Mystery, which is both present to us and something to come.
4. The natural desire for the supernatural, while not already supernatural in ontology, is an anticipation of a future communion.

Although de Lubac never elaborated a systematic eschatology that would coordinate the various aspects of his thinking, there appears to be an eschatological vision or pattern upon which de Lubac depended. In what follows, I argue that de Lubac's eschatology,

which arose as a response to diverse streams of Christian eschatology in modernity, shapes his various theological interventions.

The first chapter of the dissertation examines the resurgence of an eschatological consciousness within Catholicism and within the wider cultural sphere during the late nineteenth century and twentieth centuries. I elaborate the historical context of de Lubac's theology of history in the eschatological turn within Catholicism in the twentieth century and particularly in the “theology of history” debate, arising during the Second World War. I argue that the debate between Henri-Marie Féret, Gaston Fessard, Joseph Huby, and Jean Daniélou concerning the “theology of history” was an attempt to evaluate the eschatological impulses of French and European culture in light of the Christian faith. These debates also had significance for the struggle against fascism and as a response to the eschatological tendencies of an emerging French communism. One of the questions that emerged from these debates deals particularly with the interpretation of the Book of Revelation and in what sense it speaks of future realities.

The second chapter treats de Lubac's retrieval of a patristic theology of history manifested in the “spiritual sense” of scripture. Origen is the dominant figure for de Lubac because Origen's spiritual interpretation of scripture constitutes a theological understanding of history—that is, an understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament, the New Testament, and eschatological fulfillment. Origen's biblical exegesis, in which the letter of scripture hides “spiritual realities,” reflects a Christian belief that the surface of history hides what de Lubac calls an “ontological fecundity.” In the

allegorical sense, the figures of the Old Testament signify not “transhistorical realities” (as in Greek allegorization) but the concretely historical reality of Christ. For Origen, history is not just phenomena but interconnected “events” of God's intervention into history. The inner orientation of the events of the Old Testament to the New becomes a paradigm for the inner yearning of all history for its eschatological destiny. As the source for the tradition of Christian allegorization, Origen transmitted an implicit understanding of history to his exegetical progeny.

Chapter Three treats de Lubac's understanding of the last spiritual sense of scripture, *anagogy*. According to de Lubac, Origen's anagogy concerns both the consummation of creation and the ascent of the mind to the transcendent. Again in anagogy, the biblical hermeneutic reflects an implicit understanding of history. For de Lubac, it is key that anagogy unites *futura* and the *invisibilia*. The practice of spiritual interpretation reflected a Christian belief that the events of history were part of a great development toward a future fulfillment. He explains that the *anagogical sense* “designates also 'something else,' the very reality of which (not merely the manifestation of it) is to come.”<sup>37</sup> Anagogy, therefore, is a contemplation of a reality that is not only “above” or “always present,” but the anticipation of a future consummation. Yet, we contemplate that future through the present. By recovering Origen, de Lubac attempted to recover an understanding of history that loses neither transcendence nor the reality of history, but binds sacramentally history to its eschatological goal.

De Lubac believed that modern eschatology, especially in secular and political

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<sup>37</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 172.

forms, traces its roots to a dissolution of a patristic-medieval understanding of anagogy. During the patristic period anagogy is “heavenly” and “future” (the *invisibilia* and the *futura*.) In the twelfth century, a dissociation between “heavenly” and “future” emerged; this division engendered two principal eschatological impulses that are Pseudo-Dionysian and Joachimite in form. The former engendered a mysticism that viewed the historical figures and realities of the Bible as figures for the unthematizable transcendent. This impulse threatened to disregard the historical character of Christianity and see history as a myth. This Joachimite impulse was radically historical insofar as it projected a form of fulfillment into a historically future age, an age just around the corner. De Lubac believed that Joachim was the source for a host of secular and political eschatologies of the modern age. Both the Pseudo-Dionysian and Joachimite forms tended to undermine the reality and efficaciousness of Christ's actions in the economy of salvation.

My fourth and final chapter argues that de Lubac's eschatological synthesis—which maintains a tension between invisible and future—structures his understanding of the sacramentality of historical revelation, of Christ, of the church, and of mysticism. For de Lubac, an authentically Christian eschatology unites the “vertical” dimensions of Pseudo-Dionysius with the “horizontal” dimensions of Joachim. The sacraments of the eschaton both make the eschatological present in our everyday reality and conduct the church to that reality. I argue that, while de Lubac does not present a systematic eschatology, his account of the sacraments, Christ, the church, and mysticism unite a

future eschatology with a realized eschatology in an attempt to bridge divergent strands of thinking in Catholic modernity.

## CHAPTER ONE: TIME AND ETERNITY IN *LA NOUVELLE THÉOLOGIE*

### I. Eschatology as the “Storm Center”

This chapter narrates the rise of an eschatological consciousness within twentieth-century Catholic theology. While Catholic theology of an earlier period produced systematic eschatologies in the form of treatises on the last things—death, judgment, heaven, and hell—twentieth-century Catholic theology more explicitly articulated a consciousness of this present time as preceding and anticipating the end. By the early twentieth century, an eschatological renewal within Christian theology was already afoot, in part due to the influence of the rediscovery of the eschatological message of the Gospels by biblical scholars.<sup>1</sup> Soon, as Hans Urs von Balthasar claimed, these eschatological themes spread everywhere:

Eschatology is the storm center of our times. It is the source of several squalls that threaten all the theological fields, and makes them fruitful, beating down or reinvigorating their various growths. Troeltsch's dictum, “The bureau of eschatology is usually closed,” was true enough of the liberalism of the nineteenth century, but since the turn of the century the office has been working overtime.<sup>2</sup>

This eschatological renewal in the twentieth century was the outgrowth of an intensifying historical consciousness within Christian theology in the nineteenth. It also, as I will argue here, was in concert with a growing eschatological awareness outside of strictly theological or strictly Christian circles. In many respects, the themes treated by Christian

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1 Particularly, the work of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer was a catalyst for rethinking the eschatological content of the Gospels.

2 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology: The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A. V. Littledale and Alexander Dru, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 255.

theologians intersected with a broader European eschatological imaginary and a broader feeling of living at the end of history.

There are reasons to believe that this eschatological storm was not solely a response to the traumatizing experience of World Wars I and II, as significant as these events were. It was being worked out and anticipated in cultural, ecclesial, literary, and political arenas before it reached European Christian theology. A significant apocalyptic consciousness is manifest within Catholic magisterial documents of the nineteenth century and within the antimodernist movement in advance of the eschatological renewal in theology.

If “eschatology was the storm center,” as Balthasar puts it, the *nouvelle théologie* became the eye of the storm in Roman Catholicism from the 1930s to the 1950s. Many of the theological conflicts suppressed during the Catholic Modernist Crisis (1902-1907) reemerged in the *nouvelle théologie*: the historically embedded nature of Christian dogma, the epistemological status of concepts, the role of apologetics, and the nature of divine revelation. The papal promulgation of documents like *Pascendi dominici gregis* (1907) and *Lamentabili sane exitu* (1907) had the intention of suppressing Catholic Modernism and of supporting a homogeneous program of Catholic education grounded in the neo-Thomist revival. With the suppression of Catholic Modernism, however, similar conflicts reemerged at the center of Thomism itself.

My contention is that Roman Catholic culture and theology in the nineteenth to twentieth centuries reflected a broader struggle within European modernity to grapple

with the meaning of history and to re-imagine the relationship between time and eternity. Specifically, neo-Scholasticism and Catholic antimodernism not only suffered from an allergy to history but also contributed to an intense consciousness of history. Catholicism's response to modernity depended upon a “metanarrative” of the contemporary age as a culmination of decadence and of the present as the last age. Ironically, Catholicism combined an eternalism with a thoroughly modern and apocalyptic sensibility concerning the present age. This is the soil in which the *nouvelle théologie* grew and also to which it responded. The challenge to relate the changing and unchanging, time and eternity, and the historical and the eschaton figured prominently within the *nouvelle théologie*. In particular, these themes emerged following the First World War and during and after the Second World War in the debates over the theology of history.

In what follows, I first describe the emergence of eschatological and apocalyptic thinking in nonecclesial settings in the *fin de siècle*. Second, I narrate the “return” of eschatology to the center of twentieth-century Catholicism. Third, I examine the World War II debate over the theology of history in the *nouvelle théologie*—specifically the work of Henri-Marie Féret, Joseph Huby, Gaston Fessard, and Jean Daniélou—as a struggle over the interpretation of time and eternity.

## **II. Temporality and an Eschatological Modernity**

The re-emergence of eschatological thinking in twentieth-century Europe took a variety of forms. According to Joseph Ratzinger, the rediscovery of the eschatological

character of Jesus's preaching in the work of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer impacted biblical studies but had little immediate impact on systematic theology: "As far as systematic theology was concerned, they had not the faintest idea of what do do with their discovery."<sup>3</sup> However, as Ratzinger explains, Karl Barth's 1919 *Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* initiated a revolution. Barth stated: "A Christianity that is not wholly eschatology and nothing but eschatology has absolutely nothing to do with Christ."<sup>4</sup>

Barth's radical break with liberal Protestantism and his eschatological turn is often associated with a disillusionment with modern ideologies of progress triggered by the experience of the World War I. The war indeed acted as a ferment for a theological reawakening to eschatology. Yet, this reawakening also occurred in the midst of a period of re-evaluation of the meaning of time and eternity beginning in the nineteenth century. From around the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, a broad crisis of adequately representing temporality and the eternal was unfolding within scientific, literary, economic, philosophical, and artistic spheres:

The structure of history, the uninterrupted forward movement of clocks, the procession of days, seasons, years, and simple common sense tells us that time is irreversible and moves forward at a steady rate. Yet these features of traditional time were also challenged as artists and intellectuals envisioned times that reversed themselves, moved at irregular rhythms, and even came to a dead stop. In the *fin de siècle*, time's arrow did not always fly straight and true.<sup>5</sup>

No single theoretical model accounts for all the different shifts in temporal representation

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- 3 Ratzinger, Joseph, *Eschatology, Death and Eternal Life*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 47.
- 4 Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 314.
- 5 Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983), 28.

and eschatological consciousness during the period. It suffices, for my purposes, to indicate that the confusion over the meaning of time and its end existing within European modernity had an affect on Roman Catholicism's representation of time and eternity.

### **A. Representing Time in a Changing World**

According to David Harvey, prior to the mid-nineteenth century, an Enlightenment sense of space and time was dominant among the bourgeoisie. This Enlightenment sense emphasized the rational, objective, quantifiable, and universal characteristics of time and space.<sup>6</sup> For example, the production of maps increasingly represented the earth in those aspects necessary for navigation and commerce, evacuating space of the “sensuous” qualities developed in medieval cartography: “Maps, stripped of all elements of fantasy and religious belief, as well as any sign of the experiences involved in their production, had become abstract and strictly functional systems for the factual ordering of phenomena in space.” The Enlightenment gave a “totalizing” sense of space insofar as the whole world could be conceived as existing in a “single spatial frame.”<sup>7</sup>

The Enlightenment conception and production of time was similarly totalizing in its prioritization of the neutral, objective, quantifiable, and infinite qualities of time. The chronometer provided a fixed division for time's flow, allowing its exact measurement and, significantly, its conception as a linear progress. Newton's *Principia* envisioned

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6 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford; Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989), 245.

7 *Ibid.*, 249–50.

space as a kind of envelope or container for materially extended things, and time was a receptacle for change. Absolute time is mathematical in its qualities and extends into the past and future infinitely. Although Newtonian space and time had its challengers in Leibniz and Kant, they left undisturbed the emphasis on the universal, neutral, and quantifiable temporal qualities.

The conception of temporality of the Enlightenment project was not seriously challenged until the mid-nineteenth century, with the genesis of literary, artistic, and cultural phenomena known as “modernism.” Technological development is significant to the story of modernism because new technologies reordered how Westerners experienced their world and how they experienced time. In brief, the increasing speed of communication and transportation during the nineteenth to twentieth centuries led to a shrinking world. As a result, heterogeneous local practices of measuring time—often governed by agricultural, local commercial, liturgical-religious, and seasonal cycles—were put in conflict. The development of the telegraph and the expansion of railways joined different local times together, exposing their differences. Kern notes that travelers on a cross-continental journey by railroad in 1870 would pass through over two hundred different local times. In 1870, there were over eighty time zones used by the railroads in the United States.<sup>8</sup> The confusion between different systems had a detrimental effect on the efficiency of railroads and, in 1883, a uniform system of measuring time for the railroads was created. In the following year, the Prime Meridian Conference organized the twenty-four time zones. The increased speed of communication and transportation led

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<sup>8</sup> Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 12.

to various systematic orderings of time across space, joining previously separated peoples and economies. This was a vast but chaotic reorganization and creation of “public time,” the uniform and measurable progression of moments to which local times would have to conform.

According to Harvey, modernism as a “cultural force” formed under the “crisis of representation... derived from a radical readjustment in the sense of time and space in economic, political, and cultural life.”<sup>9</sup> The interconnectedness of the international economy, the increased speed of commerce, the unification of monetary systems, and the development of new communication technologies were elements of “space-time compression.”

Enlightenment thought operated within the confines of a rather mechanical “Newtonian” vision of the universe, in which the presumed absolutes of homogeneous time and space formed limiting containers to thought and action. The breakdown in these absolute conceptions under the stress of time-space compression was the central story in the birth of nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of modernism.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, “time-space compression” brought the tensions between public time and private time, the universal and the particular, the international and the local into the foreground.

The awareness of new configurations of space and time played out in art and literature, notably in the writings of James Joyce, Gustave Flaubert, and Charles Baudelaire. Joyce and Flaubert expressed the “simultaneity” of modern life, in which actions and events in different places paralleled and affected one another. Just as different places were being absorbed under a single economy, these authors tried to represent the relationship between heterogeneous “times.” Closely related to “simultaneity” is the

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<sup>9</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 260.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

feeling that modern life is riddled by constant change, insecurity, and ephemerality. Baudelaire's attempt to reconcile “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent” with “the eternal and the immutable” is characteristic of the “aesthetic thrust of modernism” as a whole “to strive for this sense of eternity in the midst of flux.”<sup>11</sup>

The attempt to reconcile time and eternity in literary modernism is consonant with the work of French philosopher Henri Bergson. For Bergson, the discrete units of mathematical or clock time fail to capture the dynamic flow of reality, life as a dynamic energy, and of the experience of *durée* (duration). According to Bergson, consciousness is a stream rather than a “conglomeration of separate faculties or ideas.”<sup>12</sup> He distinguished between a relative knowledge of reality through the symbols or language that ultimately distort it, by breaking it up into various pieces, and the absolute knowledge of reality through a form of intuition. In his conception of *durée*, he appealed to a mystical experience of time and of reality beyond our power to represent. In a sense, Bergson's temporal mysticism was an attempt to reconcile the sense of eternity with an evolutionary view of a constantly changing world.<sup>13</sup>

The technological advancements that were the cause of economic and cultural unification impacted the representation of time and eternity in literature and philosophy.

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11 Ibid., 10, 206.

12 Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 24.

13 Bergson is known to have had a keen antipathy toward clocks. As Kern notes, Bergson's appeal to the experience of temporality and his emphasis on intuition is consonant with Charles Péguy, who “explained the spiritual death of Christianity by its mindless repetition of fixed ideas: layers of habit stifle the dynamic energies of true faith.” Ibid., 26. Bergson's lectures inspired Christian thinkers like Pierre Rousselot, Jacques Maritain, and Gabriel Marcel.

Additionally, modern life also forced the rethinking of the relationships between past, present, and future.

### **B. Representing the Future**

Just as the meaning of time was being rethought, *fin-de-siècle* Europe witnessed the contested meaning of the future in the form of challenges to Enlightenment notions of uniformity and progress. Increasingly, eschatological and apocalyptic understandings of time took center stage in cultural, literary, and political arenas. These new conceptions of time and history depicted qualitatively different times and caesuras between eras. They announced ruptures between the past and present, and between the present and future, and represented this age as the beginning of the end. The apocalyptic sentiment of living just before the end was a wide-ranging cultural expression of this contested “future.” A version of this sentiment is manifested in the Futurist Movement's admiration of technology, speed, and violence that usher in a new world. The Futurist infatuation with a new humanity or posthumanity united to technology spilled over into politics; many Futurists became fascists.<sup>14</sup>

The awareness of the near future was not always the expectation of a glorious future era. In some cases, it was an expectation of a decline. The theory of the heat death of the universe, embodied in the second law of thermodynamics, exercised an influence over popular imagination, particularly in the French Decadent Movement of the late-nineteenth century. The entropy of all available energy in the universe—no matter how

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<sup>14</sup> See Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996).

far in the future it would occur—symbolized a feeling of the late nineteenth century of being on the verge of the end. David Weir states, “Whether the late nineteenth century was actually a period of decadence is open to debate; but it clearly was perceived as such, as a time when all was over, or almost over: not the end, but the ending.”<sup>15</sup> H. G. Wells's *Time Machine* foretold a catastrophic future in which humanity would degenerate, “overpowered by the forces of nature and society, leading to...an ultimate extinction of the species.”<sup>16</sup> The protagonist first arrives in a posthuman future and then takes his time machine far into the future to witness a barren planet tumbling through space. Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* echoed the theme of the degeneration of society. According to Spengler, the modern world is uniquely obsessed with time and the future; moderns measure the meaning of the present by its projected end.<sup>17</sup>

In fields of art, politics, and history, a dominant trope was emerging. Whether the coming era was perceived as the dawn of a new era of history, or the initial winding down of a tired universe, at the *fin de siècle* the present age was seen to be one of transition to a new era. Furthermore, to imagine the future was to represent the *telos* of the present. While the *fin de siècle* representations of the present moment ranged from intoxicated enthusiasm to despair, they interpreted the present time in terms of its *telos* and represented the modern age as just before the end. In the next section, I indicate that *fin-*

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15 David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 17.

16 Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 91.

17 Spengler stated, “The theory of Entropy signifies today [the] world's end as completion of an inwardly necessary evolution.” *Ibid.*, 105.

*de-siècle* Catholicism shared in this representation of the modern age as “just before the end.”

### **III. A Return of Eschatology in Nineteenth- to Twentieth-Century**

#### **Catholicism**

The challenge to Christian theology of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries was to confront and appropriate a new historical consciousness arising within various fields adjunct to theology and within European culture generally. Historical consciousness is a multifaceted and ambiguous term that often refers to an awareness that we are historically located, that our experience of the world is affected by historical circumstance, and that the categories of our thinking are affected by our historical experience.<sup>18</sup> As I will argue below, it is true that neo-Scholasticism, the theological school of thought promoted by the Catholic magisterium at the end of the nineteenth century, lacked this historical consciousness. In fact, it was purposefully organized against it in the attempt to protect

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<sup>18</sup> Lawrence F. Barmann describes historical consciousness by distinguishing between “thinking about history” from “thinking with history.” Thinking about history is the attempt to recover the past by analyzing evidence available to the historian. Thinking with history is the perception of ourselves within the stream of history: “In this mode one perceives the past as a process in which we ourselves are located consciously and culturally that is what I would mean by “historical consciousness.” And it is this sense that forces one to acknowledge the relativity of all finite reality, i.e., of all that ordinarily impinges on our human consciousness, because it is always and necessarily in flux, moving, unstable, incomplete, partial.” Lawrence F. Barmann, “Defining Historical Consciousness” (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Denver, November 2001), 2. Historical consciousness, for Barmann, implies that human knowledge is not a “view from nowhere,” but rather is somehow tied to its particular and localized conditions.

In a 1966 lecture, Bernard F. Lonergan made a similar observation when he distinguished between a “classicist world-view” and “historical-mindedness” as “differences in horizon, in total mentality.” Bernard J. F. Lonergan, “The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical-Mindedness,” in *A Second Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 2. The classicist worldview takes the unchanging as the starting point for rational inquiry whereas historical mindedness takes the changing world of experience as its starting point: “One may work methodically from the abstract and universal towards the more concrete and particular” or “begin from people as they are” concretely.” *Ibid.*, 3.

eternity from the wages of time. However, the neo-Scholastic school and the anti-Modernist Roman Catholic culture arising during the same period promulgated a keen consciousness of history, an awareness of human beings as historical agents, and an apocalyptic or cataclysmic view of the modern world.<sup>19</sup>

### A. Eternalism in Catholic Anti-Modernism and Neo-Scholasticism

The common narrative concerning Catholic theology—in its neo-Scholastic and anti-Modernist forms—from the middle of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth is that it lacked historical consciousness.<sup>20</sup> First, it was reluctant to accept the results of historical research, or the relative independence of historical investigation from theology. This was a resistance to questions of the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and a resistance to recognizing the difference between the content of the Bible and that of later Christian doctrine. Second, there was the opposition to the idea of historical development or evolution, especially when it appeared to challenge the “unchanging” nature of truth.<sup>21</sup>

19 Neo-Scholasticism refers to a theological movement that arose in the middle of the nineteenth century as a recovery of medieval theology. Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* (1879) endorsed the theology of Thomas Aquinas as the primary intellectual vehicle for a Catholic response to the challenges to Christian belief in the modern world. Based on *Aeterni Patris*, theological schools employed neo-Scholastic thought for the intellectual formation of priests.

Neo-Scholasticism is historically related to what Joseph Komonchak calls the “construction” of Roman Catholicism, a distinct subculture or sociological form that Catholicism took as a response to modernity. Joseph A. Komonchak, “Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism,” *Christianesimo Nella Storia* 18, no. 2 (1997): 353–385. A resistance to the “modern world” was characteristic of this subculture. Generally, “anti-Modernist” refers to those authors and their writings who suppressed the Modernists, those considered overly sympathetic toward modern philosophy, critical methods, political philosophy, and culture during the early twentieth century and particularly during the Modernist Crisis (1903-1907). In what follows, I use the term “anti-Modernist” quite broadly to refer to the negative assessment of modernity in Roman Catholicism, which often functioned as the background narrative to neo-Scholasticism.

20 See Gerald McCool, *Nineteenth Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 9–11; T. M. Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology, 1800-1970* (Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist Newman Press, 1970), 35–36.

21 The Scholastic systems were more prepared to respond to the attacks on revealed religion by the

Scholasticism's model of scientific knowledge prioritized unchanging essences over changing events. History and particularity did not fit well within this model.

Anti-Modernist arguments against the Modernists and the later neo-Scholastic grievances against the *nouvelle théologie* almost always returned to the same theme: the loss of a notion of truth as unchanging. Pope Pius X's *Lamentabili sane exitu* (1907) condemned a host of errors attributed to Modernist Catholics, which were perceived as undermining the authority of the “teaching church” and orthodox doctrine. Among the theses proscribed: “53. The organic constitution of the Church is not immutable”; “58. Truth is no more immutable than man himself, since it evolved with him, in him, and through him”; “64. Scientific progress demands that the concepts of Christian doctrine concerning God, creation, revelation, the person of the Incarnate Word, and redemption be re-adjusted.” The follow-up encyclical, *Pascendi Dominici gregis* (1907), targeted a Kantianism in which human minds cannot rise beyond “phenomena.” Thus, God cannot be known by the light of “natural reason.” *Pascendi* goes on to say that the Modernist presumes that the “representations of the object of faith are merely symbolical” since the

rationalists than they were to face the challenge of historical research into the continuity of Christian dogma with the Bible. The idea of development, change or evolution within doctrine and theological systems, found in the theology of John Henry Cardinal Newman just years before, was met with *anathema* by *Pascendi* and *Lamentabili*. Indeed, Newman was considered suspect by many anti-Modernists. It is not that the neo-Scholastics rejected all development of doctrine. Rather, Newman's organic model of doctrinal or theological development was rejected in favor of a theory of logical development. Theological development—such as the doctrine of the hypostatic union—results from the application of metaphysics to biblical propositions, resulting in a syllogism. Historical research into scripture threatened not only the truthfulness of certain revealed propositions found in scripture, but also the model of conceiving doctrine. Thus, the work of biblicists like Marie-Joseph Lagrange was alarming because it assumed a *relative* independence of historical research from theology. Although neo-Scholasticism in the nineteenth century appears to be “classicist” due to its rejection of development and resistance to historicity, it also had much in common with the empirical turn within the sciences and history in the nineteenth century. T. M. Schoof states that during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, there is a philosophical and cultural shift away from German idealists and toward the trust in empirical data, from synthetic methods toward analytic. Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology*, 33.

mind must construct these representations from the phenomenal and changing world. In sum, the anti-Modernist preoccupation was with preserving the *constancy* of Christian doctrine.

Nearly forty years later, the neo-Scholastic attacks on the *nouvelle théologie* returned to the same issue.<sup>22</sup> Marie-Michelle Labourdette's 1946 article, "Théologie et ses sources," raised questions over the series *Théologie* and *Sources Chrétiennes* for their recovery of the thought of the patristic period. While he did not object to the recovery of patristic theology, he suspected that the authors and editors of these series lacked a respect for theological truth in its "scientific state" embodied in the neo-Scholastic system. The implication of the recovery of an earlier theology in these series implied a historical relativism—that truth did not remain the same for each time period—and an "experiential relativism" in which the object of faith is an expression of an inner experience that might differ from person to person or from age to age.<sup>23</sup>

Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance, called the *monstre sacré* (the sacred monster) of

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22 The condemnations against the Modernists and the end of the Modernist Crisis, generally traced to 1907, ended discussion on a range of philosophical, exegetical, and ecclesiological debates. It did not, however, "resolve" those debates by any means, but instead shifted the loci of these conversations to the safety of the Papally-endorsed Thomistic thought. Jean Daniélou suggested that the solutions of the Modernists were insufficient, but the questions that they asked were valid. Their condemnation only prolonged the crisis. Jean Daniélou, "Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse," *Études*, no. 249 (1946): 5–21. The same debates were continued within Thomistic and scholastic categories and through the interpretation of St. Thomas. By stifling "modern" thought and expelling it to the periphery or outside of the Catholic Church, and by dismantling pluralism through the enforcement of scholastic or Thomistic theology, this same pluralism re-emerged within Thomism itself, and not even a generation later. See Gerald McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992). Walter Cardinal Kasper's assessment that "the outstanding event in the Catholic theology of our century is the surmounting of neo-scholasticism" is valid. However, those theologians who most successfully surmounted it considered themselves as part of its tradition. Walter Kasper in Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), vii.

23 Aidan Nichols, OP, "Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie," *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 3–4.

Thomism, led the neo-Scholastic denouncement of what was called the “new theology.”<sup>24</sup> In his article “La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?” (“The New Theology. Where Is It Going?”), Garrigou-Lagrange dropped what Aidan Nichols called the “A-Bomb” of the *nouvelle théologie* controversy. Henri Bouillard had written in *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin* (1944) that “a theology that would not be contemporary [*actuelle*] would be a false theology.”<sup>25</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange asked the question, “How can ‘an *immutable truth*’ be held if the two notions that are united by the verb *to be* [the subject and the predicate] are *essentially changing*?”<sup>26</sup> He claimed that, promulgating a form of historical relativism, the *nouvelle théologie* was headed straight toward Modernism. For Labourdette as for Garrigou-Lagrange, the first line of defense against Modernism was a Thomistic metaphysics and epistemology that enabled a secure possession of unchanging truth against the backdrop of an ever-changing world.

These examples from Labourdette and Garrigou-Lagrange are fragmentary do not provide a complete picture of the neo-Scholastic movement but it is sufficient to state that both neo-Scholasticism and anti-Modernism betrayed a desperate anxiety to preserve a metaphysics of unchanging truth and displayed a correlate allergy to historicity. The neo-Scholastics very clearly foresaw a contemporary challenge to Catholicism under the form of historicity and attempted desperately to hold on to truth as eternal, unchanging, and

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24 Richard Peddicord, O.P., *The Sacred Monster of Thomism: An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2004).

25 Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., “La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?,” *Angelicum* 23 (1946): 127.

26 *Ibid.*, 127; See Agnès Desmazières, “La nouvelle théologie, prémisse d’une théologie herméneutique? La controverse sur l’analogie de la vérité (1946-1949),” *Revue Thomiste* 104, no. 1/2 (2004): 241–272. Garrigou-Lagrange’s preoccupation with the “unchanging” is illustrated in his unyielding opposition to Henri Bergson, the philosopher of process.

readily available to human reason. Their apologetics, epistemology, metaphysics, and dogmatics depended upon a profound dichotomization between historical reality and eternal truth. However, they mistakenly attributed to the writings of the Modernists and of the *nouvelle théologie* a form of relativism rather than a search for a responsible way out of it.

In another sense, the “eternalism” and “essentialism” of the neo-Scholastic system depended upon a vibrant consciousness of history and of its contingency. In the next section, I argue that this consciousness of history developed within neo-Scholasticism and anti-Modernist Catholicism under the form of an apocalyptic interpretation of the modern age.

### **B. The Consciousness of History: The Return of the Apocalyptic within Roman Catholicism**

I have already indicated that a strong resistance to historicity marked Roman Catholic culture. The counterpoint to this ahistorical viewpoint was an intense historical consciousness on another level. Specifically, neo-Scholasticism and anti-Modernism betrayed a cognizance of the contemporary age as one of decadence. Roman Catholicism was driven by a profound consciousness of the difference between the modern and medieval ages in that this age emerged from a fracturing of the medieval synthesis between faith and reason, and church and state. It was a form of consciousness of the emerging place of the church in modernity, and a consciousness of the self as an agent that can affect this history. This awareness reflected a profound anxiety over the church's

place in modernity that manifested itself as what Emile Poulat calls a “cataclysmic eschatology.”

Within nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism, “secularization,” both as a sociological process and as a seizure of church property, was given an apocalyptic interpretation. Even earlier, as Jean Séguy notes, there was an apocalyptic stream in French and Italian Catholicism before, during, and after the French Revolution.<sup>27</sup> As Joseph Komonchak indicates, the French Revolution

was seen as a decisive battle, perhaps the final one, in the great warfare between God and Satan. The three great heroes of the Restoration, de Bonald, Lamennais, and de Maistre, bequeathed to subsequent generations an interpretation of the Revolution as Satanic in root and branch.<sup>28</sup>

According to Cardinal Manning, secularization's “various features represented the great apostasy which must shortly precede the appearance of the Antichrist.”<sup>29</sup> In the Italian annexation of the Papal States in 1870, Catholics witnessed the loss of the “ideal” relationship between religious and civil society—that is, a unity of throne and altar. The political struggle was interpreted as the struggle for the soul of society. This “catastrophic” eschatology became a dominant stream in Catholicism's self-interpretation within the nineteenth century and was employed by papal encyclicals.

A certain narrative about the modern age formed the backdrop to the rise of neo-Scholasticism. Three Jesuits particularly helped link an interpretation of history with the

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27 Jean Séguy, “Sur L’apocalyptique Catholique,” *Archives De Sciences Sociales Des Religions*, no. 41 (1976): 165–172. Émile Poulat states: “This Catholic *catastrophism* that seems to surprise us today... dominates the whole of the nineteenth century and maintained its vigor for a long time.... In its way, the Catholic nineteenth century manifested an acute consciousness of the Reign of God.... The religious climate of the time is of a ‘tragic ultramontanism.’” Émile Poulat, *L’Église, c’est un monde: L’ecclésiosphère*, Sciences humaines et religions (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1986), 255.

28 Komonchak, “Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism,” 359–60.

29 *Ibid.*, 358.

neo-Scholastic system: Giovanni Perrone, Matteo Liberatore, and Joseph Kleutgen.

Giovanni Perrone (1794-1876), one of the founders of neo-Scholasticism, promulgated the idea that the recovery of Aquinas can overcome the division between faith and reason characteristic of the modern age. Matteo Liberatore (1810-1892), who co-founded and edited the popular journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, connected the political problem to the theological one. For Liberatore, eternal, unchanging principles derived from revelation and the church must govern civil and political society, not vice versa.<sup>30</sup> The unmooring of civil society from those unchanging principles initially occurred in the Protestant Reformation, which effects were being worked out in contemporary life. The recovery of the medieval theological-philosophical synthesis held the promise of overcoming secularization.

Joseph Kleutgen's (1811-1883) *Die Theologie der Vorzeit verteidigt* [*Defense of the Theology of the Past*] (1860-1873) and *Die Philosophie der Vorzeit verteidigt* [*Defense of the Philosophy of the Past*] (1878) provided an intellectually robust account of the differences between medieval and modern philosophy. Kleutgen interpreted modern rationalist and empiricist philosophy as a dissolution of a previous medieval epistemological synthesis. According to John Inglis, Joseph Kleutgen and Albert Stöckl “were consciously 'recovering' a philosophical tradition in order to provide an alternative

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30 “Against the view that the church should submit to political authority, Liberatore argues that since the church is a divine and unchanging institution while the state is earthly and changing, the church should not be subject to the state. How can we submit what is eternal to the temporal? Since the eternal cannot submit to the temporal, the church should never submit to the state. Any other view, we are told, is Protestant and therefore wrong.” John Inglis, *Spheres of Philosophical Inquiry and the Historiography of Medieval Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 76.

to what they took to be the inherent skepticism and individualism of modern philosophy.”<sup>31</sup> They offered an alternative to the histories of philosophy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that interpreted the faith of the medieval period as a detriment to human reasoning. According to Kleutgen, the realist epistemology of the medieval period united the respect for observation of the concrete (in the spirit of modern empiricism) with an emphasis on universals (in concert with modern rationalism).<sup>32</sup> The premise upon which the neo-Scholastic revival was based was the need for a circumnavigation of a modern separation between philosophy and theology, and between civil society and the church.

The early neo-Scholastics were generally quite sober and not very amenable to apocalypticism. However, the neo-Scholastic narrative concerning modernity—modernity as a perfidious time in which faith and reason are estranged, and the basis for social cohesion is lost—fit well with an apocalypticism and would contribute to an apocalyptic reading of modernity in the papal encyclicals and popular journals.<sup>33</sup>

The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* of the First Vatican Council saw in the theologies of the Protestant reformers a source of challenges to the faith. Moreover, the challenges to the faith were threats to the unity and cohesiveness of human society.

The abandonment and rejection of the Christian religion, and the denial of God and his Christ, has plunged the minds of many into the abyss of pantheism, materialism and

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31 Ibid., 11.

32 Ibid., 296.

33 Liberatore had a popular influence through his journal *Civiltà Cattolica*, which supported integrism between the church and state. Kleutgen directly influenced official ecclesial documents. He consulted the first Vatican Council as a theological expert in the writing of *Dei Filius* (1870) and later composed the first draft of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), which established Scholasticism at the heart of the Roman Catholic Church's intellectual response to modernity.

atheism, and the consequence is that they strive to destroy rational nature itself, to deny any criterion of what is right and just, and to overthrow the very foundations of human society.<sup>34</sup>

Five months after the promulgation of *Dei Filius*, the Italian army invaded the Papal States and surrounded the Vatican. As Komonchak stated, the loss of the Papal States was felt by many Catholics to be an attack on Christianity's public and social role (not just political) and a suppression of the exercise of the faith.<sup>35</sup> The suppression of the public role of the Catholic Church in France over the next forty years would deepen the crisis, confirming the anxiety over the disintegration of Christian and European unity.

Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*, written nine years after the annexation of the Papal States, interprets the outward crisis as a spiritual and intellectual crisis. "False conclusions concerning divine and human things, which originated in the schools of philosophy, have now crept into all the orders of the State, and have been accepted by the common consent of the masses."<sup>36</sup> As the intellect guides the will and the will guides public life, the misguided philosophies of the moderns have exercised a deleterious influence on the public order. *Aeterni Patris* presents the restoration of Scholastic thought, with its unity-in-distinction of philosophy and theology, as the primary intellectual response to this situation. Given the historical context in which *Aeterni Patris* was written, the document is quite measured. While its analysis is incomplete from a contemporary perspective, it does not contain the vitriolic language of subsequent papal encyclicals in reference to modern thought.<sup>37</sup>

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34 *Dei Filius*, 7.

35 Komonchak, "Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism," 338–39.

36 *Aeterni Patris*, 2.

37 The document does contain some apocalyptic language: "In these late days, when those dangerous

Pope Leo XIII, however, freely elaborated a “catastrophic eschatology” elsewhere. The most dramatic of these is the legend that arose surrounding the “Prayer to Saint Michael,” which Leo added to the “Leonine Prayers” said at the end of the low Mass. In 1884, Leo modified previous prayers to make them into intercessions for the freedom of the church throughout the world. The “Prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel” was added in 1886. While the prayer may have its inspiration in a mystical experience of Leo, a millenarian legend about the origins of the prayer developed later. A long version of the prayer contains vibrant apocalyptic imagery. It explains that the devil has taken the form of an angel of light and invaded earth, sending wicked people against the Church:

These most crafty enemies have filled and inebriated the church... with gall and bitterness, and have laid impious hands on her most sacred possessions. In the Holy Place itself, where the See of Holy Peter and the Chair of Truth has been set up as the light of the world, they have raised the throne of their abominable impiety, with the iniquitous design that when the Pastor has been struck, the sheep may be.<sup>38</sup>

This prayer's lively apocalyptic images linked recent political events directly to the spiritual warfare between the angels and the devil.

The Catholic antimodernism of the early twentieth century only intensified this apocalypticism. In 1907 Pius X promulgated *Pascendi*, the premier document of the anti-Modernist movement. *Pascendi* suggested that a cataclysmic contest between good and evil was presently occurring and dividing the Catholic Church itself. The church, Pius

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times described by the Apostle are already upon us, when the blasphemers, the proud, and the seducers go from bad to worse, erring themselves and causing others to err, there is surely a very great need of confirming the dogmas of Catholic faith and confuting heresies” (*Aeterni Patris*, 14). Leo's language here is a quotation from the sixteenth-century pope, Sixtus V, whose bull *Triumphantis* confirmed the perennial utility of Scholastic theology in combating error.

38 *Rituale Romanum*, 6th ed. post typicam (Ratisbon: Pustet 1898), 163.

wrote, has always needed to be vigilant against those who will mislead it. Yet, “it must be confessed that the number of the enemies of the cross of Christ has in these last days increased exceedingly...[They are] striving, by new and subtle arts, to destroy the vital energy of the Church, and, if they can, to overthrow utterly Christ's kingdom itself.”<sup>39</sup> In his first encyclical, Pius set his pontificate the task of “restoring all things in Christ” with God's grace. With allusions to the French Revolution, Pius states that the extinction of God in the public and private realm is perhaps a foretaste of the last days. The “Son of Perdition...may already be in the world.” For St. Paul, he writes, the “distinguishing mark of the Antichrist, man has with infinite temerity put himself in the place of God.” Pius states that human beings have usurped God's place in the Temple.<sup>40</sup> For Pius, the events of the French Revolution, the annexation of the Papal States, and the challenges of the modernists offer an insight into the underlying meaning of modernity and where it is heading. Recent attacks against the Roman Church unveil the revolt of the devil against God and God's church: this age is the site of a cataclysmic contest between good and evil. Furthermore, for Pius, these recent events unveil the ultimate trajectory of the Protestant Reformation, which culminates in the siege against the church.

The apocalyptic mentality of nineteenth- to twentieth-century Roman Catholicism complicates any neat division between “classicism” and “historical-mindedness” (in Lonergan's terminology). Neo-Scholasticism did not successfully integrate the historical consciousness of the age. Yet Roman Catholicism, as a whole, was increasingly

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39 Pope Pius X, “Pascendi Dominici gregis,” in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, vol. 40, 1907, 593–94.

40 Pope Pius X, “E Supremi,” in *Acta Sactae Sedis*, vol. 36, 1904, 131–2.

organizing itself around a cataclysmic eschatology found in political interventions by lay Catholics, in the messages contained in the alleged appearances of Mary, and in official Catholic pronouncements. The contrast is striking between the serene, rational “eternalism” of neo-Scholasticism and the apocalypticism of the encyclicals. This apocalypticism functioned as a religious explanation for the church's confrontational relationship with modern thought and politics, as well as a justification for the ecclesial response. Both a classicist neo-Scholasticism and apocalypticism were joined within Roman Catholicism in a form of historical experience and a manner of interpreting the contemporary world.

Although Roman Catholic apocalypticism and neo-Scholasticism reinforced each other, the apocalyptic was not theologically integrated with neo-Scholasticism. Neo-Scholasticism had an understated eschatology at best. Within the neo-Scholastic manuals of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, eschatology comprised a discrete subject within dogmatic theology. It exclusively focused on the *last things*: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Not only did neo-Scholasticism not generally integrate a contemporary apocalyptic sensibility, but Scholasticism as a whole resisted millenarian tendencies. In part, this resistance was due to the traditional opposition of the medieval Scholastics to the apocalyptic imagination present in the Franciscan Spirituals and other marginal or heretical groups. Ironically, many of the same proponents of the neo-Scholastic system employed apocalyptic images to make sense of current crises within the church and society (Liberatore, Leo XIII). This apocalyptic sensibility envisioned a form of the

ultimate drama occurring as a present prelude to the ultimate fight between good and evil. There is definitely a tension between the apocalyptic sensibilities and eternalism within Roman Catholicism at the *Fin de siècle*, specifically among the proponents of the neo-Scholastic system. The debates before, during, and following the second World War over the “theology of history” addressed this tension directly.

The feeling of being at the end of an era and of the present time as a foretaste of the end had much in common with the growing eschatological consciousness in European modernity. Similar to the conflict over the meaning of time within cultural and literary modernism, Roman Catholicism reflected a preoccupation with the relationship between time and eternity. In nineteenth-century Catholicism, the church is the spatially and temporally extended outpost of the eternal within time. The papal encyclicals treat various challenges to church authority as “incursions” into the social space occupied by the church. With the loss of the Papal States in 1870, that “space” has collapsed: the sociopolitical world that was Catholicism's medium was coming to its end. History was unhinged from eternity, giving an impetus for an already-existing apocalyptic view of the modern age.

After the First World War, the new situation of Catholicism spurred a reimagining of “social Catholicism” in France, especially in the work of Henri de Lubac, Gaston Fessard, Jacques Maritain, and Teilhard de Chardin. It also spurred a new theological reflection on history that sought to integrate a modern historical consciousness with a traditional interpretation of Christianity.

#### IV. Theology of History in the *nouvelle théologie*

One of the most prominent characteristics of the *nouvelle théologie* was its attempt to honestly face the challenges of a modern historical consciousness and to integrate it with traditional sources of theological reflection.<sup>41</sup> The *nouveaux théologiens* criticized neo-Thomists for their poor understanding of the relationship between theology and history.<sup>42</sup> The debate over the “theology of history” (1943-1962) arose over differences among themselves over modern historical consciousness, the interpretation of scripture, and the theological interpretation of human history.

The debate was initiated by Henri-Marie Féret's book, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean: Vision chrétienne de l'histoire* (1943). After the liberation of France, a flurry of articles in the journals *Dieu vivant*, *Études*, and *Recherches de science religieuse*

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41 Yves Congar's article “Déficit de la théologie” (1934) in *Sept* magazine implied a reimagining of theological methodology in light of the present human condition. Theology, he explained, had become a “closed domain,” cut off from other disciplines and human activity. “As long as we talk about Marxism and Bolshevism in Latin, as I have seen it done in classes and conferences of theologians, Lenin can sleep in peace in his Moscow mausoleum.” Quoted in Jürgen Mettepenning, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor to Vatican II* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 45. Marie-Dominique Chenu's *Le Salchoir* (1937) proposed that theology was the impact of God's gift upon the human intellect. Analogous to the incarnation, because human beings are in time and history, theology is going to take a historical form. Chenu suggested reorganizing theological education around the study of history. The so-called Catholic Modernist authors—such as George Tyrrell, Alfred Loisy, and Friedrich von Hügel—were part of a previous generation engaged precisely with the issue of the methodological impact of history on the discipline of theology.

42 It would be a simplification, however, to merely oppose the *nouvelle théologie* to neo-Scholasticism. There was significant continuity between neo-Scholasticism and the *nouvelle théologie*. First, most of the *nouveaux théologiens* considered themselves to be “Thomists” in some sense of the word. Second, like its neo-Scholastic counterpart, the *nouvelle théologie* was an attempt at a *ressourcement* of the Christian intellectual heritage in order to address contemporary problems. Third, reflecting the inheritance of anti-Modernist Roman Catholicism, the *nouvelle théologie* reflects a keen consciousness of the present moment as a confrontation between Christianity and the secular world. The *nouveaux théologiens* expressed an awareness of living within a modern age and that a rift has occurred between our age and an earlier time. While theologians like Marie-Dominique Chenu and Jean Daniélou are more open to the élan of modern thought, they retain a negative theological assessment of modernity as falling away from a previously attained ideal of Christianity.

responded to this book, taking up themes from earlier debates. The participants included Henri-Marie Féret, OP (1904-1992), Jean Daniélou, SJ (1905-1974), Joseph Huby, SJ (1878-1948), Gaston Fessard, SJ (1897-1978), and Jean Mouroux (1901-1973), a secular priest of the diocese of Dijon.<sup>43</sup> De Lubac's contribution to this debate came out in his books on Origen, the history of medieval exegesis, and his two books on the posterity of Joachim of Flore. Daniélou cited de Lubac's earlier *Catholicism* (1930) as an inspiration to the recovery of a patristic understanding of history. The debate over the theology of history did not so much go away as it diffused itself into broader theological themes.<sup>44</sup>

In what follows, I provide an introduction to the historical context of this debate, then examine the theological interventions of Féret, Huby, Fessard, and Daniélou. My purpose is to show that eschatology and apocalypticism were persistent themes within this debate, and that this debate forms the backdrop for de Lubac's subsequent eschatological synthesis.

### **A. The Socio-Political Context of a Debate**

At the end of the nineteenth century, French Republicans tried and succeeded to remove from France the Catholic religious congregations and their hold on public education. Prior to 1879, the religious congregations were permitted to function even if the law heavily circumscribed their activity. From 1879 to 1889, France began to expel

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43 The last three are sometimes not included in the usual rosters of the *nouvelle théologie* authors. Huby, who was de Lubac's teacher, was really from a previous generation. Gaston Fessard, though he was caught up in the *nouvelle théologie* controversy of the 1950s, is often not numbered among the "New Theologians." For example, Jürgen Mettepenningen hardly mentions Fessard in *Nouvelle Theologie - New Theology*.

44 Mettepenningen locates the end of this debate as the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, in which history became a prominent theme.

some religious congregations. At the same time, the French government created a system of free, obligatory primary school education without religious instruction. It is at least symbolic that, at a time when there was a concerted effort to remove the public footprint of Catholicism from France, an iconic expression of technical modernity, the Eiffel Tower, was being erected as the most visible structure on the Parisian skyline to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the French Revolution.

In 1889, Action française rose as an antirevolutionary movement that advocated the return of the monarchy and the return of the Catholic Church as a state religion in France. Charles Maurras, the principal spokesman for the movement, was an agnostic who wished to capture the power of social cohesion of Catholicism for the French state. While Action française attracted many Catholics, others were quite suspicious of the movement. The Dreyfus Affair put Catholics on the defensive yet again.<sup>45</sup> Under the French Concordat of 1801, the church held a place of privilege and was subsidized by the government. From 1899 to 1914, Catholics were excluded from government and public office. Religious orders, including the Jesuits, were exiled. The Law of 1904 forbade the religious to teach. In 1904 France broke diplomatic relations with the Holy See because Pope Pius X refused the French government the power to name bishops. In response, French Republicans took away the church budget. In 1905, the Law of Separation allowed the church to organize itself as it pleased, but provided for lay associations for

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<sup>45</sup> Alfred Dreyfus, an army captain of Jewish descent, was condemned to life imprisonment for giving military secrets to the Germans. When it became clear that another man had committed treason and that antisemitism was behind his condemnation, his case was reopened in 1899. The case split France as well as French Catholics. Members of the Augustinian religious order joined a rush to condemn him, triggering an anti-Catholic backlash. Yet prominent Catholics were among the Dreyfusards, including Charles Péguy.

the conservation of church property. Due to the latter provision, Pius X unwisely condemned the Law of Separation. The Catholic Church never established associations, so church properties were given by the state to other organizations.

The aftermath of the Great War put Catholics in a very different situation. Returning from exile abroad, religious served as chaplains, medics, and soldiers, thus they could no longer be seen as the enemy. Foreign affairs and domestic economic problems dominated French politics, which no longer had a place for anticlerical politics. Religious congregations were allowed to return, though the law banning them remained on the books until 1942. In 1921 France and the Holy See resumed relations. In 1924, a modification of the French law allowed the church was allowed to own property. An anti-Catholic government was elected in 1924, but fell quickly in 1925. In 1926, Pope Pius XI condemned Action française, precipitating the search for new models of Christian involvement in the social and political realm.

The theological renewals in France in the 1920s and 1930s occurred during a time of political truce between integrist Catholicism and republicanism. At least in part, the generation of theologians of the 1920s to 1930s were not as tied to the political establishment as those of the previous generation.<sup>46</sup> This generation was less inclined to believe that partisan political interests were aligned with the spiritual needs of Catholics. Between the wars and following, pastoral initiatives and domestic missionary work

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<sup>46</sup> The priests under the concordat were largely rural and pious, and the state treated them like government officials. They tended to align themselves politically with those parties and organizations that advocated a return of the monarchy. The priests after the separation of 1905 (and especially after World War I) were mostly urban, bourgeoisie or working class and not tied to the political establishment.

outside the institutional church sought to engage the laity.<sup>47</sup> The re-claiming of the theological virtues, mysticism, and spirituality became a central pastoral task, especially as so many Catholics were disengaged from moral and outward practices of the Church. Significantly, the post-war context saw the re-thinking of “Social Catholicism,” a vision of the social and political space of the church as the leaven for society. The amelioration of tensions between the French government and Catholics allowed for this re-envisioning to take place apart from seeking the restoration of a pro-Catholic monarchy.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, French literary Catholicism was blossoming. The work of Leon Bloy, François Mauriac, Georges Bernanos, Charles Péguy, Gabriel Marcel, and Paul Claudel had an immense influence on those who would form the *nouvelle théologie*. Bernanos and Marcel especially treated apocalyptic and eschatological themes as modes of understanding the relationship between Christianity and secular society. Marcel raised the specter of a “post-human” technological society, which wipes away any traces of subjectivity and human authenticity.<sup>49</sup>

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47 Henri-Marie Féret was involved in founding three pastoral initiatives just before WWII: *Journées sacerdotales*, retreats for priestly formation, *Cours Saint-Jacques*, a parallel retreat for lay people, and *Groupe évangélique*, a women's bible study. Henri de Lubac participated in *Semaines sociales*, an annual conference on the social dimensions of Christianity for laity.

48 Turn of the century initiatives from Catholic philosophers, theologians, and writers contributed to seeking new forms of Christian social witness. The philosopher Maurice Blondel was a prominent participant in the Catholic “social congresses” from the late nineteenth century to early twentieth century. Under the inspiration of Leo XIII's social vision for Catholicism, Marc Sangnier founded *Le Sillon* [The Furrow] in 1894. *Le Sillon* was a liberal Catholic labor movement and political alternative to Marxism. The group was endorsed by the Pope until the 1905 law of separation, which *Le Sillon* supported. In 1912 *Le Sillon* was condemned by Pius X. These political interventions lead to Catholic social philosophies of the 1920s and 1930s. Jean-Yves Calvez names Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, Gaston Fessard, Teilhard de Chardin, and Henri de Lubac as the most significant theorists of social Catholicism. Jean-Yves Calvez, “The French Catholic Contribution to Social and Political Thinking in the 1930s,” *Ethical Perspectives: Journal of the European Ethics Network* 7, no. 4 (December 2000): 312–315.

49 His philosophy highlighted the experience of living in a broken world in which the awe of being is lost and transcendence is quashed. Marcel described this as the human being reduced to “function.” Marcel's

The advent of the Second World War and the occupation of France divided Catholics politically. In general, those involved with the debate over the theology of history were active participants in the “spiritual resistance” against the État Français, which collaborated with Germany, and the German occupiers. The administrative center of the État Français was in Vichy, located a mere 150 kilometers from Lyon. East of Lyon was an area of Italian occupation. The southern zone in general, and Lyon in particular, became a bastion for resistance movements.

The underground journal *Cahiers du témoignage chrétien* became an organ of the Catholic “spiritual resistance” that attacked the Vichy and German governments.<sup>50</sup> In 1941, in Lyon, the *avant garde* editor and art critic Stanislaus Fumet arranged a meeting between the Jesuits Pierre Chaillet and Gaston Fessard, and Henri Frenay, the head of the *Combat* network of resistance movements. Fumet and Frenay encouraged Chaillet to start a clandestine paper that criticized Nazi ideology from a Christian perspective. The first edition of *Témoignage chrétien* appeared under the title *France, prends garde de perdre ton âme* [*France, Take Care to Not Lose Your Soul*] in 1941. From 1941 to 1945, Pierre Chaillet, Gaston Fessard, Stanislaus Fumet, Henri de Lubac, Georges Bernanos, Yves de Montcheuil, and Jean Lacroix were among the authors. Jacques Maritain was among the editors. Many of its contributors, including de Lubac, who were located near Lyon, had a

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example in *The Philosophy of Existentialism* was of a person who does repetitive tasks and regulates life around a “time table.” Technological progress functioned to regulate the self and even to see the self as a function, which Marcel saw as degrading the experience of being and mystery.

50 *Cahiers du témoignage chrétien* was one of a series of publications that criticized Nazism. *Temps présent*, which became *Temps nouveau*, was shut down by the authorities in 1941. *Sept, Esprit, L'Aube*, and *Semaine religieuse* were all under surveillance by the authorities. Guy Boissard, *Quelle neutralité face à l'horreur: le courage de Charles Journet* (Saint-Maurice, Switzerland: Éditions Saint-Augustin, 2000), 215.

greater freedom of movement and communication that allowed for the publication of the journal. Yves de Montcheuil, a scholar at Institute Catholique de Paris, distributed *Témoignage chrétien* through his networks in occupied Paris. De Montcheuil's writings exuded an apocalyptic interpretation of the present time.<sup>51</sup> While ministering to students in the armed resistance movement *le maquis*, he was captured and killed in 1944.<sup>52</sup>

While the writers for *Témoignage chrétien* were united in their opposition to “collaboration” with Nazism, this unity frayed almost immediately in the post-war period. Maritain and Bernanos had anti-revolutionary leanings and ties to Action française, and they supported anti-communist regimes.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, for many French resisters, communism appeared to be a viable political alternative. In 1947, writing in the journal *Esprit*, Emmanuel Mounier and Jean Lacroix took a stance against the “fascism come to France” of General de Gaulle. They appealed to non-fascists, including Catholics, to “collaborate” with communists. The contributors to *Témoignage chrétien* had diverse responses to this invitation. Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou were more sympathetic to the social and eschatological impulses of communism and sought to understand it in light of a Christian understanding of history. In July 1947, De Lubac's , Mounier's, and Lacroix's joint participation in *Semaine sociales de France* (an intellectual retreat for Catholic laypeople) contributed to the perception of the emergence of a leftist

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51 Yves de Montcheuil, “Communisme,” *Courrier français du temoignage chretien* 5 (1943); Yves de Montcheuil, “Perspectives,” *Courrier français du temoignage chretien* 9 (1944): 384–386.

“Perspectives” is particularly apocalyptic, in which he interprets the present totalitarianism in terms of the beasts of Revelation.

52 Aidan Nichols, OP, “Henri de Lubac: Panorama and Proposal,” *New Blackfriars* 93, no. 1043 (January 2012): 20.

53 Bernanos had supported Franco during the Spanish Civil War, but became disillusioned with the brutality of the war. During and after World War II, he supported Charles de Gaulle.

Catholicism in Lyons.<sup>54</sup> In private letters to Henri de Lubac, Gaston Fessard indicated that he saw a community of thought developing in Lyon that was open to communism. De Lubac denied that his proximity to this group in Lyon played a significant role in his thinking.<sup>55</sup>

The debate over the theology of history that would unfold extended from the reflection over the social space of Catholicism in the modern world in the 1920s and 1930s and from the spiritual resistance to fascism in the 1940s. Many of the writers associated with the *Témoignage chrétien* also contributed to this debate. While the '*théologie de l'histoire*' concerned primarily the understanding of God's interventions into history, the political question remained in the background.

## **B. The Debate over the '*théologie de l'histoire*'**

### **1. The Exchange Between Henri-Marie Féret and Joseph Huby**

Roger Aubert correctly claimed that Henri-Marie Féret's book *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean: Vision chrétienne de l'histoire* (1943) initiated the debate over the theology of history within the *nouvelle théologie*.<sup>56</sup> As suggested above, Féret's project to give an interpretation of history in light of the Book of Revelation had precedents within magisterial documents of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as cultural

<sup>54</sup> Lyons was home to the *Fourvière*, the Jesuit seminary in Lyons, from which the *Cahiers du témoignage chrétien* was launched. It also was the home to the new series *Sources Chrétiennes* and *Théologie*, which would come under increasing criticism from neo-Thomists. Mounier and Lacroix, editors of *Esprit*, were also living in Lyons, as was Fumet.

<sup>55</sup> Frédéric Louzeau, "Gaston Fessard et Henri de Lubac: leur différend sur la question du communisme et du progressisme chrétien (1945-1950)," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 84, no. 4 (2010): 531.

<sup>56</sup> Roger Aubert, "Discussions récentes autour de la théologie de l'histoire," *Collectanea Mechliniensia* 33 (1948): 129–149.

and political precedents. Jürgen Mettepenningen states, “not only did he give an initial impetus to a biblical-theological explanation of the course of history, but also evidently to a theology of history, i.e., a theological reflection on history that took seriously history and endeavored to integrate it to the full.”<sup>57</sup> Written during a time of messianic politics, Féret's book attempted an interpretation of history through a biblical lens and spurred the reflection on the methodological implications of history on theology. *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean* advanced an apocalyptic interpretation of the bible, giving voice to a powerful religious intuition of the presence of God in history and God's providence over its outcome.

Féret argued that the Book of Revelation provides the “concrete details” concerning the development of God's plan in history, particularly with regard to the church. The history of the church is composed of three periods: a time of persecution by the Roman Empire; a time of battle against the church's political opponents; and a time during which there is a “progressive amelioration of the situation: through numerous difficulties, spiritual and religious values would little by little take the place that they should.”<sup>58</sup> The “conversion of the Jews” and the beginning of the establishment of Christian civilization (the thousand-year reign of Christ) would follow long periods of struggle. During this era, the fight between good and evil would continue within each individual, while religious and civil society would find peace. At the end of this period

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<sup>57</sup> Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Theologie - New Theology*, 59–60.

<sup>58</sup> Aubert, “Discussions récentes autour de la théologie de l’histoire,” 133.

would come a resurgence of evil in the world, followed by the final intervention of God who would destroy evil and bring about a “new heaven and a new earth.”

Féret states that the last stage of history has begun in Christ. Rejecting the “messianism” of both Marxism and liberalism, he states that the Christian cannot look to a new revelation or a new age. At the same time, “the cause of Christ is assured of triumph, not only on the plane of individuals who arrive in heaven, but on the plane of a humanity, who in this world will experience...an organization of the world here below conformed to the truth of the Gospel.”<sup>59</sup> While avoiding the kind of temporal hope that characterized fascism and Marxism, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean* sought to describe a situation in which humanity is conformed to the Gospel, visibly and in its social organization and not just individually or spiritually. Furthermore, because conformity to the Gospel must occur in this world through human relationships, it must occur through human action and cooperation with the Gospel.

In “Apocalypse et histoire,” Joseph Huby responded to Féret's book in order to correct its specious interpretations of the Book of Revelation.<sup>60</sup> Huby took the position that the apocalyptic discourse in this book, as a “succession of visions that reveal the designs of God,” serves to reveal the ultimate meaning of conflicts between the church

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Huby, S.J. (1878-1948) was a professor of apologetics at Ore Place, Hastings (1913-1917), professor of scripture at Ore Place (1923-1926), and professor of scripture at Lyon-Fourvière). See Henri de Lubac, Marie Rougier, and Michel Sales, eds., *Gabriel Marcel - Gaston Fessard: Correspondence (1934-1971)* (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1985), 322. As de Lubac's teacher at Ore Place from 1924 to 1926, Huby encouraged de Lubac to begin the body of research that would become *Surnaturel*. As a biblical scholar, he was also philosophically astute. De Lubac called him “the most faithful disciple of Fathers de Grandmaison and Pierre Rousselot.” Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings* (San Francisco: Communio Books, 1993), 20.

and the world in the time when it was written and in the present. The Book of Revelation lifts the veil, not on the future, but on the present. “Revelation has as its object a present, contemporary mystery....”<sup>61</sup>

First, according to Huby, the representations of the end of history in the apocalyptic genre are only a “contingent manner by which to represent this end.”<sup>62</sup> While the apocalyptic genre represents God's judgment over history as occurring within time, this temporal judgment is “one with the universal judgment at the end of time (or the 'eschatological' judgment).”<sup>63</sup> These temporal representations of catastrophe symbolize that we must be torn from our temporal condition to reach our end.

Second, the Book of Revelation is thoroughly Christocentric, which the future eschatology of Féret makes us forget. For Huby, the book does not as much signify the reign of God in the historical future as it reveals the reign of God already intervening in the world through Christ. “Among the revelations that this book brings us, the most important concern not so much particular events as the person of Christ himself and the reciprocal relationships between Christ and his faithful.”<sup>64</sup> The church will remain in conflict with the world until the end of time as a sign of contradiction. However, through the church militant, the saints, and the martyrs, the eschatological “church triumphant” is already made present. Avoiding any form of millennialism, Huby indicated that the reign of God is already realized in Christ but will remain in tension with the present age.

Féret responded to Huby in “Apocalypse, histoire, et eschatologie chrétiennes,” a

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61 Joseph Huby, “Apocalypse et Histoire,” *Construire* 15 (1944): 84.

62 Ibid., 89.

63 Ibid., 84.

64 Ibid., 95.

clarification and development of his original thesis. At the outset, Féret distanced himself from any crass, literal millenarian reading of John's Revelation. Instead, he developed the outlines of a theory of symbol that could support the “prophetic” message of the scripture.

According to Féret, the realities about which the apocalyptic text speaks “are presented—and without doubt first of all known to the inspired author—only through symbols.”<sup>65</sup> The meaning of the text is conveyed through symbols and images—the horsemen, the lamb, the lamp stands, the beasts, the woman—that are polyvalent. These symbols usually possess a historical referent from the time of the author. In addition, they often possess a prophetic character. Apocalyptic symbols, “save exceptions sufficiently marked by their meaning or contexts, are normally overt about the future or announcing it... We cannot contest that they... predict the future.”<sup>66</sup>

Féret claims that the apocalyptic genre in the Old Testament possessed a messianic content, since it awaited a further completion. The authors of the New Testament recognize that, while the messiah has come, Christians await his return:

In faith the Christian lives inseparably by the fulfillment of the ancient promises made by God to his people—a fulfillment inaugurated in the first place by Christ—and in expectation of their fuller blossoming—a blossoming that the parousia or second coming of the same Christ at the end of time will realize. It is on the future that the eschatological fragments of the New Testament project their own light, in their way, according to variable stages.<sup>67</sup>

God's promises have been fulfilled with Christ. However, those same promises are oriented to a development into the future, as the extension of that fulfillment in time.

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65 Henri-Marie Féret, “Apocalypse, histoire, et eschatologie chrétiennes,” *Dieu Vivant* 2 (1945): 119.

66 *Ibid.*, 122–23.

67 *Ibid.*, 123.

In opposition to Huby's account, Féret argued that the temporal characteristics within prophecy are significant. The millennial prophecy (Rev. 20:1-6) symbolically portrayed an era of peace. While we lack explicit knowledge of the concrete mode of that “era,” we cannot neglect that it points to the historical future. The prophetic symbols in scripture prefigure the “aspect of the mystery of the Church in its future evolution.”<sup>68</sup> The temporal mode of prophetic expression is itself of importance and should figure into our interpretation of the New Testament.

Féret argued that the neglect of the “prophetic perspective” is “of grave consequence not only for Christian eschatology...but already for the prophetic documents [of the Old Testament].”<sup>69</sup> He feared that, by not recognizing the element of prefiguration in scripture, we would reduce the symbols of scripture to “some general atemporal truths.”<sup>70</sup> As a result, the content of Christian hope would be an abstraction and would no longer have any bearing on the present church and its current struggles.

Huby's response to Féret's article in “Autour de l'Apocalypse” witnesses to the closeness of the two authors in their basic understanding of scripture, but also to remaining differences. The point of contention was the manner in which we must interpret the “prophetic,” “messianic,” or “future” meaning of the Scriptures, particularly John's apocalypse. Féret had stated that prophetic inspiration really sees something “that appears to touch on the future.” Huby agreed that

any Catholic interpreter would not hesitate to admit with Fr. Féret that, in the Apocalypse as in the messianic prophesies, the “inspired author claims to glimpse and announce,

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68 Ibid., 130.

69 Ibid., 125.

70 Ibid., 130.

through the symbols which he uses, something of the future.”... It remains to be determined more accurately what this “something of the future” is and to show how this “something,” captured by a mode of knowledge other than that of history, is “really in continuity with another reality accessible to historical knowledge.”<sup>71</sup>

The question is precisely to what the prophetic glimpse into the future pertains and how the reality in the future is related to the reality in the historical context of the author.

According to Huby, some scriptural symbols, like the beasts of Revelation, refer both to the historical context of the author and to future realities. While the human author of scripture did not foresee the concrete realities in the future, the symbols that represent historical realities in turn bear an analogy to present-day circumstances. In a sense, the persecutions of the church throughout time are contemporaneous to the persecution occurring in the time of the author.

I believe that this “contemporaneity” of the Apocalypse to each of the great fights of the church permits one to call the visions of Saint John properly prophetic visions: through a supra-historical view they make him *present* to the spiritual crises that the church would have to cross before its final transformation in the heavenly Jerusalem. It is in this sense that I speak of a *legitimate* application, that is to say, conformed to the intention of the inspired author, of the teachings of the Apocalypse that Christians make to analogous crises of the Church from the persecution of Diocletian, without moreover causing the complete distinction of successive periods, which map in advance the contours of the history of the church, to enter into the Johannine vision.”<sup>72</sup>

Huby affirmed that the Book of Revelation contains a prophetic meaning beyond the “historical plane” that tells us something of the future. However, he resisted “the tendency to conceive this prophetic or apocalyptic perspective as a *second plane itself also historical*,” that is, a perspective that would single out particular future events as precisely foretold by the scriptures.<sup>73</sup> Huby affirmed two depths of interpretation of

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71 Joseph Huby, “Autour de l’Apocalypse,” *Dieu Vivant* 5 (1946): 125.

72 *Ibid.*, 126.

73 *Ibid.*, 124.

scriptural symbols, the historical meaning and the prophetic meaning. However, he opposed the notion that the prophetic meanings signify a new historical era in which those prophecies concretely come to pass. The scriptural symbols are analogous to and contemporaneous with the events throughout the life of the church.

In summary, Féret and Huby were divided on a point of biblical hermeneutics, a point which implicated their respective understandings of history. Importantly, both authors articulated the scriptural and theological grounds for a theological understanding of the historical future. Féret voiced the notion that the Christian must hope for and work toward an era in human history in which society, culture, and human institutions are conformed to the Gospel. His theology suggested that Christianity held a response to communist aspirations. Féret's critics attempted to formulate a theological understanding of history that avoided temporalizing the eschaton. Gaston Fessard developed an original reflection on the contemporaneity of the scriptural events.

## **2. Gaston Fessard's Dialectic of History**

In 1947, Gaston Fessard, SJ intervened in the debate over the theology of history from the perspective of a philosopher rather than that of a biblical theologian. His previous writings in the 1930s and 1940s demonstrate his keen interest in social philosophy and its applicability to international relations, political authority, society, and the crises then enveloping Europe.<sup>74</sup> He warned of “tactical alliances” between Christians

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<sup>74</sup> Gaston Fessard, *“Pax nostra”*: *examen de conscience internationale* (Paris: Grasset, 1936); Gaston Fessard, *Le Dialogue catholique-communiste est-il possible?* (Paris: Grasset, 1937); Gaston Fessard, *Épreuve de force: réflexions sur la crise internationale* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1939); Gaston Fessard, *Autorité et bien commun* (Paris: Aubier, 1944); Gaston Fessard, *France prends garde de perdre ta*

and communists in *France, prends garde de perdre ta liberté*, a political as well as a religious intervention. According to Fessard, communism possessed a similar underlying view of history and human agency as the fascism against which he had fought. He believed that the theology of history proposed by Féret and others represented a loss of a genuine Christian eschatology and a close approximation of Marxism. “Théologie et histoire” appeared in *Dieu Vivant* in 1947, serving as Fessard's response to Féret. This article was the initial articulation of a theology of time that would culminate in *De l'Actualité historique*.<sup>75</sup> “Théologie et histoire” sought to articulate, beginning from the Pauline dialectic between the pagan and the Jew, a theology of history, a synthesis between “essentialism” and “existentialism,” and a resolution to the problem of the supernatural. Here I wish to trace the basic outlines of Fessard's objection to the “apocalyptic” or “prophetic” interpretations of scripture offered by some of his contemporaries.

Fessard recognized that Apocalypse of John had a resonance in the contemporary age: “a time of world conflicts and atomic bombs seems to place in question the very existence of humanity and to presage its end under the form of a cosmic drama.”<sup>76</sup> A recent commentary in *Dieu Vivant* opposed the “Constantinian” Christian who “hopes for

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*liberté* (Paris: Témoignage chrétien, 1946).

75 Gaston Fessard, “Théologie et histoire,” *Dieu Vivant* 8 (1947): 37–65; Gaston Fessard, *De l'actualité historique* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1960); See also Michel Sales, *Gaston Fessard, 1897-1978: Genèse d'une pensée*, Presences 14 (Brussels: Culture et Vérité, 1997); Michèle Aumont, *Philosophie sociopolitique de Gaston Fessard, S.J.* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2005); Mary Alice Muir, “Gaston Fessard, S.J.: His Work Towards a Theology of History” (M.A., Marquette University, 1970); Nguyen Hong Giao, *Le Verbe dans l'histoire: la philosophie de l'historicité du Pere Gaston Fessard*, Bibliothèque des Archives de philosophie 17 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1974).

76 Fessard, “Théologie et histoire,” 39.

salvation by social institutions and identifies the victory of the Lamb with the concept of Christian civilization” with the “‘apocalyptic’ Christian which knows that the work of the church here below is, like the terrestrial life of Christ, doomed to failure, so that he must live ‘under the scope of a rupture of historical time.’”<sup>77</sup>

According to Fessard, the work of Féret and Charles Journet suggests that the prophetic meaning of the Scripture must come to pass temporally. Specifically, Fessard examines Journet's argument that the “conversion” or “salvation” of Israel in Romans 11 is an expectation of a *time* in which Jew and Gentile will be united. Yet the opinion handed down from the Fathers and Thomas Aquinas envisions the restoration of Israel occurring at the end of time. Referring also to writings by E. B. Allo and Jacques Maritain, he states, “Here then are three or four theologians, philosophers and exegetes, whose affection toward St. Thomas is not in doubt, who do not hesitate to abandon the opinion of their Master, on a secondary matter it is true, in appearance at least.”<sup>78</sup>

The abandonment of the “traditional opinion” on this precise matter illustrates, for Fessard, a more generalized shift toward a hermeneutic that interprets the symbolic language of Scripture as prophecies of future historical events rather than evoking its deeper meaning. The traditional hermeneutic allowed for the “spiritual interpretation” of the literal sense of scripture: “What distinguishes essentially sacred prophecy from the profane divination, is that it claims to discover less the superficial and transitory phenomena of history than—if one can say it—its ‘noumena,’ its intelligible essence, in

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77 Ibid., 40.

78 Ibid., 43.

brief what gives a religious meaning to the event.”<sup>79</sup> Fessard suggested that the Fathers and Thomas Aquinas read the “prophetic” content of scriptures in terms of its spiritual meaning, because their conception of history supported such a move. He explains that if the Fathers

were not tempted to place [the conversion of Israel] in time, it is also that their conception of history, the foundation of their exegesis, more spiritual than literal, allowed them to perceive in the pagans and the Jews less the phenomenal realities than “historical categories,” of which the opposition clarifies the whole mystery of Christ and of the redemption of the universe. We know that, spiritual or allegorical, the exegesis of the fathers considered the history of the world to be divided in two by relationship with Christ, and that the whole content of the Old Testament was “shadow,” “figure” or “type,” finding its reality, its truth or its fulfillment in the New. Thus, Adam by relationship to Christ, the Law and the synagogue in the face of Charity and of the Church. On the basis of this notion of “type” in particular, the imagination of the Fathers could be abused. But its scriptural and theological foundation is not less solid...<sup>80</sup>

Fessard suggested that prioritization of the “spiritual sense” in the Fathers and Thomas justified a manner of relating the temporal realities of Scripture to a broader, more universalized set of meanings. Thus, the Pauline prophecy of the conversion of the Jews and pagans contains, in seed, a glimpse of the union of all humanity in Christ.

Fessard's principal text is Romans 11, in which Paul explains his apostolate to the Gentiles as something that would contribute to the salvation of Israel itself.

Before Christ, Paul had been the Jew proud of his election in the face of pagans without God and without promise in this world; once seized by Christ, he became the apostle to the idolatrous Gentiles whom he called to conversion, while the Jews were rejected for their incredulity. He unveiled the meaning and the end of the dialectical process in the final unity of “All Israel saved” and of “the mass of Gentiles entered into the Church.” Naturally, in the course of this reflection, pagans and Jews who are first phenomenal historical realities, are stylized, so to speak, into “existential attitudes” characterizing the diverse positions of man in the face of God, so that finally “the pagan” and “the Jew” appear as “historical categories” of which the interplay—the function of the *before* and

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79 Ibid., 47.

80 Ibid., 48.

the *after* of Christ—defines the *future-Christian* in each man as in the whole of humanity, by relationship to the second Coming, the end of history.<sup>81</sup>

In Fessard's account, the Jews and pagans are, first of all, phenomenal realities and historical people. In Christ, the enmity between Jew and Gentile, man and woman, slave and free, rich and poor is dissolved. The historical realities—reconciled in Christ—are reinterpreted in light of the mystery of Christ. According to Fessard, the “pagan” and “Jew” become “existential attitudes” within humanity that are to be reconciled within each person and each epoch. Furthermore, only at the end of time will all of humanity be fully reconciled in Christ. The “pagan” and “Jew” as existential poles within humanity—while already healed through Christ—are completely united and reconciled only at the Second Coming.<sup>82</sup>

Fessard believed that there were serious theological, as well as exegetical, shortcomings in the recent “apocalyptic” interpretations of Scripture which placed the conversion of Israel within time. These shortcomings concern the loss of the eschatological meaning of the present. He says that we know from experience that the divisions that characterize our present history cannot be entirely overcome while we live. Those who project the conversion of Israel and the Gentiles within time—and by extension expect the realization of a perfected Christian state within time—reduce Christianity to a perfection of the natural or social world:

They have forgotten that one cannot *be* Christian as one is French or English, blond or brunette, intelligent or dull: in other words, that Christian existence [l'être chrétien] must never be conceived as a mode of a *natural* reality. For the reason simply that the genesis of this existence is essentially *supernatural*. This is what Kierkegaard meant when he

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81 Ibid., 49.

82 Ibid., 52.

said: one is never—in the full sense of the word—Christian, but it is always something of the future.<sup>83</sup>

For Fessard, “Christian existence” or the “New Man” is something that must always remain in expectation until the end of time, lest we reduce the supernatural life to an aspect of the natural.

Furthermore, Fessard claimed that the historical-future eschatology of Journet and Féret limited the meaning of scriptural symbols to particular times and eras, thereby losing the sense in which they are applicable universally. Although they wish to avoid the implication that the meaning of scriptural prophesy is a series of abstract and atemporal truths, in reality, Journet and Féret make those prophesies merely “relative” to a particular people or age. To say that there will be a point in history at which the “new man” is fully established, in other words, when the oppositions that characterize our history are resolved, would be to undermine the theological meaning of the present. Instead of the “pagan” and “Jew” referring to a particular group of people or to a particular era of history, they describe “existential attitudes” in every era. According to Fessard,

the pagan and the Jew are very exactly “historical categories,” or “existential attitudes” of which the value, far from being relative to an epoch or a part of humanity, transcend time. And in order to discover the extraordinary profoundness of the Pauline analysis, it suffices...to find in his dialectic the image even of the most simple act of faith. It appears then that *the dialectic according to the before and after, of these historical categories, reveals precisely the genesis of Christian existence, or of the supernatural life in us as in the world.*<sup>84</sup>

Though he did not use the term, Fessard's purpose was to support a “realized

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83 Ibid., 53.

84 Ibid., 54.

eschatology.” In other words, he desired to articulate a dialectic that describes the concrete condition of humanity in the present as already conducing to its future eschatological completion. By emphasizing the “contemporaneity” of the Scriptures, he attempted to defend the promise of salvation entering into the situation of every person at all times, though never as fully realized until the end of time.

### 3. Jean Daniélou's Fulfillment Theology

Jean Daniélou (1905-1974) was a theologian of history par excellence. This younger Jesuit confrere of de Lubac earned a doctorate in theology from the Institut catholique de Paris with a dissertation on Gregory of Nyssa. He served on the editorial board of *Sources Chrétiennes*, and he edited the first volume of the series, Gregory of Nyssa's *La vie de Moïse* (1942). In 1943 he was appointed as professor at the Institut catholique de Paris and became editor-in-chief of *Études*, an established Jesuit journal. Daniélou's *Sacramentum futuri* (1950) and *Essai sur le mystère de l'histoire* (1953) exemplify his “fulfillment theology,” in which the historical events of salvation history are “types” or sacraments of future events which will fulfill them.<sup>85</sup> These essays were given over to an elaboration of a Christian understanding of history that can respond to present-day understandings of progress and evolution.

Two brief articles published in 1947—“Christianisme et histoire” and “A travers les revues: Christianisme et progrès”—exemplify Daniélou's intervention into the debate

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<sup>85</sup> See Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Theologie - New Theology*, 89; Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 168–90.

over the theology of history.<sup>86</sup> This controversial 1946 article “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,” published in *Études*, gave the context for this debate. “Les orientations présentes” argued that contemporary theology (that is, neo-Scholastic theology) was not sufficient for the authentic needs of living souls and unresponsive to the current intellectual world. He stated that Scholasticism had lost contact with the movement of philosophy and science, having remained fixed in earlier thought forms.<sup>87</sup> Anti-Christian Marxism and existentialism appear to address the questions that modern humanity is asking, while the church appears to be silent. Daniélou aimed to identify the salient features of modern thought to which Christianity must respond.

The study of patristic thought—he names Gregory of Nyssa, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine—was elemental to this response. The church fathers “are the nourishment most modern for people today,” he writes, because we find in them an understanding of history relevant for today. Whereas history is critical for modernity, “the notion of history is foreign to Thomism.”<sup>88</sup> For Daniélou, the recovery of a Christian notion of history goes hand-in-hand with establishing deeper contact between theology and life. Daniélou mentions new pastoral and social initiatives taking place in France—the movements of *Action Catholique* and *J.O.C.* (Christian Working-Class Youth), as well

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86 Daniélou, “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse”; Jean Daniélou, “A travers les revues: Christianisme et progrès,” *Études* (December 1947): 399–402; Jean Daniélou, “Christianisme et histoire,” *Études* 80, no. 254 (1947): 166–184.

87 Daniélou was deliberately provocative. Many neo-Scholastics claimed that Scholasticism integrates the truths of other disciplines into a unified “scientia.” By implying that Scholasticism no longer could account for modern science and history, Daniélou was announcing its death.

88 Daniélou, “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,” 10.

as Emmanuel Mounier, whose work was sometimes sometimes associated with leftist movements.<sup>89</sup>

Daniélou's essay "Christianisme et histoire" traces the outlines of a theology of history to be further elaborated in *Sacramentum futuri* and *Essai sur le mystère de l'histoire*. He presents the justification for a theology of history as follows:

The search for a vision of history that permits an interpretation of reality and gives meaning to human action is, after a century, at the center of the preoccupations of philosophers. It suffices to speak here of the philosophy of history of Hegel, the historical materialism of Karl Marx, the creative evolution of Bergson, the Spenglerian theory of the birth and decline of civilizations, the role of temporality in the anthropology of Heidegger. This is a new dimension that is now overt in thinking. For the old philosophy, the future is the world of illusion and of multiplicity, which is opposed to the world of being. The conception of time as a positive value, of creative duration is an acquisition of modern thought. But modern thought received this conception from Christianity.<sup>90</sup>

Daniélou is aware that modern historical consciousness in Hegel, Marx, Bergson, etc., in part, derives from a Christian worldview.

Daniélou contrasted the Christian understanding of history with its first and second century competitors, Hellenistic philosophy and Gnosticism. His choice is influenced by his reading of Irenaeus, whose understanding of history was shaped by his opposition to second-century Gnosticism. On the one hand, he characterized history in Hellenistic thought as the "eternal return." The divine world is the unmoving world of ideas.

Immutable laws of the cosmos and of the city are the visible reflection of this eternity of the invisible world. Movement itself is an imitation of this immobility. It is conceived, in fact, as cyclical, in the regular movement of the stars as in the eternal return that

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89 Ibid., 18.

90 Daniélou, "Christianisme et histoire," 166.

regulates the movement of history and according to which the same events are eternally reproduced.<sup>91</sup>

In this scheme, the events of history are merely reflections of the eternal ideas. On the other hand, Gnosticism depended upon a metaphysical dualism between the inferior or evil god of creation and the god of salvation. The god of salvation represented an “irruption... of a new world without relationship to the old.”<sup>92</sup> Hellenism evacuated history entirely, Gnosticism made history entirely discontinuous. Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, with a “chain of heterogeneous civilizations” is an example of this Gnostic tendency.

According to Daniélou, Christianity concerns historical events more than abstract doctrine. Through these irrevocable events, God initiates the slow pedagogy that brings humanity from infancy to maturity, in which one dispensation prepares for the next. Each historical dispensation must pass away in order to make way for a new stage of fulfillment. The passage from Judaism to Christianity, as its succession and fulfillment, is analogous to the passage from the temporal to the future age: “Thus this entire world has to pass away, undoubtedly not in its very being but in its form, in order to make way for the future age, which is built here below by the invisible operation of charity and will be manifest on the last day.”<sup>93</sup> The Christian must look forward in hope to the fulfillment of the present.

While Daniélou admits that this understanding of history has analogies in evolutionary systems, these systems lack a key trait of Christianity. “Christianity ... is not

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91 Ibid., 168.

92 Ibid., 169.

93 Ibid., 172.

only a progress, but the term of progress.” Christianity is eschatological, he states, in three ways. First, history is not just an undending process, but has a definite fulfillment. Second, Christianity is that term: “Christ is presented as coming at the end of time and introducing the definitive world. Thus, there is nothing beyond Christianity. It is truly 'eschatos,' 'novissimus,' the last.” Third, the end has already arrived in Christ's death and resurrection: “the last of things exists already.”<sup>94</sup> Christians are now living in the last days awaiting the transition from the temporal to the eternal. While death and evil have been vanquished in Christ, we nonetheless await the ultimate triumph in the rest of creation. Daniélou describes this period of waiting as analogous to the time between the moment of victory in the war and the victorious entrances into Paris.<sup>95</sup>

For Daniélou, the Christian lives in the tension between the future and past. The eschatological is already present now, albeit in anticipation. “The future age is already, but in mystery, under the sacrament.”<sup>96</sup> Yet, the present is also a culmination of a temporal process. In a rather unclear passage, he explains:

The Christian is divided between two successive worlds that are found to coexist. The mystery of the present time is in fact that it brings this simultaneous presence of a past world, that survives itself, and a future world that is already existing in an anticipated fashion. This is to say that in fact there is not a present world, or that this world is only a passage. For the Christian, the world of natural life and of science, the world of the temporal city and of economic life has something essentially anachronic. It is radically transcended [*dépassé*] by the world of the Church, which is the future already present. The world of the Church, in its turn, seems in relationship to political society, “catachronic” in the measure that it appears in the future. Juxtaposition of a past and future, such is the Christian present.<sup>97</sup>

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94 Ibid., 173.

95 “This moment is the resurrection of Christ. Then will come the *Victory Day* [*Viendra ensuite le Victory Day*], the day when we pass under the arches of triumph.” He was referring to the parades through the Arc d'Triomphe in Paris following Germany's surrender to the Allies.

96 Daniélou, “Christianisme et histoire,” 182.

97 Ibid., 183. He defines *catachronique* as an antonym of *anachronique*, as “the anticipation of a reality to

Daniélou's understanding of Christianity is thoroughly eschatological. While he maintains that Christ has brought a definitive fulfillment, the present is characterized by anticipation (anachronic or anterior) of that fulfillment. In the “world of the Church,” the eschaton exists already. Thus, Christianity appears as the “future” of political society. Living between two times, the Christian awaits their convergence.

Daniélou's theology of history gives rise to his response to the political question. In “Christianisme et histoire,” he explains that “human progress is ambiguous.”<sup>98</sup> “A travers les revues: Christianisme et progrès” fills out his understanding a little more. He claims that a belief in human progress—he envisions both technological and political advancement—may be an “elementary form of religion,” that is, a basic component of religious faith that takes into account humanity's creative role in the temporal. However, the presentation of human progress in Marxism takes an idolatrous turn insofar as it awaits the salvation of humanity by human power.<sup>99</sup> The conception of human progress advanced by Marxism is one that lacks transcendence. “The progress of history, according to Christianity, is not a process of continual accumulation, as technological progress.... It is ascent.”<sup>100</sup> While Daniélou sees in a Marxist philosophy of history an “idolatrous pretension,” he does not hesitate to find something valid in its underlying hope.

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come.” Ibid., 183, note 1.

98 Daniélou, “Christianisme et histoire,” 183.

99 Daniélou, “A travers les revues: Christianisme et progrès,” 400. Daniélou says that Marxist understandings of history betray the “great heresy of the modern world,” to believe that by human effort we can save ourselves.

100 Ibid., 401, quoting Emmanuel Mounier.

## V. Conclusion

In the post-war context, the debate over the theology of history manifested an intense interest in eschatology and a fragmentation of the interpretation of Christian eschatology. Although this debate did not treat directly of the political question, its backdrop was the restructuring of French civil and political society after the Second World War and the variety of Catholic responses to this restructuring. Opposed opinions with regard to Communist-Catholic collaboration of Fessard, Daniélou, and de Lubac indicate the importance of the political question for their theological deliberations.

The debate over the theology of history was dominated by the question of how to represent the historical present and future from a Christian theological perspective. As I have indicated, the subject of this debate shared much in common with the questionings within the wider culture. One of the cardinal problems of European Modernism—how to recognize the eternal in the midst of flux—became a fundamental concern for the Roman Catholic response to modernity, though it was addressed in widely divergent ways. The Catholic apocalyptic response—which envisioned the present moment as a decline of the current temporal order, (often) the emergence of a new era, and an ultimate battle between good and evil to come—mirrored the responses to modernity found in the Futurist Movement, the Decadent Movement, forms of Fascism, and Marxism. While, traditionally, Scholasticism rejected all forms of millennialism, in the late nineteenth century, “catastrophic eschatology” of anti-Modernism began to merge with the serene “eternalism” of neo-Scholasticism. A tension between the two still remained.

In the “theology of history” debate, the political, cultural, and theological questions converged and were made the explicit subject of theological inquiry. The primary question was eschatological: *Theologically, what is the relationship between our historical world—experienced in the church and secular history—and its promised consummation? What is the Christian understanding of history and its fulfillment?*

Three correlate questions surfaced in this debate. First, *to what extent can the contemporary eschatological and historical consciousness (such as that present in Marxism) be reconciled to a Christian understanding of history?* Fessard opposed Féret, in part, because he believed that Féret's future eschatology too closely mirrored an understanding of history undergirding both fascism and communism. On the other hand, Féret and, more explicitly, Daniélou believed that an authentic Christian eschatology served as a corrective to both ahistorical neo-Scholasticism and the dialectical materialism of Marx.

Second, *what form of eschatology preserves the eternal significance of the present moment and the social space of Christianity?* Although Féret and Fessard disagreed on this question, both were concerned to preserve the theological significance of the present, as well as the importance of a lived Catholicism in which God is encountered through the concrete realities of social existence. Daniélou employed the language of sacrament to interpret the present as an anticipation of the eschaton. Huby's notion of the “contemporaneity” of the Scriptures figured into his desire to preserve the applicability of the Scriptures in each moment.<sup>101</sup>

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101 The question of the applicability of Christianity to the social world would be addressed in widely

Third, *in what sense is Christianity essentially an eschatological reality?* The selected authors agreed substantially on this point. For Fessard and Daniélou, Christianity is something “to come.” Fessard spoke of “Christian existence” or, alternatively, the “New Man” as a reality yet to come and not fully present now. For Daniélou, the church is where the future is made present under the sacrament. Féret suggested that the conformity of the church to the Gospel awaits a future completion. Similarly, de Lubac would give a robust account of Christianity as an eschatological reality.<sup>102</sup>

Henri de Lubac's intervention in this debate came primarily through his *ressourcement* of patristic writings. In *Catholicism*, he had already suggested that Christianity held the corrective to two views of human existence: an ahistorical Hellenism in which the goal is to flee the world; and the historical immanentism of Marxism, which lacks a transcendent goal. The understanding of history present in the Fathers, he believed, united history and transcendence.

Similar to the other participants in the debate over the theology of history, de Lubac sought the foundations for an understanding of history within scripture. Féret, Huby, Fessard, and Daniélou each depended upon the notion that the scriptures signify something beyond the historical or literal meaning. De Lubac's work toward the *ressourcement* of the “spiritual sense” of scripture had a precedent in the disagreement among Féret, Huby, and Fessard concerning the future or prophetic meaning of the text.

With Huby and Fessard, de Lubac rejected the idea of a new historical era of fulfillment

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varying directions before Vatican II in the work of Gaston Fessard, Jacques Maritain, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and Maurice Montuclard, among others.

<sup>102</sup> In chapter 4, I will treat de Lubac's account of the eschatological dimensions of the sacraments, the church, Christ, and mysticism.

after Christ, and he was critical of a Joachimite tradition of biblical interpretation. While he does not single out Féret, de Lubac appears to reject the millenarian aspects of Féret's exegesis. At the same time, de Lubac was sympathetic with Féret's attempt to interpret the “prophetic” meaning of the biblical texts as the “aspect of the mystery of the Church in its future evolution.”<sup>103</sup> As I will indicate, de Lubac's theology of history approaches that of Daniélou, for whom historical events are the sacraments of future fulfillments. The disagreement that arose between Daniélou and de Lubac over the terminology of spiritual interpretation—Daniélou preferred the term “typology” while de Lubac preferred “allegory”—testifies to how close their understandings of history were.

De Lubac's contribution to a theology of history came primarily through his *ressourcement* of Origen, the second- and third-century African theologian. De Lubac's groundbreaking book on Origen, published a few years after the exchanges between Féret, Huby, Fessard, and Daniélou, sought to address the issues that arose from their debate. It argued that Origen's characteristic “spiritual interpretation” of the Scripture preserved a Christian understanding of history necessary for today. De Lubac would emphasize that Origen's treatment of *anagogy*, the final “spiritual sense” of scripture, united both the anticipation of the future and the contemplation of the transcendent. Origen appeared to offer a synthesis and harmony between the divergent eschatological positions of Henri-Marie Féret, Gaston Fessard, Joseph Huby, and Jean Daniélou. In the following chapter, I examine de Lubac's recovery of Origen as a theologian of history and as the basis for de Lubac's eschatological synthesis.

<sup>103</sup> Féret, “Apocalypse, histoire, et eschatologie chrétiennes,” 130.

## CHAPTER TWO: EXEGESIS AND THE STRUCTURE OF HISTORY

Henri de Lubac devoted more of his writing to the history of scriptural exegesis than to any other theological topic, including nature and grace, and ecclesiology. Composed over several decades, these writings focused on the spiritual interpretation of scripture, especially the fourfold sense. In 1948, he published a short article “On an Old Distich: The Doctrine of the 'Fourfold Sense' in Scripture.”<sup>1</sup> This article argued that the “spiritual meanings” embodied in the fourfold sense of scripture not only influenced a long tradition of Christian interpretation of Scripture, but also that their logic structured the relationship between theological disciplines. De Lubac's groundbreaking *History and Spirit* was published two years later.<sup>2</sup> It claimed that Origen was largely responsible for systematizing the Christian teaching on the spiritual meaning of Scripture and refuted the then-dominant opinion that Origen's spiritual sense of scripture was primarily Hellenistic in character. In “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory” (1959), de Lubac argued that Christian allegory (particularly in Origen) constituted the antithesis of Hellenistic allegory. His monumental multi-volume work *Exégèse Médiévale* (1959-1964) is often cited for its recovery or *ressourcement* of the fourfold sense of scripture. *Exégèse Médiévale* took a diachronic approach to the spiritual sense, tracing a development from the patristic period to the early modern period.

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1 Henri de Lubac, “On an Old Distich: The Doctrine of the ‘Fourfold Sense’ in Scripture,” in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 109–28. Originally published as “Sur un vieux distique: La doctrine du 'quadruple sense,’” 347-366 in *Mélanges offerts au R. P. Fernand Cavallera* (Toulouse: Institut Catholique, 1948).

2 Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007). Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et esprit: l'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène*, Théologie 16 (Paris: Aubier, 1950).

De Lubac's *ressourcement* of patristic and medieval exegesis is sometimes interpreted as a reaction against critical methods in biblical studies. However, his writings on the history of exegesis were not intended to reestablish the fourfold sense as a contemporary biblical hermeneutic. He did not merely intend for his studies on the history of exegesis to break perceived constraints of historical-critical exegesis. His goal was not primarily exegetical. He explained that his research on spiritual interpretation in Origen was a window to the recovery of a partially lost vision of reality:

The subject I had first envisioned assumed a broader scope in my eyes...It was no longer even a matter solely of exegesis. It was a whole manner of thinking, a whole world view that loomed before me. A whole interpretation of Christianity of which Origen, furthermore, despite many of his personal and at times questionable traits, was less the author than the witness. Even more, through this 'spiritual understanding' of Scripture, it was Christianity itself that appeared to me as if acquiring a reflective self-awareness. This is the phenomenon, one of the most characteristic of the early Christian period, that, in the final analysis, I sought to grasp.<sup>3</sup>

De Lubac wanted to understand the mentality, the doctrinal vision and the sense of history, which supported Origenian practices of spiritual interpretation. Spiritual interpretation was both an epiphenomenon of the creed and ethos of the early church and also that by which the church attained a doctrinal "self-awareness." So Origen's exegesis belonged not only to biblical interpretation, but to an entire way of looking at reality that was the shared inheritance of the early church.

Moreover, de Lubac sought to recover the roots of an early Christian reflection on history and revelation for the contemporary age.<sup>4</sup> Against what he believed was a

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<sup>3</sup> De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Recent interpreters have focused on the significance of de Lubac's recovery of ancient Christian exegesis for his understanding of the supernatural, culture, and ecclesiology. See *Susan K. Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998); Bryan C. Hollon, *Everything Is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology*

resurgent Hellenistic view of history within modern thought, he argued for a recovery of an authentically Christian understanding by turning to patristic and medieval sources. In response to an empiricist separation between history and metaphysics, he proposed the vast ontological interconnection of historical realities. And, in response to an increasingly secular and humanist historical consciousness, he proposed a Christocentric view of history.

In Chapter 1 I surveyed twentieth-century debates over the theology of history and the development of a renewed eschatological focus within Catholic theology. In this chapter, I draw from de Lubac's writings on the Christian exegetical tradition in order to discover the key components and structure of his theology of history. Although he does not compose a discrete theology of history apart from eschatology, an analysis of his specifically historical reflections helps to contextualize his eschatology.

I first examine de Lubac's argument that the early Christian exegetical tradition was a reversal of the Hellenistic view of history. Second, I argue that, according to de

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*of Henri de Lubac* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009); Bryan C. Hollon, "Ontology, Exegesis, and Culture in the Thought of Henri de Lubac" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2006); Hans Boersma, "Sacramental Ontology: Nature and the Supernatural in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac," *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1015 (2007): 242–273; Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Other scholars have interpreted de Lubac's historical studies for their value in recovering an ancient biblical hermeneutic for today's biblical exegesis. See See Marcellino G. D'Ambrosio, "Henri de Lubac and the Recovery of the Traditional Hermeneutic" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1991); David M. Williams, *Receiving the Bible in Faith* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004). Williams expresses consternation that de Lubac composed no clear methodology for uniting contemporary scientific exegesis with ancient allegorical methods. However, de Lubac's guiding interest became theological rather than exegetical. De Lubac himself indicated that his studies on ancient exegesis were not for the purpose of establishing it anew: "Does this mean that we would propose returning to it as a guide for today's exegesis and theology? No one would seriously dream of that." De Lubac, "On an Old Distich," 124. While de Lubac's studies on ancient exegesis may have a bearing on contemporary exegesis, I will emphasize that de Lubac's primary interest was in the theology of history underlying the procedures of interpretation.

Lubac, the multiple senses of scripture represent an epiphenomenon of a Christian understanding of history in which there is an “ontological bond” between realities. Third, I explain this ontology in terms of an “historical exemplarism” that de Lubac appropriates from Origen. This exemplarism envisions the historical life of Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament figures and the signified of previous signs. Fourth, I examine de Lubac's understanding of revelation and salvation for the rationale for this Christocentric view of history.

### **I. Spiritual Meanings and the Hellenistic View of History**

De Lubac argued that the spiritual interpretation of scripture, a dominant mode of exegesis in the ancient and medieval church, was a correction to Hellenistic thought. First, I provide a brief summary of what de Lubac meant by spiritual meaning and the fourfold sense. Second, I examine de Lubac's contrast between Hellenistic allegory and Christian allegory. Third, I argue that de Lubac saw in the fourfold sense an epiphenomenon of a particularly Christian view of history that reversed or corrected a Hellenistic view of history.

#### **A. Spiritual Meanings and the Fourfold Sense of Scripture**

The exegetical consensus of the early Christian tradition, especially the pre-modern tradition of exegesis, is that scripture contains meanings beyond and beneath the literal, that is the plain meaning of the text. The reading of scripture should also involve a penetration of the text, and the text's penetration of the believer, so that she or he might

attain to its hidden depths. Various theological formulations of this teaching were proliferated during the Middle Ages. De Lubac argued that these formulations generally had a common structure.

A medieval formula summarized and systematized this traditional teaching in a short rhyme:

Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,  
 Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia  
 [The letter teaches what took place, allegory what to believe  
 The moral what to do, anagogy what goal to strive for.]

The foundational meaning, upon which the others were based, was the literal sense. De Lubac describes the literal sense as essentially an historical meaning, insofar as the text truthfully conveys what occurred, namely God's interventions into time. The literal sense is an historical sense. Beneath the letter, there is a spiritual sense, which was sometimes divided into multiple spiritual senses. "Allegory" (often called the "mystical sense") described the Christological meaning of the scriptures. It suggested that the events narrated in the Scriptures are fulfilled in the "event of Christ" and that this fulfillment extends through the church. The "moral sense" (often called the tropological meaning) denotes the implication of the historical meaning for the individual soul and for the church. The anagogical sense denotes the last meaning, the ultimate fulfillment at the end of the world.

De Lubac saw the fourfold sense exemplified by the Christian interpretation of the city of Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> The historical city of Jerusalem is symbolic of the city of God

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<sup>5</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 108. Originally published as *Exégèse médiévale, 1: Les quatre sense de l'Écriture* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959). Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The*

“renewed in Christ”; but it also symbolizes the reign of God in the soul; and, finally, the historical city of Jerusalem ultimately refers to the heavenly city. The Old Testament reference to Jerusalem is assumed into a broader interconnection of scriptural realities and images.

While de Lubac recognized a terminological anarchy during the patristic period with regard to the meanings of scripture, he argued that the various terminology often contained a common structure. In his usage, the “spiritual sense” is inclusive of the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses in contradistinction to the “historical sense.” The primary division between letter and spirit expresses the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament: the New Testament *is* the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament history. Indeed, the title of his monograph on Origen, *History and Spirit*, reflects this division. The basic meaning of the division between letter and spirit is articulated within various formulations of multiple spiritual senses. The fourfold sense (history, allegory, tropology, anagogy) in medieval thought is basically the same as Origen's trichotomy (history, allegory, anagogy). As the first of the spiritual senses, de Lubac often identifies “allegory” with the spiritual sense as a whole, inclusive of the moral and allegorical senses. However, at times, he specifically distinguishes allegory from the other spiritual senses.

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*Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E. M. Macierowski, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 199. Originally published as *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sense de l'Écriture* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959). De Lubac, “On an Old Distich,” 115.

## B. Hellenistic Allegory and Greek History

Patristic and medieval theologians employed allegorical interpretation (also “spiritual interpretation” and “mystical interpretation”) to read the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. Admittedly, this procedure resulted in extravagant interpretations of the Bible and, in many cases, appeared to have few hermeneutic controls. In the Latin Middle Ages, the predominant use of the Latin text and the distance of medieval culture from the Greek language resulted in a loss of the textual criticism developed by some church fathers, including Origen. The rebirth of Greek studies during the Renaissance and the doctrinal battles of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation led to a renewed focus on the literal meaning of the text. New tools of exegesis developed during the Enlightenment lead to critical exegesis and to broad challenges to traditions of spiritual interpretation and allegorization.

Nineteenth-century biblical scholarship, especially the work of Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), constitutes the broad context for de Lubac's studies on spiritual meaning, the fourfold sense, and Origen. Employing the tools of critical exegesis, Harnack developed what is described as the “Hellenization Thesis.” In *History of Dogma* [*Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*] and in a more popular work *What Is Christianity?* [*Das Wesen des Christentums*], Harnack argued that the early Christian development of dogma was “Hellenistic.” Christianity developed away from the Gospel through its increasing focus on philosophical truth.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Hellenistic thought-forms

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6 According to Harnack, Hippolytus and Tertullian contributed to identifying elements of the Christian faith with Greek philosophy, for example, by identifying the *Logos* with the Son of God. Origen

infiltrated the Hebraic-Christian thought-forms, overshadowing them from the second century to the time of the Reformation. Thus, the doctrinal development of the earliest councils—including the Trinitarian doctrine, *Logos* Christology, the doctrine embedded in the Creeds—are suspected of being Greek at their core. Harnack's Hellenization thesis suggested that the major theological developments of patristic thought served to mutate the Gospel into a species of Greek philosophy.<sup>7</sup> The allegorization of Scripture reflected a development whereby the Greek philosophical milieu permeated Christian interpretation of the Scriptures.

Harnack impacted the French Catholic theological milieu through the work of Alfred Loisy, a Catholic priest and scholar, whose *L'Evangile et l'Eglise* (1902) challenged Harnack's assertions in *What is Christianity?* Although Loisy's resolutions were unacceptable to the French Catholic bishops and the Holy See (Loisy was excommunicated in 1907), he brought attention to a series of issues that would dominate early twentieth-century Catholic theological debate.<sup>8</sup> De Lubac believed that many French historians—including Aimé Puech, Pierre Batiffol, and Louis Duchesne—repeated Harnack's claim that much of third century Christian thought had “transformed

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(Harnack calls him the “Christian Philo”) was responsible for “recasting” Christian faith as a dogma, in order to compete with the neo-Platonic systems of his day. He sought to transcend the Gospel for the sake of speculation. Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 2 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1896), 11.

7 For an overview of Harnack's dichotomization of historical interpretation and metaphysical speculation, see James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 287.

8 To what extent was Christianity's doctrinal development the result of a permeation by Greek or Platonic philosophy? And was this development a negation of the Gospel? Is the metaphysical form of Scholastic thought fundamentally at odds with the historical form of the Scriptures? The response often adopted by Catholic apologists generally responded to Harnack's Hellenization thesis by denying differences between the New Testament teaching and latter dogmatic formulations, arguing that the later formulations were a development, but a logical development necessitated by the Scriptures themselves.

Christianity into a philosophy.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, contemporary scholarly opinion regarded Origen as promulgating a “tool for obtaining a 'timeless superunderstanding' of the Bible,”<sup>10</sup> a hermeneutic that saw the events narrated in scripture as mythical expressions of a philosophical reality.<sup>11</sup>

While scholars of early Christianity criticized the spiritual interpretation of Scripture, especially in Origen, for its mythological reading of scripture, Rudolf Bultmann's influential program proposed a “demythologization” of Scripture itself. Bultmann suggested that God's sovereign actions in history are themselves transcendent and ineffable. The Bible contains the report of God's actions clothed in the worldview of its writers. Demythologization was, in effect, the process of translating the mythical vestment of biblical narrative into the historical and existential categories of contemporary humanity. The culture-bound mythical formulations of Scripture must now find a transposition into modern language, the language of existentialism. Bultmann's biblical criticism, according to de Lubac, established a radical break between God's

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9 The quotation is taken from Aimé Puech, *Recherches sur le discours aux Grecs de Tatién* (1903) in de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 93 note 258. See also 259-261. These scholars, de Lubac argued, misunderstood Origen's allusions to the need to pass to a deeper meaning or a “higher teaching.” For them, it expressed a gnostic doctrine: that the historical events of redemption, including Christ's sacrifice, were only for beginners; that to advance spiritually, one must pass beyond the external and corporeal events of salvation; that there exists a more profound knowledge—a philosophical, gnostic meaning—for those who are “spiritual.” De Lubac also mentioned Alain Guy, who stated that allegory derived a “philosophical meaning” from the Bible and used the Bible as a “kind of philosophical code and a springboard for ontological mediation.” Henri de Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 175. Originally published as “Allégorie hellénistique et allégorie chrétienne” *Recherches de science religieuse* 47 (1959): 5-43.

10 De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 174.

11 *History and Spirit* outlined the two principle criticisms of Origen. First, Origen “infused Hellenism broadly into the biblical tradition' and...substituted a 'metaphysical truth' received from another source for the 'absurdity of the text taken in its literal sense.” De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 15. Second, Origen refused the historicity of the meaning of scripture, distancing himself from the literal meaning of the text. *Ibid.*, 17. Others imagined that Origen was a Platonist or that he anticipated idealist philosophy.

actions and the form by which they are communicated.<sup>12</sup> In his own work, Bultmann reproduced what was criticized in Origen, the transposition of biblical narrative into the philosophy of the day.

### C. De Lubac's Assessment of Hellenism within Christian Theology

De Lubac essentially agreed with the now-classic contrast between Greek metaphysics and Christian historical thought. However, he differed from Harnack on whether early Christianity in general and Origen in particular followed the pattern of Greek metaphysics. *History and Spirit* and “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory” challenged the position that “all Christian allegory is bound to be related, in its origins and characteristics, to the doctrines of intellectual paganism that allegorized its myths and to Philo's exegesis.”<sup>13</sup> De Lubac noted, “the main question that comes up with respect to Origen is less of knowing whether he was an intellectualist or a mystic, or in what measure he was one or the other, than of knowing whether he was fundamentally 'Hellenist' or Christian.”<sup>14</sup> De Lubac did not dispute the profound influence of the Hellenistic milieu on Christian theology or the use of Greek categories by the Church Fathers. Yet, de Lubac argued that early Christianity developed allegory, not as a

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12 Henri de Lubac, “La Révélation divine: Commentaire du préambule et du chapitre I de La Constitution ‘Dei Verbum’ du Concile Vatican II,” in *Révélation divine – Affrontements mystiques – Athéisme et sens de l’homme*, vol. 4, Œuvres complètes (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2006), 70. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *La Révélation divine: Église Catholique Romaine, Concile Vatican II [1962-1965]* (Lyon: La Bonté, 1966).

13 “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 165. De Lubac writes that Philo “develops a timeless allegory that maintains no internal relation with biblical history. This is not at all the case with Origen.” De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 22.

14 *Ibid.*, 48. De Lubac states that he intends to show that Origen distanced himself from “a 'Platonic gnosis.’” *Ibid.*, 93.

repetition of Hellenistic categories, but as a reflection upon the realities expressed in the Gospel.

The essential difference between Hellenistic thought and early Christian thought was a differing understanding of history. De Lubac explains,

There are two features in the allegorism of the philosophers that appear constantly whatever the text on which their work is based or the system that they deduce from it; whatever purpose guides them or the precise nature of the method they use. For on the one hand they reject as myth what appears as a historical account, and deny to its literal sense what they claim to reveal in its meaning as a mystery: their *ὑπόνοια* [esoteric meaning] is, in the strictest sense, an *ἀλληγορία* [allegory]. ... On the other hand, if they “spiritualize” in this way whatever purports to be historical, it is not for the purpose of a deeper understanding of history. They do not see mythical events as symbols of spiritual happenings; but perceive beneath the historical veil scientific, moral or metaphysical ideas.<sup>15</sup>

Hellenistic allegorical interpretation reinterpreted unseemly and irreverent exploits of the gods in Homer and the poets by recasting those stories as allegories or myths for philosophical or scientific truths.<sup>16</sup> In sum, pagan philosophical allegory, for de Lubac, refused the historical account in favor of discovering the “power of nature,” the “harmony of the universe,” or “the original matter,” in these myths. This form of allegorization also influenced Philo of Alexandria, a first-century Jewish philosopher. While Philo did not deny that the events of Scripture occurred, he believed that “they are of no interest save through what they symbolize.”<sup>17</sup>

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15 *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 166. Originally published as *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Coll Unam Sanctam 3 (Paris: Cerf, 1938).

16 “For the philosophers, in all the stories that serve as material for their theories, it is not a question of personal beings or spiritual facts; the tangible individuality of heroes or gods is transformed under their eyes into the nature of things or of the human soul or of divinity diffused everywhere; their ‘allegory’ (their *ὑπόνοια* [esoteric meaning] dissipates all history, all real drama; it makes everything ‘vanish into the elements of the world.’” De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 21.

17 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 167. In “Hellenistic Allegory,” de Lubac cites Jean Pépin, whose studies argue the early Christian tradition adapted a method from Stoic philosophy. De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 117-118. Interpreting a kinship among the allegorical interpretation of St. Paul,

According to de Lubac, Hellenistic allegorical method exemplifies certain presuppositions concerning the meaning of history, which, in *Catholicism*, he attributed to Platonism, Buddhism, certain Indian religions, and Christian heresies such as Manichaeism, Docetism, and Gnosticism.<sup>18</sup> These religions and philosophies envisioned human destiny as an individualist escape from history.<sup>19</sup> This pattern of conceiving history is circular, dualistic, and phenomenal. Despite their diversity, de Lubac asserts, “running all through these many differences there is always agreement about the basis of the problem and its presuppositions: the world from which escape must be sought is meaningless, and the humanity that must be outstripped is without a history.”<sup>20</sup> Within this pattern, history is cyclical and what occurs in time will return again *ad infinitum*.<sup>21</sup>

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Origen, Porphyry, and Sallust, Pépin argues “that the essential attitude of Christians toward the Bible was the same as that of the Greeks toward their myths.” *Ibid.*, 178, note 82.

18 Susan K. Wood noted this correlation between exegetical methods and philosophies of history. She indicates that de Lubac interprets the fourfold sense as a theology of history. In other words, de Lubac does not treat the fourfold sense for its own sake, but only insofar as it proposes a particular understanding of temporality. The correlation is present early in de Lubac's career in *Catholicism* (a chapter entitled “Christianity and History” directly precedes and corresponds with the one entitled “The Interpretation of Scriptures.”) *Catholicism* is significant for two reasons. First, de Lubac's first book anticipates many of the themes that are developed later in his career. Second, it provides a broader perspective on how de Lubac understands the alternatives to a Christian conception of history. His other writings on the history of exegesis often make only glancing allusions to problems that he is attempting to resolve. In contrast, *Catholicism* provides a wider lens for de Lubac's fundamental concerns. It is therefore important to read his writings on exegesis in light of his earlier *Catholicism*.

19 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 140–41. *Catholicism* identified an opposite stream of thought within contemporary thought, exemplified by Marxism, that envisions a purely historical destiny of a corporate humanity. *Catholicism* made little effort to explicate this second stream of thought or philosophies of historical progress that underly it. However, the main argument of the book is that Christianity possesses a different view of the social unity of humanity than do philosophies of historical immanentism. The context for *Catholicism* is the balkanization of the Catholic Church amidst the rise of totalitarianism and nationalism throughout Europe and the loss of the Church's social cohesion. *Catholicism* was published in 1938, prior to the German invasion. The pressing need was to assert the social and historical dimensions of Catholicism in the face of a growing spiritual individualism. During and after the German occupation, de Lubac more directly emphasized the narratives of history within atheistic humanism. He suggested that those philosophies proposing an escape from history and those proposing a historical immanent human destiny shared certain fundamental tenants.

20 *Ibid.*, 139.

21 “The 'eternal return,' from which nothing may be expected, each of its phases—the Great Year,

Insofar as the events of history will perpetually recur, history itself is phenomenal and unessential. In this historical cycle—de Lubac calls it an “infernally cycle”<sup>22</sup>—there is no true forward movement. Salvation or fulfillment consists in an escape from materiality and history, a spiritual ascent to the One, or the escape from the desires of this world. The world itself is something from which we require salvation or escape.

Platonic metaphysics in particular supported a phenomenal view of history. It posed a dichotomy between the world of ideas—made up of stable and unchanging essences— and the world we experience, the world of appearances. Platonic dualism—the sensible and intelligible, temporal and eternal, appearance and reality, illusion and truth—affected its appraisal of history.<sup>23</sup> History, of course, falls on the side of the sensible, temporal, appearance, and illusion. It is not that the events of history are unimportant, but they symbolize in movement what exists eternally. Historical reality is 'this moving image of unmoving eternity,' 'this eternal image without end' which is 'unfolded in a circle following the law of numbers’<sup>24</sup> De Lubac recognized within Hellenistic thought in general, and Platonism specifically, a tendency towards a phenomenal view of historical events whereby history is always something to be eclipsed.

The Greek philosophical view of mythical narrative reflected this dualism. To attain the intelligible truth, the particularity of history or myth must be stripped away.

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Mahâkalpa, Jubilee or whatever it is called—the end of one being the beginning of another, with never a forward movement, how overpoweringly monotonous it all is!” Ibid.

22 Ibid., 142.

23 De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 186.

24 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 141–42.

According to Plotinus, “myths distribute throughout time and separate from each other beings who are not separated in reality...they cause to be born what was never begun, they divide it, thus teaching what they can and leaving to one who understands the task of recomposition.”<sup>25</sup> According to Sallust, “it is not that these things [myths] never happened, because they always exist; but the discourse can express only successively what the understanding sees and grasps at the same time”<sup>26</sup> In other words, Hellenistic religious myth served as a metaphoric vehicle or an allegorization of the truth which has always been.<sup>27</sup>

In sum, the central theme running throughout these works is that Hellenistic thought vacates history of meaning, leading to a mythical interpretation of religious narratives. Possessing no truth in themselves, these histories symbolize atemporal truths, whether philosophical, moral, or cosmological. Allegorical interpretation, in its pagan forms, was the tool used to discover a deeper philosophical truth beyond religious myth. However, de Lubac would argue that Christian allegorical interpretation, far from negating the importance of history, was the primary tool Christians used to preserve its meaning.

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25 De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 182.

26 Ibid., 182.

27 De Lubac suggested that the Christian docetistic heresy especially bore the mark of a Hellenistic conception of religious myth and history. By conceiving a divide between the mere human appearance of Jesus and his divinity, Docetism repeated the Hellenistic pattern whereby that which occurs in time is unsubstantial and phenomenal and in which the events of salvation become a mere appearance or a sign that points to a reality that they do not themselves embody. De Lubac stated that Christianity overturns the “docetist mitigation” of history. De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 141. Additionally, “Gnosticism tends toward a universal docetism,” thereby repeating a pattern inherited from Hellenistic thought. Ibid., 145 note 29.

### D. Christian Allegory as a Subversion of Hellenism

Despite superficial similarities with Hellenistic thought, De Lubac argued, early Christian exegetical practices diverged significantly from Hellenism.<sup>28</sup> He suggested that the allegorical interpretation of Scripture (which, as de Lubac claims, influenced the entire development of Christian theology) was neither a syncretistic melding of Greek philosophy with the Scriptures, nor was it a transformation of the Gospel into philosophical categories. In practice, de Lubac claimed, Christian allegory and its conception of history functioned as an 'antithesis' or subversion of Greek allegory.<sup>29</sup> By drawing the opposition between Greek and Christian allegorical interpretation, de Lubac could counter the supposition that the Christian doctrinal tradition was merely a repetition of Greek ontological categories.

Yet some current literature suggests that the *nouvelle théologie* in general and de Lubac in particular espoused a recovery of Neoplatonism or depended upon Neoplatonic ontology. Wayne J. Hankey, John Milbank, David Grumett, Guy Mansini, and Hans Boersma have each, to some extent, attributed Neoplatonism to de Lubac.<sup>30</sup> In general

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28 De Lubac, "Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory," 183. The value of history is a critical and consistent claim running through *Catholicism*, "Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory," *History and Spirit*, and *Exégèse Médiévale*.

29 Susan K. Wood notes his anti-Platonism within both his understanding of exegesis and in his ecclesiology. See Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 46 and 100.

30 Wayne Hankey suggests that the ressourcement of the Greek Fathers within the *Nouvelle Théologie*—especially de Lubac and Daniélou—and within the series *Sources chrétiennes* was indeed a turn to a Platonic ontology. He writes, "Those who were seeking an alternative to Thomism, whose scientific divisions of this kind they associated with its Aristotelianism, generally saw Platonism as involving the desired integration for the sake of theology understood as mystical itinerarium." Wayne J. Hankey, "Neoplatonism and Contemporary French Philosophy," *Dionysius* 23 (December 2005): 143. Following Hankey, John Milbank concludes that de Lubac's entire work is informed by a Neoplatonic ontology. Milbank attributes a thoroughly neo-Platonic ontology to de Lubac (and to Thomas Aquinas!). John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand

they appeal to Neoplatonic ontology in order to explain aspects of de Lubac's theology of grace, his theology of the supernatural, or his challenge to the Scholastic theory of “pure nature.”

Boersma, particularly, has claimed a link between de Lubac's theology and Neoplatonic ontology. He interprets de Lubac's opposition to the theory of “pure nature” as a critical adoption of a roughly Christian Neoplatonist ontology derived from the Greek Fathers. This ontology, according to Boersma, envisions created realities as sacraments of the divine and eternal. The invisible is made present in the visible; the transcendent is made present in the immanent; the supernatural is made present in the natural; the divine is made present within history.<sup>31</sup>

Boersma further argues that the *nouvelle théologie* adopted a “unified view of reality,” expressed by the term *néoplatonisme belgo-français*.<sup>32</sup> Although he stops short of stating that the *nouvelle théologie* expressly depended upon Neoplatonic ontology, he affirms fundamental commonalities. In a subsequent book, he doesn't hesitate to align Neoplatonism and Christian sacramental thinking.<sup>33</sup>

Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 26. David Grumett believes that de Lubac's denial of the theory of pure nature requires an ontology found within Teilhard de Chardin, which he suggests resembles Neoplatonism. David Grumett, “Eucharist, Matter, and the Supernatural: Why De Lubac Needs Teilhard,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 2 (2008): 165–78.

31 By framing the relationship between the historical (visible) and the mystical (invisible) in terms of natural and supernatural, Boersma misses how, for de Lubac, the historical is not merely “natural” because it is the place of God's self-revelation. Indeed, the “natural-supernatural” distinction is ultimately unsuitable for explicating the relationship between history and revelation.

32 Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 114.

33 Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 117. It is somewhat unclear what Boersma refers to the “Platonizing tendencies” within de Lubac's thought. Boersma, “Sacramental Ontology,” 273. He concretely points to de Lubac's insistence that human beings have a natural desire for God with a Platonic sensibility: “De Lubac was unyielding on the issue of *desiderium naturale* [natural desire] because it provided an essential theological link with a patristic, more or less Neoplatonic mindset, which had been sacramental in character.” Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 98.

Boersma recognizes several instances where de Lubac affirms the gratuity of grace by strongly distancing his theology of grace from Neoplatonic ontologies that fail to distinguish between the created order and God's redeeming grace.<sup>34</sup> Boersma writes, de Lubac's anti-Platonic "comments may seem to make it difficult to look to de Lubac as a resource for the recovery of a more sacramental ontology that relies in part on the Platonic tradition."<sup>35</sup> By implication, a sacramental view of reality requires something like a Neoplatonic ontology. Boersma explains that de Lubac's anti-Platonism was an obligatory defense against his critics, who accused him of losing the gratuity of grace. The question left unanswered is whether, in Boersma's view, de Lubac's theology of grace and understanding of sacraments requires support from a Neoplatonist metaphysics.

The attribution of Neoplatonism or elements of it to de Lubac is misleading on several counts. First, parallels between Neoplatonism and de Lubac's theology are not, strictly speaking, unique to Neoplatonism. De Lubac himself recognized similarities within a general mystical tradition found in Hellenism, Philo, Origen, and patristic theology, including Origen and Augustine, through the Medieval period.<sup>36</sup> Second, these

Boersma's reasons for closely relating Neoplatonism and sacramental ontology are not entirely clear. He suggests that Platonism has certain broad characteristics that make it amenable to sacramental ontology: the visible is a sign of the invisible; the universe is destined to ascend to the One; the immanent is open to be lifted up to the transcendent. If the natural universe can be a sign of the supernatural, one might suppose that natural could mediate the supernatural. Yet two aspects of Platonic thought cannot be easily fitted to Christianity: first, its lack of clear delineation between the created and uncreated orders; second, its lack of respect for history. The neo-Scholastics accused de Lubac and the *nouvelle théologie* of the first; the writers of the *nouvelle théologie* accused the neo-Scholastics of the second. Both accused each other of having too close allegiances to Greek metaphysics.

34 Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 89.

35 Ibid., 90.

36 "[I]n the Bible so many things 'are given in parables and enigmas.' It is all 'full of mysteries.'" De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 184. "This way of thinking, which Origen shares with Philo as well as others, would more or less be that of the whole patristic age. It would persist as well into medieval theology." Ibid., 185. However, he states that it was not sufficient for understanding the threefold sense, which "had the merit of bringing out Christianity and its interpretation of the Bible in all their originality,



















































































































































































within the New Testament, and also prophetically prefigure the persons, figures, and events in the third age, which is presently arriving.<sup>125</sup>

Third, the hiatus between the second and third age affected how Joachim viewed the relationship between present ecclesial institutions and those of the future age. There is some debate about the extent to which Joachim believed that ecclesial institutions, the papacy, and the sacraments must pass away in history. However, he envisioned a disjunction between the institutions of the present age and those that come, between the Christians of this age, and the “spiritual men” of the subsequent age. Where Origen saw continuity between the present and the eternal, Joachim saw a rupture. According to de Lubac, the rupture between present and future introduced by Joachim goes so far as to endanger the centrality of Christ and the church in the coming era of salvation.

### **C. Effects of Joachim's Theology of History and Eschatology**

The rupture that Joachim advances is between the second and third age. By locating the third age within history, he dissociated the events of salvation history and its future fulfillment. According to de Lubac, it is because the “time of the Spirit” intervenes between the Gospel and eternity that a rupture occurs between the present church and the eternal church, between the work of Christ and that of the Spirit.<sup>126</sup> The age of the Spirit

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<sup>125</sup> The principle of “concord” assured a correspondence between past and future events. De Lubac insisted that concord was fundamentally different from the principle of spiritual interpretation in Origen and much of the tradition. De Lubac describes concord as a correspondence of certain external characteristics between events, such that one historical figure is likened to another, one war is likened to another, one liturgical practice is like another. The guiding principle of spiritual interpretation, on the other hand, is “interiorization.” Christ recapitulates events of the Old Testament by subsuming them to himself. The “interiorization” of the New Testament is the spiritual recapitulation of the New in the life of the church.

<sup>126</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:418.

will supplant the present economy of salvation. By placing the age of the Spirit within history, Joachim calls into question the “definitively fulfilling character of the work accomplished by Jesus Christ.”<sup>127</sup> As de Lubac indicates, “Joachim has compromised—without intending to, it seems—the full sufficiency of Jesus Christ.”<sup>128</sup>

Additionally, for de Lubac, Joachim both contributes to and is the witness of a shift in a Christian understanding of eschatological expectation. The awareness that the “kingdom of God is near” is common in Christianity. In the early church, this awareness is an expectation of the imminent end of the world. Within Joachim, an expectation exists for a new temporal order, a spiritualization of the Gospel that is just beginning to take ecclesial and political shape. The spiritual tradition inspired by Joachim transmitted a future-oriented expectation of a new era, already germinating, in which humanity would come of age. This expectation carried well beyond the boundaries of biblical interpretation or theology, and well into modernity. In *La Posterité spirituelle*, de Lubac argued that this spiritual tradition would become entirely horizontal, historical, and secular.

## **VI. Conclusion**

As indicated previously, the vertical and the horizontal, the mystical and eschatological elements of the Christian faith were important to de Lubac from his earliest work, *Catholicism*. In *Catholicism*, he contrasted Hellenistic images with

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127 Ibid., 3:387.

128 Ibid., 3:418.

Christian images used to describe the movement from this world to the next.<sup>129</sup> The former envision an ascent of the individual soul through various levels of reality, each level being necessary for the attainment of the next. Christian images of “ascent” through history transformed the Hellenistic images: “the old image of the ascent of the individual from sphere to sphere soon gives way to that of a collective progress from one age to another.”<sup>130</sup> Patristic Christianity, he claimed, was fascinated with the notion of a collective journey through time, and the subdivision of ages. Christianity, unlike Hellenistic thought, brought together both collective progress through history and the transcendence beyond it.

De Lubac's historical narrative extended his claim in *Catholicism* concerning the patristic understanding of history and eschatology. By holding together eschatological hope and mystical ascent, Origen's eschatology exemplified the essential characteristics of this Christian synthesis. The subsequent dissociation between the *futura* and *invisibilia* within Christian eschatology, particularly during the twelfth century, engendered two principal eschatological impulses. The first was Pseudo-Dionysian in form; the second was Joachimite. The first engendered a mysticism that viewed the historical figures and realities of the Bible as figures for the un-thematizable transcendent. This impulse threatened to disregard the historical character of Christianity and see history as a myth.

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129 He also associated Hellenistic images with Pythagoreanism, Neoplatonism, the Upanishads, and the Bhūmi of Mahayana Buddhism.

130 Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 145. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Unam Sanctam 3 (Paris: Cerf, 1938).

This second was radically historical insofar as it projected a form of eschatological fulfillment into the historical future.

It is supremely important to understand de Lubac's claim that Christianity unites *futura* and *invisibilia*, collective progress and transcendence. His criticism of Dionysian and Joachimite thought is for the purpose of uniting the two, or of recovering an eschatology that circumnavigates the division between them. These two aspects are held in tension, and the neglect of either results in a deformation of Christian faith.

For that is the expression of the Christian condition: tension, essential to these “last times” that we are living in the Church, between two characteristics—mystical and eschatological—of our faith. “*Spe enim salvi facti sumus*” (For in hope we are saved). The eschatological boundary is not purely in the future—nor will it ever become purely in the past. The words of the Lord ... have “begun to put an end to figures,” and of course they have done so still in images, accommodating themselves to the present state of our understanding, but this was already “so that the truth begins.” And on the other hand, as they will never pass away, they will always be in the process of being realized. The words of Moses and those of the prophets needed to be fulfilled, and once fulfilled by Christ, they had only to disappear. But the words of Jesus Christ are and always remain full—without that fullness ever becoming something past .... Origen adds: “*et in actu impletionis sunt semper, et quotidie implentur, et numquam perimplentur*” (and they are always in the act of being fulfilled, and they are being fulfilled every day, and they are never totally fulfilled). The Lord himself, who pronounced them, “is still there, but as someone who never ceases to arrive”: Is this not the meaning of *παρουσία* (*parousia*), at once presence and future?<sup>131</sup>

The tension maintained by Origen between the mystical and eschatological is the optic through which de Lubac narrates his subsequent tracing of Dionysian and Joachimite thought. This narrative enables us to understand de Lubac's criticism of contemporary theologies of hope or of interventions in contemporary debates over communism and the theology of history.

Furthermore, the tension between the mystical and eschatological is key to de

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131 De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 261–62.

Lubac's understanding of the sacramental economy of salvation. Although de Lubac did not spell it out in these terms, the dissociation of the future and invisible within Dionysian and Joachimite eschatologies ruptures the sacramental-historical economy of salvation. The former threatens to ascend *beyond* the salvation enacted by Christ, leaving it behind for its deeper meaning. It threatens to see the historical or sacramental signs as things to be transcended. The latter threatens to progress *beyond* the present economy of salvation. By temporalizing the break between the second and third ages, and by placing the third age in the future, Joachim anticipates an age in history that has transcended signs or figures. In the next chapter, I will argue that de Lubac's theology of the church, the sacraments, and knowledge of God is governed by this eschatological tension.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SACRAMENTS OF THE ESCHATON

The previous chapter presented the historical division described by de Lubac between a transcendent-oriented mysticism and a future-oriented apocalyptic. De Lubac's return to the patristic sources, especially to Origen, included a recovery of the unity between the transcendent and apocalyptic, between realized eschatology and future eschatology, between the “already” and the “not yet.” He wished to retain the tension between the ascent to God through creation that we find in Pseudo-Dionysius and later medieval traditions and the future-oriented eschatological tendencies in medieval thought.

In this chapter, I argue that de Lubac's eschatological synthesis structures his understanding of the sacramentality of historical revelation, of the church, and of mysticism or religious knowledge. I first explain how the divisions within medieval eschatology functioned to disrupt the sacramental economy of salvation. In sum, an overemphasis on either “realized” eschatology or “future” eschatology diminishes the sacramental dimensions of the historical economy of salvation. Second, I examine the eschatological structure of de Lubac's understanding of sacramentality. In general, de Lubac sees a sacrament as a visible “means” to salvation through which the “end” manifests itself. Third, I show that de Lubac narrates the centrality and efficacy of Christ in terms of this fundamental eschatological structure. Fourth, I examine de Lubac's ecclesiology as an eschatology. Finally, I show that de Lubac's mysticism or religious epistemology is governed by an anagogical perspective inspired by Origen. Present















eschaton is made present through Jesus. On the other, Jesus begins a temporal process of transcending time, a journey opening up for the church.<sup>11</sup> Even if Christ has already come and already brought fulfillment in himself, this fulfillment awaits an ecclesiological completion of which present realities constitute the sacraments.<sup>12</sup>

The time of the Interim, characterized by a tension between realized and future, already and not yet, end and preparation, marks out the terrain of the sacraments, which is also the terrain of mystery. This “terrain” makes sacramentality possible. In this vein, de Lubac writes that sacramental reality “is essentially related to our present condition, which is not one embodied in the epoch of figures pure and simple [that is the Old Testament], nor yet one which includes the full possession of the 'truth.’”<sup>13</sup>

## II. The Structure of Sacramentality in de Lubac

For de Lubac, the Interim—the time between the time of figures and that of complete truth—forms the terrain of sacramentality.<sup>14</sup> The sacrament is a figure of the

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(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 183. Originally published as *Exégèse médiévale, 2: Les quatre sense de l'Écriture* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959).

- 11 “We are henceforth, until the end of time, within Christic time (which is the time of the end). The Incarnation of the Word of God ‘is a unique fact, not only in this banal sense, common to all facts, to all events, that it occurs only at one point in time; but it is still so in this completely unique, completely singular way. This Fact, alone among all, after having been prepared and prefigured by the long series of facts of the Old Covenant, does not cease since its first instant and will not cease to fructify within itself,’ with nothing that transcends it. It remains always current [*actuel*], always encompassing all of which he is the source: ‘*semper novum, quod semper innovat mentes, nec unquam vetus, quod in perpetuum non marcescit.*’” De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 131.
- 12 A significant convergence of themes occurs in the work of Jacob Taubes and Giorgio Agamben, who have indicated the impact of Paul on the western understanding of history. For Taubes, the Christian understanding of time opens doors to destructive and constructive forms of apocalypticism.
- 13 Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 204. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Méditation sur l'Église*, Foi vivante 60 (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1953).
- 14 While de Lubac did not generally use the adjective “sacramental” or noun “sacramentality,” he spoke generally of the attributes of sacraments. He does not explicitly examine sacramentality apart from particular sacramental loci, that is Christ, the church, and the seven sacraments. To speak of a

truth to come, making it temporal and teleological. In the language of symbol, the truth signified is the purpose or end of the sacramental sign. It is its future state. The sign's inner "intention"—its finality—overflows its bare materiality, making it participate in the reality signified while, at the same time, not yet bringing the reality signified to complete presence. The signified exercises a hidden power over the sign that makes the sign what it is. In what follows, I examine the key terms of de Lubac's sacramental lexicon, showing how they are embedded in the tension between realized and future eschatology, between *making present* and *anticipating* the future.

### A. *Mysterium and Sacramentum*

Two of the most elusive and dynamic terms in de Lubac's theological lexicon—sacrament and mystery—are terms he employs frequently and are the most elemental to his theological vision. While these terms possess multivalent meanings, these meanings should nonetheless be understood as pointing to something common. De Lubac's terminology should be read synoptically. One of the complications, is that, as de Lubac notes, "sacrament" and "mystery" were used synonymously in the early church.<sup>15</sup> The word "sacrament" is not found in the New Testament. *Sacramentum* became a Latin translation for the Greek μυστήριον (*mysterion*), which is prominent in the New

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sacramental structure in de Lubac's work is, therefore, an abstraction from particular cases.

"Sacramental" or "sacramentality" can describe the underlying intelligibility of the seven sacraments. Paul McPartlan explains that in the early twentieth-century, Catholic treatment of sacraments followed, more or less, a polemical anti-Protestant defense of the seven sacraments. The apologetic of the number seven was deficient in showing the underlying intelligibility of the sacraments, or getting "behind the number seven." The theology of de Lubac and Karl Rahner, among others, influenced a shift in Catholic perspective towards grounding the intelligibility of the sacraments in Christ and in the church. Paul McPartlan, "Catholic Perspectives on Sacramentality," *Studia Liturgica* 38, no. 2 (January 2008): 219.

<sup>15</sup> As noted above (Chapter 2).

Testament, especially in Paul's letters.<sup>16</sup> The Greek *mysterion* received a Latin form, *mysterium*. In the early Christian tradition, de Lubac states, “sacrament” and “mystery” are often synonymous and refer to something sacred.

These synonyms began to be distinguished, at least in part. With Augustine, sacrament in particular began to possess the meaning of a “sign.”<sup>17</sup> The sacrament is the visible sign of the mysterious secret. “The *sacramentum* would therefore play the role of container, or envelope, with regard to the *mysterium* hidden within it.”<sup>18</sup> The two are opposed while united. De Lubac concedes that in the patristic tradition, the meanings of both *sacramentum* and *mysterium* floated between the two poles of “sign” and “secret,” depending on the author. The Augustinian understanding of “sacrament” and “mystery” as referring to the sacred is more or less retained until the twelfth century.<sup>19</sup>

In de Lubac's exposition, *mysterium* (mystery) floats between two poles. Apart from a substantive, inert meaning as a “secret,” it possesses a relational and active meaning. In this active meaning, mystery indicates not one or the other pole, but the

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16 See McPartlan, “Catholic Perspectives on Sacramentality,” 223. For example, Paul's Epistle to the Colossians refers to the Word of God as the “mystery (*mysterion*) that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints” (Col. 1:26 NRSV). Similarly, Paul writes “with all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery (*mysterion*) of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9-10 NSRV).

17 “They always appear—beyond the permanent allusion to something sacred (*'divine and mystical'*, *'sacred and mystical'*) and all the resonances which such an allusion comprises—with the two fundamental senses, united in variable proportions, of sign and secret—'*arcantum*'—which are still the two senses attached respectively to our two words sacrament and mystery.” Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds, C.J., Faith in Reason (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 47. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: l'eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen âge. Étude historique*, Théologie 3 (Paris: Aubier, 1944).

18 De Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 47.

19 *Ibid.*, 45.

relationship between them: between *tupos* (figure, type) and *aletheia* (truth).<sup>20</sup> Mystery indicates the *passage* from figure to truth. In this sense, “mystery of salvation” or “sacrament of salvation” conveys a *movement* from figure to truth and their unity at the same time. “Mystery” is not only the “secret thing” revealed, but an action joining the sign and secret signified, the type and truth.<sup>21</sup> In *Corpus Mysticum*, he explains that the mystery is “the *secret power* by which the thing operates across the sign and through which the sign participates, here again in widely differing ways, in the higher efficacy of the thing.”<sup>22</sup> We can speak of mystery as the active power drawing the visible sacrament into a participation with what it signifies. From another perspective, the mystery is the secret signified by the sacrament.

According to this Augustinian distinction-in-relation of mystery and sacrament, the sacramental reality is requisite for discovering the mystery. It is through the power of the mystery operating “across” the sacrament that the sacrament possesses its characteristic as a sign. The mystery is present in its visible aspect, the sacrament.

The relationship between sacrament and mystery helps to illumine de Lubac's characterization of sacramental reality in *Splendor of the Church*. Sacramental realities possess a twofold characteristic: first, a sacrament is a sign that must be passed through entirely to reach the mystery; second, the sacrament cannot be discarded at will.<sup>23</sup> The

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20 Ibid., 53.

21 Ibid., 51–2. De Lubac invokes the “communication of idioms” or exchange of attributes to describe the mutual participation of sign and signified. The “communication of idioms” is especially pertinent when speaking of the humanity of Christ and the divinity, where it literally applies. He notes that depending upon the kind of sacrament about which we are speaking, this *communicatio idiomatum* will be different.

22 Ibid., 52.

23 “That which is sacramental—the sensible bond between two worlds—has a twofold characteristic.

sign, the outward visible reality, is not the truth of the sacrament itself. Thus, to stop at the sign is to be arrested by an idol. At the same time, the sacrament is indispensable and necessary to reach the reality of which the sacrament is a sign. De Lubac cryptically explained, “We never come to the end of passing through this translucent medium, which we must, nevertheless, always pass through and that completely. It is always through it that we reach what it signifies; it can never be superseded, and its bounds cannot be broken.”<sup>24</sup> The sacrament is the singular way to approach the mystery and its necessity is never compromised. Yet we must envision the sacrament as a passage rather than the end, or rather as an unending passage.

### **B. Sacrament : Mystery :: History : Eschatology**

For de Lubac, the unity and duality of *sacramentum* and *mysterium* is structurally the same as the unity and duality of history and eschatology. It is unsurprising to find the same structure involving this second pair because sacraments are always visible and historical events, realities, and rituals that signify a mysterious eschatological reality. The important point is that, for de Lubac, the sacrament is the visible reality that makes the mystery proleptically present and that mediates the eschatological consummation.

As mentioned above, the term *mysterium* “floats” between sign and secret. It likewise “floats” between historical reality and the eschatological consummation. This

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Since, on the one hand, it is the sign of something else, it must be passed through, and this not in part but wholly. It is not something intermediate, but something mediatory; it does not isolate, one from another, the two terms which it is meant to link. It does not put a distance between them. It is essentially related to our present condition, which is not one embodied in the epoch of figures pure and simple, nor yet one which includes the full possession of the 'truth.'" De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 203–4.  
24 Ibid., 204.

last point requires explanation. According to de Lubac, “mystery” suggests God's plan for salvation or God's intention: “the mystery is somehow linked to God's design for man, whether as marking the limit of or the means of realizing this destiny.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, it globally refers to the whole plan of salvation, but its meaning can be focused on the means by which this design is accomplished or the final reality accomplished.

The mystery always transcends human understanding. If restricted to the means, the mystery refers to its visible, historical, and tangible form. The mystery, de Lubac states, “concerns us, touches us, acts in us, reveals us to ourselves. To this end, it must have a tangible aspect, the incarnated Word of God, expression of the Inexpressible, the efficacious sign to realize the plan of salvation.”<sup>26</sup> “Mystery” can encompass the “end” or intended reality intended by God, but also the “means” of salvation by emphasizing the inner meaning or reality of that means. Sign or sacrament suggest the “means”—emphasizing its visible aspect—but always in union with the “end.”

For de Lubac, the eschatological is not merely the future, but the depth dimension of the present. “Mystery” is not an inert intention of God, but an active power of eternity reaching into history to bring it into eternity at the end. The mystery is the reality that actively draws the *signum* to be a participation in itself. More precisely, the mystery, as the final reality intended by God, makes its own visible aspect, the sacrament, a means to

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25 Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, trans. James R. Dunne (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1969), 13. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxe et mystère de l'Église* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1967).

26 De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 14.

the final consummation, imbuing the sacrament with mystery.<sup>27</sup> In *The Splendor of the Church*, de Lubac draws the precise parallel between “mystery” and eschatology:

Like the whole of the Christian reality, of which she is the summing-up, the *Ecclesia Sanctorum* was in their eyes, when taken in the full sense of the words, something essentially eschatological. They were, of course, very far from regarding her as something which was merely “to come.” After all, the eschatological is not something simply absent from the present, any more than what is transcendent is exterior to everyday reality; on the contrary, it is the foundation of the present and the term of its movement—it is the marrow of the present, as it were, and exercises over it a hidden power.<sup>28</sup>

De Lubac employs the same language of “exercising a hidden power” here to describe how the eschatological enters into the present as he does to describe the mystery's entering into the sacrament in *Corpus Mysticum*.<sup>29</sup>

If we can summarize the perspective which illumines de Lubac's understanding of sacramentality, it would be in a twofold eschatological perspective.

1. From visible sign to signified: The inner “intention” of the sign overflows its bare materiality, allowing it to participate in the higher order of the signified. The visible and historical sacrament has a finality that makes it tend toward what it anticipates and signifies.

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27 It is in this sense that de Lubac describes the *Sacramentum Molitio* from Augustine. Augustine interprets everything in light of a great idea “of which each is a particular expression.’ The remark can be understood for the ensemble of ancient commentators, to refer to the whole of Scripture. The Model to come disposes and orders among them all its past imitations. These are organized in a homogeneous series, which develop throughout history. It is the elaboration of a single great ‘sacrament’—‘sacramenti molitio’—and by it we have understood at the same time the thing signified and its sign. It is ‘the order of prefiguration, begun with Adam.’ It is a ‘universal prophecy’ coextensive with duration until Christ. Prophecy in act, a vast and unique word.” Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l’écriture*, vol. 4, Théologie 59 (Aubier: Éditions Montaigne, 1964), 81.

28 De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 117.

29 Elsewhere, de Lubac emphasizes that the eschatological ensures the meaningfulness of history: “History only acquires a sense and meaning by a last judgment, which is precisely the end of history. The end of messianic mystery is the mystery of the participation in the intimate life of God himself, which is not history, but eternity.” De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 86.

2. From the signified to the visible sign: The signified exercises a hidden power over the sign, making it what it is. The eschatological signified “operates across the sign,” making the sign efficacious as a sign. The sacrament possesses the quality of signifying and bringing about because the eschatological enters into it, exercising a power over it.

Although this account of “sacramentality” abstracts from the particular cases—revelation, Christ, the church, the eucharist—it is useful to see a general structure of sacramentality. The next two sections treat the particular cases Christ and church, which are grounded by de Lubac's understanding of sacrament.

### III. Incarnate Word as Sacrament of Salvation

*Catholicism*, de Lubac's earliest book, vibrantly portrays the sacramental dimensions of temporality in a Christian perspective:

Of necessity we must establish a foothold in time if we are to rise to eternity; we must use time. The Word of God submitted himself to this essential law: he came to deliver us from time, but by means of time—*propter te factus est temporalis, ut tu fias aeternus* [he was made subject to time on account of you, in order that you might be made eternal]. That is the law of the incarnation, and it must undergo no docetist mitigation.<sup>30</sup>

De Lubac's characteristically unsystematic style raises questions. He appears to endorse the sacrality of time as a general principle, an “essential law,” which describes the functioning of the Word's incarnation.<sup>31</sup> However, for de Lubac, Christ is the unique

30 Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 144. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Unam Sanctam 3 (Paris: Cerf, 1938).

31 Does the incarnation, though unique, exemplify a general principle common to all of history? Or does history contain sacral and sacramental dimensions because of the incarnation, because Christ is the leaven for all of history? To put it differently, is the potential of the created order to signify the divine, its sacramentality, a potential inherent in the created order itself? Or does the particular event of Christ open the created order to that potential? The question is rather abstract. Yet it has implications for the

revelation of God to humanity. His historical actions become sacraments of salvation. If we can speak of a general “law of the incarnation,” it is a law derived from and dependent upon the particular case of Christ. This perspective is made clearer in de Lubac's Christocentric theology of revelation. The general sacramental structure previously elaborated is the outcome of the historical revelation of the Word. Yet, the relationship between revelation in Christ and “cosmic” revelation remains ambiguous within de Lubac's writings.

I first examine de Lubac's interpretation of the structure of revelation and salvation in Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*. Second, I argue that, for de Lubac, Christ is the personal unity of salvation and revelation. Revelation and salvation are concentrated in the person of Christ. Third, I explain that salvation occurs not only through the mediation of the Father to humanity, but also through the mediation of humanity to the Father. Christ is the sacrament of this salvation, which occurs through his historical and visible presence.

#### **A. The Sacramental Structure of Revelation and Salvation in *Dei Verbum***

*Dei Verbum*, Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, prioritized the historicity of revelation and Christ as the center of revelation. The document testified to a radical shift of perspective within Catholic thinking about revelation. De Lubac

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significance of Christ, the church, and the particular sacraments. If the incarnation of the word is merely the particular instantiation of a general sacramental principle, the necessity of Christ, the church, and the reception of the sacraments are mitigated. The created order as such would seem to be an appropriate vehicle for mediating God's revelation or grace. If the Incarnation of the Word is the absolutely unique sacrament in which the temporal and eternal are united, the world might appear to be one in which God cannot be found in a sacramental or even analogous manner. De Lubac never attempts to resolve this tension directly.

played a role in the formation of the document. However, he did not reveal the precise nature of his role in the formation of the document in his autobiographical account of his writings.<sup>32</sup> The final document, ratified in 1965, emphasizes the historical nature of revelation and its Christocentricity.

De Lubac's 1968 commentary on *Dei Verbum* is not only a commentary from a participant at Vatican II; it is also an attempt at influencing the reception of the document in the church. His commentary produces a radically historical understanding of revelation, one that envisions revelation to always occur sensibly or visibly. Revelation is the visible sacrament through which salvation occurs. According to de Lubac, salvation is already taking place through the revelation of the Incarnate Word, but it is nonetheless only complete in a future consummation.

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32 In *At the Service of the Church*, he mentions that in 1960, he happened to read in a periodical that he had been appointed, along with the Dominican Yves Congar, as a theological consultant to the Preparatory Theological Commission for the Second Vatican Council. Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings* (San Francisco: Communio Books, 1993), 116. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits*, *Chrétiens aujourd'hui* 1 (Namur: Culture et vérité, 1989). While on the Commission as a theological expert, he relates, he “in particular gave the impression of being a hostage, sometimes even of being a defendant.” *At the Service of the Church*, 117. De Lubac's participation as a consultant to the Preparatory Commission lead to his appointment as a *peritus* (expert theological adviser) to the Council itself, which allowed him to attend meetings of the Theological Commission.

A sub-commission of the Preparatory Theological Commission, called “De fontibus Revelationis”, had produced a preparatory schema entitled *De fontibus Revelationis (On the Sources of Revelation)*. The working schema reflected classical positions taken as a development of the council of Trent and in the anti-protestant literature. While for Trent the “source” of revelation is the Gospel, in *De fontibus* Scripture and Tradition are thought to be the “sources.” Giuseppe Ruggieri, “The First Doctrinal Clash,” in *History of Vatican II: The Formation of the Council's Identity: First Period and Intersession, October 1962 – September 1963*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. 2 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 135. It sought to “resolve” open debates over the Catholic understanding of revelation, scripture, and tradition in favor of a neo-Scholastic and anti-Modernist school. Evidently, de Lubac had very little sway as a theological expert on the Preparatory Commission.

During debate over *De Fontibus* Schillebeeckx and Rahner provided widely-distributed and influential criticisms of the schema. *De fontibus Revelationis* became so controversial that it took an act of John XXIII to push the discussion over the document to the side. It is unclear what role de Lubac himself played in resisting the draft schema or in composing the new one, called the 1964 schema.

**1. “*Dando revelat, et revelando dat*” (“In giving God reveals, and in revealing God gives)**

De Lubac explained that the Council's intent is not to explicate the “doctrine on revelation,” but rather the “proclamation of salvation itself,” that is “revelation itself that is transmitted to us.”<sup>33</sup> The intimate union between the proclamation, that is revelation, and the salvation that it proclaims is made particularly clear in the Prologue, which quotes 1 John 1:2-3: “We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” In 1 John, the proclamation is of the “eternal” life who was with the Father and made manifest. The proclamation effects ecclesial fellowship and the fellowship with the Father and the Son, which constitute “eternal life.”

Following John, the entire first chapter of *Dei Verbum* attests to the “indissoluble union of revelation and salvation.”<sup>34</sup> De Lubac speaks of this union between revelation and salvation in two ways: first, revelation “contains” salvation; second, salvation is the object or end of revelation. First, revelation communicates the very reality of salvation:

The announcement of salvation contains the salvation announced. The object revealed does not consist in notions, by themselves without vital efficacy, which would just barely have as their goal to make explicit a Christianity existing already in an 'implicit' state, or to name finally a reality until then 'anonymous.'<sup>35</sup>

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33 De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 58.

34 *Ibid.*, 59.

35 *Ibid.* De Lubac's mention of an “anonymous salvation” sounds like a criticism of Rahner. It is possible that he had Rahner in mind, since Rahner had promulgated his thesis on “anonymous Christianity” prior to de Lubac's “La Révélation divine.” However, de Lubac did not read German.

De Lubac is criticizing an “intellectualist” notion of revelation as the communication of a series of abstract truths. “Intellectualist” theories of revelation tended to oppose “supernatural revelation” to “natural knowledge,” as that set of truths that the human mind could not attain by its own power. As a matter of course, they de-emphasized the historical nature of revelation because history could not easily be categorized into “natural” or “supernatural.” If revelation consists primarily of “concepts,” those concepts have no power to save. As a result, salvation would have to occur by other means. In contrast, de Lubac's theology of revelation is radically historical. Revelation consists in *events* that can be seen, heard, and touched. These events, and particularly the Christ event, “contain” the salvation that they announce.

Second, de Lubac speaks of salvation as an end or object of revelation. Again referring to St. John, de Lubac states that the object of divine revelation is “eternal Life,” that is salvation. The “life” of which the scripture speaks is identified with God. “The object of divine revelation, which we call '*Dei Verbum*' or '*Vita aeterna*,' is then God himself.”<sup>36</sup> This eternal life, the last end of revelation (*la finalité dernière*), is the communion with the Father and the Son.<sup>37</sup> For de Lubac, the gift of communion is brought about by the revelatory actions of God in history:

*Dando revelat, et revelando dat.* It is impossible to dissociate, even in thought...the manifestation that God makes of himself and the gift that he makes of himself; in other words, revelation and its end: this is what the whole first chapter of the Constitution *Dei Verbum* repeats. The one and the other are expressed by the same word: 'eternal Life.'<sup>38</sup>

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36 Ibid., 51.

37 Since God calls a whole people, “communion with God and communion among the faithful are then the two aspects of the same reality: the participation in eternal life.” Ibid., 56.

38 Ibid., 57.

The revelatory manifestation and the salvific gift are united, yet the two are distinguished as means and end.

In de Lubac's understanding of revelation, revelation is always visible or sensible and historical. Salvation is thought of as the object or end of revelation, which de Lubac expresses as the “ultimate finality” (*la finalite derniere*). The relationship between revelation and salvation, united as means to end, can also be expressed in sacramental language, which I will explore in the next section.

## **2. “Gesta Dei et consilium Dei” [“The Deeds of God and the Plan of God”]**

The second paragraph of *Dei Verbum* reads:

It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will [*Seipsum revelare et notum facere sacramentum voluntatis suae*] (cf. Eph. 1:9). His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature (cf. Eph. 2:18; 2 Pet. 1:4). By this revelation, then, the invisible God (cf. Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17), from the fullness of his love, addresses men as his friends (cf. Ex. 33:11; Jn. 15:14-15), and moves among them (cf. Bar 3:38), in order to invite and receive them into his own company. This economy of Revelation is realized by deeds and words [*gestis verbisque*], which are intrinsically bound up with each other. As a result, the works performed by God in the history of salvation, show forth and bear out the doctrine and realities [*doctrinam et res*] signified by the words; the words, for their part, proclaim the works, and bring to light the mystery they contain. The most intimate truth which this revelation gives us about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of Revelation.<sup>39</sup>

Instead of speaking of scripture and tradition as “two sources” of revelation, *Dei Verbum* speaks of the “economy” of revelation manifested through the words and actions of God. Moreover, this manifestation is centered in Christ.

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<sup>39</sup> “Dei Verbum,” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, vol. 1, rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 750.

De Lubac's commentary on *Dei Verbum* examines the “sacramental” relationship between the external actions and words within the historical economy and the salvation that they bring about. According to de Lubac, *Dei Verbum* overtly employs the language of the sacraments to confirm the efficacious character of God's interventions in history. *Dei Verbum* first states that revelation is communicated in *gestis verbisque* (deeds and words). But it elucidates and modifies this couplet with another phrase, *doctrinam et res* (teaching and things the words signify).

According to de Lubac, *res* was intended to evoke the *res sacramenti*, that which the sacrament signifies and brings about.<sup>40</sup> The *res* is not the external action or utterance but the profound reality united to the external action or utterance.

The “*res*” of which it [*Dei Verbum*] speaks overflows the “*opera*” or “*gesta*” taken in their sole visibility...because the “*res verbis significatae*” that it mentions designates a reality more complex and more profound than the “*gesta*”: they [things that the words signify] comprehend at the same time the “*consilium Dei*” and, in their interior efficacy, the “*facta salutaria*.” One will notice that the subject of the phrase is not simply “*revelatio*” but “*haec revelationis economia*”; the formula has been chosen to show that is a matter of revelation accomplished in time in the course of history, and not the announcement of it that is repeated incessantly since.<sup>41</sup>

According to de Lubac, the “*res verbis significatae*” of *Dei Verbum* comprehend both the salvific deeds (*facta salutaria*) and the plan or purpose of God (*consilium Dei*). The exterior “visibility” of the *facta salutaria* are interiorly connected to *consilium Dei* brought about through the *facta*. According to de Lubac, *Dei Verbum* makes explicit that the events of salvation are no mere exterior or phenomenal gesture but are sacramentally united to their salvific purpose and goal.

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40 De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 70 note 5.

41 Ibid., 70–71.

Just as de Lubac explicated the relationship between revelation and salvation in terms of sacrament, he uses the same structure in relation to the saving deeds (*facta salutaria*) and the plan of God (*consilium Dei*)

<b><i>Sacramentum</i></b>	<b><i>Res Tantum</i></b>
Deeds ( <i>facta salutaria</i> )	Plan of God ( <i>consilium Dei</i> )
Revelation (God's self-manifestation)	Salvation (God's self-gift)

In the language of the sacraments, by the visible sacramental sign (*sacramentum*), God effects the reality signified by the sign (*res tantum*). In de Lubac's commentary, the exterior or visible events of salvation (*gesta*) are efficacious in bringing about the salvific plan of God (*res*). This structure is at the heart of a Christian sacramentalism: external rites and realities are both signs of and mediations of a reality that surpasses them.

### **B. Christ, the Personal Unity of Revelation and Salvation**

De Lubac's commentary on *Dei Verbum* speaks of the historical economy of salvation as a sacrament. In addition, it places the incarnation at the center of this sacramental economy. Because of the unity of humanity and divinity in Christ, his human actions both manifest the fullness of revelation and bring about the fullness of salvation. *Dei Verbum*, he argues, expresses the "concrete unity... of revelation and salvation, and, at the same time, the personal unity of the twofold object of revelation: the end to which it tends and the means willed to realize this end."<sup>42</sup> Christ himself constitutes the personal unity of revelation and salvation.

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42 Ibid., 63.

The incarnate Word is the “absolute Presence of God among us.”<sup>43</sup> It is through him that God is revealed. Revelation is, therefore, identical to the “God-man” himself.<sup>44</sup>

But the presence of God in Jesus is not divorced from his humanity:

The presence of Jesus Christ, illuminating and salvific at the same time, is the presence of the eternal Logos (Word), the only Word of God, the only Son of the Father. But it is at the same time a human presence, of a true man, a “man sent to men” in order to say from a human mouth “the words of God”: *et habitu inventus ut homo*.<sup>45</sup>

In the mystery of the incarnation, God speaks to human beings and is present to them through a human presence. Thus, for de Lubac, the visible *humanity* of Jesus does not merely extrinsically signal the divine presence but mediates it: “The one who sees Jesus sees the Father—but one sees him through the humanity of Jesus.”<sup>46</sup> De Lubac refuses a monophysite theology of revelation that minimizes the humanity of the Son as precisely the site of the revelatory and salvific action of God.<sup>47</sup> The humanity of Jesus functions both as a sign of his divinity and a means of bringing about the divine presence.

How must we understand de Lubac's insistence that revelation and salvation are united in Christ? In “La révélation Divine,” de Lubac stated that the divine presence is totally human. But he immediately shifts to the theme of kenosis:

Already the divine Kenosis was announced in the Word of the ancient Law. In Jesus Christ, the temporality of the human experience and the eternal truth are joined together”

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43 Ibid., 116, quoting Rahner.

44 “God speaks...to reveal himself and make us know the mystery of his will, 'hidden since the beginning,’” and who is “Christ among us, hope of the glory.” Ibid., 61, quoting from Eph. 1:9 and Col. 1:26.

45 Ibid., 115, quoting Phil 2:7.

46 Ibid., 116.

47 For de Lubac, however, it is not just the “hypostatic union” as a kind of ontological reality that mediates the Father, but Christ's concrete actions as both human and divine. “Any representation of the Incarnation that sees in the humanity of Jesus only the vestment that God uses in order to signal his speaking presence, is a heresy. And it is properly *this heresy*, rejected by the Church in its fight against Docetism, Apollinarianism, Monophysitism and Monothelitism, that is today considered as mythic, and refused as mythology, but not the authentic orthodox Christology.” Ibid.

[quoting Balthasar]. It is in "emptying himself" and in taking "the form of a slave" (Phil. 2:7) that he is made present to us in history to reveal to us "what the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, what is come to the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him."<sup>48</sup>

The quotation from Balthasar supports de Lubac's previous explication of the incarnation: in sum, the divine revelation radiates through Jesus because in him human experience and eternal truth are united together.

Next, de Lubac appeals to the Philippians Christ Hymn to describe Christ's act of revealing. In Philippians, the kenosis of the Son is his being humble by taking on human form. In many accounts of salvation, the self-emptying of the Son is associated primarily with the passion and death and not with the incarnation. De Lubac interprets the kenotic act of the Son as the act by which the Son becomes historically and visibly present. De Lubac associates the self-emptying of the Son with his entire historical activity. It is through an act of self-emptying that God is able to speak to us, that the Word is articulated in history. As a result, de Lubac implies that revelation as such is kenotic, an act of self-emptying. The Word must empty himself in order to speak to us (revelation), not just to save us (salvation).

### **C. Christ as Sacrament of Salvation**

Christ makes God present to us by emptying himself. While the kenosis-revelation connection is profound, it remains an underdeveloped theme in de Lubac's work. How does this kenosis pertain to the unity of revelation and salvation in Christ? Explaining this connection, I am going beyond de Lubac's text in what I think is a faithful articulation of

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48 Ibid., 117.

its implications. Christ's kenotic self-revelation is indeed the same kenosis that constitutes the divine life. The Triune God *is* the kenotic perichoresis, the eternal and infinite exchange. De Lubac describes salvation as an entrance into the divine “eternal life,” that is, the communion between the Father and Son. The self-emptying of the Incarnate Word is the site where the divine and eternal kenosis (divinity) takes human and historical form (revelation). The historical appearance of the Son is “pro nobis” in the most intimate sense. The self-emptying of Christ in his humanity becomes both the temporal site of revelation and the efficacious sacrament of salvation that brings us into a share of the divine kenosis.

Christ is the personal unity of revelation and salvation. De Lubac more commonly referred to Christ as the “sacrament of salvation” or the “sacrament of God.”<sup>49</sup> In *The Splendor of the Church*, de Lubac wrote, “The Church is a mystery; that is to say that she is also a sacrament. She is 'the total *locus* of the Christian sacraments,’ and she is herself the great sacrament which contains and vitalizes all the others. In this world she is the sacrament of Christ, as Christ Himself, in His humanity, is for us the sacrament of God.”<sup>50</sup> In “La Révélation divine,” he applies the phrase “universal sacrament” to Christ.<sup>51</sup> In a similar way, in *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, he describes Christ as *the Mystery*.<sup>52</sup>

For de Lubac, Christ is a sacrament of God because he is both a sign and a means:

“The mystery of Christ...in the unity of his person, is for us the 'sacrament' of God.” He

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49 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 76.

50 De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 203.

51 De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 125.

52 De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 14.

notes that “*sacramentum* = at the same time sign and means.”<sup>53</sup> Calling Christ the sacrament suggests two interrelated characteristics. First, Christ mediates God's presence to us through his humanity, through the sign of his humanity. This is the symbolic or revelatory function of the sacrament. Second, as means, Christ is the way to salvation who draws us to the Father. This is the salvific function of the sacrament. The sacrament is not merely a window onto a transcendent reality, but it is the means by which we ascend to that reality.

In this perspective, Christ is the sacrament of God because his saving action is figurative in its function. He is the universal sacrament because he signifies or prefigures a future salvation of humanity. This salvation is envisaged as the *totus Christus*, the whole Christ, that is, Christ the head and members united to the head, who is united to God the Father. If, as mentioned before, salvation is both communion between the Father and the Son, and communion among the entire church, then salvation must be embodied socially. The saving actions of Christ, according to de Lubac, are what bring about this social salvation of humanity united in and through Christ. The same action by which he reveals God to us is the action by which he constitutes the church as the social locus of salvation. The church hopes for its future completion as the *totus Christus* at the end of time.

#### **D. Excursus on Sacrament and Spiritual Exegesis**

De Lubac's description of Christ as the universal sacrament could conceivably

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<sup>53</sup> De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 63.

raise some objections. He describes sacraments as *means* to a future end, something that we pass through to reach that end. Yet the Gospel precludes the notion that Christ is a means to something else, something to leave behind once we reach the end of the journey. The often-employed binary language of de Lubac—type and antitype, figure and truth, sign and signified—used to describe the sacramental mediation from visible symbol to thing signified could lead to misinterpretation. Speaking of Christ as a sign or sacrament could wrongly suggest that he falls on the side of figure or sign but not on the side of the truth signified.

The counterbalance to such an interpretation is de Lubac's affirmation of the continuity of the “mystery of Christ,” from his earthly life to the eschatological consummation. While the historical actions of Christ signify a future, eschatological fulfillment, that fulfillment is essentially *in* Christ: “Everything is being produced right now, everything is living on and buckled up inside one and the same mystery: *Christ is substantially always the same; Christ signifies himself.*”<sup>54</sup> The careful balance between affirming the completeness of the work of Christ and an eschatological reserve is preserved in de Lubac's account of the spiritual interpretation of the New Testament.

The New Testament is the allegorization of the Old Testament letter; it is its spiritual meaning. The New Testament cannot, de Lubac, claims be allegorized in turn.

He explains in *Exégèse médiévale*:

If it [the New Testament] is the spirit of the Old Testament, which is its letter, it is clear that we couldn't possibly treat it newly as a letter from which we could then extract the spirit. From here, we would be launched into a *processus in indefinitum*, a fruit of a wanton imagination, destructive of the Christian reality. To admit an explication of the

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<sup>54</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:202.

New Testament analogous to this explication of the Old Testament that itself constitutes, would be to remove all the specific content from the word “spirit.” It would be to admit that the New Testament is susceptible, as the Old was, of an ulterior transformation or supplanting. It would be to make its very substance a call to something beyond itself. This would be to make the faith in Christ a relative and provisional faith, to see in Christ and in his Gospel the figures of another Savior to come, which would have in its turn the power to transform and surpass its figures “*in spiritualem intellectum*”—without doubt until that third Savior, who would no longer be the supreme and true savior.

To believe that the New Testament in its plain and complete meaning no longer contains an allegorical or spiritual meaning is simply to believe in Jesus Christ, of which his testament is “*novissimum*”—that is to say last, definitive, eternal, new—in an absolute sense. That is to believe that “with Jesus, eschatology has entered into history.” After Jesus Christ, we no longer have anything to understand or to receive. Outside Jesus Christ, we no longer have anything to hope for.<sup>55</sup>

To say that there can be no allegorization of the New Testament indicates that Christ definitively transforms the world and that we await no other savior. It claims that Christ is definitive and last. It claims that any future world transformation, including that at the end of history, is a working out of the one already realized in his person.

The definitive nature of the Christ event is why, as de Lubac claims, tropology and anagogy follow allegory and are developed *within* it. Christ, who constitutes the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament, does signify additional meanings. Christ is a figure for the church and for the heavenly Jerusalem. Yet, de Lubac explains, there is a priority of the “sign” over the “signified.” The Old Testament was a figure of the New Testament, where the New Testament was the greater reality that fulfilled the Old. However, when we speak of the allegory as a figure of tropology and anagogy, the figure is the dominant reality.<sup>56</sup> The figure of Christ assimilates to himself (*concorporatio*) what he signifies.<sup>57</sup> Tropology and anagogy develop “within” allegory as the further

<sup>55</sup> De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, 4:109–10.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:112.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:112–13.

explication and deepening of the meaning of Christ in the life of the church.<sup>58</sup> The movement of spiritual meaning is, in fact, incomplete without tropology and anagogy.

The New Testament allegory must engender further meanings:

It is really a sign, an efficacious sign. It is not any longer only mystery; it is the whole mystery in its principle. Tropology will describe only the fruit, anagogy will evoke only the consummation. It would not be grasped in its profoundness, it would even be truly mutilated if it were not contemplated in this double prolongation. But this word itself of prologation is inadequate, because in reality the investigation of the two last senses contributes nothing to the Mystery of Christ; it does not carry us outside of or beyond it; it only manifests its fecundity.<sup>59</sup>

In this sense, there can never be a meaning that outstrips and supplants Christ. The New Testament can never be a letter for a new spiritual meaning.

However, de Lubac mentions that, in practice, the New Testament *was* interpreted as a “letter.” The Christ event is a sign pointing to the future salvation of the church, a salvation embodied in the tropological and anagogical meanings of Scripture. Although the Christ event was definitive, tropology and anagogy were something truly “to come.” In this way, without moving *beyond* Christ, the tropological and anagogical meanings are something more than allegory. De Lubac addresses this issue in *Exégèse médiévale*, where he asks whether the literal or spiritual sense is more important. If one is thinking of the Old Testament, he says, then clearly the New Testament, its spiritual sense, is more important: “the Mystery of Christ is superior to all its prefigurations.” However,

if one considers the New Testament, the response appears less simple. Here the literal

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58 “At the same time it is the allegory of the Old Testament, its 'truth', its 'mystery', this great Fact constitutes up to a certain point the equivalent of what was, in the Old Testament, the *historia*. For it is really a real fact, happened in a certain place, in a certain time; it has then completely an exterior face, and, as the *historia*, it is really the foundation of all that there remains to inventory within the New Testament, that is to say, inside itself, by *tropologia* and *anagogē*. It is truly really the sign, or the figure of all that the establishment of the two last senses must expose.” Ibid., 4:111.

59 Ibid.

sense is itself spiritual, as the Mystery of Christ, even under its first aspect of historical fact, is the “truth,” that is to say, “the spirit” of the Old Testament. On the other hand, as this Mystery contains in itself, in the manner just explained, the two last senses which arise from its “letter,” this letter itself must be called the most dignified. The assimilating figure prevails clearly over the assimilated reality. The personal Act of Christ dominates the constitution of his “mystical body,” the Head is superior to the members. Nevertheless, this Act has for its end only the constitution of this “body.” The Head is desired for the members, the Word of God is incarnate only “*propter nos et propter nostram salutem*,” and the Church is the “pleroma” or the plenitude of Christ. More than the letter of the Old Testament, the intention of the Spirit is only that one remains at the letter of the New, and since the spirit of this letter, that is to say tropology and anagogy of which it is the sign and the foundation, does not surpass it really but finds in it all its substance, it is here not improper to say that it is the Mystery taken in its totality, the final reality wished by God, that constitutes the sense otherwise the most “dignified,” at least the most complete and, in the end, the most important.<sup>60</sup>

God's ultimate intention, the mystery of Christ taken in its final state, takes priority. The actions of Christ recounted in the New Testament are truly anticipatory, prefiguring the eschatological consummation. When de Lubac speaks of Christ as the sacrament of salvation or the sacrament of God, he means that the historical actions of Christ are truly efficacious in bringing about a new situation between God and humanity. Furthermore, this salvation remains yet to come. The incarnation and his historical action remain the foundation and the sign of the accomplishment of salvation, which, though accomplished in his humanity, still awaits its full extension to the rest of humanity at the end of the world.

#### **IV. Eschatology as Ecclesiology**

Henri de Lubac's ecclesiology organically unfolds from Christology, just as, in spiritual exegesis, the allegory gives rise to tropology or anagogy. One of his predominant ecclesiological metaphors is the church as sacrament, which extends, so to

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60 Ibid., 4:113–14.

speak, from Christ as sacrament. The sacramental metaphor relates the church in time to the church of eternity. Henri de Lubac's eschatology takes the form of an ecclesiology because the church at the end of time, the “whole Christ,” is the goal of all of God's salvific action. While a definitive account of de Lubac's sacramental ecclesiology is impossible here, I intend merely to relate the central ecclesiological theme, the church as sacrament, to his eschatology. I first briefly examine the treatment of his sacramental ecclesiology in recent literature, indicating the increasing prominence given to de Lubac's eschatology. Second, I examine the paradoxical nature of the church in terms of her being a “sacrament” of salvation. Third, I show that the structure of the church as sacrament is that she is the means to and signification of a future and heavenly communion.

### **A. De Lubac's Sacramental Ecclesiology in Recent Literature**

De Lubac's treatment of the church and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, has received significant attention on several fronts in recent literature. De Lubac's writings have sustained interest for his communion ecclesiology and also for his understanding for the relationship between church and sacrament.<sup>61</sup> The 2008 English

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<sup>61</sup> Hans Boersma, “The Eucharist Makes the Church,” *Crux* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 2–11; Francesca Murphy, “De Lubac, Ratzinger and Von Balthasar: A Communal Adventure in Ecclesiology,” in *Ecumenism Today: The Universal Church in the 21st Century* (Aldershot, England / Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 45–81; Lisa Wang, “Sacramentum unitatis ecclesiasticae: The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac,” *Anglican Theological Review* 85, no. 1 (December 1, 2003): 143–58; Robert Franklin Gotcher, “Henri de Lubac and Communio: The Significance of His Theology of the Supernatural for an Interpretation of *Gaudium et Spes*” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 2002); Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), chap. 4; Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998); David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996); Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993); Elie Koma, “Le mystère de l’Eucharistie et ses dimensions ecclesiales dans l’oeuvre d’Henri de Lubac” (Th.D., Pontificia Universita Gregoriana,

translation of his 1939 book *Corpus Mysticum*, which made this difficult text more accessible to English-speaking audiences, has spurred further debate over de Lubac's understanding of the social dimensions of ecclesial existence.

De Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum* argues that the term *corpus mysticum* (mystical body) applied within the late medieval and modern era to the church. At the time, “mystical body” was in the process of being opposed increasingly to the “real body.” The “real body” was that of Christ as really present in the Eucharist. De Lubac showed that these uses of the terms “mystical body” and “real body” came about through an inversion of meanings that took place primarily during the twelfth century. De Lubac revisited an earlier theology that envisioned the Eucharist as the “mystical body” and the church as the reality of which the Eucharist was the sign and sacramental means.

A dominant reading of *Corpus Mysticum*, from Michel de Certeau and Radical Orthodoxy, interprets de Lubac's recovery of the eucharistic meaning of *corpus mysticum* as a response to the individualistic spirituality that arose in modernity. The overemphasis on the Eucharist as the “real presence” of Christ (what Lawrence Paul Hemming calls the “fetishization” of the Eucharist), was a result of a spirituality that increasingly neglected the social dimension of salvation. By recovering the idea of the Eucharist as the “mystical body,” de Lubac shifted our attention to the assembled body of believers and their ecclesial practices as the object signified by the Eucharist.<sup>62</sup>

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1990); Marc Pelchat, *L'Église mystère de communion: l'ecclésiologie dans l'œuvre d'Henri de Lubac*, Collection Brèches théologiques 2 (Montréal: Éditions Paulines, 1988); Hubert Schnackers, *Kirche als Sakrament und Mutter: Zur Ekklesiologie von Henri de Lubac*, vol. 22, Regensburger Studien zur Theologie (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1979).

62 Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 158–166; John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*

As Lawrence Paul Hemming indicates, Catherine Pickstock and John Milbank interpret de Lubac to have spoken of the liturgical and social action of the visible church as the “site” of God's salvation. Not only is the work of Christ made present through the church, but the visible, assembled community is the site of the saving action of God: “What is being read back into de Lubac is precisely the visibility of the assembled community, the *ecclesia*, whilst at the same time an enforcement of the visibility of the work done as mystical.”<sup>63</sup> In other words, the visible ecclesial community is the “real body” of Christ that gathers to constitute the “mystical body,” the Eucharist, a sign and performative manifestation of the “real body.” Pickstock and Milbank, following de Certeau, collapse the saving action of God into the liturgical and social activity of the church.

This collapse of God's saving activity into the liturgical action of the church is consonant with John Milbank's interpretation of de Lubac's theology. First, Milbank advanced an interpretation in which de Lubac's understanding of the supernatural grounds all other aspects of his theology. De Lubac consistently rejected the Scholastic theory of pure nature, which proposes a hypothetical state in which humanity is not called to the beatific vision. As a correlate to the theory of pure nature, there developed a notion that human beings possessed a dual finality, a natural finality in virtue of possessing a human nature, and a supernatural finality “superadded” in virtue of the reception of grace.

Instead, de Lubac proposed that humanity possesses a single, supernatural finality.<sup>64</sup>

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(Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997).

63 Laurence Paul Hemming, “Henri de Lubac: Reading Corpus Mysticum,” *New Blackfriars* 90, no. 1029 (September 2009): 526.

64 See Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991). Originally

According to Milbank, de Lubac's opposition to “pure nature” and its consequences implied that he collapsed the distinction between “nature” and the “supernatural” and between the immanent and the transcendent.<sup>65</sup>

Second, as a consequence, de Lubac also removes any distinction between social practice and grace, that is between ecclesial performance and supernatural life, or *praxis* and *theoria*. Milbank's ecclesiology reflects his understanding of the supernatural. Thus, Milbank's *Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* lacks any partition between Christology and ecclesiology, because, as John Webster puts it, Christ and the church are “co-constitutive.”<sup>66</sup> To be fair, Milbank does not demonstrate absolute consistency in his

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published in 1944. See also Henri de Lubac, *Le mystère du surnaturel*, Théologie (Paris: Aubier, 1965); Henri de Lubac, *Petite catéchèse sur nature et grâce*, Communio (Paris: Fayard, 1980).

65 For the pivotal texts on Milbank's interpretation of de Lubac, see John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005); John Milbank, “Henri de Lubac,” ed. David F. Ford, *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Modern Theology since 1918* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005); John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 220–225; John Milbank, “The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy,” in *Radical Orthodoxy?: A Catholic Enquiry* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000), 33–45; John Milbank, “An Essay Against Secular Order,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 199–224.

66 John Webster is critical of Catholic communion ecclesiologies for their lack of partitioning between the agency of the visible church and God's agency. According to Webster, communion ecclesiologies share the characteristic of viewing salvation as something embodied within a particular ecclesial communion, as “essentially visible as a form of common life and part of the world's historical and material economy.” John Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London / New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 161. While Webster recognizes the need to overcome an overly individualistic notion of salvation by re-integrating theology and church practice, he believes that most communion ecclesiologies fail to safeguard the “unparticipable perfection of God's triune life.” *Ibid.*, 163. They fail to recognize God's “utter difference” in relation to creatures and, as a result, risk minimizing God's freedom and grace with regard to the church: “The very density of the resultant ecclesiology can sometimes become problematic. Ecclesiology can so fill the horizon that it obscures the miracle of grace which is fundamental to the church's life and activity.” *Ibid.*, 155. While Webster takes particular exception to Milbank's theology, he believes that Milbank, Jenson, and de Lubac fall within a spectrum of the same teaching. De Lubac's ecclesiology, which he says depends upon a “metaphysical substructure” found within *Surnaturel*, is a principal example of a confusion of the divine and human within communion ecclesiologies,

Webster critiques a range of communion ecclesiology rather than offering a definitive interpretation of de Lubac. However, his understanding of communion ecclesiology in its Lubacian form is influenced by John Milbank's unfortunate interpretation of de Lubac's ontology. As a result, Webster understands a theology of communion to be a systematic consequence of the confusion

own theological program.<sup>67</sup>

It remains, however, that the Radical Orthodox interpretation tends to distort de Lubac's ecclesiological vision by delimiting the scope of the “real body” to the present, visible communion. As Hemming states,

The result—caricature indeed—has been the fetishisation, not of the sacred species, the eucharistic host, but of the community itself, the one that has assembled for the Eucharist, and so the *Anwendung* of the interpretation has been a turning-in on ourselves, to intensify the objectification of the subjects for whom the host has become mere object.<sup>68</sup>

The interpretation advanced by Milbank and others results in a misunderstanding of both de Lubac's ecclesiology and his understanding of sacraments.

I contend that de Lubac's sacramental ecclesiology corrects what Hemming calls the “fetishization of the assembly” and what Webster claims is a confusion of human and divine action within the church. However, de Lubac's ecclesiology must be read in an eschatological key. Hemming himself indicated the importance of eschatology for understanding de Lubac's theology of the church:

Only at the end of time is the Church in its entirety to be understood as fully present, and so only then is the identity of the Church with the Body of Christ visible and complete.

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between creator and creature. First, Webster's view depends upon a misinterpretation of de Lubac's understanding of nature and grace. Second, Webster falsely believes that communion ecclesiology depends upon this confusion between God and creature. Instead, de Lubac vigorously defends the absolute transcendence of grace that makes communion possible.

67 In *Theology and Social Theory*, he writes, “In the Incarnation, God as God was perfectly able to fulfil the worship of God which is nevertheless, as worship, only possible for the creature. This descent is repeated and perpetuated in the Eucharist which gives rise to the *ecclesia*, that always 'other-governed' rather than autonomous human community, which is yet the beginning of universal community as such, since it is nothing other than the lived project of universal reconciliation. Not reducible to its institutional failures and yet not to be seen as a utopia either, since the reality of the reconciliation, of restored unity-in-diversity, must presuppose itself if it is to be realizable (always in some very small degree) in time and so must be always already begun.” Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, xxxi. Rather than failing to distinguish between the *ecclesia* and Christ, or between the visible community and grace, here Milbank describes the church as the already-begun “universal reconciliation.”

68 “Henri de Lubac,” 528.

At this point, sacraments, and above all the sacrament of the altar, cease to be, no longer needed as the mediation of the incompleteness of the *Corpus mysticum* (the end of time and the glorification of Christ's mystical Body, and the point at which the Body ceases to be mysterious, or a matter of significations, and is completed). Von Balthasar himself emphasises the importance of this eschatological aspect in de Lubac's work, and notes: "the Origenistic thought, which finds so strong an echo through history... that Christ and the blessed attain their ultimate beatitude only if the whole 'Body of Christ,' the redeemed creation, is gathered together in the transfiguration, is honoured in its lasting spiritual meaning." This occurs, von Balthasar tells us, only in "the heavenly Jerusalem." There is a hermeneutical key proposed in the text that most commentators have, as far as I can see, overlooked.<sup>69</sup>

While Hemming is correct to locate the hermeneutical key in de Lubac's eschatology, he overlooks Susan Wood's *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church* in which she correlates de Lubac's understanding of Scripture, the church, and the sacraments. She notes that de Lubac did not explicitly capitalize on the eschatological orientation of spiritual exegesis in his work on the sacramentality of the church.<sup>70</sup> In other words, the correlation between scriptural anagogy, the eschatological church as *totus Christus*, and the *res sacramenti*, that signified by the sacramental signs, remains underdeveloped. In what follows, I draw from Wood's analysis of the church as sacrament to explicate this eschatological key to de Lubac's understanding of sacrament.

### **B. Paradox and Mystery: The Church as Sacrament**

At the outset, we should note that de Lubac's ecclesiology weaves together the central biblical and patristic metaphors for the church: body of Christ, spouse, mother, mystery. Each metaphor is incomplete in itself and must be supplemented by the others.

As Susan Wood notes, the church-as-sacrament supplements the "body of Christ"

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 530.

<sup>70</sup> Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 127.

metaphor.<sup>71</sup> The church as the “body of Christ” could suggest that the incarnation of the Word in Jesus extends through the church in an “ongoing incarnation,” which de Lubac himself employed to describe the church. The metaphor of sacrament, she writes, functions to moderate the body of Christ metaphor.

The sacramental metaphor for the church functions to bring together two sides of the church's paradoxical nature. In his post-Vatican II work, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, de Lubac examines the church in terms of paradox, opposing truths that must be somehow reconciled or joined together. To neglect either pole of the paradox would be to deform its reality. Paradox is characteristic of our present state, where we lack the intellectual perspicacity to rationally resolve both poles. The paradox is “resolved” only by recognizing the mystery, in which the parallel lines meet only at the horizon, the limit of history. “The mystery always transcends our definitions.”<sup>72</sup> Referring to the church, de Lubac describes three paradoxical pairs: the church is of God and of humanity; the church is visible and invisible; the church is of time and of eternity.

First, de Lubac states the “Church is of God (*de Trinitate*) and she is of men (*ex hominibus*).”<sup>73</sup> De Lubac describes the church with the highest ecclesiological descriptors: she is “a mysterious extension in time of the Trinity,” “the incarnation continued,” the “presence of Christ on earth,” “the spouse of Christ and his body.”<sup>74</sup> He warns that these descriptions are inadequate because the church is also very human and sinful. We should avoid “ecclesiological 'monophysitism'” as well as Christological

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71 Ibid.

72 De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 18.

73 Ibid., 23.

74 Ibid., 24.

monophysitism. She is faulty and sinful. “The Church disguises her borrowed splendour in a shabby garment: the contradiction is, therefore, part and parcel of her nature and only the penetrating regard will know to discover the beauty of her face.”<sup>75</sup>

De Lubac's high ecclesiology should make someone from the Reformed tradition, like Webster, uncomfortable. The first side of the paradox may not always match one's experience of the church. But, in what way does the church extend the Trinity in time? In what way is it the presence of Christ? De Lubac's intention is not to literally apply the incarnation of the Word to the ecclesial body. The church has a “borrowed splendor,” just as the moon borrows its light from the sun.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, this borrowed splendor can only be seen by penetrating her shabby humanity. The idea of “sacrament” remains in the background of this exposition, which will be filled out by two additional paradoxes.

Second, de Lubac describes the church as visible and invisible at the same time. Here the sacramental nature of the church becomes clearer: “The mystery, the efficacious sign, is not separated from that which it signifies and, on the other hand, what is signified can only be grasped through the mediation of the sign.”<sup>77</sup> De Lubac insists on the necessity of the visible, hierarchical, ministerial, and historical reality of the church as a sign pointing to its invisible reality. In the church, a “reciprocal interiority” pertains between the visible and the transcendent.

We must keep in mind that the relation between visible and invisible is, for de

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75 Ibid., 25.

76 On the lunar symbolism for the church, see *ibid.*, 16.

77 Ibid., 26.

Lubac, the relation between the “visible ecclesial communion” and the “invisible communion with the Trinity”:

Communion is the objective—an objective which, from the first instant, does not cease to be realized in the invisible; the institution is the means for it—a means which even now does not cease to ensure a visible communion. But their reciprocal interiority could not be understood...if we did not believe that the Christian life is received from above, a life to which we are begotten and in which we are nourished by a ministry coming from Jesus himself and which realizes historically a communion victorious over all history.<sup>78</sup>

Here the church generates a visible ecclesial communion while at the same time acting as a means to the invisible. It is a means, but the invisible is already present, already acting within the visible communion. What is critical is that the visible communion is an historical “means” to an invisible, eternal “end.”

This leads us to the third paradoxical pair: the church is of time and of eternity. It is historical and eschatological. In *Motherhood of the Church*, de Lubac describes the church as the “eschatological anticipation, within the temporal order itself, of that Kingdom of God proclaimed by the Gospel.”<sup>79</sup> In *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, he states:

The reign of God is yet to come: but “without waiting for history to run its course, it has already, in a mysterious anticipation, made its appearance in the inner marrow of history.” After the coming of Christ and his resurrection, “‘time-after’ is already present in the interior of time.”<sup>80</sup>

The church is a visible and historical communion that anticipates the eschatological communion and is the site for the eschatological acting within the temporal. There

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78 Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church Followed by Particular Churches in the Universal Church and an Interview Conducted by Gwendoline Jarczyk* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 35. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Les églises particulières dans l'Église universelle; suivi de La maternité de l'église, et d'une interview recueillie, par G. Jarczyk*, Intelligence de la foi (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1971).

79 *The Motherhood of the Church*, 126.

80 De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 52.

remains an identity between the present and eschatological church, as well as a distinction between them.

De Lubac's criticism of the Vatican II constitution on the church, *Lumen Gentium*, is helpful for understanding this identity with distinction. De Lubac approved of *Lumen Gentium*'s recovery of a virtually lost theological theme, the “people of God journeying towards a common destiny.”<sup>81</sup> This theme recovered the historical dimensions of ecclesial existence as a communal pilgrimage on the way to a goal that transcends history. However, de Lubac criticized the document for reintroducing a modern dualism between the “pilgrim church” and the “heavenly church.” Commenting on the seventh chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, de Lubac explains that the eschatological perspective of the church arising in the last centuries and articulated in *Lumen Gentium* is “novel in the light of the classic teaching (though not always of the theological reflections).”<sup>82</sup> This dualism—which originated from a focus on individual eschatology against corporate eschatology—sees the two churches as vertically juxtaposed. While *Lumen Gentium* melds together corporate and individual eschatologies, he says, the juxtaposition of the earthly and heavenly tends to occlude the notion that the terrestrial is already making the heavenly present. As a result, *Lumen Gentium* represents a “narrowing of the patristic horizons.”<sup>83</sup> For the Fathers, the church is both terrestrial and heavenly, existing as a terrestrial anticipation of the eschatological kingdom constituted by the whole Christ.<sup>84</sup>

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Here, as in *Catholicism*, de Lubac argued that an adequate ecclesiology must

81 Ibid., 47.

82 Ibid., 47.

83 Ibid., 51.

84 Ibid., 52.

balance the image of development through time with proleptic anticipation. The church exists in a paradoxical “not-yet” and “already-present;” it is the “church on pilgrimage” and the “church as already filled with Christ and the Spirit.”<sup>85</sup>

### C. Communion Ecclesiology in an Eschatological Perspective

The church-as-sacrament is situated in the tension between these two perspectives. Between the visible church and the heavenly church, there is both an identity and a gulf. The church militant is not other than the heavenly church: in de Lubac's perspective, they are different states of the same reality. Yet there is clearly a gulf between the now and the eschaton. De Lubac's understanding of the church as a sacrament helps to harmonize the two affirmations.

There are two temporal trajectories to any ecclesial sacrament: the sacrament is first a making-present of a past reality; secondly, it makes present and anticipates a future reality. De Lubac writes,

The Church which gave them life in the waters of baptism, this Church--visible and terrestrial herself—was therefore for them at the same time “the heavenly Church,” “the heavenly Jerusalem, our mother”.... In this all-embracing view of the mystery the Church is identified with Christ, her spouse, who is himself the kingdom: “autobasileia,” as Origen admirably puts it. Now this view corresponds to the deepest logic of Christian eschatology and to depart from it could lead to many abuses of both thought and action. The reign of God is yet to come; but “without waiting for history to run its course, it has already, in a mysterious anticipation, made its appearance in the inner marrow of history.” Since the fact of Christ and his resurrection, “time-after” is already present in the interior of time.”<sup>86</sup>

To speak of the church as a sacrament means first of all that the church makes Christ present. But this making-present is equally a making the end of time present to us since

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 76; See also, de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 147.

Christ has entered into that fullness in his own person. The eschatological church, the whole Christ, is what the sacrament makes present. He states: “Christ has inaugurated the eschatological era. His work fructifies, but not by appeal to another. The 'last times' have arrived; salvation is accomplished in Him, and for each generation 'the Church makes already present to time the end of history.’”<sup>87</sup> This end of history is constituted by the unity of all humanity through Christ.

The historical church is a means to its own eschatological realization and a proleptic anticipation of that realization: “The Church is the ark that saves us from death. But we are not mere passengers on this ark: we *are* the ark, we are the Church.”<sup>88</sup> The church is the sacramental means and the eschatological end. As means, she is a present, visible, organic, and incomplete unity which is the sacrament of her eschatological culmination, the “whole Christ,” the heavenly unity of all humanity.<sup>89</sup> To put it differently, the visible communion exists in anticipation of a more perfect communion. The eschatological élan of de Lubac's communion ecclesiology moderates a triumphalistic fusion of church and kingdom that would presume an identity between the Roman Catholic Church with the kingdom. It moderates the “already-present” with a “not-yet.”<sup>90</sup>

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87 De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 93, quoting Jean Mouroux.

88 De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 21.

89 As Susan Wood explains, the notion of the church as sacrament supplements the notion of the church as body of Christ by limiting the identification of church with Christ: “The Church as a sacrament of Christ is Christ, yet it is different, and the difference can, at least in part, be expressed as the difference between sacramental mediation of that which is complete eschatologically and its full eschatological manifestation.” Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 127.

90 Similarly, in his “Le Fondement théologique des missions,” de Lubac describes the catholicity of the church as what the church is called to be. Catholicity is not a description of the geographical extent of the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, it is an essential aspect: “It is an idea and a force. It is an ambition and exigence. Its catholicity is its vocation, which is melded with its being.” Henri de Lubac, “Le

In summary, the church is the present union of humanity awaiting its eschatological completion; but it is also the concrete anticipation of and means to that completion. For de Lubac, the locus for salvation is concrete and visible. This exposition of de Lubac's eschatological understanding of the church may not satisfy some objections. Webster might interpret a sacramental ecclesiology as endangering divine freedom or agency. For de Lubac, it indicates concrete and historical nature of our participation in salvation without thereby reducing salvation to an historical process.

#### **D. Temporal Progress and the Kingdom**

At this point it is pertinent to raise the question of the relationship between temporal progress and the kingdom of God. If the Christian church is a visible unity that anticipates and mediates the Kingdom, and if that unity is social, concrete, and historical, it would follow that the actions of the temporal church anticipate and mediate the kingdom. The tradition of Catholic social teaching assumes that the church has a positive role to play in the human social and political arena. If salvation is indeed social, the social doctrine of the church cannot be divorced from other theological doctrines. In sum, the practical action of the church in the social sphere is unified with its liturgical action and its function as a sacrament of salvation. If salvation is being realized in the concrete, then it must take up social and political dimensions, embody particular relationships, and social structures.<sup>91</sup>

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Fondement théologique des missions," in *Résistance chrétienne au nazisme*, vol. 34, Œuvres complètes (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2006), 47. This essential mark of the church is its calling.

91 Such a perspective is implied in a range of recent studies. Susan K. Wood's book, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, is based on her dissertation entitled "The Church as the Social Embodiment of Grace in

De Lubac's position remains somewhat ambiguous. Schindler argues that for the liberal tradition of political thought, there is a sharp dualism between citizen and believer, between the political and the supernatural, between ultimate and penultimate ends. For de Lubac, he states, sanctity comprehends citizenship and the eternal comprehends temporal ends. In other words, our ultimate destiny is already being worked out within the particular and historical, and is embodied in political and social forms.

However, in his *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, de Lubac insisted on the non-identity of temporal progress and the kingdom of God.<sup>92</sup> He argued human liberation is fundamentally ambiguous in its relationship to salvation:

“Liberation of man,” understood as a social emancipation, is a human undertaking which, even when inspired by faith, brings about...by human means certain changes in the organization of temporal society, and which becomes part of human history, with all the hazards...of going from bad to worse, which will always remain possible in this

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the Ecclesiology of Henri De Lubac.” While Wood extensively analyzes de Lubac's communion ecclesiology, she does not address the question of social and political progress. David L. Schindler, employing a communion ecclesiology from de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and John Paul II, argues that social and political practices (processes and procedures) are not ideologically neutral. There is a religious form embodied within social and political practice, which either bear a structurally resemblance to the Christian mystery, or which take on another form. John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock take the perspective that socio-political practices can either embrace nihilism or embody salvation, the latter constituting the social-liturgical practice of the Christian church. In a similar perspective, Hans Boersma has indicated that de Lubac's sacramental ecclesiology suggests a pathway between two extremes: an exaggerated anti-Constantinianism which would restrict the action of the church to the “spiritual,” leaving the state in its own realm; and the “perfect society” ecclesiology that imagines the church as a national or political community. Susan K. Wood, “The Church as the Social Embodiment of Grace in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1986); Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*; Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*; Milbank, “Henri de Lubac”; Pickstock, *After Writing*; Hans Boersma, “Sacramental Ontology: Nature and the Supernatural in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac,” *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1015 (2007): 242–273; Jean-Yves Calvez, *Chrétien, penseurs du social*, Histoire de la morale (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008).

92 The context of *ABrief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* can help explain its tone. It was written during the Cold War and at a time when Marxist thought was influencing Christian theological reflection on the coming of God's kingdom and the role of temporal progress and development. It was also written a year after de Lubac's *La Posterité spirituelle*, which traced Hegelian, Marxist, and other future-oriented philosophical eschatologies back to Joachim. When he writes about human progress, he is thinking of Joachim, Hegel, and Marx. See Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 162.

groping and sinful world. “Salvation in Jesus Christ,” on the contrary, is essentially a divine undertaking which comes about in the depths of hearts and is inscribed in eternity. This makes clear the proper role of the Church; she is the messenger and bearer of this salvation and hence she cannot be assimilated, either in her structure or in her aims, to any of our human societies.<sup>93</sup>

De Lubac maintains the absolute transcendence of the grace of salvation with respect to the structures of political society. He distinguishes between liberation as a social program and liberation as the freedom from sin. The first is fundamentally ambiguous in relationship to the latter. Yet one might wonder, given his language, whether human liberation is *ambivalent* with regard to salvation.

Writing about the relationship between the “world process” and salvation, he uses stronger language:

since the world as a whole is going to its death, “it cannot be considered an immanent reflection or an anticipation of the Kingdom of God.” Hence it cannot be, as such, the goal of our hopes. We must, then, take care not to confuse the “progress of this world” (itself a very ambivalent term) with the “new creation.” We must avoid slipping from conversion of heart, by which the “new man” is born in Christ, to the unfolding of history (dialectic or not) that bears “as in its womb” the societies of the future.<sup>94</sup>

Neither human progress nor world history should be considered an anticipation of the promised kingdom:

In its social meaning liberation of every kind belongs to time; salvation is for eternity, and for that reason anticipates time. We should not even say, strictly speaking, that the more or less perfect accomplishment (it always remains imperfect) of the first of these two goals is at least the indispensable preparation for the second; for this would amount to saying that the Christian hope is necessarily situated in the prolongation of the objective results obtained by human efforts.<sup>95</sup>

Human liberation cannot be confused with the spiritual renewal that occurs in the human heart and which transcends history and progress.

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93 Ibid., 159–60.

94 Ibid., 101.

95 Ibid., 107.

De Lubac's response to Edward Schillebeeckx's considerations on the relationship between salvation and human progress illuminates his position. As Wood has argued, de Lubac reacted to Schillebeeckx's characterization of the church as the *sacramentum mundi*, the "sacrament of the world." The question is posed about what the ultimate reference of the church-as-sacrament is: is the church the sacrament of the world or of Christ?<sup>96</sup> For Schillebeeckx, the church is the visible sacrament of the growth of the historical process toward salvation. God's universal will to save humanity is manifested in the struggle for a better world, even though this manifestation is not explicit or thematic. The salvation of the world through God's grace, coinciding with the unity of humanity, is made explicit within the church.<sup>97</sup>

De Lubac criticized Schillebeeckx on two fronts. First, Schillebeeckx's description of the church as *sacramentum mundi* presented the church as the expression of a salvation already available in the secular world. It ultimately confuses the supernatural and nature and it collapses "creation and divinization."<sup>98</sup> As a result, the church explicitly thematizes a salvation implicit within socio-political projects. Second, Schillebeeckx fails to articulate the fact that salvation transcends all the features of our historical world. Concerning Schillebeeckx's position, he asks, "Does the 'eschatological kingdom' not appear, in all this, as the culmination of our 'earthly expectations,' as their supreme fulfillment and consummation?... So, in practice, human history and salvation history

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96 See Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 109–17.

97 See Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 260.

98 De Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, 226.

would be one and the same.”<sup>99</sup> The problem, as de Lubac saw it, was that the eschatological kingdom for Schillebeeckx is merely the endpoint of secular progress and not the transfiguration of the world that takes the world beyond itself.

In general, de Lubac's eschatology attempted to avoid two pitfalls. On the one hand, he wished to avoid the identification of temporal and secular progress with a coming eschatological kingdom (reflecting his engagement with Joachim and Joachim's posterity). The infinite difference between creation and salvation is preserved in the difference of orders between human progress and the kingdom. It is clear that he wished to avoid collapsing salvation into an immanent world process to which political progress would contribute. On the other hand, de Lubac attempted to avoid severing all relationship between the visible, temporal order and grace, the supernatural, or the kingdom (reflecting his engagement with early modern theories of pure nature). In different contexts, he places a greater emphasis on avoiding one or the other extreme. In *Brief Catechesis*, he was primarily attempting to avoid the former. His manner of speaking of temporal progress and human liberation is telling, for he defined “human liberation” as the restructuring of temporal society by human means. Human liberation is the rearrangement of the deck chairs on the sinking ship of history. It is a social or political rearrangement considered independently from the revolution of God's grace, the conversion of heart.

In the context of my wider discussion, does de Lubac's insistence that grace is of an entirely different order than temporal progress conflict with his understanding of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 225.

sacramentality, especially of the church's visible and historical presence? Is de Lubac's sacramental ontology, in which we proleptically encounter salvation in concrete, social, and historical forms, at odds with his claim that temporal progress cannot be the preparation or anticipation of salvation? De Lubac did not directly address this apparent conflict within his writings.

For de Lubac, the church itself is the temporal reality—a visible communion and sacramental anticipation—that makes the kingdom present. The church is the sacrament of the eschaton. As in all sacramental reality, the visible sacrament cannot be an end in itself. It achieves its identity as sacrament when it is a means to the final end, a means that we must pass through, and which we never completely pass through. The church embodies a certain way of life that takes on social, liturgical, and political dimensions, which constitute her visibility. Salvation proleptically enters into these dimensions. Yet this social and political space is always an anticipation and, as such, is incomplete.

In de Lubac's view, it would be false to absolutize a certain set of practices as definitively embodying salvation. His communion ecclesiology cautions against it. We enter into communion with God through the ecclesial communion. It would be a mistake, however, to confuse the exterior dimensions of the ecclesial communion, conceived of as exterior practices and structures, with communion with God. The rearrangement of institutions, structures, and practices is no guarantee of salvation; and salvation is not reducible to these institutions, structures, or practices. That is why the exterior of the

sacrament, however we conceive it, cannot be an idol pursued for its own sake. Rather, it must be an icon transparent to the eternal.

Unfortunately, de Lubac did not apply the notion of sacramentality to human liberation or the growth of charity as an ecclesial practice that embodies salvation, at least partially. Unlike Johann Baptist Metz or Gustavo Gutiérrez, de Lubac did not show how social and political practices, the struggle for justice, or the social aspects of ecclesial communion could be anticipatory of the consummation of God's plan. Conceived as only a human effort to reorganize the bureaucracy of social existence, social justice appears enclosed within its own order. Conceivably, de Lubac's understanding of the church as sacrament—of God and of humanity, bearing both the invisible and visible, uniting the eschaton with history—could be reclaimed for interpreting the church's socio-political dimensions. Keeping in mind that these dimensions are always ambiguous—as is temporal progress—they might appear as icons of the divine or as sacraments of the eschaton. In this sense, practices of communion could be considered *within* the sacramental economy of salvation as anticipatory of the eschatological kingdom.

#### V. Mysticism as Anagogy

After outlining the eschatological features of de Lubac's Christology and ecclesiology, the transition to mysticism may appear abrupt. I concede that it is. Yet, de Lubac's eschatological themes are extended in his writings on mysticism and this mysticism suffuses his writings.<sup>100</sup> Like his eschatology in general, his reflections on

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<sup>100</sup> As Rudolf Voderholzer states, his interpretation of Christianity is mystical and the mystical appears as a *leitmotif* throughout his works. Rudolf Voderholzer, *Meet Henri De Lubac*, trans. Michael J. Miller

mysticism are fragmentary and incomplete. De Lubac claimed that his unwritten book on mysticism inspired much of his thinking. In 1956, he wrote:

I truly believe that for a rather long time the idea for my book on Mysticism has been my inspiration in everything; I form my judgments on the basis of it, it provides me with the means to classify my ideas in proportion to it. But I will not write this book. It is in all ways beyond my physical, intellectual, spiritual strength. I have a clear vision of how it is linked together, I can distinguish and more or less situate the problems that should be treated in it, in their nature and in their order, I see the precise direction in which the solution of each of them should be sought—but I am incapable of formulating that solution. This all is enough to allow me to rule out one by one the views that are not conformed to it, in the works I read or the theories I hear expressed, but all this does not take its final form, the only one that would allow it to exist. The center always eludes me. What I achieve on paper is only preliminary, banalities, peripheral discussions or scholarly details.<sup>101</sup>

Beyond his powers to begin, this book is at the center of his theology. While de Lubac failed to articulate the systematic core of his thinking, his failure is congruent with his mysticism itself, in which the very ideas and concepts that we vitally need to reach God, in the end, must be transcended.

De Lubac gave significant attention to mysticism in four sets of writings. Because de Lubac lacked a systematic approach to the diverse arenas in which he spoke of mysticism, most commentators fail to correlate them. First, de Lubac's ecclesiological writings treat the “mystical body,” which we have already touched upon. Second, his writings treating non-Christian religions have “mysticism” as a prominent theme.<sup>102</sup> His

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(San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 211.

101 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 113; Voderholzer suggests that de Lubac's unstarted book on Christ and never-begun book on mysticism were one and the same. Voderholzer, *Meet Henri De Lubac*, 159; The book on Christ is mentioned in de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 147–8.

102 Henri de Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 35–69; Henri de Lubac, *Aspects du Bouddhisme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1951); Henri de Lubac, *La rencontre du Bouddhisme et de l'occident*, *Œuvres complètes 22* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000); Paul Magnin, Jean-Noël Audras, and Association internationale Cardinal Henri de Lubac, *L'intelligence de la rencontre du Bouddhisme: Actes du colloque du 11 octobre 2000 à la Fondation Singer-Polignac*, “*La rencontre du bouddhisme et de l'Occident depuis Henri de Lubac*,” *Études lubaciennes 2* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001); David Grumett, “De Lubac, Dry Land Buddhism, and

article “Mysticism and Mystery,” which relates non-Christian mysticisms with the Christian mystery, is sometimes referred to as an outline of his mystical theology. Third, de Lubac's writings on the history of biblical interpretation speak of “tropology,” the third sense of scripture, as the “interiorization” of the mystery. These writings describe the unity of biblical interpretation, mysticism, and doctrine in pre-Modern times.<sup>103</sup> Lastly, his *Discovery of God* presents a fragmentary religious epistemology and apologetic. It presents our experience of the finite world as a pathway to God. Interpretation of this work is made difficult by the fact it reads more like Pascal's *Pensees* than a treatise on religious knowledge: it gathers together fragmentary thoughts, quotations, and prayers of praise under a single title. Instead of presenting a demonstration for theistic belief, it leads the reader to move beyond the constructions of our limited intellects and recognize in those constructions the traces of God. *Discovery of God* is certainly mystical, though its themes are not easily harmonized with his other writings.

I will not attempt a systematic correlation among his various writings on mysticism. My intention is more limited. In what follows, I merely sketch how de Lubac's mysticism is situated in his eschatology. First, I interpret de Lubac's *The Discovery of God* in terms of its tension between possession of God in the present and anticipation of God. Anticipating his recovery of *anagogia* in the Fathers, de Lubac describes mysticism as the discovery of the sacramental traces of God in the world. At the same time, these traces of God forever propel the mystic beyond them. Second, de Lubac

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Roman Catholicism,” *The Journal of Religion* 92, no. 1 (2012): 58–83.

103 See Voderholzer, *Meet Henri De Lubac*; William Murphy, “Henri de Lubac’s Mystical Tropology,” *Communio* 27, no. 1 (2000): 171–201; Marcellino G. D’Ambrosio, “Henri de Lubac and the Recovery of the Traditional Hermeneutic” (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1991).

interpreted natural or non-Christian mysticisms as anticipations of the mystery to be consummated only at the end of time. His understanding of mysticism assumes the pattern of his Christology and ecclesiology, in which the eschatological enters into the present and the present is a proleptic anticipation of the mystery to come.

### A. Religious Epistemology

The question of religious epistemology is integral to de Lubac's understanding of mysticism. However, de Lubac's reflection on religious epistemology treats a distinct set of themes from a different viewpoint. Whereas his writings on mysticism addressed the relationship between the human image and divine likeness, his writings on religious epistemology account for how knowledge of a transcendent God is possible via a knowledge of creation. The latter question was one of the obligatory questions of natural theology in nineteenth- to twentieth-century Catholic theology, which de Lubac took up in *The Discovery of God*.<sup>104</sup> In a sense, mysticism and religious epistemology converge, according to de Lubac's thought, on a single point.

In what follows, I will first contextualize de Lubac's *The Discovery of God* in the debates over natural theology early in the twentieth century. Second, I examine de Lubac's treatment of the “dialectic of affirmation” for its eschatological themes. Third, I argue that sacramentality and kenosis are two themes that emerge from de Lubac's religious epistemology, albeit in an underdeveloped way.

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<sup>104</sup> *The Discovery of God* is the English language translation of de Lubac's *Sur les chemins de Dieu (On the Roads toward God)* (1956), an updated edition of his *De la connaissance de Dieu (On the Knowledge of God)* (1948). While the two versions were substantially the same, the updated title perhaps reflects a shift in metaphor, from scientific knowledge to mystical journey.

### 1. Transcendental Thomism and the Recovery of Intuition

De Lubac sought to remedy a tendency within modern Catholic natural theology. Often following Thomistic principles, natural theologians attempted to demonstrate God's existence, rising from the knowledge of being of creatures to a knowledge of God's being. Neo-Scholastic natural theologians of the early twentieth century operated under the problematic derived from the Thomistic revival in the nineteenth century. They saw their primary task as establishing a pathway between rationalism and fideism by demonstrating that, on the one hand, reason could prove the existence of God independently of faith and, on the other hand, the act of faith was reasonable.<sup>105</sup>

For the neo-Thomist school, the knowledge of the first principles of metaphysics is garnered from sense experience rather than immediate intuition. The “intelligibility grasped in the universal is the intelligibility of the sensible singular.”<sup>106</sup> This position characterizes the Thomism of Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. For this school, the concept is acquired through abstraction from singulars. The

105 The neo-Scholastics reacted to the nineteenth-century Catholic theology influenced by continental idealism, that is “traditionalism” and “ontologism.” They opposed Catholic traditionalism, which grounded knowledge of God exclusively in revelation. As Gerald McCool explains, “The traditionalism of Lamennais, Bautain and the Catholic Tübingen School, which made man's knowledge of the first principles of metaphysics and ethics dependent upon a primitive act of divine revelation communicated to Adam's descendants by tradition, deprived human reason of its legitimate autonomy and, by doing so, undermined the reasonableness of the act of faith.” Gerald McCool, *Nineteenth Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 7. The neo-Scholastics likewise opposed “ontologism,” which grounded human knowledge of concrete particulars in the “intuition” of Infinite Being. The mind's direct intuition of the divine being would undermine the need for historical revelation, fail to respect the relative autonomy of reason, and fail to respect the gratuity of faith. The Holy Office's condemnation of Antonio Rosmini's ontologism in 1887 cast a shadow over the Augustinian tradition of religious epistemology as a whole and became a point of contention between different theological schools.

106 *Ibid.*, 11.

object “Being” is grasped immediately in the concept. Through the process of abstraction, the mind moves from concrete singulars to a concept of Being. Through the concept of Being, one obtains an analogical knowledge of God through creatures.

The transcendental Thomists recognized a deficiency in the neo-Thomist account. It is impossible to move from a concept of creaturely perfection to a concept of divine perfection that adequately represents the transcendent. The process of abstraction, which removes all finitude from our concept of Being, remains suspended in a negative phase. Abstracting the finite elements from our concept of the being of creatures leaves the knower no closer to representing the infinite and transcendent.

The problem, for Joseph Maréchal (1878-1944), was how analogical knowledge of God was possible. The neo-Scholastic epistemological tradition had placed all of the work of religious epistemology, so to say, in objective conceptual knowledge. “Must this objective concept necessarily be the proper, direct, 'quidditive' concept of God?”<sup>107</sup> If so, Maréchal stated, we are forced to accept either ontologism, a direct knowledge of God’s essence, or a univocal concept of being that applies the same way to God and to creatures, a denial of God’s transcendence.

In contrast to the neo-Thomists, Maréchal's religious epistemology moved from creatures to God through the finality of the human mind rather than the concept. For Maréchal, the “object of sense experience...would, as soon as it enters our consciousness, contain a meta-empirical element, which is intimately associated with a strictly empirical

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107 Joseph Maréchal, *A Maréchal Reader*, ed. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 144.

element.”<sup>108</sup> This meta-empirical element derives, not from the concepts themselves, but from the natural finality of the human intelligence toward its infinite end. Gerald McCool explains, “It is the dynamism of the mind into which man’s concepts have been inserted rather than the representative content of the concepts themselves which grounds them in reality.”<sup>109</sup> In other words, concepts are entirely constructed through the experience of sensible realities, but the dynamism of the human mind towards the infinite draws the knower to seek a “beyond” of that experience:

Thus we are induced to postulate in our objective knowledge...a movement of thought which would bring us constantly 'beyond' that which may still be represented by concepts, some kind of metaempirical anticipation which should show us the objective capacity of our intellect expanding infinitely until it exceeds any limitation of being.<sup>110</sup>

For Maréchal, without concepts derived from the sensible world, the intellect could never know the world as contingent, that is, to make the judgment, “This is not God.”

The dynamic finality of the mind for the infinite allows the mind to recognize the world as contingent, pushing beyond toward the transcendent source of being.

The dynamism of the intellect serves to ground an analogical knowledge of God's being. Instead of requiring an adequate “univocal” concept of being applied in the same way to God and creatures, Maréchal argues that the concept of being derived from our sense experience signifies more than it contains. That is because the “internal dynamic finality” of the mind causes us always to seek beyond. For Joseph Maréchal, as for Karl Rahner, this “internal dynamic finality” of the mind grounds the ability to recognize the world as contingent and it constitutes a “pre-thematized” intuition of the divine.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>109</sup> McCool, *Nineteenth Century Scholasticism*, 88.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 145.

## 2. The Dialectic of Affirmation: *Affirmatio, Negatio, Eminentia*

De Lubac, borrowing liberally from Maréchal, sought to restore the pre-conceptual intuition of the divine that undergirds the movement from creation to God. His *Sur les chemins* followed Maréchal in defending a pre-conceptual, “intuitive” knowledge of God, which he believed was suppressed in modern Catholicism. De Lubac sought to recover intuition in the resources of a broad Christian spiritual tradition that at once preserved God's transcendence and, in the face of negative theology, affirmed our ability to know God through creation.

In fact, de Lubac's stated intention was to support a religious epistemology expressed in transcendental Thomism, though employing the resources of a more ancient notion of anagogy:

It [*Sur les chemins*] sought...to remedy what seemed to me to be a deficiency of classical Thomism: for the latter, the necessary movement of negative theology creates a danger of agnosticism...; so I wanted to base this same movement on a more fundamental exigency, there at the beginning and constantly recurring, by which I sought to define the human spirit in its relation to God. This intuitive, or more precisely proleptic and dynamic (not thematized, as one would say today), element, well founded in tradition, was diametrically opposed to the extrinsic and restrictive rationalism of one whole modern Thomistic school; it seems more important to me today than ever to stress this, at a time when an undue inflation of “negative theology” risks opening the way not only to agnosticism but to atheism. On the other hand, still dependent upon awkward reflections dating from my beginnings as an apprentice philosopher, I was also moving in an atmosphere of “natural theology,” outside of which, even today, I cannot breathe completely at ease—which does not mean that I admit a natural theology correctly constituted outside revelation, which would in that case come simply to be added onto it.<sup>111</sup>

Like Maréchal, de Lubac's religious epistemology grounds the movement of the mind beyond sense experience in the “dynamic finality of the intelligence.” Furthermore, this

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111 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 80–1.

“dynamic finality” must be understood as a proleptic anticipation and an anagogical drive.

De Lubac distinguishes between objective, conceptual knowledge and transcendental, pre-conceptual intuition. On the one hand, we possess an objective, conceptual knowledge deriving from the world of experience and from which we compose our ideas concerning God. This constructive, conceptual knowledge is entirely derived from the human experience of the world. As a result, any concept concerning God must be purified by negating everything in it belonging to the finite world.

Yet, prior to the construction of concepts there exists a primordial “affirmation” of God, which de Lubac sometimes calls “transcendental.” “Every human act,” he writes, “whether it is an act of knowledge or an act of the will, rests secretly upon God, by attributing meaning and solidity to the real upon which it is exercised.”<sup>112</sup> It is a “basic experience”—the presence of nonconceptual being to consciousness which is common to the philosopher and to all men.<sup>113</sup> De Lubac appeals to the Thomistic maxim that “all knowers know God implicitly in all they know.” Before any conscious and conceptual affirmation, there is an “affirmation which is still implicit, implied in each of our judgments on existence or judgments of value, and in consequence co-extensive with our whole spiritual activity, an affirmation congenital to the mind.”<sup>114</sup> Conceptual processes of discursive reason that prove God's existence by moving from creatures to God are not

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112 Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 36.

113 Ibid., 37.

114 Ibid., 53.

worthless. However, according to de Lubac, the success of these processes depends upon a “transcendental” affirmation deeper than the “conceptual” or “objective” affirmation.

The transcendental affirmation is what de Lubac calls “the idea of God.” “The idea of God is not a conceptual construction; it is antecedent to conscious or volitional acts: In its primary and permanent state the idea of God is not, then, a product of the intelligence. It is not a concept. It is a reality: the very soul of the soul; a spiritual image of the Divinity, an 'eikon.'”<sup>115</sup> It is significant that de Lubac speaks of the affirmation in terms of an “image” or “eikon” of God. The notion of “image” and “likeness,” so prominent within his eschatology, suggests that the affirmation is an ontological effect of being created as an “image” with a finality toward “likeness.”

De Lubac affirms the historical and cultural constructedness of our concepts about God yet affirms that those concepts can truly signify God:

In reality the authentic affirmation of God—which is something much more than an affirmation—belongs in the first instance to the deepest operation of thought, which is not itself either “mythical” or “logical,” although it is obliged to borrow the procedures of logic in order to express itself, and makes use of imagination to give itself body, in such a way that its spontaneous constructions reveal a structure analogous to the structures of myths. Perhaps, if we are to take all these elements into account, we should do better to describe it with a word of which modern abuse ought not to be allowed to deprive us, namely a “symbolic” affirmation or even, to use another and older term beloved of the Fathers, “anagogical.”<sup>116</sup>

The mention of “anagogy” is not incidental. The “affirmation” of God is implicit within each objective judgment because the affirmation is co-extensive with the spirit or mind itself. The mind is drawn towards its final end in a movement described as “anagogical.”

While de Lubac does not explicitly link the two, the *anagogia* explicated in

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115 Ibid., 40. De Lubac's notion of the “transcendental affirmation” is similar to Karl Rahner's *Vorgriff auf esse* (pre-apprehension of being) that underlies all objective, conceptual judgments.

116 Ibid., 19.

*History and Spirit* and *Exégèse médiévale* is essentially the anagogy in *The Discovery of God*. In *Exégèse médiévale* de Lubac described two senses of anagogy. On the one hand, it is the fulfillment of the “doctrinal formulation,” the fourfold sense of Scripture. This anagogy is objective: it denotes a “higher meaning,” an eschatology in a speculative sense; it is the fulfillment of the person or the cosmos. On the other hand, it is also the fulfillment of the “spiritual formulation,” the threefold sense of scripture. It is subjective in nature: it indicates the manner of apprehending those higher things; it is a higher contemplation, or *theoria*.<sup>117</sup> Anagogy in *The Discovery of God* is oriented toward what *Exégèse médiévale* calls “subjective anagogy.” In *The Discovery of God*, anagogy designates the objective “end” insofar as it engenders an ascent through our present reality. The mystical impulse to know God in essence is an “anagogical dialectic” and an “ascending dialectic.”<sup>118</sup>

De Lubac's “affirmation of God” is a supplement or corrective to an account of theological language. Drawing from Thomas Aquinas's formulation of the dialectic of the affirmation of God, de Lubac reinterprets the way of affirmation, the way of negation, and the way of eminence.<sup>119</sup> At the beginning of the dialectic is the affirmation (*via affirmationis*) that some attribute belongs to God (being, goodness, truth). As I have noted, the concept is formulated through knowledge of sensible realities, through processes of abstraction and unification within the mind. The concept used of God here never can be applied univocally to particular objects of our experience and to God, who is

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117 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:183.

118 De Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 150–1; de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:184.

119 See D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God: Theology, Language, and Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 152–155.

already known through the fundamental experience of the human mind. Applying such a concept to God is a construction ultimately inadequate to its object.<sup>120</sup> Through the concept the

absolute, upon which our knowledge rests, now enters into the system of our knowledge. It therefore appears to be caught up in the universal network of relationships. And the Transcendent, which by definition “goes beyond” the notions elaborated by our intelligence, seems to allow itself to be imprisoned within them.

As soon as we formulate a concept of God, a concept that is necessary for knowledge of God, it becomes inadequate. To rest at a conceptual formulation of God would be to form an idol.

The way of negation (*via negationis*) is the second stage of the dialectic. The negation is a purification of the concept: “As the idea of God is particularized and becomes objective, it is submitted to a negative dialectic, which is turned against all the gross elements from which it seems to take its substance.”<sup>121</sup> At the negative stage, the concept does not become vacuous, as if the affirmative stage were simply denied. Instead, the negative phase denies that we affirm God in the manner that we affirm the beings in the world. The way of negation makes room for the final stage of the dialectic, the way of eminence (*via eminentiae*). The final stage predicates something of God, but recognizing God's transcendence, it affirms that the predicate absolutely transcends what we can affirm of the world.

The traditional manner of viewing the dialectic of affirmation raises an objection.

<sup>120</sup> De Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 106.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 106. The radical difference between God and creation is enshrined in the Fourth Lateran Council's statement “*Inter creatorem et creaturam non potest similitudo notari, quin inter eos major sit dissimilitudo notanda*” [Between creator and creature no similitude can be expressed without implying an even greater dissimilitude].

If all concepts are formed by abstraction from the material world, and if, in the negation, we deny those elements in the concept that are formed through experience of the sensible world, are we not left with nothing? If the negative stage denies everything “which, starting from the creature, we have first affirmed of God,” we will end in atheism or agnosticism.<sup>122</sup>

De Lubac responded that there is “more in the concept than the concept itself.”

Besides the concept, there is the transcendental affirmation that underlies it. This primordial affirmation—co-extensive with the human spirit—is drawn toward the transcendent:

In the dialectic of the three ways, which gives us access to a human knowledge of God (*affirmatio, seu positio; negatio, seu remotio; eminentia, seu transcendentia*), the *via eminentiae* does not, in the last analysis, follow on the *via negationis*; it demands, inspires, and guides it. Although it comes last, the *via eminentiae* is covertly the first, superior and anterior to the *via affirmationis* itself. Although it never assumes a definite form in the eyes of the intelligence, it is always the light and the norm... a hidden power which excites us to pursue objective knowledge and compels us to rectify it. That is why we can enter the *via negationis* and remain in it without fear, once the necessary preliminary affirmations have been left behind. Understood in this way, the *via negationis* is only negative in appearance or negative of appearances. In other words – and more exactly perhaps—although it is negative and remains negative, it is the very opposite of negation.<sup>123</sup>

The *via eminentiae* is at the beginning of the dialectic insofar as it is presupposed by the *via affirmationis* and the *via negationis* as the end of the journey and the source of its inspiration. In de Lubac's resolution, the likeness exercises a “hidden power” over the historical image, and the *via eminentiae* exercises a “hidden power” over the *via affirmationis*.

The *via negationis*, therefore, takes place within the movement of affirmation,

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 122.

negating only the concept that the mind constructs, a concept that the created intellect must transcend even if remains necessary for knowledge. The conceptual affirmation and negation remain in tension: the idea of God rises spontaneously and is objectified by the mind. The need to check the objective affirmation continues in the negative phase. Always recurring, the objective affirmation rises again, only to be censured by negative theology. “It may seem, perhaps, as though man were destined to oscillate forever between those two poles without ever finding a haven in which to rest.”<sup>124</sup> The affirmative and negative phase remain together an unbreakable paradox, each correcting the other, neither permanently gaining the upper hand.

In the present state, our knowledge of God exists only in constructed representations. Because of God's transcendence, these representations always exist in tension with negative theology. The mystic must use concepts, affirmations, images derived from the created world, but must be willing to brush them aside forever. One must enter the light through the darkness, abandoning all representations, even if those representations are carrying us, just as the swimmer stays afloat only by pushing the water aside.

In the Lubacian vision, the tension between affirmation and negation is creative insofar as it causes the human being always to push beyond his or her own constructions. Although de Lubac's religious epistemology is neither well-developed philosophically nor systematically connected to his eschatology, there are obvious parallels with his understanding of the sacraments and ecclesiology. Just as the way of eminence is covertly

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 108.

the inspiration for the way of affirmation, the eschaton enters into the present. In a text quoted above de Lubac explains:

After all, the eschatological is not something simply absent from the present, any more than what is transcendent is exterior to everyday reality; on the contrary, it is the foundation of the present and the term of its movement—it is the marrow of the present, as it were, and exercises over it a hidden power.<sup>125</sup>

De Lubac's understanding of eschatology expressed here applies as readily to his understanding of the church's temporal movement toward the kingdom as it does to the movement of the mind through creation to God.

### 3. Emerging Themes: Sacrament and Kenosis

Two complementary themes emerge in de Lubac's account of religious knowledge, themes which reflect his understanding of sacramentality and eschatology but are not overtly developed. First, created realities can truly signify the divine, and are the requisite medium of our minds to reach God. Second, the dialectic of religious knowledge reflects a Christic pattern of life, death, and resurrection, in which transcendence requires a death to self.

The first theme reflects a positive outlook on the ability of created realities to possess a transcendent referent. Hans Boersma, reflecting on nature and grace in the *nouvelle théologie*, states that “de Lubac and [Henri] Bouillard thus left a lasting legacy by rediscovering that the contingencies of human existence were sacramental mysteries meant to draw the created order into deifying union with their origin and end, the triune God.”<sup>126</sup>

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125 De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 117.

126 Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 115.

In de Lubac's religious epistemology, our conceptual formulations can signify God, but only in the acknowledgment of their contingency and insufficiency. He submits that "our concepts really have the power to signify God—and yet, strictly speaking, we cannot grasp God in any one of them; or rather, it is in that very way that they really do signify Him."<sup>127</sup> From de Lubac's perspective, if mysticism is seeing through signs, it is a seeing of their radical contingency in reference to and in anticipation of the fullness to come: "Every creature reveals him [God] by virtue of the being it borrows from him, crying out that it is not he. Such is the mystery which, in spite of its obscurity, is always a light; the emptiness which it demands of us is the form of his Fullness."<sup>128</sup> The human knower, recognizing the insufficiency of the sign, moves beyond it in an "anagogical" anticipation. The movement of our mind through created signs to God, however, follows upon the movement of God toward us. The signified acts within the sign, acts through the sign. If de Lubac affirms that human concepts and worldly realities authentically signify God, it is because of God's descent through the world to my mind, in a form of cosmic revelation.<sup>129</sup>

Second, in de Lubac's religious epistemology, negation is presented as *kenosis*.

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127 De Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 130.

128 Ibid., 92.

129 "O Thou who appearest through every form and structure without adhering to them or being confounded with them!" From this it follows, in the first place, that the knowledge of God which comes through the external world is itself, in a sense, a revelation: The greatness of God and the beauty of creatures make us, by analogy, contemplate their Author (Wis. 13:5). It is an objective revelation just as natural reason is in itself, as we have seen, a subjective revelation. There is a double and unique natural revelation, a gift of the sign and of the capacity to interpret it, a gift of the book and the capacity to read it. For it is not my mind which first rises from the world to God: it is God who first descends, in some sort, through the world to my mind. The proof [of God] is my construction, but the sign which precedes it and already contains it, which allows it, provokes it, sets it in motion, and always overflows it, is given me by another. In all truth, God *makes me a sign*." Ibid., 89–90.

Characteristic of de Lubac's work is the lack of partitioning between theological topics, as well as a lack of partitioning between topics often treated only under the discipline of “theology” and those only treated by “philosophy.” Within de Lubac's religious epistemology—which until recently would be characterized as philosophy—mystical and Christological themes emerge.

As noted above, de Lubac speaks of construction and negation as a “double dialectic” in the ascent of the mind to God. Two kinds of mysticisms or spiritualities correspond to the dialectic: “The way of signs and the way without signs. Like the two dialectics, these two spiritual ways are, moreover, less separate than united; but is is sometimes one and sometimes the other which dominates.”<sup>130</sup> The objective affirmation of God, the ascent to God through created signs, requires its own purification in the negative phase. The negative phase does not merely negate the affirmation: it functions as a spiritual way to God, a form of spiritual detachment.

Because man cannot receive anything into his mind without collaborating with his own thought: even the object of revelation must, after all, be *conceived*. In the same way the mystic needs the intellectual because detachment from defined forms—*videntur ut paleae*—presupposes the work which constructs those forms, and the judgment which acknowledges their value. So the conflict cannot end in the victory of either side. It must be transformed into harmony. It must become a rhythm—and mirror the rhythm first sounded by the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Savior.<sup>131</sup>

Religious knowledge emerges in *The Discovery of God* as a mirror of the revelation of Christ's kenotic incarnation, death, and resurrection.

In de Lubac's account of mysticism, the willingness to cede before the mystery characterizes the authentic form that non-Christian mysticisms take. Authentic non-

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130 Ibid., 156 note 29.

131 Ibid., 98.

Christian mysticisms are characterized by their willingness to cede before the mystery of Christ. Christian mysticism, already in “possession” of the mystery through baptism and the Spirit, is characterized by an attitude of hope for the second coming. On the other hand, an inauthentic expression of mysticism either devolves into myth by worshipping its own constructions (a corruption of the *via affirmationis*) or by refusing any object by making oneself the object (a corruption of the *via negationis*).

For de Lubac, the willingness to cede before the mystery constitutes an essential aspect of religious knowledge and mysticism. In concert with the theme of kenosis, negative theology is characterized by letting go of the very constructions which allow one to raise one's mind to God. By giving oneself up to the mystery, we enter the light through the darkness.

A telling account of de Lubac's own experience was preserved in his personal notes, copied by Edouard Duperray, and included in the appendix of Michel Sales, *L'Etre humain et la connaissance naturelle qu'il a de Dieu*:

Then the only thing that remains is a great emptiness. A single word names it, mystery. But in this gulf an invincible strength, a strange austere softness pushes me. And the deeper it gets, quenching all clarity, in a leap of faith I throw myself into the Mystery, guessing its true name, Love. Mystery! Mystery!...Everything is darkness. But I believe in Love. Outside of this, which is not knowledge [*science*], I know nothing.

Thirst to escape these stifling vanities, of these vanities that are believed so serious. Thirst to break this system of representations; these learned formulas; and these complicated doctrinal scaffoldings, a thirst for fresh air.

In a gesture of refusal, I reject all these concepts—not that I don't know in time, their role and their value—because they constantly abuse, they clutter the mind, they arrogate to themselves the whole place, they mask the Being to whom they should initiate me. One must from time to time empty out one's house.

However, when all the ideas are placed outside, there still remains in the centre of my

spirit as of my heart, a great living image. There is no risk of it disappearing because the hollow that I make in myself opens up a place for it. In it, in the death of everything that appears to be wisdom or knowledge, I have all knowledge and wisdom. I embrace it in my anguish, and the night makes it more luminous. This great living image is the Cross of Jesus.<sup>132</sup>

In these personal notes, the author dramatically expresses the negation of all human representation in the attempt to transcend them. This movement requires a leap into the darkness of unknowing. At the point of darkness and the abandonment of security, there remains the belief in love and the “great living image,” the “Cross of Jesus.” Through this death, he has “all knowledge and wisdom.”<sup>133</sup>

The recovery of anagogy is omnipresent in de Lubac's account of religious knowledge and mysticism. However, it never receives a systematic presentation. The affirmation of God that is pre-conceptual and ontological is the anagogical drive of the human spirit, which moves us to transcend the signs in search of their ultimate meaning. This same drive requires the mystic to move beyond those constructions while simultaneously moving through them. For de Lubac, negative theology is not a mere intellectual negation, but a spiritual disposition of emptying oneself to await God's advent. The search for God itself enables a foretaste of what is to come: “To await God is to possess him.”<sup>134</sup>

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132 “Une note personnelle” in Michel Sales, *L’Être humain et la connaissance naturelle qu’il a de Dieu: Essai sur la structure anthropo-théologique fondamentale de la Révélation chrétienne dans la pensée du P. Henri de Lubac* (Paris: Parole et silence, 2003), 132–3; I employ the translation of “Une note personnelle” in Noel O’Sullivan, *Christ and Creation: Christology as the Key to Interpreting the Theology of Creation in the Works of Henri de Lubac*, Religions and Discourse 40 (Oxford / New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

133 The note echoes de Lubac's religious epistemology: “Beyond all conventions—in the rejection of all untruth—at the cost of security—behind all negations—when everything fails—in the abandonment of everything: The discovery of God.” De Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 169.

134 *Ibid.*, 172.

## **B. A Mysticism of Likeness: Conformity to the Figure of Christ**

Among many Catholic authors in the twentieth century, de Lubac attempted to reconcile an appreciation for the diversity of religions with the exclusive claims of Christian doctrine. He distinguished a “natural mysticism,” a natural openness of humanity to God, from “Christian mysticism,” that is, conformity to the mystery of Christ. De Lubac’s account of mysticism is eschatological in the sense that he envisions mysticism as a proleptic anticipation of the mystery to come or, alternatively, it results from the eschatological “mystery” entering into the present.

### **1. *La mystique et le mystère***

Two related essays—“Mystique naturelle et mystique chrétienne” and “Mysticism and Mystery”—contain de Lubac’s reflection on the relationship between natural or non-Christian mysticism and Christianity. De Lubac rejected two opposing accounts of mysticism, the first of which posits mysticism as the one truth of all religious systems and the second which rejects mysticism as idolatry.<sup>135</sup>

The “Catholic position,” as he presents it, maintains that mysticism is a universal

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<sup>135</sup> The first, he calls “universalist”: “there is a universal mysticism, which is the same depth, the same truth, the one truth of all spiritual systems, religious or non religious, which can be found in humanity.” Henri de Lubac, “Mystique naturelle et mystique chrétienne,” *Bulletin du Cercle saint Jean-Baptiste* 32 (1964): 10. The second, finding an expression in the Protestant reformers, regards mysticism as a human product opposed to the true revelation of God and idolatry: “All mysticism leads to pantheism; it is a naturalism. Faith is received from above, and in order to be preserved as pure, it must reject mystical infiltrations as the supreme evil.” *Ibid.*, 11. De Lubac rejects this extreme claim, yet affirms an element of truth in it: outside of Christianity, mysticism tends towards the identification of the mystic with God.

impulse for humanity, while preserving the Christian claim of the centrality of Jesus

Christ:

One can say, in sum, that everything is explained by the relationship that the Christian makes between two ideas, the two words: *mysticism* [*la mystique*] and *mystery* [*le mystère*]. Everywhere human nature is the same in its very depths inasmuch as it comes from the same creator God. We have a precise biblical expression of this truth: man created in the image of God. The idea is often expressed in the Christian tradition, since the patristic era, in this manner: God has created man in his image in view of likeness. The image is...the very depth of the being; the divine likeness is to realize, under the action of the redeeming incarnation, by union with Christ, where one finds divine union. Mysticism is inherent to human nature, since man is made for this union. There is a yearning. In other words, within human nature there is a certain power of intussusception of the mystery given and revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>136</sup>

In de Lubac's account, mysticism (*la mystique*) describes the same capacity for God common to all human beings that is the result of God's universal calling of humanity.

Mysticism is the “inherent” capacity for grace. The correlate to “mysticism” is “the mystery” (*le mystère*), Jesus Christ, who completes and elevates it.

De Lubac furthermore distinguishes between “natural mysticism” (*mystique naturelle*) and “Christian mysticism” (*mystique chrétienne*), both modalities of *la mystique*. Both mysticisms designate the passive capacity to receive the mystery, a capacity that is “empty and powerless.” De Lubac recognizes a common, “natural” root to Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and even atheistic forms of mysticism (Nietzsche).

*Mystique naturelle*—this inherent capacity for God—can blossom in different directions. This inherent capacity, which de Lubac calls the “image of God,” “is that by which the Christian reality is assimilated, as well as that by which divine revelation becomes fecund; but alone, it is sterile. And if it wishes to hide its proper object by being

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<sup>136</sup> De Lubac, “Mystique naturelle et mystique chrétienne,” 13.

realized by itself alone, it will become pernicious.”<sup>137</sup> In “naturalistic” forms, this capacity for God can fold in upon itself: “In its final stage of realization, natural mysticism, having become naturalistic, would be a ‘pure mysticism.’ No longer recognizing any object, it would almost be the mystical intuition hypostatized in a way; and that, it seems, would be the most profound kind of atheism.”<sup>138</sup> The innate capacity of human beings for God can turn upon itself as its own object, thereby refusing its true object. “Christian mysticism” is the process of recognizing and “interiorizing” the transcendent object, the “Mystery.”

A couple of clarifications concerning de Lubac's lexicon are essential to understanding his account of mysticism. First, the two poles of the Lubacian exposition—mysticism (*la mystique*) and mystery (*mystère*)—are interpreted in terms of the biblical expression “the image and likeness of God.” The image, for de Lubac, is the ontological openness to God that all people have because God creates them and destines them for himself. “Likeness” is, fundamentally, the destiny or goal of the image. In de Lubac's account of mysticism, “likeness” describes the conformity of the mystic (*le mystique*) to the mystery. As a result, natural mysticism is incomplete unless it attains to the likeness of God, which is the penetration into the divine Mystery. The image is created only to be

137 *Ibid.*, 13–14.

138 De Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” 53. De Lubac's assessment of atheistic humanism focused on its religious and mystical elements, particularly its refusal to recognize transcendence in the name of immanence (or God in the name of humanity). See Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995); Grumett, “De Lubac, Dry Land Buddhism, and Roman Catholicism”; William L. Brownsberger, “The Confrontations with Modern, Western Atheism of Henri de Lubac, S.J., Martin Buber, and Wolfhart Pannenberg” (S.T.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 2001).

united to God in likeness by taking the mystery into itself in a process of “interiorization” or deepening.

Second, while de Lubac contrasts “natural” mysticism with “Christian” mysticism, he is not contrasting natural with supernatural. In this case, “natural” designates the capacity we have for God because we are created in God's image. It does not thereby indicate that “natural mysticism” embodied in different religions is somehow “un-graced.”

Third, *le mystère* is concrete. All mysticism is oriented toward fulfillment in a transcendent goal specified by divine revelation. Drawing from St. Paul, de Lubac takes *le mystère* to be “the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9-10 NRSV). The mystery is the plan of God that is revealed in Christ and to find its fulfillment at the “fullness of time.”<sup>139</sup>

## 2. Mysticism as an Expression of “Supernatural Finality”

In his writings on the supernatural, nature, and grace, de Lubac recovered the traditional teaching of a single, supernatural finality of human beings and the “natural desire for the supernatural.” In his writings on mysticism, “natural mysticism” is an expression of the “supernatural finality” of humanity. In other words, the innate mystical impulse of human beings is an epiphenomenon of their intrinsic orientation to their eschatological destiny.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> See above, chapter 4, II, A and B.

<sup>140</sup> These themes are treated in detail in Éric de Moulins-Beaufort, *Anthropologie et mystique selon Henri*

First, de Lubac's characterization of *la mystique* approximates his characterization of “natural desire for the supernatural.” In “Mysticism and Mystery,” de Lubac claims that *la mystique* “is a capacity [for God] that is naturally accompanied by desire, a desire that must be described as ontological.”<sup>141</sup> By “ontological” he means that desire for the supernatural belongs essentially to the constitution of humanity. Although *la mystique* is powerless in itself, it is truly a yearning for *le mystère*. As I have mentioned above, just as the “image” is oriented to its “likeness,” *la mystique* is oriented to *le mystère*. His earliest publication, “Apologetics and Theology,” expressed this idea by affirming that the image of God imprinted on all human beings testifies naturally to God's presence and spurs the human being to discover the likeness that can complete it.<sup>142</sup>

In a parallel manner, de Lubac's writings on the supernatural claim that “the natural desire for the supernatural,” though powerless, is an expression of the inner orientation of the human being toward God. De Lubac expressly rejected the neo-Scholastic interpretation of Cajetan's axiom “Natural desire does not exceed the power of nature” (*naturale desiderium non excedit vim naturae*). Exploiting a controversial axiom of Thomas Aquinas—“Every intellect naturally desires the vision of the divine substance”

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*de Lubac: « L'esprit de l'homme » ou la présence de Dieu en l'homme*, Études lubaciennes 3 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2003); Jean-Pierre Wagner, *La théologie fondamentale selon Henri de Lubac* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997).

141 De Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” 52.

142 “What is more legitimate than basing understanding on the divine image that every man has within him and that gropingly searches for the only religion capable of uniting it with its model? Do we not have the right to trust in this '*testimonium animae naturaliter Christianae*' [the witness of the naturally Christian soul] that far from testifying in favor of some sort of 'natural religion' where the soul can find its rest, instead stimulates it in its quest until it finds the unique way to salvation?” Henri de Lubac, “Apologetics and Theology,” in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 100. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, “Apologétique et théologie,” *Nouvelle Revue théologique* 57 (1930): 361–378.

(*Summa Contra Gentiles* 3.57.4)—de Lubac argued that human beings, powerless to attain supernatural life, nonetheless desire the supernatural as their only end. The knowledge given to us through revelation that we are called to a supernatural end (the beatific vision) enables us to “recognize within ourselves the existence and nature of that desire (for that supernatural end).”<sup>143</sup> The scriptural knowledge of the supernatural destiny of human beings is evidence of the “natural desire for the supernatural.”

Second, de Lubac makes a much stronger claim: the desire for the supernatural is *constituted* by God's calling or our supernatural finality. This desire for the beatific vision is the ontological consequence of God's intention for humanity:

For this desire is not some “accident” in me. It does not result from some peculiarity, possibly alterable, of my individual being, or from some historical contingency whose effects are more or less transitory. *A fortiori* it does not in any sense depend upon my deliberate will. It is in me as a result of my belonging to humanity as it is, that humanity which is, as we say, “called.” For God's call is constitutive. My finality, which is expressed by this desire, is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God. And, by God's will, I now have no other genuine end, no end really assigned to my nature or presented for my free acceptance under any guise, except that of “seeing God.”<sup>144</sup>

The “desire for the supernatural” is a consequence of the inner orientation of humanity as a whole by God to supernatural life. God's call, that is God's ultimate intention, “constitutes” the finality of humanity. In this light, the mystical impulse should be similarly understood as a consequence of the supernatural finality of human beings. It is the consequence of the impact that the final eschatological reality, as the essential goal of our entire being, has upon our present existential condition, characterized by incompleteness and yearning.

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<sup>143</sup> Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 209.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 54–5.

De Lubac's work is marked by a number of parallel terms: image and likeness, *la mystique* and *le mystère*, natural desire and supernatural, nature and grace. While they do not always possess a perfectly analogous meaning, these pairs are tied to de Lubac's eschatology. In de Lubac's imagination, the movement to the supernatural life takes place on an historical plane, as a movement through history toward an eschatological consummation. *The Mystery of the Supernatural* states that to pass from the natural to the supernatural is to “pass from the 'dignity of the image' received at the 'first creation' to the 'perfection of the likeness' which is 'reserved for the consummation of all things.’”<sup>145</sup>

### **3. An Origenian Tension: Mysticism as Possession and Anticipation**

The mystical impulse—alternatively called the natural desire for the supernatural—belongs to human beings by reason of their supernatural finality. Mysticism exists within the tension between an anticipation of the mystery as a future reality and a present possession by the mystery. De Lubac indicates that this tension exists for forms of non-Christian and Christian mysticism.

Speaking of the salvation of non-Christians, de Lubac affirmed that all of humanity is saved only through conformity to the mystery of Christ, what he calls “likeness.” The desire of the “image of God” is insufficient in itself for salvation; the “image” must be conformed to the likeness of God. However, de Lubac recognizes that the search itself is already an anticipatory possession by the mystery:

The only condition on which his [the non-Christian] salvation is possible is that he should already be a Catholic as it were by anticipation, since the church is the “natural

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145 *Ibid.*, 31.

place” to which a soul amenable to the suggestions of grace spontaneously tends. The “less” is then sufficient ...not in itself, of its own worth, but insofar as it aspires to the “more,” insofar as it is ready to be lost in this “more” directly the exterior obstacles which hide the “more” from it are removed.<sup>146</sup>

De Lubac thinks of salvation as an incorporation into the body of Christ and a conformity to the person of Christ. For the individual, salvation comes through a receptiveness to the mystery revealed in Christ and completed at the end of time. The non-Christian aspiring to a mystery and open to this mystery has, already, an inchoate possession of the mystery. In effect, the readiness of the “image” to be “lost in the more” is already the intimation of “likeness,” a conformity to the mystery. In sum, the mysticism of non-Christians is characterized by de Lubac as anticipating a future mystery as well as being possessed by the mystery in the present.

A similar tension exists in de Lubac's elaboration on Christian mysticism, for which his sources are the Pauline and Johannine texts. Christian mysticism is, for Paul, a present union of the believer with Christ, which does not have a “purely eschatological significance.”<sup>147</sup> In Paul, the believer is presently united with Christ through baptism and in the Spirit, and this union is oriented to a future fulfillment. Paul himself, de Lubac claims, has been interpreted as a master of mystical understanding in two ways:

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146 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 236–7.

147 De Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” 50–1.

A symbol, and a material expression as well, of this opposition [between two forms of Christian mysticism] can be found in the two different ways of referring to St. Paul as a great master of understanding. Some people, who consider the entire process of mysticism, say that St. Paul is the master because—on the road to Damascus, overwhelmed by Christ—he understood completely, in a sudden illumination, the meaning of the Scriptures by seeing that they led to Christ and found their fulfillment in him. Thus, they are the basis for everything. For others, St. Paul is the master because one day he was raised up to the third heaven and there, in a unique intuition, he contemplated the mystery of God—inexpressible, incomprehensible—in which everything is summed up and unified.

Pauline mysticism envisions the entire history of salvation as coming to fulfillment in Christ at the end of time and is also the present contemplation of God's impenetrable mystery.

Similarly, the Johannine teaching combines present mystical union with eschatological hope:

According to John, the Christian has received divine life; he is reborn from water and the Spirit. *Kaí vūv* [and now]: these two little words, it can be said, explain the complete doctrine of the fourth Gospel. They echo through it like a refrain, attesting that mystical unity is not only something to come but that it has already been mysteriously consummated. The life that John announces is, of course, a gift that will be fully realized only on the last day.<sup>148</sup>

In both the Pauline and Johannine forms, the mystical initiation into salvation is balanced by an expectation of its future consummation.

De Lubac expressly appealed to Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Prayer* to elaborate an understanding of Christian mysticism.<sup>149</sup> According to Balthasar, Christian mysticism is the contemplation of the deeds accomplished by Christ in history and, as such, has a “backward gaze.” However, these deeds remain cloaked in mystery. Their ultimate unveiling to us occurs only at the *parousia*, the second coming.<sup>150</sup> Balthasar warned

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148 Ibid., 50–1.

149 Ibid., 63, note 94.

150 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 145.

against “subsuming the eschatological element [of Christianity] into mere mysticism.”

This would be to “reduce what is historical in Christianity simply to the general, pre-historical relationship of God and man, of transitory time and the hidden eternity above and within it.”<sup>151</sup> Instead, Christian contemplation looks back to the events of salvation

awaiting their ultimate *apokalypsis*, their unveiling of the hidden, but present mystery.

For de Lubac as for Balthasar, contemplation synthesizes gazing backward at the events of salvation and the future expectation of the ultimate unveiling of the mystery at the *parousia*, a mystery that is proleptically present to present contemplation.

Christian mysticism, in sum, follows a pattern captured by Origen's *anagogia*.<sup>152</sup>

Anagogy describes a unity of the mystical ascent to God with that which is the object of the ascent. According to the pattern of the fourfold sense, anagogy follows upon history, allegory, and tropology. In fact, as it is the perfect synthesis of the allegorical meaning and the tropological meaning, anagogy designates the “fusion of the mystery and the mystic.”<sup>153</sup>

Anagogy is a contemplation of the heavenly realities that looks forward to a future consummation; it is a present union with Christ that anticipates a future fulfillment. De

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151 Ibid., 145–6. Balthasar states that for Christianity, the “backward gaze on Jesus is one with the prospect of his expected, future *parousia* in glory. The Day of the Lord which began with the arrival of the Messiah will come to its fulfillment. So it is only insofar as the Old and New Covenants meet in Christ, their center, and show their inner unity and penetration in him, that their respective eschatological horizons can also converge on him.” Ibid., 146–7.

152 Christian mysticism is that [mystical understanding of Scripture] pushed to its most fruitful phase by its four traditional dimensions—history, “allegory” or doctrine, ethics or “tropology” and anagogy—each of which is absorbed by the following one...It is by submitting to the historical-doctrinal facts and assimilating them that the necessary foundation for union can be found. The anagogical sense by which the spirit raises itself to God in a unique intuition has the richness of the three preceding dimensions concentrated within itself. de Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” 58.

153 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:184.

Lubac explains: "By the very fact that it is a mysticism of likeness, Christian mysticism is directed toward a goal, toward God who calls to us and beckons us to meet him at the end of the road. It presupposes a process that can never be finished, and it contains an element of eschatological hope."<sup>154</sup>

## **VI. Conclusion**

I have argued that, for de Lubac, Christian eschatology must reintegrate the *invisibilia* with the *future*, bringing together what was increasingly separated beginning in the twelfth century. The Dionysian and Joachimite traditions were not so much opposed theological traditions as mirror opposites. Both contributed to an increasing separation between the ascent to the transcendent and the hope for the future. De Lubac read this twelfth-century separation in light of what I have described as the separation of "realized" and "future" eschatologies in the twentieth century. The result was diminution of the sacramental dimensions of the historical economy of salvation, that is, the efficacy of historical events for salvation.

De Lubac's formulation of "sacramentality" responded to what he saw as the separation of the future and the transcendent. In effect, the sacramental sign is an anticipation of the eschaton but also a making-present of its reality. The inner "intention" or finality of the sign overflows its bare materiality, allowing it to participate in the higher order of the signified. It points forward to its eschatological end. At the same time, the signified exercises a hidden power over the sign. The sacrament possesses the quality of

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154 De Lubac, "Mysticism and Mystery," 57.

signifying and bringing about because the eschatological enters into it, exercising a power over it. In de Lubac's account of the particular sacraments, he emphasizes that the sacraments are loci of the eschatological entering into history and propelling us on to eternity.

De Lubac's general account of sacramentality underlies his narration of Christ as the sacrament of salvation and his ecclesiology. His Christology places Christ at the center of history, much as Oscar Cullmann did. Christ inaugurates the eschatological era and initiates the beginning of the end. It might be better to state that the historical actions of Christ are the manifestation of and means to the eschaton. The result is an account of revelation that weaves a passage between exaggerated realized eschatologies like that of Rudolf Bultmann and future eschatologies like that of Jürgen Moltmann. His account of Christ as sacrament of salvation attempts to retain the orientation toward the future in Moltmann by presenting Christ as the means to a future realization. De Lubac avoids the pitfalls of the Joachimite posterity by situating that future realization *in Christ*.

Similarly, de Lubac's ecclesiology reflects the insight, present in *Catholicism*, that Christianity unites transcendence with historical development. The church militant is the historical communion that anticipates the eschatological communion. Even though it is terrestrial and sinful, as the "sacrament of Christ," the church makes the eschaton present within time. The Christian has access to salvation now and patiently awaits its consummation in the *totus Christus*, the union of all humanity in Christ. Although he supported the recovery of the ecclesial image of the "people of God" in Vatican II's

*Lumen Gentium*, he felt that it inadequately expressed the unity of the terrestrial and the heavenly dimensions of the church. His sacramental ecclesiology allowed him to affirm both the terrestrial and the heavenly without thereby conflating the two. As a result, his ecclesiology sharply contrasts with the institutional ecclesiologies of a previous era.

In dialogue with post-Vatican II theologies of history, de Lubac opposed what he believed was an identification between temporal progress and the kingdom of God. His opposition to Joachimite thought influenced his position in *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* that just as the natural is not a seed of the eternal, temporal progress cannot in any sense “anticipate” the coming kingdom. His position is consistent with his refusal to collaborate with political regimes or to allow theology to underwrite political ideologies. However, I have argued that de Lubac's position on this point is not entirely consistent with his understanding of the sacramentality of the temporal order, especially when we are speaking of ecclesial practices of charity in the world. If the temporal ecclesial communion is indeed an anticipation of the eschatological body of Christ, the actions of the church in the world might be considered in a sacramental perspective.

De Lubac's *The Discovery of God* elaborates the implications of his mystical theology for a religious epistemology. As the image of God, the human spirit constitutes a primordial affirmation of God coextensive with that spirit. This affirmation is the substratum to all objective acts of volition and intellection. Drawing from Joseph Maréchal, de Lubac conceived this affirmation as a consequence of the finality of the intellect for an infinite object. The finality of the intellect drives its search for what will

fulfill it, not letting it rest until it reaches the true transcendent. De Lubac freely associated this natural desire for the supernatural with the *anagogia* of the Fathers, which is the unending movement through present historical signs to their transcendent eschatological signified. In *The Discovery of God*, he described *anagogia* as an “anticipatory” and “proleptic” knowledge. In effect, his religious epistemology reflects the notion that we are situated in the time between the first and second comings. This is the time of the ending, the time of waiting, the Interim. In the present state, our knowledge of God is obscure and attained only through signs.

It is clear that while mysticism is an omnipresent theme in de Lubac's writings, it is not systematically integrated with his other theological topics. It does, however, consistently play on eschatological themes. Whereas his Christology and ecclesiology focus on the objective dimension of eschatology, his mysticism maintains a subjective focus, that is, on the experience of the mystic. In “Mystique naturelle et mystique chrétienne” and “Mysticism and Mystery,” de Lubac characterizes mysticism as the passive power to receive the Mystery. The relationship between the mystic and the Mystery is analogous to the relationship between the image and its likeness. There are traces of an emerging subjective eschatology insofar as he draws upon the idea of finality to characterize the “likeness.” Likeness to God is the eschatological term of the image. Thus, likeness exercises a proleptic influence upon our humanity, causing it to search for that which could complete it. The mystic—in reality, any human being—possesses an

orientation to his or her transcendent goal, which is his or her completion within the body of Christ, which is the Mystery.

Arguably, the pivotal but underdeveloped aspect of de Lubac's mystical theology is on the kenotic dimensions of the passage of the soul to God. These dimensions appear in his “La Révélation divine,” where he construes the historical and visible revelation of the Word as itself kenotic. The Word's kenotic revelation and presence in the church inspires the kenotic return of humanity to God. Again, in his account of mysticism, the attitude of openness to the mystery and of willingness to give up oneself is requisite for Christian and non-Christian mysticisms. Because “negative theology” is inscribed within kenosis, knowledge of God requires the mystical abandonment of knowledge. De Lubac does not expressly bring together his writings on kenosis in revelation, in mysticism, or in religious epistemology. Kenosis does, however, resonate with de Lubac's understanding of mysticism in general. The anagogical ascent of the mind to God is not merely the contemplation of an ahistorical transcendence, but an entrance into the mystery of salvation enacted in Christ. It is a personal participation in the mystery of salvation through the personal and ecclesial interiorization of the historical mystery, which itself is a kenosis unto eschatological life. This anagogical ascent is never complete. In the present state, our contemplative ascent remains suspended in the hope for the *parousia*.

## CONCLUSION

This study has intended to elaborate the theology of history and eschatology underlying Henri de Lubac's contributions in a range of theological topics, including sacramental theology, the theology of revelation, Christology, the history of biblical exegesis, and mysticism. While de Lubac's work does not admit a metaphysical or epistemological foundation in a strict sense, there is an “organic unity” amidst the diversity of themes. I have argued that de Lubac's understanding of history and its end comprises a significant component of this unity.

### **I. De Lubac's Eschatological Vision**

In the first chapter, I argued that the prominence of eschatological themes within de Lubac's writings issued from a cultural and religious context in which the relationship between time and eternity was increasingly a problem. A defining characteristic of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century “Modernist” culture was the preoccupation with temporality and eternity. The consciousness of European moderns registered a rupture between the past and the future, envisioning the present as the beginning of the end. This rupture featured prominently in the Futurist and Decadent Movements around the turn of the century.

The struggles with temporality in European modernity acutely affected Roman Catholicism. Many Catholics saw the problematic relationship between time and eternity as the consequence of the faithlessness of modern culture and life. Beginning in the

nineteenth century, Roman Catholic culture defined itself against a modern European culture, philosophy, and politics, and the Catholic Church saw itself as the bulwark against the loss of eternity altogether in modern life. The neo-Scholastic movement erupted as an intellectual response to modernity and as an attempt at recovering a medieval era in which faith and reason, church and state, and time and eternity were united. The deepest concern of the neo-Scholastics was the same as that of the cultural modernists: to secure the eternal in the midst of flux. The various attacks on church authority and property were conducive to an apocalyptic view of modernity within Catholicism. While apocalypticism was a prominent Catholic interpretation of the present day, this apocalypticism was at odds with a traditional Scholasticism.

In the World War II-era debate over the theology of history, the understanding of history was subjected to theological critique. Henri-Marie Féret launched this debate by seeking a theological understanding of history in the Book of Revelation. He originally concluded that the Book of Revelation forecasts a coming era in which the structures and institutions of human existence conform to the Gospel. Joseph Huby and Gaston Fessard both saw Féret as the advocate of a new millenarianism. Féret responded, stating that Christians must take seriously the temporal character of biblical prophesy even if the precise object of prophecy is unclear. Fessard argued that biblical prophesy signifies, not the specific event, but a dialectic of history significant to every generation. Jean Daniélou turned to a developmental view of the historical actions of God in history for the source

of an interpretation of the historical present. I argued that de Lubac sought a synthesis for these divergent understandings of history within the *nouvelle théologie*.

My second chapter argues that de Lubac sought his synthesis under the inspiration of Origen of Alexandria. While many scholars dismissed Origen as an ahistorical Platonist, de Lubac argued that Origen was the source for a Christian theology of history influential for a millennium. The spiritual sense of scripture—the supposed proof of Origen's Hellenism—was more indebted to the Bible than to Philo. The fourfold and threefold senses of scripture sought to uncover the depth-dimension of history within a progressive and unified history of salvation. For Origen, historical revelation symbolizes and prepares for that which will fulfill it. The Old Testament takes its fuller meaning from the New Testament; the New Testament will only be fulfilled at the eschaton.

Origen offered a critique and response to his Hellenistic milieu. In Hellenistic allegory, the mythic account was merely the occasion for a moral or philosophical meaning. In Christian allegory, an Old Testament event is interiorly related to a later event in history. The Old Testament event is significant in itself as God's salvific intervention into history. However, this intervention is related to the fulfillment of God's entire plan of salvation. The Old Testament prepares for and symbolizes its realization in Jesus Christ.

De Lubac brings out a paradox in Origen's exegesis of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, between figure and truth. On the one hand, the figures of the Old symbolize the truth of the New and are oriented toward their own realization in

the truth. On the other hand, Christ brings total “newness” and transcendence in relation to the Old. How is it possible that the Old Testament prefigures the New without already possessing the knowledge or reality of what is to come? How is the Old Testament figure oriented to something that utterly transcends it? De Lubac explains that Christ objectively reorients the prefigurations of him. His entrance into history transforms the entire “spiritual horizon,” so that he makes those figures signs of himself.

De Lubac's interpretation of the relationship between the figures of the Old Testament and the truth of the New echoes his understanding of human finality. While not already in possession of supernatural life, humanity nevertheless desires it as its only end. This desire is possible because God's intention for humanity objectively orients human existence. Furthermore, the paradox of Christ and his historical prefigurations is the model for the relationships between sacrament and mystery, type (*tupos*) and truth (*aletheia*), sign and signified, and mysticism and mystery.

My third chapter treated de Lubac's recovery of Origen's *anagoria*. De Lubac clearly drew from Origen in order to offer an alternative to the eschatological legacy of the twelfth century, the dissociation of the *futura* and the *invisibilia*. De Lubac saw in the twelfth century the beginnings of the gradual dissociation of mysticism and dogmatic eschatology, on the one hand, and eschatology and apocalypticism on the other. The influence of Pseudo-Dionysius during the Middle Ages led to an understanding of anagogy as the individual contemplation of the invisible through the visible. For de Lubac, this was a stage in a separation of individual and subjective mysticism from the

Christian teachings about the consummation of human history. In the twelfth century, the radical teaching of Joachim of Fiore transformed anagogy into an apocalyptic expectation of a radical upheaval within history. These two traditions—the Dionysian and Joachimite—constituted the source of two opposed eschatological trajectories in modernity.

Origen provided de Lubac with an understanding of anagogy that synthesized and united the Dionysian and Joachimite eschatology. First, Origen's *anagogia* unites objective and subjective elements that could be called dogmatic eschatology and mysticism. The object of the “spiritual understanding” is the Christian mystery. In order to know the Christian mystery, one must be united to it and transformed into it. The objective content of this mystery is the same as the subjective union with it. The *apocatastasis* is, according to de Lubac, the conversion of the whole church to Christ in charity, both a transformative conversion and an ecclesial-cosmic consummation. Second, *anagogia* unites the *futura* and the *invisibilia*. The Origenian tripartite division “shadow / image / truth” is fundamentally the same as the division “Old Testament / New Testament / Eternal Gospel.” The New Testament is definitively oriented toward the “Eternal Gospel” as its symbolic prefiguration. It is oriented to a fulfillment that is yet to come. However, the Eternal Gospel shares the identity of the New Testament Gospel; it is simply the future state of the present Gospel. Origen retains an eschatology in which salvation is available in the present yet simultaneously something to be awaited. He retains a tension inherent in Christian thinking that we live in the “interim,” a time of

signs, during which we must await the final unveiling of the truth already present to us through signs pointing to it as a transcendent eschatological future.

My fourth chapter provides a synthetic examination of de Lubac's eschatology in his understanding of sacramentality, his theology of revelation and Christology, his ecclesiology, and his understanding of mysticism. I have examined these diverse theological fields under the lens of de Lubac's reintegration of the *invisibilia* with the *futura*. In de Lubac's account of sacramentality, the sacramental sign points toward and makes present the eschaton. The inner "intention" of the sign overflows its bare materiality, making it point forward in anticipation of its eschatological end. The sacrament possesses the quality of signifying and bringing about because the eschatological enters into it, exercising a hidden power over it. In *Corpus Mysticum*, de Lubac recovers a Eucharistic ecclesiology in which the sacrament symbolizes and brings about the true Body of Christ, made complete only at the end of time.

De Lubac's account of Christ as the sacrament of salvation represents the historical actions of Jesus as the manifestation of, and the means to, the eschatological kingdom. The kenotic actions of Christ in the incarnation and passion both make God's salvation visible and conduce humanity to that salvation. In a sense, the lines are blurry between his Christology and his ecclesiology. This is not because, as John Webster supposes, the lines are blurry between nature and grace. Instead, it is because the church is the "sacrament of Christ." Even though the church is terrestrial and sinful, it makes the eschaton present in and through time, and the church points forward to its fulfillment in

the *totus Christus*. De Lubac's sacramental ecclesiology allows him to affirm that the church is terrestrial and heavenly without conflating the two.

Lastly, de Lubac's theology of mysticism and his religious epistemology draw on eschatological themes. He associates both intellect's tendency toward the transcendent and the natural desire for the supernatural with the *anagoria* of the Fathers. While not yet possession, this tendency constitutes a "proleptic" knowledge of the end. Similarly, the relationship between mysticism—the passive power to receive the mystery—and the mystery parallels the relationship between "image" and "likeness." The likeness is, for de Lubac, the final goal of humanity, completion within the Body of Christ. By reason of being made as "image," we have a mystical yearning that is an anticipation of the eschatological communion and an inchoate possession.

Although de Lubac never developed a systematic eschatology, an eschatological vision permeating his work is disclosed throughout his various theological interventions. This eschatological vision takes shape in analogous binary structures: sacrament and mystery, type (*typos*) and truth (*aletheia*), sign and signified, and mysticism and mystery. The former is the immanent historical reality that constitutes the manifestation of, and means to, the latter transcendent and eschatological. The latter is the term or final goal of the former. The binary structures support a sacramental pattern of thinking, or, as Hans Boersma describes it, a "sacramental ontology." These binaries are not univocal in de Lubac's writings. Instead, they find various applications in various fields of inquiry.

As I have argued, the dual structures in de Lubac's work must be read in terms of

the duality between history and its eschatological fulfillment. In *Catholicism*, his first book, de Lubac was concerned to chart a path between two extremes: first, a Hellenistic worldview in which history was an eternally recurring nightmare from which the soul must escape; and, second, an historical immanentist worldview in which there is nothing more than history. The Christian view of the world preserved both the need for transcendence and the belief that events really matter. De Lubac elaborated *Catholicism's* proposal for a recovery of a patristic understanding of history in subsequent writings, including *History and Spirit* and *Exégèse médiévale*. The relationship between history and its eschatological fulfillment constitutes a significant theme in these works. Moreover, the relationship between history and eschatology is the framework through which de Lubac understands sacramentality, revelation, Christ, ecclesiology, and mysticism.

## **II. Significance and Implications**

There are several ways in which this study contributes to understanding Henri de Lubac's theology. First, I have shown the significance of de Lubac's reflection on history and eschatology for many of his significant theological writings. Although my study is far from exhaustive, it examines a theological theme little explored within de Lubac studies.

Second, extending the work of Susan K. Wood and Rudolf Volderholzer, I make the case that history and its consummation are at the center of de Lubac's theological vision. Particularly, by examining de Lubac's *Exégèse médiévale* in conjunction with *History and Spirit* and his other writings on spiritual interpretation, I was able to indicate

how Origen is, for de Lubac, the inspiration for his theology of history. By examining parts of his *Posterité spirituelle*, I could trace a common eschatological theme from the time immediately following World War II until the early 1980s.

Third, many accounts of the *nouvelle théologie* focus on the commonalities among the thinkers generally grouped within this movement, contrasting them with the neo-Scholastics. On the other hand, in my account, unresolved tensions within the Catholic Church as a whole in the mid twentieth century took shape as a division within the *nouvelle théologie* itself concerning eschatology and the theology of history. My examination of the historical context of the *nouvelle théologie* debate suggests that a re-imagination of the eschatological was occurring in social, literary, and cultural spheres long before it hit the theological journals.

### **III. Limitations of this Study**

This study, focused on the particularities of de Lubac's theology, has several limitations. First, the debate over nature and grace triggered by de Lubac's *Surnaturel* concerned the meaning of human finality. Recently, de Lubac's writings on nature, grace, the supernatural, and human finality have been the source of significant controversy. In some cases, the relationship between natural and supernatural is interpreted as de Lubac's most foundational interest and insight. Without denying the significance of this theme in his work, one must simultaneously interpret de Lubac through the lens of history and eschatology. This study has treated de Lubac's understanding of human “finality,” which is an eschatological issue for de Lubac. I suggested that the binary terms “nature” and

“supernatural” are not strictly parallel to “history” and the “eschaton” because God's intervention in history makes history neither distinctly natural nor supernatural. History is the place of encounter of the natural with the supernatural. Similarly, the historical-eschatological structure of de Lubac's various theological interventions cannot be easily reduced to the relationship between nature and the supernatural or between nature and grace. There is a need to respond more directly to recent challenges to de Lubac's understanding of nature and grace, nature and the supernatural, and human finality. My account needs to be supplemented by a thorough exploration of the eschatological themes in de Lubac's *Surnaturel*, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, and *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*.

Second, I sought to reconstruct the pertinent historical background for de Lubac's theology of history. Focusing on the debate over the theology of history during the 1940s, I did not examine the subsequent work of the contributors to that debate. Gaston Fessard and Jean Daniélou produced a significant body of work pertaining to the theological meaning of history to which I merely alluded. A broader theological account would require a greater attention to Catholic eschatological contributions leading up to the Second World War, as well as to the various trajectories of the *nouvelle théologie*. Furthermore, the current study did not compare de Lubac's contribution to that of other significant contemporary theologians before or after the Second Vatican Council, such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner, and Johann Baptist Metz.

Third, Chapter One examined a broad eschatological revival within European

culture and within Catholicism in the nineteenth to twentieth century. A lacuna in its examination of the theology of history debate is that it focuses exclusively on texts. While I provided a snapshot of the situations that occasioned these texts, this study could benefit from an examination of the relationship of these theologies to practice. Lyon, Paris, and Amiens during and following the Second World War were laboratories for putting theologies into creative practice. *L'Action catholique* movements, including *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* (Christian Working-Class Youth) sought a new social Catholicism during the post-War period. Maurice Montuclard and his *Jeunesse de l'Église* movement sought a rapprochement between Christianity and communism following the Second World War. *Les Semaines sociales de France* sought to direct the light of faith onto the concrete social conditions of laypeople in France and around the world. In the post-War situation, the *prêtres ouvriers* sought a new form of ministry among the working classes in France. A more complete picture of the theology of history debate would examine not only the texts, but the movements, practices, and communities as living theories of history, society, and eschatology.

#### **IV. Directions for Future Research**

Aware of this study's limitations and its lacunae, I believe that further research could go in several fruitful directions. First, focused research on the “theologies of history” and theologies of society blossoming in the lyonnaise context during and following the Second World War would be a significant contribution to understanding the *nouvelle théologie*. A significant number of authors associated with the *nouvelle*

*théologie* or in its lineage had roots in Lyon, including de Lubac, Huby, Chaillet, Fessard, von Balthasar, Jean Mouroux, Henri Bourgeois, and others. The book series *Théologie* and the translation series *Sources chrétiennes* had their roots in Lyon. Furthermore, many who were in dialogue with, connected to, or who had inspired, the authors of the *nouvelle théologie* had lyonnaise connections, including Stanislaus Fumet, Pierre Frenay, Emmanuel Mounier, Gabriel Marcel, and Maurice Montuclard. While Lyon was not the whole of the *nouvelle théologie*, it constituted an important site of confluence of Catholic theologians, historians, activists, poets, and philosophers.

Second, in a related way, de Lubac and the *nouvelle théologie* drew from essayists, novelists, and poets whose work was adjunct to the theology of history debate. Charles Péguy, François Mauriac, Paul Claudel, Emmanuel Mounier, and Georges Bernanos each contributed to moving history, eschatology, and apocalypticism to the center of French Catholic consciousness. French Catholic literary production had a more immediate impact on French Catholics than did theological production. It has been said that the theology leading to the Second Vatican Council drew from twentieth-century renewals in biblical studies, liturgical studies, and patristic studies. Perhaps the Catholic literary scene should also have its place.<sup>1</sup> At the very least, de Lubac's theological vision was inspired by the eschatological mysticism of Péguy and Claudel.

Third, Chapter Three indicated that de Lubac sought to understand the origins of modern eschatology. He traced a divergence between the *futura* and the *invisibilia* within

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Schloesser's research into French Catholicism following World War I is a significant starting point. See, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

anagogy to the twelfth century. His work on Joachim of Fiore was essentially an account of the genesis of a modern eschatological consciousness. While this work came late in his life, it echoed some of his early work. De Lubac was not alone in his attempt to discern the role of eschatology in the genesis of modernity. Hans Urs von Balthasar completed his dissertation, “The History of the Eschatological Problem in Modern German Literature” in 1928. After completing the dissertation, he joined the Jesuits, then studied in Lyon from 1932 to 1936. In 1937, Balthasar published *Apocalypse of the German Soul*, the book form of his dissertation. Jacob Taubes, the Jewish political philosopher, completed his *Occidental Eschatology* in 1947. Taubes is known as the opponent of Carl Schmitt, a Catholic jurist, political philosopher, and Nazi. Taubes was provoked into writing through attending the lectures of Balthasar. *Occidental Eschatology* was, in part, a Jewish response to Balthasar. The work of Balthasar, Taubes, and de Lubac reacts to the “messianic apocalyptic” arising during their lifetimes in the concrete form of a “messianic politics.” An examination of their respective genealogies of modern eschatology would be a significant interdisciplinary extension of this present study.

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