

The *Surnaturel* Controversy: A Survey and a Response

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ALTHOUGH the Second Vatican Council left in its wake a host of disputes about its meaning and impact (disputes that live on to this day), no result of the council seems more secure than this conviction: that in the clash between neo-scholasticism and *ressourcement* theology, the latter had decisively won. In that famous preconciliar struggle over how to understand the relation of nature to grace, the battle lines were drawn between a school of neo-Thomism centered in the Roman universities (and represented most effectively by Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.) and the so-called *nouvelle théologie* headquartered at the French Jesuit theologate at Fourvière (near Lyons, where Henri de Lubac, S.J. was in the vanguard). The former side posited a two-fold end for the human species, one natural and the other supernatural; while the latter held that God had aboriginally intended the human race for only one end, a specifically and exclusively supernatural one. But by the time the council had completed its last session on December 8, 1965, nearly everyone agreed: the prior reigning synthesis, as bequeathed by the manual Thomists and anti-Modernists, was over and done with.¹

¹ So Walter Kasper: “There is no doubt that the outstanding event in the Catholic theology of our century is the surmounting of neo-scholasticism,” which Kasper defines as “the attempt to solve the modern crisis of theology by picking up the thread of the high scholastic tradition of medieval times. The aim was to establish a timeless, unified theology that would provide a norm for the universal church. It is impossible to deny this attempt a certain grandeur. But in the long run a restoration was bound to fail.” Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 1. This view, it bears recalling, was

Recently, however, this same neo-scholasticism—which had been thought moribund these past four and a half decades, and whose obituary has been written so many times—has shown surprising signs of life. Not just noted experts long familiar with this debate, but also young scholars who have investigated this issue with fresh eyes, claim that de Lubac can hardly be regarded as having spoken the last word. Indeed, they go further and claim that he fundamentally misunderstood both Thomas Aquinas and the Thomist tradition generally. Finally, they even charge that many of the woes now afflicting the Church in the wake of Vatican II—declining vocations, a confused moral theology, a revitalized secular hostility to the Christian religion—can all be traced to an over-hasty adoption of his thesis.

In what follows, I wish first to outline the Lubacian consensus that obtained for most of the postconciliar period; then in the second section I will try to survey, as much as the space of an article permits, the recent attacks on the viability of that consensus; and finally I will conclude with some reflections of my own. Throughout these three sections, we must keep in mind two separate issues: (1) Did de Lubac misinterpret Thomas's teaching on nature and grace? This question is fundamentally exegetical and belongs under the rubric of historical theology. (2) Even if de Lubac successfully showed that Thomas's Renaissance and Baroque commentators diverged from the position of the Common Doctor, does that mean that they were wrong on the issue itself? That is, might not the commentary tradition represent a legitimate development of St. Thomas's more fundamental insights? In other words, even if de Lubac was correct on the exegetical point of Thomas's historical position, maybe Catholic theologians should adopt the (newly minted) position of the commentators anyway, as being the most logical and consistent in light of new developments.² After

also endorsed by no less an authority than Joseph Ratzinger (a cardinal at the time when he penned these lines): "It is my view that the neoscholastic rationalism that was trying to reconstruct the *praeambula fidei* . . . with pure rational certainty, by means of rational argument that was strictly independent of any faith, has failed; and it cannot be otherwise for any such attempts to do that kind of thing. In that sense, Karl Barth was right when he rejected philosophy as a basis for faith that is independent of faith itself." Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 136; emphasis added.

² This distinction seems to form the basis of Garrigou-Lagrange's concession that "one cannot follow St. Thomas by falling into a material literalism." P. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, "La possibilité de la grâce est-elle rigoureusement démontrable?" *Revue thomiste* 94 (1936): 214, note 20: "il ne faut pas, pour suivre saint Thomas, tomber dans un littéralisme matériel." Ironically, John Henry Newman would agree, at least formally.

all, is that not what development of doctrine means? Why should the same not hold true of the Thomist tradition? But to understand how that position of the commentators has come to the fore once more in revitalized form, one must first see how de Lubac convinced the vast majority of twentieth-century theologians of the rightness of his thesis that man has only one, supernatural end.

I

Perhaps the best way of getting a sense of how much the postconciliar consensus was taken for granted would be to look at the reminiscences of those trained in theology at that time and who now look back on their training from our more unsettled times. Prior to Vatican II most seminarians were taught that in order to preserve the sheer gratuity of grace (that is, the teaching that grace is not “owed” to nature, that nature cannot therefore make a claim on grace for its proper fulfillment), there must be something, at least hypothetically, called “pure nature” that could get along without grace. For if it could not, that is, if grace were truly indispensable to nature, that would mean that grace must be an “exigency” of nature, which then God would “owe” that nature, and its gratuity would thereby be undermined. But then, if nature can be fulfilled without grace, why should nature bother with grace at all, if it can get by just fine using only its own powers of self-fulfillment? Such a devastating rhetorical question then led to this “obvious” conclusion: banish all talk of that figment “pure nature” from theology! And from this axiom came all that followed, as described in this vivid memoir:

Declaring “pure nature” not to belong to the subject matter of theology was also the remedy against what Maurice Blondel labeled an “extrinsicist” view of grace, or what we as students referred to as “Suárez’s cream cake.” It is the well-known picture of nature and grace as two tiers, one on top of the other, without an intrinsic connection between the two. Human nature is complete in itself, and it might well do without grace, that is, without a personal relation to God. Without the cream of grace, it would be a little dry and less tasty, but the cake of nature is not really affected by the cream topping. However, from a religious, and hence also from a theological perspective, such a view was completely unacceptable. It alienated grace and faith from our personal, concrete, everyday life and from the larger reality of society and the world by promoting a flight into a distinct spiritual realm. It domesticated and isolated theology, confining it to the little, sheltered niche of the supernatural, fully disconnected from the humanities and sciences.³

³ Harm Goris, “Steering Clear of Charybdis: Some Directions for Avoiding ‘Grace Extrinsicism’ in Aquinas,” *Nova et Vetera* 5 (2007): 67–79; here 69.

Those who were professionally trained in theology during that time, whether as seminarians or as aspiring professors, can easily recognize the truth being described here, both as to how the issue seemed at the time and how students were struck by the perfect obviousness of de Lubac's attacks on the hypothesis of *natura pura*. Karl Rahner, who received his training in theology much earlier, and thus knew well the theology against which he battled, of course did not take for granted the victory over the neo-scholastic account of pure nature. Yet he too speaks of that tradition as inherently untenable, which thus now deserves to lose its hold on the theological world:

[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 oboedientialis*" 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."⁴

Of course what Goris and Rahner are describing here is the new *attitude* and *position* adopted in de Lubac's wake, which rejects out of hand the utility of the concept of pure nature, but not the *argument* that led to the new consensus. For that argument one must go to de Lubac's epochal *Surnaturel*,⁵ together with the later clarificatory tomes that expatiate on this thesis in more detail, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*⁶ and *The*

⁴ Karl Rahner, S.J., "Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations* IV, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 165–88; here 165. Against this view Rahner proposes his own, one based entirely in the empirical order of salvation history as currently established by God: "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" (ibid., 183; emphasis in the original).

⁵ Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Surnaturel: Etudes historiques*, nouvelle édition préparée et préfacée par Michael Sales (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991); first edition published in 1946.

⁶ Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: Crossroad, 2000), first published in English in 1969; abbreviated henceforth as *Augustinianism*.

Mystery of the Supernatural.⁷ The impact of these three works, both on Vatican II itself and above all on the postconciliar consensus, can scarcely be exaggerated, as the citations above from Goris and Rahner vividly show. But what was his argument?

As we noted at the outset, there is a historical component to his argument and a more directly theological one. The first tack argues that Thomas never countenanced a theory of pure nature in any of his writings, and that when his later commentators did so, they inevitably distorted the views of the Common Doctor. The second argues that, even if traces of what would later become the pure-nature tradition can be found in Aquinas, the thesis should still be rejected for a host of reasons: the concept of pure nature, so goes the claim, creates a “fortress mentality” against the wider culture, is harmful to the Church’s sacramental life, and damages the Church’s missionary commission to make converts of all nations.

De Lubac’s first line of argument rests on the common medieval axiom that Thomas repeats throughout his writings: grace perfects nature.⁸ Obviously, if grace *perfects* nature (that is, brings it to completion), it must belong in some intimate way *to* nature. Another favorite passage from the Common Doctor says: “All knowing beings implicitly know God in everything they know,”⁹ an axiom repeated on other

⁷ Henri de Lubac, S.J., *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad, 1998); first published in English in 1967; cited henceforth as *Mystery*. The latest edition translates all the Latin quotations. *Surnaturel* was never translated, perhaps because *Augustinianism* and *Mystery* were meant to supersede it.

⁸ It would be tedious to cite every mention of this axiom in the Thomist corpus, but here are a few: “Since therefore grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, natural reason should minister to faith as the natural bent of the will ministers to charity” (*ST I*, q. 1 a. 8, ad 2); “Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence. To make this clear, two points must be observed: first, that man is not perfectly happy so long as something remains for him to desire and seek; second, that the perfection of any power is determined by the nature of its object” (*ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 8, resp.); “Grace is proportionate to nature as perfection is to the perfectible” (*De veritate*, q. 27, a. 5, obj. 17); “Nature is anterior to grace. . . . The gifts of graces are added to nature in such a way that they do not raise it but rather perfect it” (*In Boetium de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3). Of course Thomas is not remotely innovating here but draws on a common medieval legacy.

⁹ *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 1, ad 1. This passage was especially favored by the Transcendental Thomists like Joseph Maréchal and Karl Rahner, because they held it justified their attention to Immanuel Kant’s transcendental method of attending to the inherent dynamism of the human intellect. Thus Rahner: “For Thomas the *concept* of God is that which comes last in all our knowledge. But the outreach [*Vorgriff*] toward the infinite being is the previous condition of our very first conceptual knowledge, so that in every such knowledge God is already implicitly known.” Karl Rahner, S.J., *Hearer of the Word*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Continuum,

occasions.¹⁰ If *all* knowing beings actually *know* God, albeit implicitly, in every act of knowledge, then obviously this must be an endowment of their nature. But by far the most significant texts justifying de Lubac's thesis are those passages in which Thomas speaks of the human intellect as endowed with an innate desire to attain ultimate felicity by gazing on the divine essence, the so-called "natural desire for God."¹¹ Most of these passages come from Thomas's extended treatment of this very question in Part III of his *Summa contra Gentiles*, where he says quite explicitly:

Since it is impossible for a natural desire to be incapable of fulfillment, and since it would be so frustrated if it were impossible to reach an understanding of divine substance *such as all minds naturally desire*, we must say that it is possible for the substance of God to be seen intellectually, both by separate intellectual substances [angels] and by our [human] souls.¹²

So much for de Lubac's textual justification (citations which of course could be extended further). But he also has a more directly theological argument to make, or rather and more specifically, an eschatological one: if there

1994/1941), 52. De Lubac, however, was diffident of the project of the Transcendental Thomists, so their use of de Lubac's *Surnaturel* need not be considered here.

¹⁰ "Every intellect naturally desires the vision of the divine substance" (ScG III, chap. 57).

¹¹ This phrase, "the natural desire to see God," will become the flashpoint in this debate. For how can God endow a creature with a natural desire for something and not fulfill it? For one side of the debate, it would be like God creating a rational animal without the ability to reason, a logical contradiction. Since Thomas clearly holds that rational creatures (both human and angelic) have that natural desire, while other passages hold that grace is necessary to achieve a supernatural end, the debate gets quite complex. For a good overview, see William R. O'Connor, *The Eternal Quest: The Teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Natural Desire for God* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947) and Reinhard Hütter, "Aquinas on the Natural Desire for the Vision of God: A Relecture of *Summa contra Gentiles* iii., c. 25 *Après* Henri de Lubac," *The Thomist* 73 (October, 2009): 523–91.

¹² ScG III chap. 51, 1; emphasis added. Space does not allow any more citations, but the chapter headings of the ScG give a good indication of the gist of the argument: "That the ultimate felicity of man consists in the contemplation of God" (chap. 37); "That the ultimate felicity does not consist in the knowledge of God gained through demonstration" (chap. 39); "That in this life we cannot see God through his essence" (chap. 47), etc. To be sure, this set of chapters is also paired with other chapters asserting the necessity of grace for that natural desire to be fulfilled: "That no created substance can, by its own natural power, attain the vision of God in his essence" (chap. 52). How to reconcile those two contrasting positions is of course the problem that constitutes this debate.

were such a thing as a *de facto* pure nature currently now obtaining in the created world and operating inside the context of salvation history, then that same pure nature would have to be reflected in the eschaton as well, a point refuted by Scripture: “He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rules or authorities; *all* things were created through him and *for* him” (Col 1:15–16; emphases added). From which de Lubac draws this conclusion:

It is said that a universe might have existed in which man, though without necessarily excluding any other desire, would have his rational ambitions limited to some lower, purely human, beatitude. Certainly I do not deny it. But having said that, one is obliged to admit—indeed one is automatically affirming—that in our world as it is this is not the case. . . . In me, a real and personal human being, in my concrete nature—that nature I have in common with all real men, to judge by what my faith teaches me, and regardless of what is or is not revealed to me either by reflective analysis or by reasoning—the “desire to see God” cannot be permanently frustrated without an essential suffering. To deny this is to undermine my entire Credo. For is not this, in effect, the definition of the “pain of the damned”? And consequently—at least in appearance—a good and just God could hardly frustrate me, unless I, through my own fault, turn away from him by choice. The infinite importance of the desire implanted in me by my Creator is what constitutes the infinite importance of the drama of human existence.¹³

Although de Lubac does not mention the issue directly, this passage obviously has a bearing on the topic of limbo, specifically the *limbus infantium*, where it was held that unbaptized infants go who die before reaching the age of reason. The trouble with that hypothesis (now almost universally abandoned)¹⁴ is that limbo becomes, as it were, the place where the *hypothesis* of pure nature takes on *reality*, even though it is admitted by all hands that God in fact never created anything outside of Christ, anything in a state of *actual* pure nature.¹⁵ From this concession, admitted by all sides, de Lubac comes to the most vivid expression of his thesis:

¹³ De Lubac, *Mystery*, 54.

¹⁴ See Edward T. Oakes, S.J., “Catholic Eschatology and the Development of Doctrine,” *Nova et Vetera* 6 (2008): 419–46 for details on the abandonment of this hypothesis by Pope Benedict XVI and the papally convened International Theological Commission.

¹⁵ “All theologians agree that this state of pure nature never existed. Baius and Jansenius [erred by denying] its *possibility*.” Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace: Commentary on the Summa theologiae of St. Thomas, IaIIae, q. 109–14*, trans. Dominican Nuns of Corpus Christi Monastery (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1952), 23;

For this desire is not some “accident” in me. It does not result from some peculiarity, possibly alterable, of my individual being, or from some historical contingency whose effects are more or less transitory. . . . It is in me as a result of my belonging to humanity as it is, that humanity which is, as we say, “called.” *For God’s call is constitutive.* My finality, which is expressed by this desire, is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God. And, by God’s will, I now have no other genuine end, no end really assigned to my nature or presented for my free acceptance under any guise, except that of “seeing God.”¹⁶

This position, so boldly stated, of course raises again the problem of the gratuity of grace: if God has so constituted us that we desire the beatific vision *by nature*, yet we can attain that end only by a freely bestowed gift *of grace*, which we are given not because it is owed to us but because God freely (“gratuitously”) gives it to us, does that then not mean that God has created us for an end naturally and inherently desired but only to be attained by something beyond nature? What does that say about God? Why would God create a nature subject to such futility?

This conundrum is indeed a knotty one, and de Lubac’s proposal for solving it came under heavy attack at the first appearance of *Surnaturel*, an attack recently renewed, as we shall see in the next section, where his proposed solution will be subjected to closer analysis by setting it against its perceived weaknesses. It must be conceded by all hands, however, that it was always at least de Lubac’s *intent* to preserve the gratuity of grace. Here, in nutshell, is his position:

However, whether one adopts or rejects [pure nature], if one succeeds in making clear—as at all costs we must—that the supernatural end can *in no case* be the object of any requirement or debt, even by a being who here and now has no other end, then there will no longer be any need to refer to this indirect consideration of an order that is purely natural even as to its finality. We have seen that it is not an adequate

emphasis added. This position is commonly held in the Dominican commentary tradition: “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. . . . 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.” Thomas Joseph White, O.P., “The ‘Pure Nature’ of Christology: Human Nature and *Gaudium et Spes* 22,” *Nova et Vëtera* 8 (2010): 283–322; here 292. We will take up the impact of the condemnation of Baius and Jansenius in the next section of this article.

¹⁶ De Lubac, *Mystery*, 54–55; emphasis added.

consideration. Perhaps we may now go so far as to admit that it is not a necessary one either.¹⁷

In other words, if the gratuity of grace can be preserved without the hypothesis of pure nature, then the hypothesis has lost its viability. Now whether this passage just quoted represents a true solution to, or is just a restatement of, the problem, merely recast in different words, is precisely the issue and will largely constitute the terms of the debate set in motion by de Lubac's work. Obviously, as *he* formulates the issue, the paradox remains a paradox: (1) we are *made* for God, and our hearts are restless until they reach final union with God in the beatific vision; yet (2) we cannot *attain* that vision by means of our natural powers alone. But for de Lubac, that is precisely the point! Consider an analogy: all infants and children need the love of their parents, without which they wither. And yet love is not love unless it is freely given.¹⁸

De Lubac has long been known as a theologian who insists that Christian revelation is inherently paradoxical, from the God-man Jesus Christ, to the juxtaposition of free will and predestination.¹⁹ But of course theology has never contented itself with merely conceding the paradox and going no further; otherwise Christology would never have arisen, and the debate over nature and grace would not have been so heated. So let us now get a better idea of the exact contours of de Lubac's views by

¹⁷ De Lubac, *Mystery*, 73; emphasis in the original. Note also that a page later de Lubac covers his right flank by conceding that the concept of pure nature might still hold utility *under other presuppositions*: "And if there are those who feel that it is impossible to preserve that divine truth except by reference to the system of 'pure nature,' I would be the first to tell them that not merely have they every right to maintain it, but that they would be wrong to reject it" (ibid., 74). Far from being a concession granted to his critics after the promulgation of *Humani Generis*, de Lubac made this same point in *Supernature*: "Le nouveau système [of pure nature] ne fut donc point sans rendre d'éminents services." De Lubac, *Supernature*, 153.

¹⁸ Victorian fiction is filled with descriptions of children raised by prosperous parents who take care of their every physical need but deprive them of love ("the poor little rich boy"). For an example in real life, the philosopher Bertrand Russell recounts in his autobiography that he was given every material comfort as a child born to the ruling classes, but the lack of love in the household withered his personality.

¹⁹ See Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, trans. James R. Dunne (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1969) and *Paradoxes of Faith*, trans. Paule Simon, Sadie Kreilkamp, and Ernest Beaumont (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987). For a lucid account of this important dimension of de Lubac's thought, see Rudolf Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 117–21.

seeing how they measure up to recent challenges thrown up by revisionist theologians who think that the tradition attacked by de Lubac has more viability than he realized.

II

The challenge to de Lubac's theology of the supernatural comes from several quarters. In the United States, a young scholar, Lawrence Feingold, has recently published a revised version of his doctoral dissertation, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas and His Interpreters*,²⁰ which defends (most of) the classic commentators of Thomas down through the centuries; and Steven Long, building on Feingold, argues the same point from a more analytic and conceptual perspective in his recent book *Natura Pura*.²¹ In France, the Dominicans of the Toulouse Province sponsored a symposium in 2000 in which several scholars, both lay and clerical (with the clerics coming both from the secular presbyterate and from several different orders—including the Jesuits), criticized de Lubac from numerous angles.²²

One thing must be said at the outset of these works (and also of the journal articles generated by these books): they all adopt a tone of reasoned criticism. There is no tone of heresy-hunting among de Lubac's recent critics, no instance of unfair characterization or overheated rhetoric.²³ Moreover, historical claims are always backed up with texts, most of which were either ignored by or not cited in de Lubac; and finally, the specifically theological arguments adduce many relevant considerations that must be taken into account if de Lubac is to be adequately defended in the future.

²⁰ Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas and His Interpreters*, second edition (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010). The dissertation carries the same title (Rome: Apollinare Studi, 2001). Besides being more accessible, the second edition has translated all the texts that the dissertation had cited in the original language; and many of the arguments have been made clearer and more cohesive. The 2010 version will be the edition quoted throughout in this article.

²¹ Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

²² All contributions were published in *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., trans. Robert Williams and Matthew Levering (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2009).

²³ "It must be borne in mind that my criticism of de Lubac's positions does not mean to imply any unorthodox intention on de Lubac's part, for it is clear that his intention was always to think with the Church. Secondly, I do not mean to imply any global criticism of de Lubac's other theological views, which I respect. The question under dispute is limited to the concrete issue of the interpretation of the natural desire to see God." Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 317, note 2.

Before getting into the specifics of the case raised against the thesis of de Lubac's *Supernature* and his later books, however, perhaps it would prove helpful to summarize the anti-Lubacian case in more generic terms. Although the challenge raised against de Lubac is too new to have filtered down into the classroom long enough to have generated reminiscences like the one cited above from Harm Goris, nonetheless perhaps we can anticipate what some future memoirist might say in the next generation. For the climate of opinion affecting the reception of de Lubac's work has definitely shifted. Here is one possible formulation of how that reassessment might be written at some future date:

When the Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac published *Supernature* in 1946, he irrevocably altered the Thomist understanding of grace. Even more, he changed Thomism itself, which now gives Thomas priority of place over his later commentators by embedding him in the patristic tradition he knew so well. Finally, and most crucially, man is now seen as inherently open to the supernatural. No longer is grace seen as "topping out" nature, like icing atop a layer cake. Unfortunately, de Lubac had made his case so convincingly that problems soon followed in his overpowering wake. After Vatican II, grace came to be seen as so intrinsic to man that the supernatural gifts of revelation, the Church, and the sacraments seemed, at best, merely symbolic reminders of an already realized redemption. Clearly the time has come for a reassessment of *Supernature*.²⁴

Just as de Lubac challenged neo-scholasticism on two main points—that it misunderstood Thomas from the ground up, and that the reigning consensus boxed the Church into a ghetto of irrelevancy—so too the challenge to *him* disputes him at both these points: *he* is the one, his critics say, who has distorted the true doctrine of the *Doctor Angelicus*; and, far from giving the Church new relevance to the secular world, the acceptance of his position has caused the Church's true supernatural identity to become obscured, especially among believers. The charges might sound extraordinarily sweeping; but so too, after all, were de Lubac's attacks on the prior consensus that had reigned in the preconciliar decades immediately after the First World War and continued to be taught in seminaries up to the eve of Vatican II. So if de Lubac is wrong, then his error must be as sweeping as were his attacks.

At all events, the case against de Lubac is both exegetical (did he get Thomas right?) and theological (is his position, whether reliant on the "real" Thomas or not, coherent?). As mentioned, Feingold's case is primarily

²⁴ Adapted from the publisher's blurb to Bonino, ed., *Supernature: A Controversy*.

historical and exegetical, so to him we first turn, after which we will look at Long's.

II.1

Feingold's thesis against de Lubac depends on a crucial distinction, which he believes de Lubac has elided: that between an *innate* natural desire and an *elicited* natural desire for God. According to Feingold, if God had planted in us an innate natural desire for celestial beatitude, then God would be "bound" to give us the means to fulfill that desire, just as God is "bound" to give us the gift of reason if he is to make us specifically *rational* animals. But the gratuity of grace is preserved, maintains Feingold, if that fully natural desire of which St. Thomas so often speaks is *elicited*:

St. Thomas, when dealing with the natural desire to know God's essence, is plainly speaking of an elicited natural desire: a desire spontaneously aroused on the basis of prior knowledge of God's effects in the world. However, the real question is deeper and more difficult. Does this natural elicited desire correspond to an *underlying innate* appetite for the vision of God? . . . In fact, if one conceives the natural desire to see God as an innate appetite or inclination, then it follows that it will be absolute rather than conditional, for a conditional desire is possible only on the basis of knowledge.²⁵

So which view does Thomas hold? Early on, Feingold concedes that Thomas never directly addressed this question,²⁶ and this omission might, it seems to me, undermine his thesis from the outset. Later on he will show that the commentary tradition legitimately developed Thomas's doctrine by introducing important distinctions in order to counteract Baius and

²⁵ Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 15, 20; emphasis in the original.

²⁶ "The texts of St. Thomas concerning the natural desire to see God do not directly address or explicitly determine the question of whether the natural desire in question is elicited or innate, which explains the divergence of views which have existed and which still exist in this matter." Feingold, *Natural Desire*, xxxiii. Further: "St. Thomas seems to contradict what he frequently asserts elsewhere. Indeed, he has said: '*There can be no natural desire except for things which can naturally be possessed.*' [Feingold's footnote: *III Sent.*, d. 27, q. 2, a. 2, ad 4; see also *De veritate*, d. 2, q. 27, a. 2.] How can there be a natural desire to see God's essence if created intellects have no natural power to see it? If the created intellect has no natural passive potency, properly speaking, to see God, how can it have a natural desire for that vision? . . . A resolution of this doubt will have to show that *at least in a certain respect* there can be a natural desire for something which natural active forces are unable to obtain" (ibid., 168; emphases in the original). But what Feingold concedes here is precisely de Lubac's point: man is a paradoxical animal.

Jansenius, who denied not just the existence of pure nature but also (and most crucially) its very *possibility*.²⁷

But of course it would never have occurred to the commentators that they were introducing these distinctions—either between pure nature and unmerited grace, or between innate and elicited natural desires—out of thin air. Later distinctions became necessary because of *other* distinctions definitely present in the texts of Thomas, such as this key one:

Man by his nature is proportioned to a certain end for which he has a natural appetite, and which he can work to achieve by his natural powers. This end is a certain contemplation of the divine attributes, *in the measure in which this is possible for man through his natural powers*; and in this end even the philosophers placed the final happiness of man. But God has prepared man *for another end*, one that exceeds the proportionality of human nature. This end is eternal life, which consists in the vision of God in his essence, an end which exceeds the proportionality of any created nature, being connatural to God alone.²⁸

Admittedly, this passage does not explicitly assert that this latter end, one that exceeds the proportionality of human nature, is not a part of

²⁷ It would take this analysis too far afield to discuss the differences between Michael Baius (or Michel de Bay, 1513–89), a delegate at the Council of Trent, and Cornelius Jansenius (1585–1638), bishop of Ypres, Belgium. However, what they have in common is what is crucial in this context. Baius anticipated Jansenism in that he held that in Eden innocence (original justice) was not a supernatural gift to Adam and Eve but a *necessary component* of human nature itself; that is, that God was tautologically unable to withhold from Adam the gifts of original justice, so that original sin *reverses* this order: now nature is *inherently sinful*. Without grace, man necessarily sins in all that he does, even in striving after virtue for its own sake; and now even involuntary concupiscence is sinful, including in infants. Building on these positions, Jansenius held that grace was due to Adam by right. For that same reason, original sin utterly vitiated human nature, such that pagan virtues are in reality vices before God. Both Baius and Jansenius were condemned by a series of popes, not least because they ran afoul of Trent's condemnation of Luther's assertion that concupiscence is itself a sin. In the context of these condemnations, it becomes obvious why theology *had* to distinguish, at least conceptually, nature from grace, a point that de Lubac is willing to concede, albeit diffidently: "But without for the moment going back any further than the time of Baius, it is possible, I believe, to show that this idea of pure nature, as it is understood by modern theology, is a systematic idea, *quite legitimate no doubt and perhaps useful*, but recent." De Lubac, *Augustinianism*, 106; emphasis added. But why should the "recent" provenance of the doctrine tell against it necessarily? Is not de Lubac here implicitly invoking a kind of "originalism" or "primitivism" that goes against Newman's *Essay on Development*?

²⁸ *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 2; emphases added.

man's nature. However, elsewhere Thomas, almost anticipating the later condemnations of Baius and Jansenius, says: "Reason and will are naturally directed to God, inasmuch as He is the beginning and end of nature, but in proportion to nature. But reason and will, according to their nature, are not sufficiently directed to God as the object of supernatural happiness."²⁹ Elsewhere Thomas makes these crucial distinctions: "There can be no inclination except to that which is similar and fitting."³⁰ Even more telling is this axiom of his thought: "Now it is evident that whatever tends to an end has, in the first place, an aptitude or proportion to that end, for nothing tends to a disproportionate end."³¹ Thus the transition from the texts of the Angelic Doctor to his commentators is, if not absolutely seamless, nonetheless smooth and unproblematic.³²

The only way to reconcile the earlier-cited statements in the Thomist corpus that de Lubac favors with these just-cited ones used by Feingold is, the latter claims, to make a distinction between innate and elicited desires, which is just what the famous and nearly canonical Dominican commentator Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469–1534), for example, does in his commentary on the *Summa*: "Note that natural appetite is generally used in two senses. First, with regard to an inclination implanted by nature. . . . Second, it is taken for a second act, by which one tends to something previously known."³³

²⁹ *ST* I–II, q. 62, a. 1, ad 3.

³⁰ *ST* I–II, q. 8, a. 1.

³¹ *ST* I–II, q. 25, a. 2.

³² James Healey makes the fascinating observation that both classical scholastics and Jansenius failed to notice the essential paradoxicality of their respective positions when set over against each other: "Despite these deficiencies, however, Jansenius's critique of pure nature is not without value. . . . In stressing this sanating [healing] role of charity Jansenius therefore emphasizes a link between goodness and grace which had perhaps been neglected by the Scholastics in their concern to protect the supernaturality of grace and the possibility of a naturally good act. . . . Finally, there is perhaps some merit in Jansenius's insistence that for Augustine nature too is grace. For if the assertion that 'all is grace' shows theological carelessness and exposes one to the risk of neglecting the extraordinary gift of God which is theologically expressed as 'supernatural,' it is nonetheless true that nature too is God's gift. . . . If anything, Jansenius seems to have missed the full significance of this understanding of nature. For what is 'natural' rather than 'supernatural' is not 'man's' rather than 'God's' but, in its own way, a manifestation of the generosity of God which is even more extraordinarily manifested in 'supernatural' grace." James G. Healey, S.J., *Jansenius' Critique of Pure Nature* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964), 76–77.

³³ Commenting on *ST* I, q. 78, a. 1, notation 5, in the Leonine edition at Vol. 5, 252; full citation in Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 19, note 35.

Only the second can be properly called a natural desire *for God*. That is, inclinations “implanted by nature” pertain to hunger for food and the like, and the failure to attain them leads to death. But the second kind of natural desire, one that follows on philosophical reflections of the world leading to a realization that there is a First Cause, *that* kind of desire *can* be adequately fulfilled by using one’s natural powers of reasoning independent of supernatural grace (Aristotle serves as the test case here). Therefore, say most of the commentators, supernatural grace gives not just the means to reach the supernatural destiny that God intends for rational creatures, *it gives a new end as well*; that is, it gives a quite different—an entirely *unexpected*—kind of fulfillment, precisely because a new end first comes into view with the bestowal of grace.³⁴

The trouble with this distinction between innate and elicited natural desires is that the second depends, in Cajetan’s words, on “something previously known,” which means that an elicited desire can be elicited only from someone who has already reached the age of reason, a concession which brings us back to the old specter of limbo. At least one must give Feingold credit here for not flinching from the issue, even if it damages his case, since the hypothesis of limbo has almost completely disappeared—and not just from the common opinion (the *sententia communis*) of theologians either, but from magisterial documents as well, as even critics of de Lubac concede.³⁵ Still, there can be no question that Feingold’s attack on de Lubac, as well as his defense of the commentary tradition, directly entails, at least for him, the existence of limbo, as he unflinchingly concedes:

With regard to the text of St. Augustine [Confessions 1.1] and the great theme of man as *imago Dei*, analogical distinctions also need to be

³⁴ Whenever Thomas quotes St. Paul to the effect that “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor 2:9), this is a reliable indicator that he is speaking of a twofold end for man, a natural one that man *expects*, since it is born out of his natural (albeit elicited) desire and thus set vividly before his imagination in the wake of philosophical contemplation; and a supernatural one that, if granted, comes utterly without anticipation.

³⁵ “Ever since Jacques Maritain and his inseparable friend, Charles Journet, the doctrine of limbo has been hard put to find defenders. . . . Even more, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes no mention of limbo in regard to infants who die unbaptized (see no. 1261). This silence is eloquent when we consider that up until the middle of the twentieth century this doctrine was commonly held as a certain theological truth and was diffused widely among the Christian people by catechesis.” Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., “The Theory of Limbo and the Mystery of the Supernatural in St. Thomas Aquinas,” in Bonino, ed., *Supernatural: A Controversy*, 117–54; here 117, note 1.

made. *There is a restlessness of the heart that comes from nature, and another far higher restlessness that is the product of grace.* Likewise, resting in God can have a natural as well as a supernatural realization for St. Thomas, for he recognizes limbo as a state of natural happiness in which the souls of the unbaptized who died before the age of reason rejoice in a natural contemplation of God and do not experience interior restlessness of dissatisfaction.³⁶

One can readily see how Feingold got himself enticed into this cul-de-sac. For he rightly notes not just that de Lubac's version of the natural desire to see God undermines the thesis of limbo, but also that any attack on him *must* entail the existence of limbo:

The fact that the deprivation of the vision of God causes no suffering for the souls in limbo can only be either because they experience no natural desire to see God, or because their natural desire to see God is only a conditional one whose frustration causes no suffering. The first possibility must be discarded because St. Thomas had already demonstrated in *ScG III* ch 50–51 that *all* intellectual creatures naturally desire to see God, once they consider His existence. It follows, therefore, that the natural desire to see God in those without knowledge of Revelation can only be a conditional desire. . . . Furthermore, these articles of St. Thomas on the lack of spiritual suffering in limbo reveal a fundamental incompatibility with de Lubac's interpretation of the natural desire to see God. Precisely because de Lubac holds the desire to see God to be the most absolute of all desires, he cannot admit that it could be frustrated or unfulfilled without causing an essential suffering. This certainly seems to imply a significant form of spiritual suffering, which is precisely what St. Thomas emphatically excludes from limbo.³⁷

Feingold errs, however, when he implies that limbo was first mooted as a defense of elicited natural desire. Admittedly, he never asserts the historical connection, but the implication is there because of the way he ties the two together logically. But in fact limbo was first introduced to get around Augustine's teaching that unbaptized infants go directly to

³⁶ Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 203; emphases in the original. This entailment is mentioned frequently in Feingold's text, as here: "Furthermore, it is precisely for this reason that St. Thomas, followed by the vast majority of Catholic theologians for seven centuries, held that limbo would be a state of natural joy without any spiritual suffering for many individuals of our concretely existing human race" (*ibid.*, 391). Here again Feingold elides the *hypothesis* of pure nature with the *concrete reality* of limbo. Worse, he relies on a consensus that no longer obtains. The large listing of page numbers under "Limbo" in his Index is another indication of how much his argument relies on this jejune theologoumenon.

³⁷ Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 352; emphasis in the original.

hell.³⁸ Of course, once that hypothesis began to win over the majority of theologians, the concept of *natura pura* gained a new purchase on the theological imagination; and from that point on, the assertion of limbo marched *pari passu* with continued theological reflection on the meaning of a nature not endowed with grace. Unfortunately for Feingold's thesis, once the hypothesis of limbo is abandoned for other reasons, it only begs the question to appeal to the authority of the medieval doctors for its restitution, as Feingold clearly does here:

Third, an unconditional natural desire for the vision of God would contradict St. Thomas's well-known teaching concerning the lack of spiritual suffering in limbo, since the lack of realization of an unconditional natural desire would necessarily cause spiritual suffering and an essential frustration of the spiritual creature.³⁹

The trouble with this argument, besides its sheer reliance on authority, is that it ignores the shift in logic that has taken place in the twentieth century. St. Augustine was driven to his version of an infantile hell because of this syllogism:

1. Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.
2. Baptism is necessary for salvation, that is, for the attainment of the beatific vision, without which our hearts remain inherently restless.
3. Therefore, unbaptized infants suffer the restless torments of hell, eternally.

The medieval advocates of an infantile limbo, on the other hand, used a different syllogism:

1. Baptism is necessary if the human rational creature is to be given *both* the *supernatural* desire for the beatific vision *and* its actual attainment.
2. However, there are two ends in every rational creature: the contemplation of God as First Cause, which can be attained using reason's natural powers; and the contemplation of the divine essence, a gift of supernatural grace given in baptism.

³⁸ See Augustine's *Opus incompletum contra Julianum* and *Sermon 294* for especially gruesome depictions of infantile suffering in hell.

³⁹ Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 428. But Thomas clearly holds that "demonstration from authority is the weakest form of proof" (*ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2).

3. Therefore, infants who die without baptism can still enjoy the felicity of natural contemplation in limbo, since the attainment of that end remains possible without grace and would be unaffected by its deprivation.

The modern view, endorsed by Vatican II⁴⁰ and Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*,⁴¹ says there is only one end for rational creatures, a supernatural end. Of course, no magisterial document has ever denied that baptism still remains necessary for salvation. So how can the dilemma—that baptism is necessary for salvation and yet all human beings are called to one divine end—be solved without lapsing into St. Augustine's assertion of an infantile hell? The paradox is resolved by introducing a new premise, the notion of *solidarity*, the key word for interpreting Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Spe Salvi*.⁴² In other words, not only is the idea of felicity in limbo rendered impossible, since every human being has been inscribed by Christ and is destined for him (Col 1:16b), so that eternal separation from him would entail eternal suffering;

⁴⁰ "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." *Gaudium et Spes* §22.

⁴¹ "Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique, unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his 'heart.'" *Redemptor Hominis* §8; the rest of this same paragraph goes on to endorse *Gaudium et Spes* §22.

⁴² "[W]e should recall that no man is an island, entire of itself. Our lives are involved with one another, through innumerable interactions they are linked together. No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone. The lives of others continually spill over into mine: in what I think, say, do and achieve. And conversely, my life spills over into that of others: for better and for worse. So my prayer for another is not something extraneous to that person, something external, *not even after death*. . . . It is never too late to touch the heart of another, nor is it ever in vain. In this way we further clarify an important element of the Christian concept of hope. Our hope is always essentially also hope for others; only thus is it truly hope for me too. As Christians we should never limit ourselves to asking: how can I save myself? We should also ask: what can I do in order that others may be saved and that for them too the star of hope may rise? Then I will have done my utmost for my own personal salvation as well." *Spe Salvi* §48; emphasis added. Note also this encyclical's endorsement of de Lubac's book *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Mankind* at §§13–14, especially here: "Against this, drawing upon the vast range of patristic theology, de Lubac was able to demonstrate that salvation has always been considered a 'social' reality" (§14).

but also the *absence* of some souls from heaven supposedly languishing in limbo would affect the felicity of souls in heaven too.⁴³

The introduction of the notion of solidarity has obvious implications for the theology of baptism. It still remains necessary for salvation, and still remains inherently efficacious *ex opere operato*. But now this sacrament, *pace* St. Augustine and the medieval doctors, is seen—as St. Paul saw it—as a sacramental plunge into the death and resurrection of Jesus, sacramentally incorporating the new Christian into the Body of Christ, the Church, which is obviously and quintessentially a *social* reality.⁴⁴

Given all of these developments (to which de Lubac of course made his own contribution),⁴⁵ but considering also and above all the fact that these developments have been taught by both councils and popes, we can now conclude that any theology of nature and grace that entails the

⁴³ “This real life, towards which we try to reach out again and again, is linked to a lived union with a ‘people,’ and for each individual it can only be attained within this ‘we’. It presupposes that we escape from the prison of our ‘I,’ because only in the openness of this universal subject does our gaze open out to the source of joy, to love itself—to God.” *Spe Salvi* §14.

⁴⁴ It would take us too far afield to analyze in detail Paul’s theology of baptism, but this at least can be noted: “One could say without exaggeration that the concept of the body forms the keystone of Paul’s theology. In its closely interconnected meanings, the word *soma* knits together all his great themes. It is from the body of sin and death that we are delivered; it is through the body of Christ on the Cross that we are saved; it is into His body the Church that we are incorporated; it is by His body in the Eucharist that this Community is sustained; it is in our body that its new life has to be manifested; it is to a resurrection of this body to the likeness of His glorious body that we are destined. Here, with the exception of the doctrine of God, are represented all the main tenets of the Christian Faith—the doctrines of Man, Sin, the Incarnation and Atonement, the Church, the Sacraments, Sanctification, and Eschatology. To trace the subtle links and interaction between the different senses of this word *soma* is to grasp the thread that leads through the maze of Pauline thought.” J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), 9. At a minimum we can conclude from this passage that baptism entails much more than an individual’s ticket of admission to heaven. Rather, it involves a sacerdotal (1 Pt 2:9) responsibility to make the Church more and more the universal sacrament of salvation that she declares herself to be (*Lumen Gentium* §1).

⁴⁵ It has long been recognized that *Gaudium et Spes* §22 is directly reliant on de Lubac: “By revealing the Father and by being revealed by him, Christ completes the revelation of man to himself. . . . It is through Christ that the person reaches maturity, that man emerges definitively from the universe and becomes conscious of his own being.” Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 339. See Paul McPartlan, *Sacrament of Salvation: An Introduction to Eucharistic Ecclesiology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 74.

necessary conclusion that the *limbus infantium* actually exists, will have undermined its case irreparably. But perhaps the hypothesis of pure nature (as a purely hypothetical possibility, if not as an actually obtaining reality in salvation history) can still be rescued using other arguments, as Long tries to do; and so to him we now turn.

II.2

Although Steven Long has nothing but praise for Feingold's work,⁴⁶ he wisely refrains from resorting to that *pis aller* of medieval eschatology, an infantile limbo. But he does adopt and make his own several other features of Feingold's work, and at times sharpens them with more directly theological arguments, which means less reliance on the argument from mere authority. Like Feingold, Long readily concedes de Lubac's orthodox intentions;⁴⁷ and like Feingold, he admits that one reason the debate has remained so intractable down through the ages is because of an inherent ambiguity in Thomas's original texts:

It helps to put to rest the exegetic difficulty. It is without doubt true that there is a problem in the very texts of Aquinas, and a problem which seemingly does not allow much room for maneuver with respect to its solution: because the doctrinal points which constitute the elements of the problem—one is almost tempted to say “constitute the contradiction”—are starkly and clearly stated in St. Thomas's text. Yet the realization that there are indeed *two* sets of texts, one of which was not merely an interposed corruption, itself marks a decisive advance toward correct interpretation of Thomas's teaching. . . . The second set of texts hedges about, and delimits, the possible signification of the first set, and vice versa. That is, on the supposition that we do not wish to

⁴⁶ The first chapter of *Natura Pura* is a republication of his article “On the Loss, and the Recovery, of Nature as a Theonomic Principle: Reflections on the Nature/Grace Controversy,” *Nova et Vetera* 5 (2007): 133–83; all citations will be from the pagination in the book version. Chapter 2 of *Natura Pura* focuses its polemics against Hans Urs von Balthasar's (alleged) endorsement of de Lubac in his influential monograph, *The Theology of Karl Barth*. But a treatment of this part of his argument would take this article beyond its proper focus and so will not be discussed here. The same must apply *a fortiori* to any critique leveled by Long against Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Jean Porter, Tracy Rowland, or Joseph Ratzinger. One does wish to salute, however, Long's courage in taking on this “cloud of witnesses.”

⁴⁷ “[D]e Lubac's account of the natural desire for God, despite what I shall argue to be its doctrinal deficiency, is rooted in a genuinely profound theological need to overcome the loss of natural order as a theonomic principle.” Long, *Natura Pura*, 11.

suppose St. Thomas's texts to exhibit raw incoherence, then we need to read these texts in relation one to another.⁴⁸

Given this duality of texts, Long (along with Feingold) accuses de Lubac of a tendentious selection of texts from the Thomist/Thomistic corpus, highlighting the first set while ignoring the second; this obviously only "solves" the problem by ignoring it. Of course, de Lubac would reply that the same might be said of St. Thomas's commentators, only from the opposite side. But since both Feingold and Long concede that the first set of texts in Thomas shows him to be, at the least, more nuanced than the neo-scholastic tradition had noticed, we are now finally in the position to take the inadequacies of both neo-scholasticism and de Lubac into account, in order to forge a stronger synthesis.⁴⁹

One of the great merits in Long's book is the way he transposes this debate to a discussion of the moral law, both natural and divinely promulgated, a dimension long missing from this debate. As is conceded by all sides, St. Thomas recognizes both forms of law; but rarely has it been noted that his discussion of the interrelationship of these two versions of law has direct bearing on the nature-grace relationship. Consider this passage from the *prima secundae*:

⁴⁸ Long, *Natura Pura*, 13, 15; emphasis in the original. He gives samples here: "On the one hand, we have St. Thomas's argument that to know God is the end of every intelligent substance (*Summa contra Gentiles* III, 25), that there is indeed a natural desire for God (*ScG* III, c. 25; and *Summa theologiae* I–II, q. 3, a. 8); and that no natural desire may be in vain (*ST* I, q. 75, a. 6; *Compendium* 104). On the other hand, we have his clear affirmation that human and angelic natures are distinguished based upon their differing natural and proximate ends whereas their supernatural beatific end is the same (*ST* I, q. 75, a. 7, ad 1; *Quaestiones de anima* a. 7, ad 10)." Long, *Natura Pura*, 13.

⁴⁹ Guy Mansini makes the perfectly correct observation that this dilemma goes back to the New Testament and is not some tiresome piece of theological arcanum bequeathed to us by the Angelic Doctor: on the one hand, Scripture speaks of everything being made through Christ and for Christ (Jn 1:1–3; Col 1:15–16), while on the other it speaks of our elevation to grace on the analogy of adopted sons (Rom. 8:14–17). It is of course the whole point of adoption that it is not owed to the natural child (one thinks of Charles Dickens's novel *David Copperfield* here). So the paradox is rooted in revelation. See Guy Mansini, O.S.B., "The Abiding Significance of Henri de Lubac's *Surnaturel*," *The Thomist* 73 (2009): 593–619. Thomas Joseph White sees this same tension in *Gaudium et Spes*, supposedly the document where de Lubac has been most univocally vindicated: "*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 non-Christians and the arreligious). . . . In other words, the document is replete with appeal to principles of natural law." White, "'Pure Nature' of Christology," 285.

If man were ordained to no other end than that which is proportionate to his natural faculty, there would be no need for man to have any further direction on the part of his reason besides the natural law and human [positive] law, the latter of which is derived from the former. But since man is ordained to an end of eternal happiness, which exceeds the proportion of man's natural faculty, as stated above, therefore it was necessary that, besides the natural and the human law, man should be directed to his end by a law given by God. . . . But to his supernatural end man needs to be directed in a yet higher way. Hence, the additional law given by God, whereby man shares more perfectly in the eternal law.⁵⁰

Now, since no one has ever claimed that St. Thomas considered the natural law to be a mere "hypothesis," meant only to guarantee the gratuity of the divine law, Long is able to draw this inexorable conclusion: "The proportionate capacity of human nature is not a fiction, it is not a limit concept, it is not merely ideational; rather, it is something created by God."⁵¹ Or, as he earlier puts it in a felicitous image, nature is not a vacuole (a biological term referring to a cavity or vesicle in the cytoplasm of a cell), by which he means: "*Created nature in all its ontological density is not the theologian's posit; it is God's effect.*"⁵² Of course that effect is permeated with signs of God's involvement in salvation history. But those effects do not obliterate nature; rather they presuppose it *in its integrity*, however difficult it may be to sort out one from the other:

Of course, the concept of pure nature can be exactly specified [through abstraction]. What cannot be exactly specified are circumstantial aspects of divine providence that we could only know in relation to their actual promulgation through God creating nature apart from grace, which He has not done. But any further ordering of nature in and by grace cannot efface the primordial ordering of nature that is *presupposed*

⁵⁰ ST I–II, q. 91, a. 4, resp. and ad 1.

⁵¹ Long, *Natura Pura*, 201. Further: "Human nature is a real principle in the human person, and its species is derived, not from the ultimate supernatural end of beatific vision, but from its proportionate natural end" (ibid., 200). But far from cordoning off the natural law into a separate realm independent of the drama of salvation history, Long fully admits their mutual interpenetration: "Nothing in this, however, is to suggest that the natural end in its proper integrity and completeness may be attained apart from grace in the actually existing providential order. Nor can the ultimate supernatural end be attained by one who rejects the impress of the divine wisdom in the natural law and its dominion over his actions. For both natural law and the *lex nova* are participations in the eternal law" (ibid., 200–201).

⁵² Long, *Natura Pura*, 64; emphasis in the original.

by grace, and on the basis of which man is defined and placed in an intelligible species: the contrary is simply irrationalism, denying that we can know human nature in its essential teleological structures because these are further ordered in grace. To be further ordered is not *not to be*, nor is it to be *naturally unknowable*.⁵³

Even when one concedes these trenchant arguments (as I do), problems still lurk in Long's analysis. For example, in a lengthy footnote, he seems to concede more than he realizes when he is addressing the great conundrum in this debate, the place where Thomas says: "Since it is impossible that a natural desire be frustrated, which would happen if we could not arrive at the understanding of the divine substance that all minds naturally desire, it is therefore necessary to affirm that it is possible to see the divine substance by way of the intelligence."⁵⁴ This quotation clearly belongs in the first set of statements, the ones that support de Lubac's thesis.

Long recognizes the difficulty and handles it by claiming that Thomas is speaking as a theologian, that is, from the point of view of revelation, which alone can tell us that the desire to see the divine essence is *proximately* possible, whereas a philosopher can only deduce that it is *abstractly* possible. From which Long concludes: "only revelation seems to assure the possibility of the divine vision in the second sense of proximate possibility, *such that the natural desire becomes unconditional*."⁵⁵ But of course, that was precisely de Lubac's thesis: that our natural desire for God is unconditional and that its eschatological frustration entails hell; *and* he always

⁵³ Long, *Natura Pura*, 72–73; all emphases in the original. This passage happens to be directed against Balthasar but has obvious relevance to de Lubac, although he is willing to concede a greater debt to the pure-nature tradition in Balthasar than in de Lubac: "Balthasar will argue, correctly, that the nature confronting our intelligence does not exist in a separated or 'pure' fashion ('separated' or 'pure' in the sense of being unaffected by its mode of being and its relation to God's grace): 'God's real world order [says Balthasar] is the *de facto* unity of two *materially* distinguishable and distinct orders that can be differentiated in analysis but are still not separate in reality.' No Thomist could say it better." Long, *Natura Pura*, 66; quoting from Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 280; emphases in the original. One recalls here as well Balthasar's famous criticism of what he called Barth's "christological bottleneck," by which he meant that Barth's theology was so relentlessly christocentric that it could make no room for creation (or even the Church) as self-subsistent realities. In my opinion (although the point cannot be argued here), Balthasar is more nuanced on this issue of nature's self-subsistence vis-à-vis Christ than de Lubac.

⁵⁴ ScG III, chap. 5.

⁵⁵ Long, *Natura Pura*, 226, note 11; emphasis added.

considered himself a theologian (a historical theologian, to be sure). So Long seems to have brought us right back to the starting point with nothing resolved.

Finally, there is the pesky issue of limbo again. Although, as I said above, Long wisely avoids making his case for *natura pura* rely on that jejune theologoumenon, he comes close at one point to insisting on the reality of an infantile limbo, and—as with Feingold—does so merely on the authority of the Common Doctor: “[I]f the natural desire for God were formally a desire for supernatural beatific vision, it would follow that to be perpetually deprived of this end proper to nature would be a punishment. Yet St. Thomas teaches exactly the contrary.”⁵⁶

What I have attempted to do in this section is to present as fairly as I can the case against de Lubac as lodged by Feingold and Long, together

⁵⁶ Long, *Natura Pura*, 14. Again, I would like to register my bafflement at the way the question of limbo keeps getting dragged into the debate. It is *supposed* to be conceded on all sides that the concept of pure nature serves merely as a hypothetical possibility to preserve the gratuity of grace and to block the way to Baianism and Jansenism. Yet, obviously, if limbo did exist, that is, if infants (or Aristotle, or Averroes, or even, of all people, Suleiman the Magnificent, as Dante held) really were enjoying right now a natural bliss outside of the precincts of heaven, then there would be in the actual order a pure nature, that is, a pocket of reality untouched by Christ, a clear contradiction of the Prologue to John’s Gospel and of the christological hymns in Colossians. Plus, limbo presupposes that baptism cannot be seen as a sacrament of salvation unless the non-baptized are denied salvation. But to subscribe to that binary conclusion (a legacy of St. Augustine’s lingering Manicheism) means the establishment of an insidious temptation in the minds of the baptized, such as to make them *resent* the idea of the non-baptized “sneaking into” heaven by the backdoor, so to speak. One cannot imagine an attitude more antithetical to *Spe Salvi*—or of Ratzingerian theology more generally: “We cannot start to set limits on God’s behalf; *the very heart of the faith has been lost to anyone who supposes that it is only worthwhile, if it is, so to say, made worthwhile by the damnation of others.* Such a way of thinking, which finds the punishment of other people necessary, springs from not having inwardly accepted the faith; from loving only oneself and not God the Creator, to whom his creatures belong. That way of thinking would be like the attitude of those people who could not bear the workers who came last being paid a denarius like the rest; like the attitude of people who feel properly rewarded only if others have received less. This would be the attitude of the son who stayed at home, who could not bear the reconciling kindness of his father. It would be a hardening of our hearts, in which it would become clear that we were only looking out for ourselves and not looking for God; in which it would be clear that we did not love our faith, but merely bore it like a burden. . . . It is a basic element of the biblical message that the Lord died for all—being jealous of salvation is not Christian.” Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *God Is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 35–36; emphasis added.

with possible critiques of them that arise solely from within the presuppositions of their own respective analyses. In the next and final section, I would like to step back from the debate as currently conducted to see if there might be a way of more directly unraveling this Gordian knot by the introduction of other considerations.

III

III.1

Although the previous analysis might make it sound like this debate has reached a standstill, there are in fact more convergences between supporters and critics of de Lubac than are at first apparent. Toward the end of his book, Feingold shares one of his great worries about the long-term effects of de Lubac's interpretation of the natural desire for God: "[O]ne of the great pastoral problems of our time is that so many people, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, take Heaven for granted as something somehow due simply to natural goodness. This view debases Heaven by naturalizing it."⁵⁷

Actually, de Lubac agrees! Most secondary scholarship on de Lubac, both pro and con, largely ignores his criticism of liberal Catholicism in the wake of Vatican II.⁵⁸ Even as early as 1969 he was attacking the liberal

⁵⁷ Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 443. Anyone who has been to a postconciliar funeral will readily commiserate with Feingold here and join in singing his keen. Say the deceased was an avid golfer—in that case you can be sure someone at the wake or during the eulogy will speak of the late, much-lamented Uncle Wilbur as now enjoying himself in the Great Golf Course in the Sky. When the aged senator from West Virginia, ninety-two-year-old Robert Byrd (known as the King of Pork for all the federal largesse he poured into his state), died in the summer of 2010, the Catholic (!) bishop of Charleston (the capital of West Virginia) chirruped that the Senator was surely now in heaven. One wonders if the burdened taxpayers from other states agreed, whose children will be saddled for generations to come with paying off the federal debt that was used to fund all that Appalachian bacon.

⁵⁸ An exception is Voderholzer: "For de Lubac, the seventies were also overshadowed by many disappointments. He had helped in so many ways to prepare for the Second Vatican Council and only a few years before had had to defend himself against the accusation that he was an innovator, yet now he was suddenly considered the proponent of an old, supposedly obsolete theology. For his eightieth birthday, on February 20, 1976, de Lubac received a handwritten letter from Pope Paul VI. He showed it to the superior of the house, but he did not even want to look at it, and his Provincial would not read it either." Voderholzer, *Meet de Lubac*, 95. See also Christopher J. Walsh, "De Lubac's Critique of the Postconciliar Church," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 19 (1992): 404–32. According to Walsh, there was evidently a complete breakdown of trust at that time between de Lubac and his Jesuit superiors. At one point, an article that de Lubac had written was rejected for publication in a Jesuit organ for its criticisms of liberal Catholicism (oh, the irony!), which prompted de Lubac to call the episode "a final

partisans who were appealing to that vapid *fata morgana* called “the spirit of the council” to justify their deviations from both the council itself and core Christian teachings. In an address delivered at Saint Louis University on the occasion of its sesquicentennial, where he received an honorary doctorate, de Lubac addressed the perhaps surprised assembly in words that can only be described as a jeremiad:

The Christian thinkers of the past are looked down upon as if they no longer had anything to say; the traditional formulations of faith are stated in such a way as to appear ridiculous, so as to hasten their replacement. And under the pretext of merely changing this or that word or phrase, it is the very essence of our faith which runs the risk of being sifted away. . . . Whatever is recriminatory, whatever excites, is declared prophetic, even if it is evident that it stems from ignorance, or from concessions made to what is currently in vogue—and this is the exact opposite of what we mean by prophetic! . . . We must not be afraid to say so: there is nothing in all of this that is promising. A faith which dissolves itself is unable to engender anything whatever. A community which breaks up is incapable of radiating or of attracting others. Agitation is not synonymous with life. That last hatched slogan is not necessarily a new thought. The noisiest critics are frequently the most sterile.⁵⁹

Furthermore, he explicitly links the pathology here described with a loss of the sense of the supernatural, precisely the gravamen of the concerns about de Lubac’s theology in both Feingold and Long. In other words, just because de Lubac is most famous for his criticisms of “extrinsicism,” that does not make him an advocate of “intrinsicism,” at least if that term is defined to mean that man has any claim, by virtue of his natural desire for God, on divine grace, or still less that he can entirely dispense with the supernatural merely by, say, working to reform “unjust social structures.” On the contrary, for de Lubac, *Gaudium et Spes* sought for an openness to the world precisely in order to announce the salvation that comes from Christ:

But [de Lubac continues] is it not just the opposite for some? Does not such an “openness” become a forgetfulness of salvation and of the gospel, a tending toward secularism, a loosening of faith and morals? Finally, this “openness” becomes for others a loss of identity, in a word,

example of police methods practiced by certain intelligentsia reigning at that time in France in the Society of Jesus” (as cited in Walsh, “De Lubac’s Critique,” 411).

⁵⁹ Henri de Lubac, “The Church in Crisis,” *Theology Digest* 17 (1969): 312–25; here 317. A revised version of this address was published in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 91 (1969): 580–96.

the betrayal of our obligation toward the world. Because the Council, following the desire of John XXIII, did not wish either to define new dogmas or to pronounce anathemas, many conclude that the church no longer has the right to judge anything or anyone; they recommend a “pluralism” which is not the pluralism of the theological schools but that of entirely different beliefs from those of the normative faith. . . . The word “renewal” can cover a multitude of abuses!⁶⁰

De Lubac continued these critiques until his last book, published in 1989, *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits*.⁶¹ (After the appearance of this book, he suffered a series of strokes and died on September 4, 1991, in the care of the Little Sisters of the Poor.) Perhaps nowhere was he both more poignant and more succinct than in this passage from an earlier book: “People nowadays speak about the Church more than they experience her. They discuss questions of faith more than they live its mystery. From this comes the expected result: a somnolence, a lassitude, a refusal to react—indeed a secret complacency—in the face of destructive forces.”⁶²

Needless to say, all these citations manifesting de Lubac's *cri de coeur* can be readily taken by his critics as confirming their critique, and perhaps they are right; it would have to be conceded, though, that de Lubac himself never abandoned his prior writings on nature and grace.⁶³ But at

⁶⁰ De Lubac, “Church in Crisis,” 319.

⁶¹ Translated as *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned his Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993). See also Henri de Lubac, *Entretien autour de Vatican II* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1985); an abridged translation of this book-length interview appeared as *De Lubac: A Theologian Speaks* (Los Angeles: Twin Circle, 1985).

⁶² Henri de Lubac, *L'Église dans la crise actuelle* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1969), 18.

⁶³ This refusal to back down can be seen most clearly in a work de Lubac wrote for the International Theological Commission, to which he had been appointed by Pope Paul VI: Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechism on Nature and Grace*, trans. Richard Arnandez, F.S.C. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984). Also, this anecdote from Voderholzer is telling: “Whereas de Lubac was regarded by proponents of a self-styled progressive trend as a theologian who had meanwhile become hopelessly obsolete, there was, on the other hand, no lack of critics who claimed that he was primarily responsible for the onset of the crisis in the Church. In 1975 someone mailed de Lubac photocopied excerpts from the book entitled *Gethsemane* by the Archbishop of Genoa, [Giuseppe] Cardinal Siri. The cardinal denounced ‘the historical conscience,’ ‘hermeneutics’ and the ‘existential reference’ as hallmarks of a theology leading to destruction, for which de Lubac was chiefly to blame, along with Karl Rahner and Jacques Maritain. De Lubac resolutely defended himself against these charges in a letter dated November 15, 1975. . . . Without entering into a discussion with Siri, de Lubac referred to the approval of his work by Pope Pius XII and to the favorable judgment of Étienne Gilson.” Voderholzer, *Meet de Lubac*, 97.

least Feingold and Long are on the same page with de Lubac on *this* issue: all theologies on the nature/grace dialectic must always serve this thoroughly biblical injunction:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory *beyond all comparison*, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For what is seen is transitory, but the things that are unseen are eternal. . . . So from now on we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he is a new creation*. The old has gone; behold, the new has come! (2 Cor 4:16–18; 5:16–17; RSV, emphases added).⁶⁴

III.2

Given the fact that both de Lubac and his critics Feingold and Long want to preserve the gratuity of grace in the face of the secularist onslaught, but also considering their different approaches to attaining that commonly held aim, might there be another way of reconciling their differences? Here I would like to pick up on one line in de Lubac's lament against liberal Catholicism cited above: his plaint that a loss of the sense of the supernatural had led to "a loosening of faith and morals."⁶⁵ If we tie this together with Long's remarks about the natural law cited above in section II.2 of this article, I think we can find a possible *rapprochement* on the horizon.

In my opinion, Long scored a bull's-eye when he showed that the existence of natural law and its continued validity (*pace* Barth) even after the promulgation of divine law entails this already-cited conclusion: "*Created nature in all its ontological density is not the theologian's posit; it is God's effect.*"⁶⁶ But perhaps this insight can be taken further: can we say something about the place of desire inside the framework of natural law? That is, since law implies choice, and since choice entails the possibility of disobedience (otherwise there would be no freedom), then *what* one desires, when set against the moral law, is of obvious relevance.

What strikes me, in other words, in this debate is that the term "desire" is still spoken of too abstractly, without a due allowance being made to

⁶⁴ Oddly, both Feingold/Long and de Lubac could find in this passage validation for their respective views, although to establish that would require both careful exegesis of this passage and an account of how they make different use of this passage, something that cannot be attempted here.

⁶⁵ De Lubac, "Crisis in the Church," 319.

⁶⁶ Long, *Natura Pura*, 64; emphasis in the original.

the phenomenology of desire in the light of original sin—with its legacy of the *fomes peccati*, that is, of temptation and concupiscence. But the only way to distinguish *proper* desires *sensu stricto* for innately necessary goods (the hunger for food, the instinct for self-preservation and the like) from improper desires that *deflect* a person from either his natural or his supernatural end (temptation properly speaking), is to view actions *and* desires in the light of philosophical ethics and/or moral theology.⁶⁷

For that project, one may perhaps best begin with an important observation from the always brilliant pen of Blaise Pascal, who said: “If man is not made for God, why is he happy only with God? If man is made for God, why is he so hostile to God?”⁶⁸ In my opinion, debate on the *Supernatural* controversy has focused too much on Pascal’s first rhetorical question but not enough on the second.

It is, after all, relatively uncontroversial to say that man cannot find his happiness in health, money, sex, or worldly ambition—a point on which the pagan moralists were also agreed (except maybe the Epicureans), and as Aristotle makes clear in Book X of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. But after the coming of Christ, a new reality entered the world, one that provokes a different kind of “desire,” best summed up in Lucifer’s *non serviam*. Thus enters, for the first time in history, the chance for human beings to make a definitive No to God’s definitive Yes (2 Cor 1:18–20). Moreover, according to Balthasar, this No continues to become more obstreperous, what he calls a *crescendoing* No, as he explains in this important passage:

Human reason, in its secularizing role in world history, prevents those who reject Jesus’ provocation from returning to a “numinous” worldview in which the divine and worldly commingle, unseparated. . . . This leaves the field clear for what must be called “post-Christian atheism.” For when nature is deprived of divinity, the presence of the Creator within it fades. To the observer who sees matters only in terms of the *utile*, God disappears into the background. This is a natural process, and over against it is heard the claim of Jesus to be “*the way, the truth, and the life*” (John 14:6)—a claim that attracts to itself and concentrates all the religious aspirations of mankind. He goes on to say that “no one comes to the Father except through me.” This is not to deny the ultimate salvation of all who do not know him and adhere to other religions; he is saying that the latter religions do not mediate salvation: he

⁶⁷ I must wonder aloud here whether the sex-abuse crisis now roiling the Catholic Church is not due, at least in part, to the failure to distinguish various species of desire, very much including sexual desire. Desires are, after all, inherently end-directed. But without an analysis of the morality of a particular end in view, moral confusion and even chaos will ensue.

⁶⁸ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. Honor Levi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8.

alone does. Once this has become sufficiently well known to mankind, the other religions (those that still remain) are bound to acquire a certain anti-Christian slant. They will try to appropriate all the features of the religion of Jesus that seem to commend it to mankind. . . . The only exceptions are those religions that are directly or indirectly dependent on the biblical revelation, first of all Judaism, and then Islam. They constitute a very strange kind of exception, however, for both of them—first of all Judaism, and then Islam—reject the full claim made by Jesus and so will be particularly susceptible to militant atheism (Judaism) or to an emphatically anti-Christian theism (Islam).⁶⁹

Therefore, when theologians speak of “natural desire,” they must carefully attend to the deep, post-Incarnation ambiguity of that phrase. Under that rubric, future debate will have to revisit, among other issues, the common medieval axiom that “it is impossible for a natural desire to be incapable of fulfillment” (ScG III, chap. 51, 1). One hardly needs to be a doctrinaire Darwinian to see how often natural desires go unfulfilled. Indeed, this axiom represents insuperable hurdles for theodicy in a world where natural, innate desires often go unfulfilled, such as in the widespread episodes of starvation in modern history, caused both by nature (the Irish potato famine in the nineteenth century, although that was also abetted by the British government’s *laissez-faire* economic policies) and by man (the Soviet-engineered famine in the Ukraine in the 1930s). Well before the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, Alfred Lord Tennyson penned these lines, which were first published in 1850:

Are God and Nature then at strife,
 That Nature lends us evil dreams?
 So careful of the type she seems,
 So careless of the single life. . . .
 “So careful of the type?” But no.
 From scarped cliff and quarried stone
 She cries, “A thousand types are gone:
 I care for nothing, all shall go.” (*In Memoriam*, stanzas 55–56)

But leaving aside biology and even theodicy, surely this axiom must yield in any event to the Bible’s assertion that creation is subject to futility, and not (just) because of sin but because of something inherent in its identity as a created reality:

⁶⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, 438–39; emphases in the original.

For creation was subjected to futility, *not of its own accord but by the will of him who subjected it in hope*, because creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole of creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only creation, but we ourselves. (Rom 8:20–23a; emphasis added).

Of course all men desire by nature to be happy, an almost tautological truth on which Aristotle, St. Thomas, the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and even Nietzsche are agreed. In that sense, this innate desire cannot be frustrated, since an innate and *frustrated* desire is self-contradictory.⁷⁰ But other, more spiritual forces are at work for which the word “desire” (under any rubric) can hardly serve. Rather, because of the coming of Christ onto the stage of history, efforts to build the terrestrial city take on an inevitable Promethean motivation, one which the Church refutes by her very presence in history. Again Balthasar:

We must not be afraid to utter the harsh truth. In making his provocative claim to have reconciled the world in God, Jesus never suggested that he was creating an earthly paradise. The kingdom of God will never be externally demonstrable (Luke 17:21); it grows, invisibly, perpendicular to world history, and the latter’s fruits are already in God’s barns. Man responds to this provocation by attempting to manufacture the kingdom of God on earth, with increasing means and methods of power; logically this power that resists the powerlessness of the Cross is bound to destroy itself, for it bears the principle of self-annihilation within it by saying No to the claim of Christ. And so we are brought to the following formulation, extravagant though it may seem: *mankind’s self-destruction is the only foreseeable end to the world, left to itself, and the only end it deserves*, insofar as it prefers to hoard what is its own (that is, power, Mammon) rather than gather with Christ. It has already decided its own fate.⁷¹

⁷⁰ As many philosophers (above all, Arthur Schopenhauer) have pointed out, a suicide kills himself to put an end to a situation of current misery, in which of course he is motivated by the desire to be happy, not miserable.

⁷¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, 442; emphasis added. Moreover, just as de Lubac, Feingold, and Long do, Balthasar worries that this same attitude has infected Christians: “Further—and this is something that even more clearly unveils the apocalyptic situation—this fascination so weakens the Christian organism that the alien wasp is able to inject its anesthetizing sting and lay its eggs right inside it, with the result that the body, now hollowed out from inside, serves as welcome food for the enemy.” Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, 441. He knows well the voice that animates this spirit and mocks them with their own voice here: “Why, if we are serious about God’s incarnation in Jesus, [say these secularizing Christians] should we not salute ‘atheism in Christianity’? For the latter’s norm now resides

The perspective offered here represents, of course, only a first step in bringing de Lubac's supporters and critics to a new synthesis. But at least we can say this: based on Christ's overthrow of the principalities and powers of this world by his entry into history as God's definitive revelation, grace crowns and completes human efforts and human nature only because it first of all turns them upside down.⁷² N V

in this divine impulse in *man*, not in the alienating spell cast by a tyrant in heaven" (ibid.).

⁷² "Looked at in this way, it is not the battle between the two cities of Jerusalem and Babylon that forms the theological heart of history, but a deeper, more hard-fought, more crucial struggle. It is the 'Babylon within us' which we must throw to the ground at whatever cost." Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 146. Nonetheless, Balthasar hastens to add that nature still has its own self-subsistent reality, even when grace turns our expectations upside down and even when we overthrow the "Babylon within." Indeed, the last sentence of *A Theology of History* says: "If we miss out the level at which creation has a content proper to itself, then everything dissolves into pan-Christism, reducing the grace-given event of God's becoming man to the dead level of a cosmological, gnostic process" (ibid., 148).