

The “Pure Nature” of Christology: Human Nature and *Gaudium et Spes* 22

THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE, O.P.
Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception
Dominican House of Studies
Washington, DC

“If you live today you breathe in nihilism. In or out of the Church, it’s the gas you breathe. . . . I think that the Church is the only thing that is going to make the terrible world we are coming to endurable. . . . [I]f you believe in the divinity of Christ, you have to cherish the world at the same time that you struggle to endure it. . . . It is easy to see that the moral sense has been bred out of certain sections of the population, like the wings have been bred off certain chickens to produce more white meat on them. This is a generation of wingless chickens, which I suppose is what Nietzsche meant when he said God was dead.”

—FLANNERY O’CONNOR
Letters to A. Autumn, 1955.

A Question Concerning the Christological Evaluation of What is Natural, and the Philosophical (Natural) Evaluation of Christ

THERE is arguably no statement from the Second Vatican Council as well known as paragraph 22 from *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. The paragraph contains these memorable lines: “In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear. . . . For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact *called to one and the same destiny*, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.” This statement in turn also alerts us to a fundamental theme of this conciliar document: that human fulfillment, or indeed, that ultimate human meaning, is

only made possible (and thereby unveiled to human consideration) in the historical mystery of Christ. It is a theme we find solemnly elaborated, again, in paragraph 41: "[T]he Church is entrusted with the task of opening up to man the mystery of God, who is the last end of man; in doing so it opens up to him the meaning of his own existence, the innermost truth about himself. The Church knows well that God alone, whom it serves, can satisfy the deepest cravings of the human heart, for the world and what it has to offer can never fully content it. . . . Whoever follows Christ the perfect man becomes himself more a man."

There are undoubtedly many possible theological interpretations of *Gaudium et Spes*, and of its presentation of the relations of human nature to the Christian mystery. But it seems unavoidable that any one of these must address in some way one of the most basic themes that the document indicates: the fulfillment of natural human aspirations that is made possible only in the light of Christ, by the grace of his mystery. For on the one hand this mystery is gracious, and is given from God as the gratuitous accomplishment of human history, in such a way that the principles and exigencies of man's natural searching would not arrive at this terminus by their own powers. (In this respect such grace is extrinsic in origin.) Simultaneously, however, this searching in the concrete historical life of man is undergirded by the energies of grace, in such a way that the nature of man is illuminated in particular by the mystery of Jesus, by his life, death, and resurrection from the dead, and can recognize in him the destiny of its own perfectibility. (In this sense, such fulfillment is intrinsic to the human community, as it comes from within the history of man, and answers to the hidden searching of the human heart.)

What is particular to the theology of the Council in this document, then, is the attempt to align a Christological conception of the fulfillment of human nature with a theological understanding of the meaning of history. The history of man and of human nature is itself teleologically ordained beyond itself into the life of God, and concretely this order is only fully manifest and fulfilled within the horizon of human history in the paschal mystery of Christ, and in the mystery of the Church to which it gives rise. In other words, the historical existence of man is only made meaningful (in an ultimate fashion) by means of recourse to the final teleological end of man, the vision of God, and this end is only made manifest in the eschatological recreation of all things in Christ. The historical existence of Christ as God and man in history, therefore, is the condition for the intelligibility of final meaning in human nature.

The question this raises, however, is: what is human nature, and how does a theological understanding of human nature relate to Christ's

humanity? Or, what is the universalized understanding of human nature that is made available to human thought in light of Christ? And secondly: what is the universalized conception of human nature that is available to human thought apart from or at least in distinction from Christology? *Gaudium et Spes* is, after all, replete with moral exhortations that are meant to inspire or appeal to the conscience of modern human beings of all backgrounds (including the non-Christian and the areligious) (§§2–3, 21, 41–43), exhortations concerning the nature of marriage and the family (§47), the dignity and rights of human life from conception to natural death (§51), the human political and economic practices of a just society (§§63–72; 73–76), the evil of total war and the basic good of political peace (§§78–82), the rational truth of equality among all human beings (§29), and so forth. In other words, the document is replete with appeal to principles of the natural law.¹ This appeal is not explicitly or overtly Christological, and in fact seems to presuppose in the recipients to whom it is addressed at least some genuine human capacity for rational receptivity (principles of synderesis and basic conceptions of the common good and of intrinsic evils that threaten the common good). Likewise the document examines at various intervals, in a form of classical Augustinian *apologia*, the moral frailties or human weaknesses that are experienced in the struggle to accomplish the natural good. In doing so it suggests a philosophical rationality to the theological claim that man finds himself in need of assistance if he is to accomplish the good that he wishes to do according to the inclinations of his better self, and not the evil that he does not wish to do.² Although there is a corresponding insistence on the need for the grace of God for the transformation of human action in the concrete sphere of history, this insistence simultaneously appeals to the concrete

¹ Explicit appeal to the concept of “natural law” appears three times in the document, in paragraphs 74, 79, and 89.

² *Gaudium et Spes*, §13: “What Revelation makes known to us is confirmed by our own experience. For when man looks into his own heart he finds that he is drawn towards what is wrong and sunk in many evils which cannot come from his good Creator.” See likewise *Gaudium et Spes*, §§37–38, 41. In a not dissimilar way, Aquinas claims that such arguments are (from a strictly rational point of view) only probable signs of a fallen human nature. See *Summa contra Gentiles* IV, c. 52: “[P]eccati originalis in humano genere probabiliter quaedam signa apparent.” Such arguments rightly underscore the experiential observation of ontological and moral disorder in human nature and civilization, but cannot demonstrate the rational necessity of a prior creation in a state of grace, or demonstrate that this disorder results as such from the prior loss of grace. The reason for this is that grace is itself a mystery that can be approached only in the light of supernatural faith, and is a principle that (de facto) originates from causes transcending the intrinsic powers of human nature and human reason.

nature or natural aspirations of human civilization, and promises that only a Christian polity can offer any ultimate resolution even to the historical, intra-temporal aspirations of human beings to the building up of a political common good.³ In short, the document proposes a very developed interpretation of what constitutes human nature, as intellectually distinguishable from the life of Christian grace, and yet simultaneously underscores that the healing, strengthening, and fulfillment of the former is only made possible by recourse to the latter. If nature is not *historically and existentially* separable from the mystery of God's gracious action in history, it is nevertheless distinguishable and can even be appealed to *precisely as a way toward understanding* the goodness of the mystery of life in Christ. Likewise, the mystery of Christ is seen to illumine one's understanding of the meaning of human nature.

In what follows, then, I would like to consider two areas of controversy surrounding the "harmony" of these two poles (natural aspirations answered by Christian life and Christological, graced fulfillment of nature) in the document. The two topics (which can be considered in the form of questions) are the following: Ought we to follow what has become a standard post-conciliar trend in rejecting a theological concept of "pure nature," so as to make sense of the theology of *Gaudium et spes* §22? How does this question relate to a corresponding articulation of a natural desire for God in the historical life of man under grace? Second, what does it mean to affirm the Christological fulfillment of human nature in history? What metaphysical presuppositions are present or absent in the claim, as regards the intrinsically historical character of nature as such? In each case, I will consider briefly a major interpreter of the Council's theology who wrote in the years just after the Council (Karl Rahner, and Marie-Dominique Chenu), and then offer critical reflections on their respective claims. In the last section of the essay, I appeal to Thomistic considerations on the relations of nature, grace, and Christology, thereby suggesting some principles for interpreting the conciliar teaching in what I take to be a theologically constructive and reasonable way. The basic argument of the essay is the following: With-

³ *Gaudium et Spes*, §38: "The Word of God, through whom all things were made, became man and dwelt among men: a perfect man, he entered world history, taking that history into himself and recapitulating it. He reveals to us that 'God is love' (1 Jn. 4:8) and at the same time teaches that the fundamental law of human perfection, and consequently of the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love. He assures those who trust in the charity of God that the way of love is open to all men and that the effort to establish a universal brotherhood will not be in vain."

out a properly understood concept of pure nature, it is impossible to claim (1) that moral evil (which is prevalent in human nature in its actual state) is in truth unnatural, and (2) that we can only become perfectly human (with a restored nature) by the grace of Christ. (3) What is true for human nature in general is the case in a unique way concerning Christ. To conceive of Christ as truly and perfectly human by contrast and comparison with ourselves requires a mediating concept of pure nature. Without such a concept we cannot rightly articulate why Christ is the fulfillment of what it means to be human.

Pure Nature and the Grace-Inspired Desire for God

In 1966, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, Karl Rahner writes in this way on the question of pure nature: "Our actual nature is *never* 'pure' nature. It is a nature installed in a supernatural order which man can never leave, even as a sinner and unbeliever. It is a nature which is continually being determined (which does not mean justified) by the supernatural grace of salvation offered to it."⁴ Rahner's remark could be (and has been) interpreted as a kind of gloss on that conciliar document, paragraph 22. Of course there are other interpretations of *Gaudium et Spes* than that which takes the supernatural-existential theory of Rahner as a starting point. Yet it is clear that this central intuition of Rahner's was potent, for he could employ it in a theologically consistent way to speak about a broad range of contemporary theological issues that also mirrored concerns of the Council: the possible presence of Christian grace in non-Christian persons and religious traditions,⁵ the

⁴ Karl Rahner, S.J., "Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations* IV, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 165–88, here 183.

⁵ See, for example, Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," in *Theological Investigations* VI: *Concerning Vatican Council II*, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (London and New York: Darton, Longman & Todd and Seabury, 1974), 390–98; 393–94: "Now that his thinking is illumined by the light of the revelation which has in fact been made in the historically accomplished reality of Christ, [man] can recognize this unapproachable height as that perfection of his own being which can be effected by God . . . that he may more fully recognize the fact that he is ordained to this mystery. . . . The believer will then also grasp that this absolute eminence is not an optional adjunct to his reality; that it is not given to him as the juridical and external demand of God's will for him, but that this self-communication by God offered to all and fulfilled in the highest way in Christ rather constitutes the goal of all creation and . . . that even before he freely takes up an attitude to it, it stamps and determines man's nature and lends it a character which we may call a 'supernatural existential'. A refusal of this offer would therefore not leave man in a state of pure unimpaired nature, but would bring him into contradiction with himself even in the sphere of his own being. . . . The expressly Christian revelation becomes the

communication of Trinitarian life to the anthropological subject in the secular world⁶ and amidst the mystery of death,⁷ and the notion of the Church's horizon as co-extensive with the mystery of grace as such, and therefore as implicitly present in all the baptized, and indeed, in some latent way, at least, as potentially co-extensive with all humanity.⁸

Within the context of this larger theological perspective, the concept of pure nature is clearly one that Rahner wishes to disavow (or significantly relativize) for theological use. Characterizing what he takes to be the "average" view of scholastic theology,⁹ he speaks of the scholastic theory of "pure nature" in the following terms:

[T]he orientation of 'nature' to grace is conceived of in as negative a way as possible. Grace is, it is true, an unsurpassable perfectioning of nature; God as the Lord of this nature can command man to submit to his *de facto* will and to be receptive to his grace, which directs man to a supernatural life and end. But of itself nature has only a '*potentia obedi-entialis*' to such an end, and this capacity is thought of as negatively as possible. It is no more than non-repugnance to such an elevation. Of itself, nature would find its perfection just as readily and harmoniously in its own proper realm, in a purely natural end, without an immediate intuition of God in the beatific vision. When it finds itself in immediate possession of itself—as part of the essence of the spirit, '*reditio completa in seipsum*'—it meets itself as though it were 'pure nature'. According to the well-known axiom . . . it is distinguished from pure nature only '*sicut spoliatus a nudo*'. And this 'state of being despoiled' is silently considered as a merely extrinsic element with regard to the absence of sanctifying grace. . . . [W]e do not usually think that the lack of grace might be different in the two cases, that of pure nature and that of fallen nature.¹⁰

At base, one concern here is that a modern, implicitly secularized vision of man has been advanced inadvertently within baroque Catholic theology by a concept of the normative or purely natural state of man, to which

explicit statement of the revelation of grace which man always experiences implicitly in the depths of his being."

⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury, 1978), 138–53.

⁷ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 273–74.

⁸ See Rahner, "Ideology and Christianity," in *Theological Investigations* VI, 43–58.

⁹ Rahner, "Nature and Grace," 165.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 168. A similar claim is made in *Theological Investigations* I: *God, Christ, Mary and Grace*, trans. Cornelius Ernst, O.P. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace," 297–318, esp. 298–301.

grace or the Christian life is attached only accidentally or extrinsically. Thus, as we find argued at greater length in de Lubac's *Surnaturel*, the late scholastic concept of pure nature in fact introduced into theology a false complacency with the secular, and was itself a theme that helped give rise to a post-Enlightenment thought-world that closes itself off within a horizon of immanence, over and against the world of grace. I will return to this claim below. However, it should also be stated here that Rahner is writing above all against the idea of a merely natural economy of concrete history, one in which *per impossibile* man might have existed in such a way that he was not—as concrete spirit-in-history—always, already wounded by sin and addressed by grace, always, already being moved or invited to participate in the work of redemption. This idea is countered by Rahner most especially in his own reworking of the Lubacian theme of a natural desire for God, promoted under the auspices of a historically precise interpretation of Aquinas, to whom Rahner attributes the idea of a *desiderium naturale in visionem beatificam*.¹¹ He takes up what is customarily seen to be a *via media* between the dialectic insistence of the transcendence of grace vis-a-vis human accomplishment in Barth's Reformed thought, and what he takes to be the overly reductive integration of natural ends and graced beatitude in the early work of de Lubac.¹² Between these two ranges on a spectrum, Rahner opts for a distinction between nature considered essentially and nature considered existentially, where the latter is the only "concrete and real" formulation of nature as we encounter it in salvation history.¹³ The human being exists concretely in a world in which the transcendental structure of the human spirit is both open naturally (*a priori*) to a supernatural accomplishment, *and* in its vital history in the world is always, already addressed by the grace of Christ.¹⁴ And it is just on this point that Rahner takes issue with the notion of a historically realized pure nature:

¹¹ Rahner, "Nature and Grace," 172. This attribution constitutes a regrettable inaccuracy. A contemporary search in the Index Thomisticus shows that the phrase does not exist in Aquinas's corpus.

¹² For Rahner's implicit but clear criticism of de Lubac, see Rahner, "Nature and Grace," 186.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 180: "If this is so then we may say that the supernatural transcendence is always present in every man who has reached the age of moral reason. That does not mean that he is justified. He may be a sinner and an unbeliever. But where and in so far as he has the concrete possibility of a morally good act, he is in fact constantly within the open horizon of transcendence towards the God of the supernatural life, whether his free act is in accord or in conflict with this prior state of his supernaturally elevated spiritual existence."

[I]t follows from the theological data already given that this *de facto* human nature, as it knows itself here, and in view of all its experiences (especially when this human experience is viewed in the light of the whole history of mankind, where alone its development is fully realized) cannot and need not be considered as the reflexion of that 'pure' nature which is distinguished in theology from everything supernatural. Our actual nature is *never* 'pure' nature. It is a nature installed in a supernatural order which man can never leave, even as a sinner and unbeliever. It is a nature which is continually being determined (which does not mean justified) by the supernatural grace of salvation offered to it.¹⁵

Yet it is also significant that after disputing the worthwhile pursuit of any concept of a merely natural end for human existence¹⁶ and even a " 'pure' philosophy of the essence of natural man,"¹⁷ Rahner does come to affirm unequivocally the utility and even necessity of a conception of pure nature as such. The concept is necessary insofar as it permits one to articulate against the backdrop of the historical experience of grace, the possibility of human existence without grace, and the simultaneous gratuity of the gift of the beatific vision as a mystery distinct from the gift of creation.¹⁸ Therefore, there is only an intrinsic disposition of the natural final end of the created human spirit (which is the open-ended natural desire to know God immediately) to the final end of man under grace (the beatific vision), and not an identity of the two. The former disposition is proportioned directly to the vision of God only by the later grace.¹⁹ This irreducible duality must be upheld even while this vision is

¹⁵ Rahner, "Nature and Grace," 182–83. The passage continues: "And these 'existentials' of man's concrete, 'historical' nature are not purely states of being beyond consciousness. They make themselves felt in the experience of man. By simple reflection on himself, in the light of natural reason, he cannot simply and clearly distinguish them from the natural spiritual activity which is the manifestation of his nature. But once he knows from revelation that there is an order of grace not due to him and not belonging to the necessary constitutives of his being, he becomes more cautious. He must allow for the fact that much of his concrete experience which he is almost automatically tempted to attribute to his 'nature' may perhaps in fact be the effect in him of what he must recognize as an unmerited grace in the light of theology."

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 186: "If it be granted, it follows that there can be no spirit without a transcendence open to the supernatural; but spirit is meaningful, without supernatural grace. Hence its fulfillment in grace cannot be demanded by its essence, though it is open for such grace."

also understood as the only possible authentic and final accomplishment of the spiritual life of man in our concrete history.

No doubt some would wish to criticize Rahner's theories as too timid a reform of prevalent scholastic views, and would instead wish to substitute the more robust critical theories of de Lubac, or for that matter von Balthasar, with a different strategy of interpretation as regards the seeming criticism of de Lubac's *Surnaturel* in *Humani Generis* (to which Rahner clearly wishes to show deference). Be that as it may, an important point to be made here is that there is something fundamentally problematic about the construal of the "average" scholastic notion of pure nature by Rahner. For what he is criticizing as the "average" position is in fact the historical position of Francisco Suarez in particular.²⁰ The problem with this characterization is that there were contrasting understandings of pure nature in the scholastic tradition, such that Suarez's account, far from being generally adopted, was not typical. Ironically, representative Dominican Thomistic scholastics articulated a concept of pure nature that was purposefully intended to contrast with the Suarezian account for reasons similar to those of Rahner, based upon a concrete theological realism concerning the divine economy. Rahner is in fact criticizing a traditional Jesuit position (one that in fact merits prudent theological consideration, rather than a cursory dismissal) while moving only incompletely toward a traditional Dominican one. This can be illustrated briefly by considering the teaching on pure nature of the archetypal Thomistic scholastic of Rahner's own epoch: that of the French Dominican Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange.

²⁰ See Francisco Suarez, S.J., *Opera Omnia* (Paris: Vivès Edition, 1857), Tome VII (De statibus humanae naturae), Prolegomenum IV, cap. VIII: "Utrum in statu naturae lapsae homo sit intrinsece debilior ad operandum bonum, quam esset in statu purae naturae?" Cap. IX: "Utrum in statu naturae lapsae debilior sit homo ad operandum, quam in pura natura, saltem ob causas extrinsecas?" Suarez's doctrine of pure nature is in fact quite subtle. He argues that the perfection of human operations in their natural structure, or formal perfection, is not altered by sin, so that a fallen man does not cease to be a human being, or become a different species of being than the one God created originally in his image. The theological interlocutors are those who claim nature is formally corrupted by original sin, so as to be shattered in its integrity. He concludes from this, however, that there must not be said to be any intrinsically less perfect natural tendency to perfection in one who is fallen than in one who would have existed in a state of pure nature. For God sustains fallen nature by his aids in ways that are similar to the ways he would act upon man in a state of pure nature. In an attempt to respond to what he takes to be the excessive metaphysical pessimism of the Reformers, he seems to overcompensate by excess, minimizing the intrinsic wounds to human nature resultant from original sin. (See, for instance, Suárez, *De gratia*, Tome VII, Prol. IV, cap. I, no. 2 [ed. Vivès, p. 179].)

Garrigou-Lagrange treats the question of pure nature in his commentary on Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, *prima pars*, in a 1943 work entitled *De Deo Trino et Creatore*.²¹ Here he raises the question in particular *de variis statibus humanae naturae relate ad gratiam* and in treating this question is indebted in particular to Rene Billuart, O.P. (1685–1757) from the latter's treatise *De Gratia*, distinction 2, articles 1–3, which was composed as an interpretation of Thomism in purposeful contrast to the positions of Baius and Jansenism as well as those of Suarez.²² So the reflections here should certainly count for authentically “Baroque Thomist,” or at least “average Dominican Thomist,” as distinct from other scholastic traditions or schools. Now what is noteworthy is that the concept of the various states of grace of created human nature is employed by this tradition just so as to reject any kind of equivalency of man's actual concrete historical nature (as both fallen and subject to the conditions of grace) with the notion of a pure nature or of a rationalistic naturalism that could be considered normative independently of Christian revelation.²³ The latter concept of nature in a “pure state” is necessary as a foil (an idea concern-

²¹ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Deo Trino et Creatore: Commentarius in Summam Theologicam S. Thomae (Ia q. xxvii–cxix)* (Taurini and Paris: Marietti and Desclée de Brouwer, 1943), 418–51, esp. 421–22.

²² Reacting against the position of Suarez, the Dominican tradition tended to affirm that the essential intrinsic dignity of the human being remains after sin, but that because of the absence of an extrinsic principle (the grace of God, which is necessarily “extrinsic,” at least insofar as it is not purely natural), an intrinsic wounding of human nature results, not from a defect in nature itself, but from the absence of grace, for which it was made. See Charles René Billuart, O.P., *Summa Sancti Thomae*, vol. 3 (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1880), *De Gratia*, dissertatio II, art. 3: “Utrum homo, in statu naturae lapsae nondum reparate, minores vires habeat ad bonum morale quam habuisset in statu naturae purae?”

²³ Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Deo Trino et Creatore*, 422. Garrigou-Lagrange goes on (in pp. 435–36) to show that the Dominican tradition continually opposed the notion of a pure nature created without being in a state of grace, or of a fallen nature that could be equated with a pure nature left to its own resources without grace: Capreolus, II *Sent.* d. 31, a. 3; Cajetan, *In ST* I–II, q. 83, a. 2, n. IX; Ferrariensis in *In ScG* IV, c. 52. This position was developed, as he shows, to argue against the Reformers, Baius, and Jansenism, that human nature was created in a state of *grace*, not merely natural perfection, but that after sin, this same nature remains structurally human, so that nature is not destroyed. On the other hand, the Dominicans argued against Suarez and some other Jesuit scholastics such as Molina, that fallen human nature is wounded *intrinsically* (in the exercise of its own powers and in the order between them) and can only be healed and fulfilled *intrinsically* by *grace*, in its concrete historical state. Consequently, there never has existed a state of pure nature, and the capacities of fallen human nature are more diminished (due to the historical rejection of grace and the concrete consequences of sin) than they would be had something like a state of pure nature ever existed.

ing something that did not exist but that could have existed) which one can contrast with the state of integral nature, a state pertaining to the original innocence of man's first parents. This original state of natural integrity was itself a result of the gift of grace, insofar as man was truly created *in and for* the life of grace, and this original state of grace had unique positive benefits upon the nature of man considered as such. Yet in Thomistic parlance, integral nature is not simply identical with the grace of original innocence (or "original justice"). For the notion of original innocence connotes among other things the genuinely supernatural gifts of divine life given to the first parents of man (supernatural friendship with God in faith, hope, and love, the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit) none of which can be acquired by human powers. Integral nature, by contrast, denotes human nature in its fullness considered as nature, yet due to a development made possible by the presence of grace and under grace. In effect, for Aquinas, in distinction from many of his medieval contemporaries, human nature was created originally in a state of grace and for the life of grace and this had positive benefits for nature as such, that would not have existed except for the privileged effects conferred by the state of original justice.²⁴

So, for example, "*Status naturae purae importat praecise naturam cum suis principiis intrinsecis et iis quae ex illis sequuntur seu ei debentur, sed absque gratia et donis praeternaturalibus. Unde homo in tali statu habuisset finem naturalem, media naturalia ad hunc finem consequendum, auxilia ordinis naturalis, sufficientia omnibus, efficacia quibusdam. Item habuisset legem naturalem; sed fuisset subditus ignorantiae, concupiscentiae, infirmitatibus, morti.*"²⁵ While a nature that was not created in grace

²⁴ Aquinas differs from his contemporaries (including St. Albert the Great) by insisting on the creation of man in a state of grace, and he developed this notion extensively in his mature theology. This is studied carefully by Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., "Nature and Grace in Thomas Aquinas," in *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., trans. Robert Williams, trans. revised by Matthew Levering (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2009), 155–90.

²⁵ Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Deo Trino et Creatore*, 421. There is no developed concept of "a state of pure nature" as such in Aquinas's writings, nor one of "praeternatural gifts" given to nature in its original integral state. But as Garrigou-Lagrange rightly notes (*ibid.*, 428–29), Aquinas gives implicit credence to these notions insofar as he considers the majority position of his time (that man was created prior to being in a state of grace, yet without sin) to be *metaphysically* possible, but theologically unfitting. II *Sent.* d. 31, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3: "Poterat Deus a principio quando hominem condidit, etiam alium hominem ex limo terrae formare, quem in conditione naturae suae relinqueret, ut scil. mortalis et passibilis esset et pugnam concupiscentiae ad rationem sentiens; in quo nihil humanae naturae derogaretur, quia hoc ex principiis

would not be free from defects of ignorance, potential subjection to concupiscence, physical infirmities, and the power of death, the *status naturae integrae* was not subject to these deficits *precisely because grace was not unrelated to but intimately present and active within its original constitution*. As Jean-Pierre Torrell has recently noted (and as Garrigou-Lagrange accurately comments on *Summa theologiae* I, q. 97, aa. 1 and 3) the notion of a nature that is “integral” is understood by Aquinas as *ontologically distinct and intellectually distinguishable* from the graces of that same nature, even as the aforementioned integrity is possible only in a state of original justice, and therefore as a reality *ontologically inseparable* from the participation in divine life.²⁶ Therefore Aquinas insists that one can analyze “what” human nature could do by its own natural powers (*per pura naturalia* or *in puris naturalibus*) in the state of original innocence as distinguishable from what could be done only under the inspiration and agency of grace.²⁷ This is not an artificial “abstraction” but rather a

naturae consequitur.” (See also *ScG* IV, c. 52.) Now this is simply the position of the later Thomistic tradition, and as Garrigou-Lagrange shows, Billuart appealed to this fundamental idea (*De gratia*, d. 31, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3) to show *against* Baius that man was created in a state of grace and not a state of pure nature, but in such a state of *integral* nature that this integrity was itself a result of *grace* (i.e., due to the presence of a gift from God), and not by a mere extension of intrinsic natural capacities. But the Thomistic tradition also employed the same idea (as the text goes on to explain in pp. 449ff.) simultaneously against the contrary excess in Jesuit thinkers that tended to ascribe to fallen human nature all the intrinsic capacities of a possible “state of pure nature.” In other words, the Thomists (from Cajetan to John of St. Thomas to Gonet) insisted that grace is so operative in the state of integral nature that the loss of grace affects the internal order of nature itself and leaves the soul no longer subject *naturally* to God, nor the body to the soul, nor the passions to reason. In this again, the Dominican commentorial tradition is simply reiterating the precise teaching of St. Thomas: see *Summa theologiae* I–II, q. 95, a. 1.

²⁶ See Torrell, “Nature and Grace in Thomas Aquinas,” here at 169–71. He cites Aquinas at *ST* I–II, q. 114, a. 2: “Two states of *man without grace* can be considered, as was said above. One state is of integral nature as it was in Adam before his sin; the other is of corrupt nature as it is in us before the reparation of grace.” It is of course essential to keep in mind that integral nature, for Aquinas, only existed when man was *in a state of grace*, prior to the fall. The point here, then, is not that integral nature exists in ontological separation from grace, but that it can attain certain goods by intrinsic natural powers, without immediate dependence upon grace for these activities.

²⁷ Torrell, “Nature and Grace in Thomas Aquinas,” 169, n. 38. St. Thomas, *Quodlibet* I, q. 4, a. 3 [8]: “[S]i homo fuit factus in gratia, ut ex uerbis Basilii et Augustini haberi potest, quaestio ista locum non habet: manifestum est enim quod existens in gratia, per caritatem diligit Deum supra se ipsum. Set, quia possibile fuit Deo ut hominem faceret in puris naturalibus, utile est considerare ad quantum se dilectio naturalis extendere possit.”

profound form of insight into the natural structure of the graced human being. The archetypal example concerns love: created, integral human nature was so constituted that human beings could love God above all things *naturally* by virtue of their intrinsic rational and voluntary powers. Were this not the case, then the higher, supernatural love of God given to man in grace would be something alien and purely extrinsic to natural, human love.²⁸ Yet even as human beings created in a state of grace could love God above all things naturally by their own powers, they were moved existentially also to love God above all things by grace in accordance with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. The natural love of God above all things (as an action of human reason and worship), and its graced exercise in subordination to the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, remained distinguishable dimensions of a given human action (the perfected worship of God by charity), but were also inseparable, just as nature is distinguishable from grace but completed and perfected by the latter.²⁹

Consequently the third state considered is the *status sanitatis et justitiae originalis*, which is not a state of being ontologically distinct from the previous, but is the same state considered with respect to the supernatural elevation of nature by grace into the life of intimate friendship with God. This two-fold consideration of the same existential reality (man in original innocence) is requisite so that one understands that the fall of man from original justice affects man intimately in two distinct ways: namely it affects *not only his possession of the life of divine grace, but also the integrity and harmony of his very nature*. Therefore the *status naturae lapsae nondum reparaatae* implies the loss of sanctifying grace, the infused virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but also the loss of the *gifts* of integrity, and is such that the fallen human being, far from being demoted to a state of pure nature (as Rahner rightly insists it is not), is now affected by the mysterious wounds of original sin that characterize this *status naturae lapsae*: ignorance in the intellect, malice in the will, concupiscence in the concupiscible sensitive appetite, weakness in the irascible sensitive

²⁸ ST I, q. 60, a. 5: "Since God is the universal good, and under this good both man and angel and all creatures are comprised, because every creature in regard to its entire being naturally belongs to God, it follows that from natural love angel and man alike love God before themselves and with a greater love. Otherwise, if either of them loved self more than God, it would follow that natural love would be perverse, and that it would not be perfected but destroyed by charity." (My own citations of the *Summa theologiae* in English are from *Summa Theologica*, 1920 English Province Dominican Translation [New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947].)

²⁹ See here, most importantly, Aquinas, ST I–II, q. 109, a. 3, a text I will return to below.

appetite.³⁰ The natural faculties and powers of the human person are affected internally by the absence of grace: reason is no longer subject *naturally* to God (as well as supernaturally), the body is no longer subject to the soul (death is a punishment of sin), and the passions are no longer subject to reason.³¹

Finally, in the “*status naturae reparaatae* . . . in quo est nunc justus a Christo redemptus,” there are the gifts of sanctifying grace, the infused virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but without the original gifts of integral nature (freedom from error, concupiscence, sickness, and death.) Not wholly unlike *Gaudium et spes* §39, Garrigou-Lagrange states: “*Natura non erit plene reparata nisi in Gloria, et rursus habebit integritatem cum resurrectione mortuorum.*”³² The *return* to the integrity of nature as such is possible for the concrete historical life of fallen man, only through redemption in Christ, and eschatologically, through the

³⁰ Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Deo Trino et Creatore*, 422; cf. *ST* I–II, qq. 83, 85.

³¹ *ST* I–II, q. 85, a. 1; See Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Deo Trino et Creatore*, 449–50: “Respondent multi thomistiae, qui hanc sententiam tenent: Facultates animae tanquam proprietates ejus, sicut ipsa essentia animae, non admittunt plus et minus, praesertim intellectus et voluntas, quae sunt ut spiritualis omnino incorruptibiles et inalterabiles; sic non sunt intrinsece diminutae. Sed homo in statu naturae lapsae nascitur ut *habitualmente et directe aversus a Deo fine ultimo supernaturali*, et ut *indirecte aversus a Deo fine ultimo naturali*; nam omne peccatum quod est directe contra legem supernaturalem est indirecte contra legem naturalem praecipientem obedire Deo quicquid jubeat. Adam peccando, sic avertit omnem suam posteritatem a Deo auctore naturae. In natura autem pura non fuisset haec aversio, quia non fuisset peccatum, et homo natus fuisset ut capax tum conversionis positivae ad Deum, tum aversionis a Deo. Unde fuisset magis habilis ad se convertendum ad illum quam ille qui nascitur aversus ab eo. Haec aversio sic pertinet ad *vulnus voluntatis*, quae, ut dicit S. Thomas I–II, q. 85, a. 3: ‘destituitur ordine ad bonum’. . . . Ex hoc sequitur *vulnus ignorantiae* in intellectu praesertim practico, quia unusquisque practice judicat secundum inclinationem suam, et si haec inclinatio non est recta, intellectus inclinatur ad errorem; pariter sequitur in appetitu sensitivo *vulnus infirmitatis* et *vulnus concupiscentiae*, quia facultates superiores sunt minus fortes ad dirigendum appetitum sensitivum ut oporteret. Unde homo lapsus comparatur homini in natura pura non solum ut nudatus nudo, sed ut vulneratus sano.” Note how the last line stands in contradiction to Rahner’s portrayal of the “average” scholastic position.

³² Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Deo Trino et Creatore*, 422. Compare *Gaudium et Spes*, §39: “When we have spread on earth the fruits of our nature and our enterprise—human dignity, brotherly communion, and freedom—according to the command of the Lord and in his Spirit, *we will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured*, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom. . . . Here on earth the kingdom is mysteriously present; when the Lord comes it will enter into its perfection.” (Emphasis added.)

glorification of the souls of human beings, and through the resurrection of their physical bodies from the dead. Interestingly, where Rahner was hesitant to speculate about the “natural” character of the resurrected body in grace (doubting whether one could claim such a thing),³³ Garrigou-Lagrange does not hesitate, particularly due to his Thomist notion of “integral nature” under grace, and the corresponding rejection of a historically concrete “state of pure nature.” It is arguably his thought which is closer to the true sense of *Gaudium et spes* §22!

Perhaps to this point, these seem like playful polemics, and in fact on one level they are. But they bear within them a deeper point. Not only is the reflection above meant to suggest that we ought to be careful to avoid historically superficial and rhetorically facile (i.e., lazy) shibboleths against the banshee of pure nature and the arcane plots of baroque Thomists. More to the point, the consideration of the divine economy requires a careful thinking through of the particular theological states of human nature (1) in dependence upon grace, (2) in secession from the life of grace, (3) in the still wounded yet partially redeemed economy of Christian grace, (4) in the eschaton and (5) in Christ himself. *None* of these states is simply reducible to another, and yet it is necessary to affirm the existence of a persisting human nature undergirding them all, albeit in different states. Were this not the case, consider some inevitable theological consequences: (1) Concerning original justice and the fall: we would be unable to consider man in the state of original innocence as truly and essentially human *or* we would be unable to consider the fallen human person as retaining his or her essentially human characteristics (as still being made in the image of God, despite the consequence of sin). (2) Concerning redemption: we would be unable to consider the redeemed human person as essentially human in continuity with the fallen human person and yet as more perfect *qua*

³³ Rahner, “Nature and Grace,” 184: “Let us ask, for instance, whether the resurrection of the body appertains to any form of the fulfillment of man as a spirit-person, or is it something that is only a consequence of grace. Or let us ask how we are to think of the fulfillment of pure nature in the concrete. Then we find ourselves faced with questions which could only be answered if one could make experiments on pure nature and draw up a concrete teleology on this basis.” As Garrigou-Lagrange’s own thought suggests, however, it is in fact quite the opposite. In a state of pure nature (which never existed) the resurrection would not be possible, as it could not be procured by the intrinsic principles of man, who is a spiritual animal, naturally subject to corruption. However, in the concrete Christian economy in which pure nature never existed, but only a nature of integral completeness, such preservation from death was normative, through an effect of the agency of grace, and consequently there is something unnatural about human death, and something profoundly “natural” about the Christian eschatological promise of resurrection.

human, that is to say, in the potencies of his or her nature. (3) Concerning Christology: we would be unable to understand the incarnate Lord, in his passion and resurrection, as bringing our human nature to an eschatological fulfillment, distinct in mode, yet identical in kind to our current state of being. Any understanding of Christ's redemption thereby would appear wholly alien (i.e., extrinsic) to our human historical condition (and the reason for his redemption of our human nature from "sin" would be unintelligible as well). Or contrastingly, we would be obliged to abolish all distinction of nature and grace, thus seeing our human historical condition as *necessarily bound up with Christ* such that human salvation in Christ simply would be co-extensive with our "natural" existence (a not-so-subtle version of *apokatastasis panton*). Nature in separation from Christ would be literally inconceivable. Either of the final alternatives, however, is theologically unfeasible and deeply unrealistic. The respect of the historically configured states of human nature by a complex set of theological-ontological reflections is the precursor and condition for a right understanding of the divine economy *in distinctly Christological terms*, terms that presuppose original integrity, the fallen state of man, the remainder of wounds of sin and death even in redeemed humanity, and the possibility of eternal loss as well as of eternal salvation. A correct consideration of the divine economy entails comparisons and contrasts which in turn presuppose a concept of human nature, one that applies to all human persons. Without this concept, such a consideration is impossible. But how then should we deal with the question of the historicity of our human nature and that of Christ, a reality to which *Gaudium et Spes* refers?

The Christological Historicization of Human Nature

If we turn, then, to the question of the Christological fulfillment of human nature, and of the historical perfection of humanity found in salvation history through Christ, a suggestive exegesis of *Gaudium et Spes* is offered by Marie-Dominique Chenu. In an essay published in 1966, shortly after the Council, Chenu claimed that the underlying question of the document was the relation of the Church to the world "and therefore underlying this the relation of nature and of grace, considered not in an abstract distinction, but in their concrete situation today."³⁴ The sub-

³⁴ Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., "Une Constitution Pastorale de l'Église," in *Peuple de Dieu dans le Monde* (Paris: Cerf, 1966), 11–34, here 12. The essay published here was originally the text of a conference given in Rome to the Dutch episcopacy at the beginning of the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council, in regard to the turbulent debate surrounding Schema XIII, from which the Pastoral Constitution was to emerge.

text, then, is also profoundly ecclesiological: how ought the Church to understand her mission in the modern world? Formulated positively, Chenu's claims in the essay are threefold.

First, there is no realm of nature that is not open to God's transcendent activity and that cannot be claimed "already, from above" for higher, divine ends. Consequently, there is no time or place in history that is not already open to the hidden higher purposes of grace, working within the aspirations of nature (which are in man *potentially* intrinsically open to a higher completion in Christ).³⁵

Second, man is by definition a historical being, subject to configurations of place and time, and in particular, open to the construction of his own destiny as man through the technological processes and social progress of culture.³⁶ Correspondingly, the mission of Christ is one of God *in his* human historicity, and the mission of the Church must be itself thoroughly centered on the needs of its historical age.

What [the pastoral constitution] is concerned with is not a contingent, and opportune "adaptation" of "eternal truths" but in the strong sense of the word, a "presence" today in act of the Gospel, by and in the Church. "An active presence in the construction of the world" . . . We are no longer dealing here with "solutions" *ex cathedra* taught from on high and from outside to the evolving problems of the world. . . . These are evangelical *stances* . . . insofar as grace completes nature within the [concrete] regime of the Incarnation, according to the rhythm of history.³⁷

Otherwise stated, God himself took on historical flesh to bring to fulfillment the dynamic, ever-developing history of man, and so likewise, doctrine must be rearticulated according to the inner living historical spirit of a given age, and in keeping with the adaptive evangelical life of the Church in history. Chenu is well known to have had a life-long

³⁵ In an adjoining essay in *Peuple de Dieu dans le Monde* (35–55), entitled "Les Signes des Temps," Chenu claims that there is a Thomistic basis for his interpretation of social development in *Gaudium et Spes* in the notion of "obediential potency."

³⁶ Chenu, "Une Constitution Pastorale de l'Église," 20–21: "We observe the upheavals of a scientific and technical civilization at the source of multiple and profound mutations which establish man—in both his body and spirit—in a new *condition*, by and in which the relation of man to the universe is intrinsically modified. . . . 'Nature becomes the humanized being of man' (K. Marx), and in humanizing nature, man becomes more human. Already old Aristotle noted in *techne* a human value. Today, *homo artifex* reveals himself apt as such to be fully human by the progress of this *techne*, even prior to the accomplishment in him of the *homo sapiens*." (Trans. from French are my own unless otherwise specified.)

³⁷ Chenu, "Une Constitution Pastorale de l'Église," 15.

(perennial!) concern with the topic of the cultural-historical and intrinsically temporally-situated character of human existence, culture, and ecclesial pronouncements. In his early work he proposes ways to make this viewpoint intelligible in Thomistic terms,³⁸ and in his later work (especially after the Council) he criticizes vehemently what he takes to be the ahistorical dogmatic essentialism of his former teacher, Garrigou-Lagrange.³⁹ Clearly in this text, then, Chenu insists that humanity and the Church are intrinsically historical entities subject to cultural reformulations over time, and sees this viewpoint as being vindicated or embraced by the Council, and by *Gaudium et Spes* in particular.

Third, then, the question is raised: where within man's historical horizon can one locate an authentic, universal measure of the value of human existence? Here Chenu practices a form of Christological "concentration" to respond to this anthropological question. It is in Christ alone that the full measure and scope of human becoming and of human possibilities are unveiled under grace. The process of transformation that is characteristic of the historical being of man finds its resolution only in Christ.

In fact, underlying the debate concerning perennial truth claims there is quite clearly an ambiguity in Chenu's own thought, one concerning the very notion of human nature as such, since he is engaged in a purposeful attempt to rethink the character of human existence in radically historical terms. What is it that serves as a common measure of the human, across all times? It seems that Christology is introduced in order to resolve the question. For example, it is noteworthy that he appeals to Christological existence not only in order to justify a historically and technologically evolutive vision of human becoming, but also to indicate the place where this becoming is resolved. Christ's deity is introduced into history such that the latter (understood now as *salvation* history) is seen as a process of divine-human encounter and communion.

³⁸ See Chenu, "Raison psychologique du développement du dogme," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 13 (1924): 44–51, where Chenu interprets Aquinas's theory of the Aristotelian agent intellect (knowledge by abstraction, in time, and by progressive synthetic judgments) as the anthropological basis for a historical "evolution of dogma." On page 49 he suggests that a historically situated determination of the content of faith is "essential" to the faith as such.

³⁹ Chenu, "Vérité évangélique et métaphysique wolffienne à Vatican II," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 57 (1973): 632–40. See on this aspect of Chenu's thought Henri Donneaud O.P., "La constitution dialectique de la théologie et de son histoire selon M. D. Chenu," *Revue Thomiste* 96 (1996): 41–66, and Fergus Kerr, O.P., *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 17–26.

[A] new light cast upon man today supports the rediscovery of the Incarnation as the human historicization of God. . . . Over and against an unconscious docetism—which has for a long time nourished itself from an abstract “spirituality” that is atemporal and acosmic—[renewed] interest in the concrete and historical humanity of Christ has led to a recognition of man as partaking of God in the history of the world. “God having become man, man is now the measure of all things.”⁴⁰

Chenu underscores that there exists no absolute identification of the earthly progress of civilization and of evangelization.⁴¹ Nevertheless, ultimately the two rejoin eschatologically. “Creation and the new creation are certainly distinct, but their [common] eschatological finality, already at work in time, forbids us from treating them as two juxtaposed realities in two different domains. . . .”⁴² Consequently, when the document *Gaudium et Spes* identifies loci of authentically teleologically oriented *natural* human developments, these latter are themselves potential indications of the work of Christ’s *grace* in history. “Wherever human intelligence engages not to the benefit of ideology but in the true service of man: in the construction of the world, of the values of socialization, in the political order of the state, of rights, of science and of morals, we can perceive there the indirect sign of the Lordship of Christ, even outside of the Church.”⁴³

It is evident that Chenu’s reflections in these pages raise numerous theological questions. Often his critics signal the questionable character of the alliance that is envisaged between technology, social “progress” broadly defined, and the Christological concentration of grace.⁴⁴ Is the

⁴⁰ Chenu, “Une Constitution Pastorale de l’Église,” 19. Chenu claims that the final quote is from Karl Barth, *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde* (1946), 36. See “Une Constitution,” 20, n. 4.

⁴¹ Chenu, “Une Constitution Pastorale de l’Église,” 26. “Neither nature nor history has the capacity to reveal the mystery of God. His Word comes ‘from above’ by the initiative of a gratuitous love, engaging itself in a loving communion [with humanity]. Grace is grace and profane history is not the source of salvation. Evangelization is of another order than civilization. To feed human beings is not in itself to save them, even if my salvation requires of me to feed them. The promotion of culture is not in any way equivalent to conversion to the faith.”

⁴² Chenu, “Une Constitution Pastorale de l’Église,” 30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See in this respect the very different evaluation of the moral ambivalency of technology in modern culture by Pope Benedict XVI, in *Caritas in Veritate*, chapter 6, notwithstanding, but rather in continuity with, the appeal to the “signs of the times,” in paragraph 18. See also Richard Schenk, O.P., “*Officium signa temporum perscrutandi*. New Encounters of Gospel and Culture in the Context of the New Evangelisation,” in *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times in Light of the Gospel* (Bibliotheca

grace of Christ not being appealed to here to lend support to a modern culture of technology that all too often in practice disregards true human dignity in favor of technological prowess and power? Is the kingdom of Christ being invoked here to underwrite an intra-human (French 1960s socialist) political vision fixated on the means of production, and the freedom from class alienation that can occur through the technological progress of civilization and a more just distribution of goods? Chenu presents claims to the contrary, insisting that the presence of these latter phenomena must in fact be subordinated to the higher and more ultimate ends of the life of grace and of the Gospel.⁴⁵ Be that as it may, the query is one worthy of careful consideration.

Here, however, it seems to me more germane to focus on the question of the perennial versus intrinsically temporal character of human nature, its relation to the progressive history of human culture, and of the relation of both these (human nature in its historical becoming) to the mystery of Christ. For although the historical character of humanity and the redemptive mystery of Christ are deeply interrelated, the claim that Christ could be the key to understanding the meaning of human nature precisely *because he is a historically unique individual* (and one in a culturally unique, biblical setting) is one that has received important criticisms in modernity, and it is not clear from the tenor of Chenu's proposals that he is prepared to meet these objections adequately.

First, we could ask with Immanuel Kant whether the historical-cultural particularity of Christ and his moral example is not the proof of an intrinsic limitation to his universal appeal, rather than a sign of the latter. Prior to Kant, Gotthold Lessing and other early Enlightenment historical-critical scholars argued coherently that there is not a guarantee of certitude given to human reason that the historical presentation of Christ offered by the early Christian movement is one that can be proven to be historically accurate. Consequently, its universal mandate is endangered, if we consider it binding upon human assent by virtue of the intrinsic principles of reason alone.⁴⁶ Following in this line of thinking, Kant is more

Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, CCVIII), ed. Johan Verstraeten (Leuven and Leuven/Paris/Dudley: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 2007), 167–203.

⁴⁵ See especially Chenu, "Une Constitution Pastorale de l'Église," 31.

⁴⁶ Gotthold Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 53–54: "If no historical truth can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths. That is: *accidental* [i.e., contingent] *truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason*. . . . We all believe that an Alexander lived who in a short time conquered almost all Asia. But who, on the basis of this belief, would risk anything of great, permanent worth, the loss of which would be

forceful. Insofar as the moral example of Christ is presented under the forms of a sensible-temporal narrative that implies a historical-cultural setting and particularity, *by that very fact* this moral example is not universal and cannot attain to the level of first principles that are embedded in transcendental reason, insofar as this reason touches upon practical action.⁴⁷ We see the echo of both these claims in the modern post-Christian *theology* (or *gnosis*) of the religious-pluralism movement, exemplified in a thinker like John Hick. While historical-critical scripture studies demonstrate the culturally limited sphere of the temporal consciousness of Jesus of Nazareth as a first-century Jew (whose identity is not readily assimilated to later dogmatic pronouncements of the Catholic tradition),⁴⁸

irreparable? . . . It is said: 'The Christ of whom on historical grounds you must allow that he raised the dead, that he himself rose from the dead, said himself that God has a Son of the same essence as himself and that he is this Son.' This would be excellent! if only it were not the case that it is not more than historically certain that Christ said this. If you press me still further and say: 'Oh yes! this is more than historically certain. For it is asserted by inspired historians who cannot make a mistake.' But, unfortunately, that also is only historically certain, that these historians were inspired and could not err. That, then, is the ugly, broad ditch which I cannot get across, however often and however earnestly I have tried to make the leap. If anyone can help me over it, let him do it, I beg him, I adjure him. He will deserve a divine reward from me."

⁴⁷ See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York and Toronto: St. Martin's and Macmillan, 1965), "The Idea of Pure Reason", section 1, A568/B596–A570/B598: "[H]uman reason contains not only ideas, but ideals also, which although they do not have, like the Platonic ideas, creative power, yet have *practical* power (as regulative principles), and form the basis of the possible perfection of certain *actions*. . . . But to attempt to realize the ideal in an example, that is, in the field of appearance, as, for instance, to depict the character of the perfectly wise man in a romance, is impracticable. There is indeed something absurd, and far from edifying, in such an attempt, inasmuch as the natural limitations, which are constantly doing violence to the completeness of the idea, make the illusion that is aimed at altogether impossible, and do cast suspicion on the good itself—the good that has its source in the idea—by giving it the air of being a mere fiction." That Kant seems to have the Gospel portrait of Christ in mind can be confirmed by consulting a parallel text: *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6:60–6:66.

⁴⁸ John Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 176: "Thus it was natural and intelligible both that Jesus, through whom men had found a decisive encounter with God and new and better life, should come to be hailed as son of God, and that later this poetry should have hardened into prose and escalated from a metaphorical son of God to a metaphysical God the Son, of the same substance as the Father within the triune Godhead. . . . But we should never forget that if the Christian gospel had moved east, into India, instead of west, into the Roman empire, Jesus'

so likewise an expanded contemporary understanding of the profundity of varied religious traditions suggests that the speculative as well as moral truth about Ultimate Reality can only be found in and through a comparative theology that disavows the uniqueness of Christianity and the uniquely saving role of Christ in history.⁴⁹

A theologically positive way of framing this objection is to ask what metaphysical criteria are required for the Christological concentration that Chenu, following *Gaudium et Spes*, wishes to defend? For it seems that we are invited to consider at least three senses in which human nature *in* Christ and in human history must be discernable, that is, under both (1) perennial aspects and (2) particular economic states (i.e., our nature as “typically” encountered in history in fallen and redeemed states), and (3) as particularly perfected in Christ and in the vision of the God-human presented by the Gospel. For if we cannot attain knowledge of nature as such, then we cannot compare the various economic states of this nature evaluatively. (In fact, we cannot even reflect on the *question* of whether behavior that theology deems “fallen” or “redeemed” has a basis in natural human structures and teleology). And likewise only if we can consider the distinctive state of Christ’s human nature in comparison with both our fallen human nature and the *essential and teleological exigencies of nature as such* can we think out reasonably *the natural perfection of Christ* in terms that are universally accessible (in philosophical as well as theological refutation of Kant, Lessing, and Hick). Only such a comparison of states of nature will allow us to develop both an appreciation and critique of other forms of non-Christian religiosity in terms that underscore the universality of Christian truth. A metaphysics of nature is needed in order to articulate the perfection of Christ in keeping with a sufficiently universalist moral teaching and eschatology that are applicable to all human persons.

Second, and perhaps more seriously, has Chenu not naively underestimated the degree to which his own theology most especially presupposes recourse to perennial principles of wisdom from which to evaluate the contingent circumstances of a given age? This is especially prevalent in his concept of world-construction as teleologically oriented, as guided by a

religious significance would probably have been expressed by hailing him within Hindu culture as a divine Avatar and within the Mahayana Buddhism which was then developing in India as a Bodhisattva, one who has attained to oneness with Ultimate Reality but remains in the human world out of compassion for mankind and to show others the way of life. These would have been the appropriate expressions with those cultures, of the same spiritual reality.”

⁴⁹ Cf. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

providential order into a supernatural beatitude that can in intrinsic fashion assume and accomplish the legitimate aspirations of human civilization. What sort of vision could be less explicitly metaphysical and therefore trans-historical, in structure? And if one refuses overt recourse to such perennial principles, how then might one reply to the post-structuralist tradition of reflection that was emerging in Chenu's own time, and which was to render any idea of a moral and political universal order superfluous or intrinsically problematic for many? Otherwise said, once we admit that human nature is radically conditioned (determined?) by its cultural-historical circumstances, then what is there to prevent us from accepting that truth constructs are historical-critical "all the way down,"⁵⁰ and that post-modern deconstructionist techniques are simply the most logically consistent outcome of any ontology that would present man as a being subject to becoming through history in all that he is? If this is the case, then a historical-ontology of man is "intrinsically disharmonious" with, or radically alien to, what must be considered *purely violent and extrinsic* Christian ends that claim for man a universal and transcendent teleology. This was, at any rate, the thinking of Friedrich Nietzsche, who perceived in the Christian pretext to historical universalism a *purely* historically situational and individually interested sacerdotal exercise of the will-to-power.⁵¹ This supposedly universal ethic of mercy was

⁵⁰ As Antonio Gramsci claimed in developing a radicalized interpretation of Marx's anthropology. Cf. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), and the analysis by Renate Holub, *Antonio Gramsci: Beyond Marxism and Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992). Something akin ought to have been familiar to Chenu via the Frankfurt school, for example in Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, first published in 1947.

⁵¹ "All that has been done on earth against 'the noble,' 'the powerful,' 'the masters,' 'the rulers,' fades into nothing compared with what the *Jews* have done against them; the Jews, that priestly people, who in opposing their enemies and conquerors were ultimately satisfied with nothing less than a radical revaluation of their enemies' values, that is to say, an act of the *most spiritual vengeance*. For this alone was appropriate to a priestly people, the people embodying the most deeply repressed priestly vengefulness. It was the Jews who with awe-inspiring consistency dared to invert the aristocratic value equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God) . . . saying 'the wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good.' . . . [W]ith the Jews there begins *the slave revolt in morality*: that revolt . . . which we no longer see because it—has been victorious." Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* I, 7, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1989), 33–34. The central issue here is not the question of Nietzsche's emotional prejudice vis-à-vis the Jewish people, but his intellectually arguable claim that their morality should not carry universal import, and stems at base from a particular cultural self-interest, underscoring the

a pretext stemming genealogically from the ancient Jewish experience of political impotence, intensified subsequently by the teaching of Jesus as an inauthentic response to the problem of violence.⁵² Or to formulate the objection (if possible) in a more pointed way (because less distinctly fixated on Christianity), a simple citation from that most ingenious of twentieth-century “deconstructionists” should suffice:

[My] essential task was to *free the history of thought from its subjection to transcendence*. . . . My aim was to analyze this history, in the *discontinuity that no teleology would reduce in advance*; to map it in a dispersion that no pre-established horizon would embrace; to allow it to be deployed in an anonymity on which *no transcendental constitution would impose the form of the subject*; to open it up to a temporality that would not promise the return of any dawn. My aim was to cleanse it of all transcendental narcissism. . . . It had to be shown that the history of thought could not have this role of revealing the transcendental moment that rational mechanics has not possessed since Kant, mathematical idealities since Husserl, and the meanings of the perceived world since Merleau-Ponty—despite the efforts that had been made to find it there.⁵³

In other words, is Chenu’s transcendental world order not simply another manifestation of the condescending Christian triumphalism he elsewhere so disparages? And should we not wonder if he could be accused himself by any logically consistent de-constructionist of “narratives of civilization,” of attempting to subject history to the transcendental narcissism of a Christian utopianism? And in this is he not simply the more subtle arbiter of the will to power that is less concealed in the older, triumphalistic ecclesiological dogmatism of the Vatican I epoch (and its scholastic defenders)? Or so the argument might run.

Again, framed positively, the argument being underscored here is that Catholic interpreters of *Gaudium et Spes* cannot avoid a self-consciously and overt metaphysical moment of explanation within theology that responds to the critique of the post-modern anti-metaphysician. The

yet more universal will-to-power that inhabited them and every other ancient and modern people.

⁵² “This Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate gospel of love, this ‘Redeemer’ who brought blessedness and victory to the poor, the sick, and the sinners—was he not this seduction in its most uncanny and irresistible form, a seduction and a bypath to precisely those Jewish values and new ideals?” Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* I, 8, p. 35. This idea is of course developed at greater length as the central argument of Nietzsche’s *Anti-Christ*.

⁵³ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 203. (Emphasis added.)

latter would see any attempt to assign prescriptive ends to human civilization as nothing less than an overt or covert assault on human freedom through an ultimately arbitrary attempt at world-construal that is purely contingent (and therefore ineffectual). But a response to such a claim entails an articulation of the epistemic basis for a philosophical understanding of human nature. Unless some natural knowledge of essences is possible, then Christian discourse is inevitably reduced to being a mere meta-narrative among others, a tribal rhetoric that is not subject to laws of universal verification in any respect, and that cannot in turn make an appeal to human nature (or educate Christians or non-Christians as to what is proper to nature and to the natural law) *even from within the domain of Christology and even in light of Christ*. To say the very least, this would entail, for Catholic theologians, the acceptance of a seeming caesura running right down the middle of *Gaudium et Spes*, separating the Christological hermeneutic of salvation history irrevocably from the multiple appeals to the natural law, and to the profound moral truths that can be attained by human reason. In fact, the two might even be seen (as they perhaps are by some Barthian interpreters) as mutually exclusive. Correspondingly, the same stance would necessarily undermine the theme in the document of a rational *apologia* which attempts to suggest that life in Christ is more perfectly human and that in fact it is only possible for a culture to be fully human if it is liberated from the denaturalizing irresolution of its own inner tensions (that are the consequence of sin) by the grace of Christ.

Christological fulfillment of history, then, requires the Christological accomplishment of human nature and of nature's various cultures, and therefore establishes a perennial standard of what is human. The apprehension of such a standard must exist *at least as regards Christ*: what does it mean to say that he is especially human? To announce that God has become *human*, after all, requires in us some intrinsic natural knowledge of what humanity is, and the realization that he fulfills some of the *natural* tendencies or aspirations of the human heart that cannot find completion concretely without him or apart from him. If there is not metaphysically perennial, essential knowledge of the human person and its nature, then the message of Christ as the historical fulfillment of human existence is a message *purely extrinsic* to human culture, a grace that is present to nature "as if from without, lacking a relation to nature and to history . . . as if the Kingdom of God was set on top of the world, like the scaffolding of a future city."⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Chenu, "Les Signs des Temps," 46.

What, then, about nature, and how ought we to understand the role of a concept of nature in the theological claim that Christ is the fulfillment of all that is human? In the next and final section of this essay, I would like to consider these questions briefly from a Thomistic point of view.

Thomistic Reflections: Integral Philosophical Anthropology as a Necessary Dimension of Christology

Karl Rahner famously commented that the Council of Chalcedon could be seen not only as the reference point for the Church's acquisition of a set of principles by which to discern the parameters of orthodox Christology, but also as a starting point for an ongoing and ever-developing subject matter in theology.⁵⁵ A different analogy—and one perhaps more apt for the interpretation of *Gaudium et Spes*—could be drawn from the Council of Ephesus. For if Ephesus identified the hypostatic union as a basic first principle of Christological reflection concerning the God-man (i.e., the recognition of the *unity* of the person of Christ) then Chalcedon was the proper qualification of this fundamental principle: that within the person of the incarnate Son there exists the distinction without separation of the two *natures*. The passage was made from unity to distinction of natures in unity. Similarly, what *Gaudium et Spes* and its primitive interpreters such as Rahner and Chenu rightly underscore is a principle of unity: the existence of humanity within a unique historical economy of grace, such that there exists a concrete phenomenological unity of grace and nature, in which grace precedes and can make use of the diverse historical states of man (as innocent, fallen, and redeemed), his natural abilities and his culture, inviting human beings in varied ways into the life of God, through participation in the redemptive history of Christ. There is not a pure exteriority between grace and nature *in exercitu*, or a “history before grace.” Likewise, there is a uniquely graced fulfillment of the teleological aspirations of human nature made possible through the designs of God in human history that cannot be found apart from Christ, while Christ is the concrete exemplar or eschatological point of concentration of the human as such. In him the true nature of man and the teleological fulfillment of human desire and of human culture is made manifest in a determinate and final way.

Nevertheless, if this principle of the concrete unity of nature and grace is important to recognize, the distinction of nature and grace is no less important and has been significantly underemphasized in recent times. This is particularly the case when nature is deemed something unintelligible in itself (apart from Christ) or when grace is simply rendered synonymous

⁵⁵ Karl Rahner, “Current Problems in Christology,” in *Theological Investigations* I, 150.

with history, such that the distinction between the work of salvation and the existential life of human persons is all but eclipsed.⁵⁶ Either error, however, renders unintelligible the claim that Christ is the fulfillment of natural human aspirations, and ironically makes Christological truth claims something imposed upon human philosophical traditions *arbitrarily*, that is to say, in a way that is purely extrinsic to them.⁵⁷ I have suggested above that a rational, philosophical concept of nature is requisite in order to articulate in sufficiently universal terms the distinctly theological claim that Christ is the historical fulfillment and exemplar of human existence. (That this concept of nature might at times be especially well elaborated within the context of Christian culture and even within the context of theological reflection—as in the case of St. Augustine or the high Scholastics—is of significant importance, but it is incidental to my argument.) I have also claimed that a notion of “pure nature” (of nature possibly existing as neither originally graced nor as fallen) is the logical corollary of any claim that human nature was originally graced, is indeed in a fallen state, and has been redeemed by Christ, in whom human nature has attained (by grace) an acutely particular perfection, even while Christ is truly human like us. In the remainder of this essay, then, I would like briefly to address a specific and limited but important aspect of each of these claims. The first concerns the indispensability of a notion of nature as a condition for the meaningful narrative articulation of historical change, and of teleological orientation. The second concerns the indispensability of a notion of pure nature for the articulation of one of the key Christological affirmations of *Gaudium et Spes* 22: the claim that “it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear.”

Nature as the Indispensable Concept Underlying All Meaningful Narrative History

Chenu claims that a theology that bases itself on what it presumes to be perennial principles runs the risk of ignoring its cultural circumstances

⁵⁶ It seems that John Milbank wishes to take his theological interpretation of grace-nature relations in this direction. Cf. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). The idea is clearly stated, for instance, on page 15, as programmatic.

⁵⁷ This would not be the judgment of Blondel, clearly, in his *L'Action*, a work that sought to argue just the opposite: to provide a rationale from within philosophical scrutiny of the ascending desires of the human will for the uniquely supernatural vision of God as the final end of man. However, the risk of this perspective is that it in fact manages surreptitiously to render natural desires formally unintelligible apart from grace, or to render claims about grace wholly alien to rival philosophical accounts of the meaningfulness of human willing.

and of failing to construct a theological response to the signs and needs of a given time and locus. Appeals to the perennial are deemed timeless but therefore abstract as contrasted with the temporal becoming of historical and teleological change, circumstances that must be taken into account for a realistic presentation of the Gospel. However, it is reasonable in this context to raise the question of which form of appeal to perennial principles of theology and of human nature one might be referring to. For it was against a Platonic conception of timeless forms which Aristotle considered all too abstract that he was to conceive of progressive (historical) knowledge of *an enduring human nature* that one discovers experientially in and *through* time.⁵⁸ And it was in consideration of Parmenides's denial of the existence of multiplicity and change that he would insist on the possibility of a universal *science* of change that could discover the explanatory principles of physical beings not beyond or outside of, but in and through, their formal and teleological developments in time (because change occurs in an intelligible subject and in relation to intelligible ends or the non-realization of these ends).⁵⁹ Most relevant to the point at hand, Aristotle argued convincingly in *Metaphysics* IV against the sophist tradition that the condition of possibility for the logical articulation of change is in fact knowledge of unchanging ontological structural principles in realities that are being described.⁶⁰ Simply put, coherent narratives of change of any kind *just to be logically coherent in themselves* as forms of discourse must evaluate change in terms of stable forms of identity (essences) that undergo or are the

⁵⁸ See, for example, the critique of the Platonic theory of the Forms as an account of natural substances in *Metaphysics* VII, 15–16, culminating in the identification of the substance in VII, 17 as the formal determination of the material individual, abiding in it, and discernable to human thought in and through its history and development. An analogous point is made in *Metaphysics* XII, 5: 1071a18–23: “The primary principles of all things are the actual primary ‘this’ [the concrete singular existent] and another thing that exists potentially [latent in the matter of what already exists]. The universal causes, then, of which we spoke do not *exist* [i.e., as separated forms]. For the individual is the source of the *individuals*. For while man is the cause of man universally, there is no universal man; but Peleus is the cause of Achilles, and your father of you, and this particular *b* of this particular *ba*, though *b* in general is the cause of *ba* taken without qualification.” Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁵⁹ This is one of the central arguments of Aristotle's *Physics* I, 1–8, and leads to affirmations of the formal and final causes of material change in II, 1. See especially 184b15–186a3; 188a13–b26.

⁶⁰ See *Metaphysics* IV, 5–8, especially 1010a1–36; 1011a3–1011b23. He also raises this point in *Physics* I, 2, 185a1ff. in response to Parmenides's denial of the real multiplicity of beings in the world and of contingent change within these beings.

subjects of history, and in terms of teleological grammar. The latter ideas are an intrinsic component of the articulation not only of purposeful development (and therefore of any possible narrative *reevaluation* of values). They are also necessary even for a description of efficient causality, insofar as decisive historical factors that alter the narrative circumstances of a reality point back themselves to an identifiably ordered (i.e., teleological) action. Form, efficiency, teleology and material alterability: these are basic principles of thought, and therefore are also inevitable conceptual properties of any possible discourse.

Behind the meaningful use of language, then, there is the implicit assertion of an ontological foundation expressed by the principle of identity ("each thing we experience has a given unity and essence"). An acknowledgement of this truth leads to the admission of a dependence of the science of logic upon the truths of ontology.⁶¹ As Aquinas points out in commenting on Aristotle, the sophist (a not-so-distant relative of the present day post-structuralist) can only avoid admitting this by making two artificial and ultimately irrational reductions: one of all ontology to mere logic, the second of the study of logic from being either theoretical or practical to being practical only (for a political use).⁶² Indeed, the practical study of logic then becomes that of dialectics *in view of power*, of the use

⁶¹ Aristotle himself, in writing against the sophists, sees that behind the realistic presuppositions of language there lies not only the reality of being, but also ultimately the question of God, whose pure actuality and immutability is the ultimate cause of the relative stability amidst change of the physical world: *Metaphysics* IV, 8, 1012b23–32: "Evidently again those who say all things are at rest are not right nor are those who say all things are in movement. For if all things are at rest, the same statements will always be true and the same always false, but obviously they are not; for he who makes a statement himself at one time was not and again will not be. And if all things are in motion, nothing will be true; everything therefore will be false. But it has been shown that this is impossible. Again, it must be that which is that changes; for change is from something to something. But again it is not the case that all things are at rest and in motion *sometimes*, and nothing *for ever*; for there is something which always moves the things that are in motion, and the first mover must itself be unmoved."

⁶² Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, IV, lec. 4, 570–77. More accurately, sophist theoretics studies the logical structure of argumentation in view of merely practical use of argument: a mimicry of it or an unmasking of it as a discourse about social power. Nevertheless, sophists have less real effect than philosophers, Aquinas notes, in that their discourse fails to truly convict the intellect through demonstrative reasoning, in contrast to philosophical science. "The philosopher differs from the dialectician in power, because the consideration of the philosopher is more efficacious than that of the dialectician. For the philosopher proceeds demonstratively in dealing with the common attributes mentioned above, and thus it is proper to him to have scientific knowledge of these attributes. And he actually knows them

of rhetoric as a dialectical art to manipulate the intellectual persuasions of one's auditors and one's culture, or to seek to analyze the political and cultural uses of dialectic by others. If ontology is merely the logical manipulation of the culture of thought, Aristotle continues, then indeed all truth is merely appearance, and has no ontological signification.⁶³ But in this case, all propositions can be equally true or untrue (including contradictory ones), and so there is the possibility of affirming a non-finite number of truths simultaneously, or (to speak in ontological terms) of affirming an infinite regression of simultaneous causes.⁶⁴ If this is the case, then we must abandon the axiom of non-contradiction, which, as Aristotle observed, is what sophists are willing to concede (and which many deconstructionists

with certitude, for certain or scientific knowledge is the effect of demonstration. The dialectician, however, proceeds to treat all of the above-mentioned common attributes from probable premises, and thus he does not acquire scientific knowledge of them but a kind of opinion. The reason for this difference is that there are two kinds of beings: beings of reason and real beings. The expression *being of reason* is applied properly to those notions which reason derives from the objects it considers, for example, the notions of genus, species and the like, which are not found in reality but are a natural result of the consideration of reason. And this kind of being, i.e., being of reason, constitutes the proper subject of logic. But intellectual conceptions of this kind are equal in extension to real beings, because all real beings fall under the consideration of reason. Hence the subject of logic extends to all things to which the expression *real being* is applied. His conclusion is, then, that the subject of logic is equal in extension to the subject of philosophy, which is real being. Now the philosopher proceeds from the principles of this kind of being to prove the things that have to be considered about the common accidents of this kind of being. But the dialectician proceeds to consider them from the conceptions of reason, which are extrinsic to reality. Hence it is said that dialectics is in search of knowledge, because in searching it is proper to proceed from extrinsic principles. But the philosopher differs from the sophist 'in the choice,' i.e., in the selection or willing, or in the desire, of a way of life. For the philosopher and sophist direct their life and actions to different things. The philosopher directs his to knowing the truth, whereas the sophist directs his so as to appear to know what he does not." *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. John P. Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Press), 574–75.

⁶³ *Metaphysics* IV, 5, 1009a6–1010a15.

⁶⁴ *Metaphysics* IV, 8, 1012b14–22: "Further, all such arguments are exposed to the often-expressed objection, that they destroy themselves. For he who says that everything is true makes the statement contrary to his own also true, so that his own is not true (for the contrary statement denies that it is true), while he who says everything is false makes himself also false.—And if the former person excepts the contrary statement, saying it alone is not true, while the latter excepts his own as being alone not false, none the less they are driven to postulate the truth or falsehood of an infinite number of statements; for that which says the true statement is true, is true, and this process will go on to infinity."

consider inevitable).⁶⁵ This means, in turn, that there can be no meaningful articulation of narrative history or teleology, since a determination and its contradictory are simultaneously equally true or untrue. To attempt to narrate even a history of that which one wishes to deconstruct is already to attempt to identify at least a formally intelligible entity with determination and ends (the deconstructive narrative of a person itself). Language that is anti-metaphysical all the way down, then, is incapable even of this.⁶⁶ What is most important to grasp from Aristotle's analysis of sophism is not only that the underlying logic of the sophist is incoherent or contradictory as soon as he begins to analyze (though indeed this is the case), but even more fundamentally, this: that language operating without reference to natures simply ceases to mean anything at all.⁶⁷

Aristotle's lucid argumentation implies by contrast (and in differentiation from some of Chenu's statements) that *if* one is committed to a narrative history of dynamic development, change in view of progress and of fulfillment in some overarching teleological mode, then one *is* committed to a concept of perennial nature, and indeed, we might even add, to an understanding of human nature that employs the classical four causes (formal, material, efficient, and final). For there must be at least *some concept of natural teleological ends* in human beings based upon *what* human beings are that can be identified rationally as a precondition for any narrative of human teleology, *theological or otherwise*. Were this not the case, the notion of teleological order that is presented in uniquely theological definitions with respect to the Christological and graced "fulfillment" of human nature would have to be unintelligible to one's natural understanding of man (and therefore purely extrinsic).⁶⁸ But this is to say that the claims of *Gaudium et*

⁶⁵ *Metaphysics* IV, 8 1012a29–1012b31.

⁶⁶ Cf. on this the germane reflections of Alasdair MacIntyre, on the thought of Michael Foucault: Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1990), 196–215.

⁶⁷ *Metaphysics* IV, 4, 1010a10–14: "It was this belief that blossomed into the most extreme of the views above mentioned, that of the professed Hericliteans, such as was held by Cratylus, who finally did not think it right to say anything but only moved his finger, and criticized Heraclitus for saying that it is impossible to step twice into the same river; for *he* thought one could not do it even once." *Metaphysics* IV, 4, 1006a12–15: "We can, however, demonstrate negatively even that this view is impossible, if our opponent will only say something; and if he says nothing, it is absurd to attempt to reason with one who will not reason about anything, in so far as he refuses to reason. For such a man, as such, is seen already to be no better than a mere plant."

⁶⁸ This is what I take to be the note of truth in Le Guillou's appreciative critique of the early work of de Lubac on grace and nature. See Marie-Joseph Le Guillou, O.P., "Surnaturel," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 34 (1950): 226–43,

spes §22 concerning the Christological fulfillment of human history would appear necessarily as something purely extrinsic to natural, human action.⁶⁹

One must speak therefore of natural ends, of a hierarchy of ends (for there are a diversity of natural goods), and indeed of a supreme natural end (the natural desire for God) that is open to the higher end of grace such that the latter is not understood as something violent to or exterior to the former. It is possible in this way to affirm that the grace of divine life can assume integrally (and not extrinsically) all of the former natural ends of man, and most especially his ultimate natural final end, while remaining extrinsic *in its originating causes* (from God!) precisely *as grace*. This is the classical Thomistic perspective of the two-fold final end of man as imperfect (in nature) and perfect (in grace), and as a single phenomenological unity. Man is created with his rational, natural desire for God *so that* he is capable of election to the life of grace, just as one final end is created for the sake of the other. Understood in this way the teleological dimensions of man, as natural and supernatural, stand in existential ordination to one another as intrinsically related.⁷⁰ Man is naturally open to intrinsic fulfillment from a gratuitous, supernatural source. This view was articulated

and the helpful study of Henri Donneaud, O.P., “*Surnaturel* through the Fine-Tooth Comb of Traditional Thomism,” in *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought*, especially 51–55.

⁶⁹ Or, one’s concept of nature could be merely assimilated to the dynamic history of grace so that nature simply is always, already graced in view of a trans-philosophical end that renders philosophy as a subject of study (and natural reason as such) unintelligible as notions. Thus human reason is simply a dimension of a pan-Christian immanentism, arguably a form of what Erich Przywara called “theopanism” (see also Garrigou-Lagrange’s contemporaneous criticisms of pantheism), in which humanity simply is always, already the pure expression of God’s divine life outside of himself, from which he is ontologically inseparable, so that the two are determined mutually and theoretically within a common history. On Przywara’s notion of theopanism, see John R. Betz, “Erich Przywara and Karl Barth: On the *Analogia Entis* as a Formal Principle of Catholic Theology” and David Bentley Hart, “The Destiny of Christian Metaphysics: Reflections on the *Analogia Entis*,” in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Anti-Christ or Wisdom of God?* ed. Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

⁷⁰ See on this Aquinas, *Expos. de Trin.*, q. 6, a. 4, ad 3; *ScG* I, c. 2; *ST* I–II, q. 3, a. 6, and the analysis by Rudi Te Velde, *Aquinas on God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 155–60. J. M. Ramirez, O.P., explains it in this sense: “Quando finis ultimus naturalis subordinatur fini ultimo supernaturali, idem homo potest simul utrumque finem intendere et habere; quando vero finis ultimus naturalis non subordinatur fini ultimo supernaturali, sed ei repugnat seu contrariatur, non potest idem homo simul utrumque habere finem neque intendere efficaciter. . . . Quando finis ultimus naturalis subordinatur fini ultimo supernaturali, non dantur duo fines ultimi simpliciter totales et adaequati, sed unus tantum finis ultimus simpliciter,

plausibly by persons like Sylvester of Ferrara, John of St. Thomas, and, more recently, Jacques Maritain, J. M. Ramirez, and Marie-Joseph Le Guillou. It certainly can be argued to have the most firm textual mandate from within the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas himself.⁷¹

What, however, about the effects of sin? Do they not eradicate the basic capacity of the human person to be naturally orientated toward God, and in this case is it not precisely grace that is necessary in order to render human beings apt to perceive in any way a final and therefore ultimately meaningful teleological end that is characteristic of a truly fulfilled human existence? Aquinas offers a qualified interpretation of the damage rendered by the effects of the fall upon human nature.⁷² The gifts of grace are destroyed in man by original sin.⁷³ The *natural* capacity to *effectively* love God above all things is itself also undermined (which is of central importance for the question under consideration).⁷⁴ Human

qui est finis supernaturalis; nam finis subordinatus alteri, eo ipso desinit esse ultimus finis simpliciter. Atqui idem homo potest simul duos vel plures fines velle et intendere quando ordinatur ad unum ultimum, quem primo et per se intendit. . . . Ergo item homo potest simul velle et intendere finem ultimum naturalem, qui est ultimus secundum quid comparatus ad finem ultimum supernaturalem, et finem ultimum supernaturalem, qui est ultimus simpliciter.” Ramirez, *De Hominis Beatitudine*, Tome I (Salamanca: Biblioteca de Teólogos Españoles, 1942), vol. 8, 339. This permits us to understand why human beings can will a number of normative final ends, while simultaneously ordering them to one another hierarchically. It also permits us to see that only if there is a natural end open to graced supernatural completion can all of the inferior goods of human existence be effectively ordered from within (intrinsically) to the all surpassing good and final end simpliciter of the beatific vision.

⁷¹ See, in recent years, Georges Cottier, O.P., *Le désir de Dieu: sur les traces de saint Thomas* (Paris: Éditions Parole et Silence, 2002); Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010); Reinhard Hütter, “Thomas on the Natural Desire for the Vision of God: A Relecture of *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 25 après Henri de Lubac,” *The Thomist*, forthcoming.

⁷² See the aforementioned study by Jean-Pierre Torrell, “Nature and Grace in Thomas Aquinas,” 172–79.

⁷³ ST I–II, q. 85, a. 1.

⁷⁴ ST I–II, q. 109, a. 3: “[I]n the state of perfect nature man referred the love of himself and of all other things to the love of God as to its end; and thus he loved God more than himself and above all things. But in the state of corrupt nature man falls short of this in the appetite of his rational will, which, unless it is cured by God’s grace, follows its private good, on account of the corruption of nature. And hence we must say that in the state of perfect nature man did not need the gift of grace added to his natural endowments, in order to love God above all things naturally, although he needed God’s help to move him to it; but in the state of corrupt nature man needs, even for this, the help of grace to heal his nature.”

beings are themselves *curvatus in se* by virtue of a disordered and malicious will of self-love infecting even the exercise of otherwise natural loves for authentic goods.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the natural (i.e., ontological-structural) orientation of the will to God as the supreme good remains inscribed in the rational appetite of the human being as a spiritual animal,⁷⁶ and so the inclination or tendency of this appetite toward God, while weakened, is still present in fallen man.⁷⁷ Likewise, certain first principles of moral perception (the principles of *synderesis*) are ineradicable, and under the right conditions *could in principle* lead man to the rational understanding of the primacy of the love of God and recognition of basic moral goods.⁷⁸ (This rational understanding would not suffice, however, for the existential *action* of virtuous religious behavior. See Romans 1:18–21.⁷⁹) In other words, man has enough

⁷⁵ ST I–II, q. 84, a. 2, corp. and ad 3; q. 85, aa. 1 and 3.

⁷⁶ ST I–II, q. 109, a. 3: “Now to love God above all things is natural to man and to every nature, not only rational but irrational, and even to inanimate nature according to the manner of love which can belong to each creature. And the reason of this is that it is natural to all to seek and love things according as they are naturally fit (to be sought and loved) since ‘all things act according as they are naturally fit’ as stated in *Physics* ii, 8.” See also q. 85, a. 2.

⁷⁷ ST I–II, q. 85, a. 1: “The good of human nature is threefold. First, there are the principles of which nature is constituted, and the properties that flow from them, such as the powers of the soul, and so forth. Secondly, since man has from nature an inclination to virtue, as stated above, this inclination to virtue is a good of nature. Thirdly, the gift of original justice, conferred on the whole of human nature in the person of the first man, may be called a good of nature. Accordingly, the first-mentioned good of nature is neither destroyed nor diminished by sin. The third good of nature was entirely destroyed through the sin of our first parent. But the second good of nature, viz. the natural inclination to virtue, is diminished by sin. Because human acts produce an inclination to like acts, as stated above. Now from the very fact that a thing becomes inclined to one of two contraries, its inclination to the other contrary must needs be diminished. Wherefore as sin is opposed to virtue, from the very fact that a man sins, there results a diminution of that good of nature, which is the inclination to virtue.”

⁷⁸ Cf. ST I–II, q. 100, a. 1; ST I–II, q. 94, a. 2.

⁷⁹ Commenting on Romans 1:21, “For, although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give thanks, but became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened,” Aquinas writes: “That their basic guilt was not due to ignorance is shown by the fact that, although they possessed knowledge of God, they failed to use it unto good. For they knew God in two ways: first, as the supereminent being, to Whom glory and honor were due. They are said to be without excuse, therefore, because, *although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God*; either because they failed to pay Him due worship or because they put a limit to His power and knowledge by denying certain aspects of His power and knowledge, contrary to Sirach (43:30): ‘when you exalt Him, put forth all your strength.’ Secondly, they knew Him as the cause of all good things. Hence, in all things He

rational and voluntary inclination toward the supreme good that remains, even in the fallen state, to be able to recognize that he should exist for God, that he is less than he ought to be, that he is a noble yet simultaneously wounded and fault-ridden being, and that he is in unresolved contradiction with himself. It is in continuity with such a perspective that *Gaudium et Spes* addresses the human person, promising him a fulfillment and liberation of his human nature that is possible only with Christ.

Grace meanwhile can elicit and strengthen both the natural tendencies toward God *and* the natural knowledge of these tendencies. Accordingly, a condition for the complete cooperation with grace is the re-actualization or studied pursuit of a Christian *philosophical* knowledge of the constitution and qualities of human nature.⁸⁰ This is necessary not only to respond to the post-modernist dissolution of nature into a flux of pure cultural becoming, and into the cultural construction/deconstruction of the self and of society by the will to power. It is also necessary in order to articulate a reasoned evaluation of authentic ends and purposes that transcends a given age and that thereby allows for the determination of the moral health and legitimate aspirations of a given culture or historical period in relation to universal standards.⁸¹ *Just such a concept of nature is therefore the sine qua non condition for an evaluative narrative history of culture.* But this implies consequently that one can provide even from within theology an articulation of aspects of the natural order and of what nature

was deserving of thanks, which they did not render; rather, they attributed their blessings to their own talent and power. Hence, he adds: *nor did they give thanks*, namely, to the Lord: 'Give thanks to Him in all circumstances' (1 Thess. 5:18)." *In Rom.* I, lec. 7, 127, trans. Fabian Larcher, ed. Jeremy Holmes, electronic manuscript, Aquinas Center for Theological Renewal.

⁸⁰ Evidently it is not my goal here to explore how one might, by a philosophical form of investigation, rightly identify what a human person is, the nature of the human being as a soul-body composite, or reason demonstratively about the final ends of man. Nor do I intend to consider the historical and existential ways that Christian faith affects the concrete historical exercise of natural philosophical reason. On these questions, one may consult with profit the writings of Benedict Ashley, O.P., Lawrence Dewan, O.P., and Robert Sokolowski.

⁸¹ Nothing I am saying here excludes the idea that human culture might make *progress* in its understanding of what a human person is, or that it might not significantly regress as well. Consider here the paradox of our progress in understanding the physical body of the embryonic human person, and our cultural regress in failing to understand the intrinsic dignity of that same person as transcending the rights of the human freedom of others. An augmented scope of scientific understanding of the material world co-exists with an expanding sense of the range of human permissions of the exercise of freedom. The two are commonly understood as mutually reinforcing processes.

can do (*per pura naturalia*, in Aquinas's sense)⁸² by recourse to natural philosophical and scientific knowledge, and that one can distinguish this as nature acting by its own powers from nature under the motion of grace. Likewise, the same consideration must be able to determine *something* of what nature *should* be able to do due to tendencies toward natural ends, tendencies which are nevertheless hampered by sin (or human faults).⁸³ Only the latter (an evaluative concept of sin as *in part* the unbecoming of nature) will allow for at least some basic evaluation of genuine human good and evil. Such a concept is also necessary in order to articulate distinctly theological notions of original sin and of the redemptive promises of grace, in order to show that these concepts touch upon something "intrinsic" to concrete historical human nature (as wounded and redeemed in its own ontological capacities and tendencies). Finally, then, to recapitulate the argument, a natural sense of teleology and of a hierarchy of goods is necessary (including recognition of a natural end that can be found in God alone as the supreme good who should be desired and loved above all else) to allow for the intelligibility of the promise of supernatural life as a supreme good that is not something violent to human nature, but capable of subsuming all lesser ends and goods into itself, just as *Gaudium et Spes* would seem to promote. In short, an ontology of human nature and a robust philosophical project that goes with it are indispensable conditions for a sane and viable theology of grace.

The Implicit "Pure Nature" of Christology

If the scholastic concept of pure nature became a bug-bear of modern Catholic theology, this was especially due to the insistence that historical human nature never did or was never meant to exist outside the field of graced communion with God, and with the consequences of the acceptance or rejection of that communion. This insistence is perfectly warranted, but as I have attempted to show succinctly above, this was the purpose of and justification for a concept of pure nature as it was articulated in the Dominican Thomistic tradition. In addition, one might add that if this tradition did emphasize extrinsic *origins* of grace vis-à-vis human nature, it was in order to emphasize that grace as a gift of divine life offered to human persons is not something that they can procure in

⁸² Cf. Torrell on Aquinas's discussion of the natural capacities as such in fallen human nature in "Nature and Grace in Thomas Aquinas," 180–84, with reference to 168–70.

⁸³ I am implying that such a concept of nature is a condition *sine qua non*, but not a *sufficient* condition for an extensive moral understanding of good and evil. For a clear example of this in Aquinas's thinking, see *ST* I–II, q. 85, a. 6.

virtue of themselves or by reason of their own resources. It was *not* to claim (in fact the most common perspective is the logical contrary) that grace is something alien to the final purposes or ends of ordinary human nature. The scholastic Thomist tradition was quite sensitive to the claim of St. Thomas that the grace of justification is *not* a *miracle* (something wholly outside the order of nature) because it touches upon the intimate natural orientation of the human person toward God.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, justification and sanctifying grace *are pure gifts* (*sola gratia*) and not intrinsic dimensions of man's natural possession, either in the original state (contrary to the claims of Baius), or in the economy of redemption (as Augustine rightly argued, against Pelagius).

What, then, should we make of the claim of *Gaudium et spes* §22 that "[i]n reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear. . . . For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact *called to one and the same destiny*, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery"? Much could be said about this dense and important passage. My goal in this concluding section of the essay is only to make three claims in the light of what has been argued above.

First, the notion that the *mystery* of man only becomes clear in the *mystery* of the incarnate Word is of course distinct from the notion of the human nature of the Word as it illumines the human nature of all men. The former notion implies the grace of union (of the humanity of the Word to his person) and the capital graces of the Savior; the illumination concerning the problem of evil, suffering, and death that his passion alone affords; and the eschatological revelation of the final end of the human soul and body that is made manifest in his resurrection. None of this is intelligible without the grace of faith. Nevertheless, a studied understanding of Christ's human nature in relation to our own is an integral part of the theological reflections just alluded to. To take just one example: during the passion narrative, the Lord is struck by a servant of the

⁸⁴ See *ST* I-II, q. 113, a. 10. In *De Deo Trino et Creatore* (430–37), Garrigou-Lagrange comments upon the significance of Aquinas's teaching that children born prior to the fall would have been conceived in a state of grace (*ST* I, q. 100, a. 1) and emphasizes (434–37) that this teaching excludes any purely extrinsicist account of the relations of grace to the constitution of human nature. "Nec dici potest, secundum definitivam S. Thomae sententiam, gratiam sanctificantem esse radicem *extrinsecam* iustitiae originalis" (434). He shows that the teaching of Aquinas is mirrored by Cajetan, Capreolus, and Sylvester of Ferrara (436), and contrasts this with what he takes to be the extrinsicism of Suarez and Bellarmine (cf. 449–50).

high priest and responds in turn, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" (Jn 18:23). The scene takes on its deepest intelligibility only in light of a perception of who has been struck, and reflection on the grace of desire in the human heart of Christ that leads him to bear witness to the truth, and to embrace persecution and the Cross. His charity, which is universal, is expressed in the love for his persecutors during his passion. These are all mysteries of grace. However, there is also present here a profound truth concerning the rectitude of human judgment and the dignity of human virtue in the face of moral evil. If we assign a non-stoic interpretation to this incident, then the natural integrity of Christ is truly remarkable: his sensitive passions are fully ordered to his reason, and his reason is in perfect subordination to God and to the virtue of speaking the truth out of compassion. "Ecce homo" (Jn 19:5). Like Pilate, we perceive in Christ a nobility to which we might *naturally aspire* (by our innate moral tendencies and best ethical judgments) but which is also so fragile and endangered in us as to seem almost perilously idealistic. And it is here in particular that we are able to see the correspondence of grace to the integrity of nature, and of the grace of Christ to his uniquely natural humanity, to a human way of being that instructs us more deeply—and universally—as to what it means to be human. This perfection exists only in Jesus and comes to human beings universally from him alone, pace Lessing, Kant, and Hick, as well as Nietzsche and Foucault.

Second, then, a Christological accomplishment of all human history presupposes not only the use of a universal concept of the human and its applicability to both Christ and to all other men. It also requires in turn the implicit acceptance of the real ontological possibility of a state of pure nature, even if this state has never concretely existed. Nor is this some kind of trivial point, but it is in fact something quite significant and intrinsic to all basic thinking on the Christological fulfillment of the human. For the claim of *Gaudium et Spes* (and of Chenu and Rahner) that we are rightly pursuing is the understanding that human beings cannot be fully themselves (in their deepest natural aspirations) without the life of grace within them, and that this life is made most manifest and clear (so as to illumine the whole world universally) only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word. This means in turn that human beings can exist without grace (because it is a gift), that they cannot be fully themselves (naturally) without that gift, and that in its absence (in the wake of sin) they suffer devastating intrinsic effects to their nature, both personally and collectively. Underlying the states of integral, fallen, redeemed, and Christic (Christ's own) human nature, there is something that is collec-

tively the same. Just as this reality that is the same did not *have* to be created in a state of original holiness (although it was) so likewise it did not *have* to be subject to sin by the faulty use of freedom (although it now is, failing redemption in Christ). Consequently, nature as it existed in original innocence and as it exists now, as fallen and offered redemption in Christ, did not *have to* exist in either state, due to its intrinsic requirements as nature. It could have existed in a state of pure nature. To think otherwise is simply either to make grace something other than a gift of God, or to make evil a normative (natural rather than unnatural) constitutive dimension of the human person.

Finally, these reflections reach their apex when we consider the case of Christ. For if Christ is without moral evil (i.e., sinless) and for this reason (though not exclusively so) more perfectly human than we are, then he is a more perfect example of humanity because evil is not intrinsic to our human nature as such. And likewise, if Christ, the pre-existent Son made human, is truly a *gift* of the Father (for the Son truly became one of us because the Father so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son), then Jesus is not someone we merited or deserved to have as our brother, and is not ours by a kind of natural right or as the product of a merely intra-historical evolutionary history.⁸⁵ And so although he is the most perfect instantiation of what it means to be authentically human, and though this can be understood even to some extent in philosophically universalizable terms (for instance through a distinctly *philosophical* examination of the virtues of Christ), nevertheless, he is this *only by the gift of God's grace*, the grace of union of the humanity of Christ to the Word, and the gift of indwelling, habitual graces in the human mind and will of Christ. Ultimately what is at stake in a sense of the ontological possibility of a state of pure nature is nothing less than the capacity to hold together three claims: (1) Christ is truly human in the most preeminent and universally intelligible sense; (2) the grace of the Incarnation is the ultimate source of the uniquely perfect human nature of Christ (and yet is distinguishable from the latter *as grace*); (3) there is no moral evil in the soul of Christ, and this innocence and virtue constitute a more natural form of human existence, such that we can claim analogously that only with the grace of Christ can human beings truly overcome the power of evil in human history.

⁸⁵ As I take it Schleiermacher is in danger of suggesting: cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), vol. 2, §§94, 99, 103.

Conclusion

In guise of a conclusion, let me say that it should be clear that this essay is written in the attempt to challenge respectfully some of the presuppositions or ingrained habits of thought surrounding what constitutes a genuine form of pre- versus post-conciliar theological anthropology. But this dialectical interplay of old and new is not meant to suggest a hermeneutic of discontinuity between the post-conciliar reflections of Chenu and Rahner that have been discussed and the preceding tradition. There is some problematic discontinuity present, no doubt, in the rhetorical posturing of these two theologians, due in part to some of the metaphysical visions they associated themselves with. These are points worth questioning and challenging, and sometimes, or so it is my conviction, by recourse to more classical forms of thought, including that of Aquinas himself. But the deeper point of substance is this: the conciliar majority-positions often are in need of some nuance, including by recourse to some of the legitimate concerns of the minority-positions. This is not so that these former positions might be alleviated or dissolved, but that they might be strengthened and further developed. The dialectic of Aristotle does not entail a vanquishing of the argument of the other, but the consideration of his or her legitimate concerns, insights, oversights, and errors, in view of a more comprehensive settlement on the fundamental principles, as well as a more distinguishing understanding of their mutual interaction of exercise. The conversation about grace and nature that *Gaudium et Spes* invites us to is not one that is completed (by judicial fiat of a “spirit of the Council” or by a dismissive disinterest in favor of pre-conciliar tradition). On the contrary, there is a great deal of reflection yet to be done. It should be done in continuity with the ongoing tradition of the Church, outside of which the thought of the Council is ultimately sterile. To think through the implications of this at times insightful, at times frustrating, document, we could do worse than to have recourse to the thought of the Angelic Doctor . . . and to that of the Thomistic commentary tradition that comes after him. N.V