

HENRI DE LUBAC, SJ (1986-1991)

- [In 1940, he founded the series *Sources Chrétiennes*, co-edited with Jean Daniélou]
- [In 1950, de Lubac was “struck by lightning”—i.e., Pope Pius XII’s *Humani Generis*. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, professor at the Angelicum and fierce combatant with de Lubac, is often credited as one of the main influences on the encyclical. De Lubac was relieved of teaching. Two months prior to the encyclical, all Jesuit provincials were instructed by the Jesuit Superior General, who was under pressure from the curial office, to remove three of de Lubac’s books from circulation (*Surnaturel*, *Corpus Mysticum*, and *Connaissance de Dieu*). All of his works, as a result, were subject to suspicion and review by curial authorities. It was not until 1958 that de Lubac received verbal approval from Rome to return to teaching courses previously taught].
- [In 1960, Pope John XXIII appointed de Lubac as a consultant to the Preparatory Theological Commission for the upcoming Second Vatican Council; afterwards, he was made a *peritus* for the Council itself. He served (together with Jean Daniélou) on the newly-formed Secretariat for Non-Believers, helping to draft the Second Vatican Council’s pronouncements on the topic of atheism (*Gaudium et Spes*, §19-21), and is generally recognized as one of the greatest authorities on modern atheism. De Lubac’s influence on *Lumen Gentium* (the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) and *Gaudium et Spes* (the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) is widely and generally recognized.]
- [In 1972, de Lubac worked together with Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), Hans Urs von Balthasar, Walter Kasper, and Karl Lehmann to found the journal *Communio*].
- [In 1983, John Paul II, offering a special dispensation to the requirement that cardinals must be consecrated bishops, elevated de Lubac, aged 87, to the College of Cardinals].
- [His two most famous pupils include Jean Daniélou and Hans Urs von Balthasar]



I. DE LUBAC AND THE CENTRAL THEME OF ATHEISM¹

- a. In his memoir, *At the Service of the Church*, de Lubac mentions that his first serious reflections were occasioned not by his reading of scripture and the Church Fathers, but by conversations he had with atheists fighting alongside him in the First World War (p. 42). He later published his notes from these conversations as a modest *apologia* addressed to his unbelieving friends (*De la connaissance de Dieu*, 1945). From then on, the question of atheism would become a central feature of his theological work. When he took up his post on the *Faculté de théologie catholique* at Lyons, he spent much of his time lecturing on the writings of atheists like Pierre Joseph Proudhon and Auguste Comte. During the German occupation in the early 1940s, he presented studies on Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Nietzsche at ‘semi-clandestine’ anti-Nazi conferences—studies which would later form one of his most influential books, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (1944). In the 1960’s, as mentioned above, de Lubac played a special role at VCII regarding

¹ I am grateful to Patrick Gardner, one of my best friends from Notre Dame, for much of the summaries that follow. Gardner completed his dissertation on de Lubac’s engagement with modern atheism, and this was a source of countless conversations and mutual projects.

atheism. It is little wonder, then, that in addition to his many other achievements, de Lubac is remembered as an authority on modern atheism.

- b. His studies on the supernatural (*Surnaturel: etudes historiques*, 1946) and the concept of 'pure nature' were, as he says, at the center of discussions about modern unbelief. Even his post-conciliar works of theological history, like his volumes on Pico della Mirandola and Joachim of Fiore, address the origins of atheism and the viability of Christian humanism. As pervasive as the topic of atheism is in his writings, it would seem that among the many themes proposed as the unifying 'center' of his work, this one certainly has a respectable claim to the title.²

II. DE LUBAC'S CONFRONTATION AND "READING" OF OUR TIMES

- a. **DISTASTE FOR GOD:** In his essay, 'Christian Explanation of Our Times', de Lubac claims that modern Europe has fallen into a spiritually stifling condition: 'Man is isolated, uprooted, "disconcerted." He is asphyxiated: it is as if emptiness had been formed in him by an air pump...the consequence is not only a social imbalance. The world itself appears "broken". There is, at the innermost part of consciousness, a metaphysical despair' (p. 443). Echoing the premonitions of his friend, Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), he goes on to characterize this situation as a 'metaphysical crisis', a destabilizing of religious life and of the culture's relationship with the Christian faith (p 440, 446). What de Lubac laments in these passages are the effects of an aggressive secularism which had taken hold in his native France. Secularism had ensured that modern societies were now indelibly marked by their rejection of mystery and their 'refusal to see in man any transcendent aspiration' (*De Lubac: A Theologian Speaks*, p. 25). Most alarming of all, he suggests, is their collective loss of any taste for God, and the exaltation of Man in its place (*The Discovery of God*, p. 88-9).
- b. **WEAKENING OF THE FAITH → DISTASTE FOR GOD:** Aligned with this sense of loss is what de Lubac calls the *affaïsement spirituel*, or spiritual decline among Christians, which he diagnoses in shorter works from the 1940s. Here he speaks of the Church becoming so 'cut off from all its source of nourishment,' so 'atrophied,' that 'it can no longer see itself except as what an unbelieving world conceives it to be' ('Teilhard and the Problems of Today,' p. 147). This spiritual weakening is a form of amnesia regarding the Church's tradition, rendering it easy prey to every ideology that means to seize and disfigure it (*De Lubac: A Theologian Speaks*, p. 1-2). De Lubac notes that while the Christian faith was once thought to be the foundation of human values, it now appears to be disconnected from the exigencies of our nature: a faith with no appeal to the common culture and no power to shape it.
- c. **"LA SÉPARATION" → WEAKENING OF FAITH:** This combined distaste for God and weakening of the faith found its social correlate in what Rudolf Voderholzer refers to as *la separation* (Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac*, p. 27). *La séparation* signifies the complete separation of the ecclesial and political spheres. It is an

² On identifying the unifying center of de Lubac's theology, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview* (trans. Susan Clements, Joseph Fessio, Michael M. Waldstein; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991). Cf. Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 129. See also Bernhard Körner, 'Henri de Lubac and Fundamental Theology', trans. Adrian Walker; *Communio* 23 (1996), pp. 710-21

ideological divide between the French Church's counter-revolutionary heritage and the anti-clerical stance of secular republicans; a divide apparent in the many tensions that overshadowed de Lubac's formation in the Jesuit order.³

- d. **'SEPARATED PHILOSOPHY' → IMMANENTISM:** In the intellectual sphere, this division meant that philosophy and theology were being increasingly practiced in isolation from one another. On the side of philosophy, what de Lubac calls 'separated philosophy' (*la philosophie séparée*) had been diagnosed a generation earlier by Maurice Blondel (1861-1945) and Victor Delbos (1862-1916), commenting on the irreligion of the French intelligentsia (cf. Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, pp. 105-117). With the progressive weakening of Catholic culture, French philosophy had begun to value immanence as the sole criterion of rationality. It would countenance, in other words, only what is intrinsic to the structure of human reason or is logically necessitated by it. De Lubac would also refer to this disposition as 'immanentism' throughout his career: the belief that all of the truths necessary for human flourishing are found within the innate powers of human nature, and consequently truths revealed from beyond those powers are deemed to be illegitimate in principle (*Mystery of the Supernatural*, p. xxxv). For de Lubac, then, 'separated philosophy' is not an accident of intellectual history, but rather a construct. He is convinced that reason's natural inclination toward the transcendent had been reshaped in an anti-theological direction not by reason coming of age, but by a set of conscious decisions made by individual thinkers.⁴
- e. **'SEPARATED THEOLOGY' → 'SEPARATED PHILOSOPHY':** Yet according to de Lubac, atheist humanism could not have claimed exclusive dominion over human flourishing if theology hadn't abandoned its own claim in the first place. A 'separated philosophy' was only made possible by a corresponding 'separated theology' (*la théologie séparée*). A condition of this kind, which de Lubac referred to as 'extrinsicism', ensured that reflection on revealed dogmas was, in practice, disconnected from the most pressing questions facing modern men and women (*A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, pp. 37-8). Partly as a response to the crisis of Modernism and its tendency to conflate Revelation with reason, Catholic theologians isolated theological reflection in an effort to maintain its integrity. However, according to de Lubac, such a 'separated theology' was not in fact preserved from

³ For instance, the closing of Jesuit colleges in 1903, the expulsion of nearly twenty-thousand religious in 1904, and the repeal of the Napoleonic Concordat in 1905, forced de Lubac and other young Jesuits to pursue their novitiate in England.¹⁹ The France in which de Lubac was raised, in other words, was one in which the bitter fruits of the Revolution were still alive and well.

⁴ The greatest example of this anti-theological construction was undoubtedly the tradition of humanism that would occupy de Lubac's attention throughout the 1940s. In this context, 'humanism' refers to those movements which support the edification of the human being 'into the irreducible, perfectible bearer and guarantor of dignity, equality, and freedom.' As early as the 1910s, *humanisme* has become a major part of the social projects of the Third Republic. Yet it was in the previous century that such social projects were aligned with a vision of human flourishing that rejected any reliance upon God. As de Lubac notes, figures like Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Auguste Comte, and Friedrich Nietzsche were the architects of the kind of unbelief that now characterized twentieth-century Europe. Each gave rise to an atheism that is 'positive' in nature: one no longer content to formulate theoretical arguments against God's existence, but rather presumes to establish the conditions of a well-functioning human society. In France, for instance, Henri de Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte proposed elaborate social systems which mirrored the structure of Catholic institutions. Even Pierre Joseph Proudhon, who exerted a peculiar attraction for de Lubac, sought to realize the liberating kernel hidden within Catholic social teachings, rather than merely convince the world of God's demise. Atheism had managed, in short, to acquire the mantle of humanism, giving rise to the tradition de Lubac labels 'atheist humanism.'

confusion with the dominant currents of the culture. Unable to speak directly to such currents, it was all the more subject to ideological manipulation. Many of de Lubac's Thomist adversaries in the French clergy, for instance, had provided theological support for the Vichy regime and even the Communist Party; telling signs of their intellectual decadence in his eyes (*At the Service of the Church*, p. 144). Most importantly, an extrinsicist theology proved unable to demonstrate why Christian doctrines should appeal to human beings at all: 'this small-minded theology makes dogma into a kind of "superstructure" believing that, if dogma is to remain "supernatural", it must be "superficial" and that, by cutting it off from all human roots, it is making dogma all the more divine.' ('Apologetics and Theology,' in *Theological Fragments*, p. 91-104).

f. BRIEF SUMMARY: IN YOUR WORDS

III. DE LUBAC'S INITIAL RESPONSE— SURNATUREL: Études historiques (1946): INTRA-ECCLESIAL CRITIQUE AND EXTRA-ECCLESIAL RESPONSE

a. INTRA-ECCLESIAL CRITIQUE: CONTRA NEO-SCHOLASTICISM'S ANTHROPOLOGY OF 'PURE NATURE'

i. Historical Aspect:

ii. Conceptual/ Theological Aspect:

b. EXTRA-ECCLESIAL RESPONSE: ‘*DESIDERIUM NATURALE*’

IV. LATER, MORE DETAILED RESPONSES— *THE MYSTERY OF THE SUPERNATURAL*: NATURE AND GRACE AS “GIFT AND PERFECT GIFT”
[Let’s turn to the other handout, which is an outline of this text]

V. IMPLICATIONS OF THIS APPROACH

Whoever teaches must become "all things to all men" (1 Cor 9:22), to win everyone to Christ. . . . Above all, teachers must not imagine that a single kind of soul has been entrusted to them, and that consequently it is lawful to teach and form equally all the faithful in true piety with one and the same method! Let them realize that some are in Christ as newborn babes, others as adolescents, and still others as adults in full command of their powers. . . . Those who are called to the ministry of preaching must suit their words to the maturity and understanding of their hearers, as they hand on the teaching of the mysteries of faith and the rules of moral conduct.¹⁸

Above All—Charity

25 To conclude this Prologue, it is fitting to recall this pastoral principle stated by the *Roman Catechism*:

The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends. Whether something is proposed for belief, for hope or for action, the love of our Lord must always be made accessible, so that anyone can see that all the works of perfect Christian virtue spring from love and have no other objective than to arrive at love.¹⁹

18 *Roman Catechism*, Prologue, 11; cf. 1 Cor 9:22; 1 Pet 2:2.
19 *Roman Catechism*, Prologue, 10; cf. 1 Cor 13:8.

PART ONE

THE PROFESSION OF FAITH

SECTION ONE I BELIEVE—WE BELIEVE

26 We begin our profession of faith by saying: I believe or We believe. Before expounding the Church's faith, as confessed in the Creed, celebrated in the liturgy, and lived in observance of God's commandments and in prayer, we must first ask what "to believe" means. Faith is man's response to God, who reveals himself and gives himself to man, at the same time bringing man a superabundant light as he searches for the ultimate meaning of his life. Thus we shall consider first that search (*Chapter One*), then the divine Revelation by which God comes to meet man (*Chapter Two*), and finally the response of faith (*Chapter Three*).

CHAPTER ONE MAN'S CAPACITY FOR GOD

I. THE DESIRE FOR GOD

27 The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for: 355, 170 1718

The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists, it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator.¹

1 Vatican Council II, GS 19 § 1.

28 In many ways, throughout history down to the present day, men have given expression to their quest for God in their religious beliefs and behavior: in their prayers, sacrifices, rituals, meditations, and so forth. These forms of religious expression, despite the ambiguities they often bring with them, are so universal that one may well call man a *religious being*:

From one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "in him we live and move and have our being."²

29 But this "intimate and vital bond of man to God" (GS 19,1) can be forgotten, overlooked, or even explicitly rejected by man.³ Such attitudes can have different causes: revolt against evil in the world; religious ignorance or indifference; the cares and riches of this world; the scandal of bad example on the part of believers; currents of thought hostile to religion; finally, that attitude of sinful man which makes him hide from God out of fear and flee his call.⁴

30 "Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice."⁵ Although man can forget God or reject him, He never ceases to call every man to seek him, so as to find life and happiness. But this search for God demands of man every effort of intellect, a sound will, "an upright heart," as well as the witness of others who teach him to seek God.

You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised: great is your power and your wisdom is without measure. And man, so small a part of your creation, wants to praise you: this man, though clothed with mortality and bearing the evidence of sin and the proof that you withstand the proud. Despite everything, man, though but a small part of your creation, wants to praise you. You yourself encourage him to delight in your praise, for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.⁶

II. WAYS OF COMING TO KNOW GOD

31 Created in God's image and called to know and love him, the person who seeks God discovers certain ways of coming to

2 Acts 17:26-28.
3 GS 19 § 1.
4 Cf. GS 19-21; Mt 13:22; Gen 3:8-10; Jov 1:3.
5 Ps 103:5.
6 St. Augustine, *Conf.* 1, 1, 1: Pl. 32, 659-661.

know him. These are also called proofs for the existence of God, not in the sense of proofs in the natural sciences, but rather in the sense of "converging and convincing arguments," which allow us to attain certainty about the truth.

These "ways" of approaching God from creation have a twofold point of departure: the physical world and the human person.

32 The world: starting from movement, becoming, contingency, and the world's order and beauty, one can come to a knowledge of God as the origin and the end of the universe. 54, 337

As St. Paul says of the Gentiles: For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.⁷

And St. Augustine issues this challenge: Question the beauty of the earth, question the beauty of the sea, question the beauty of the air distending and diffusing itself, question the beauty of the sky . . . question all these realities. All respond: "See, we are beautiful." Their beauty is a profession [confession]. These beauties are subject to change. Who made them if not the Beautiful One [Palatium] who is not subject to change?⁸

33 The human person: With his openness to truth and beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness, man questions himself about God's existence. In all this he discerns signs of his spiritual soul. The soul, the "seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material,"⁹ can have its origin only in God. 2500, 1730 1776 1703 366

34 The world, and man, attest that they contain within themselves neither their first principle nor their final end, but rather that they participate in Being itself, which alone is without origin or end. Thus, in different ways, man can come to know that there exists a reality which is the first cause and final end of all things, a reality "that everyone calls 'God.'"¹⁰ 199

7 Rom 1:19-20; cf. Acts 14:15, 17; 17:27-28; Wis 13:1-9.
8 St. Augustine, *Sermo* 241, 2: Pl. 38, 1134.
9 GS 19 § 1; cf. 14 § 2.
10 St. Thomas Aquinas, *STa* I, 2, 3.