

REASSESSING HENRI DE LUBAC'S THEOLOGY OF THE
SUPERNATURAL—SELECTED SESSION

Topic: Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace
Convener: Aaron Pidel, Marquette University
Moderator: Susan Wood, S.C.L., Marquette University
Presenters: Patrick X. Gardner, Valparaiso University; Sr. Chau Nguyen,
University of St. Thomas; Aaron Pidel, Marquette University

In this paper, “The Phenomenology of the Supernatural: Nature, Grace, and Method in de Lubac’s Early Theology,” Patrick X. Gardner noted that, though Henri de Lubac is often credited with revolutionizing the Church’s thinking on nature and grace, relatively little attention has been paid to de Lubac’s fundamental theology. Many have presumed that the only methods informing his *ressourcement* project are the methods used within the Augustinian and Thomist traditions. Gardner, however, drawing from de Lubac’s earliest and often unpublished writings, argued that de Lubac’s most important reflections on method endorse a form of phenomenology, especially the kind developed by Maurice Blondel. He proceeded to argue that this broadly phenomenological style, whose point of departure is human experience, makes sense of several of de Lubac’s more puzzling claims. Viewing nature phenomenologically and experientially, as de Lubac did, we may more coherently reject pure nature and affirm the paradox of humanity’s natural desire for supernatural fulfilment.

In her presentation, “De Lubac and Teilhard with Mary in the Nature-Grace Conflict,” Sr. Chau Nguyen, O.P., noted how de Lubac’s larger corpus might illuminate his position on the relationship between nature and grace. Her paper argued that a particular work is especially significant in this regard: de Lubac’s book-length commentary on Teilhard de Chardin’s eponymous poem, *L’Éternel féminin*. Nguyen argued that de Chardin sees the feminine as force of attraction organizing the universe. This force has analogous manifestations in subpersonal and personal registers, finding its highest and most concrete instantiation in the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary comes to represent the spiritual consummation of the created world while nevertheless pointing beyond herself to Christ, the Omega. Sr. Nguyen suggested that de Chardin’s understanding of Mary, upon which de Lubac commented extensively, serves as a paradigm for de Lubac’s own understanding of human nature elevated by grace. This is because human nature in de Lubac’s thought, paralleling Mary in de Chardin’s thought, has its own integrity yet finds its ultimate “natural” fulfillment beyond the natural order.

In his presentation, “Erich Przywara on Nature-Grace Extrinsicism,” Aaron Pidel, S.J., argued that Erich Przywara’s analogical or “parallax” model of nature and grace offers a satisfying alternative to de Lubac’s “paradoxical” model. Concerned to preserve the Augustinian doctrine of the *cor inquietum*, de Lubac argues that the human person is so deeply oriented toward the vision of God that a human person not so oriented would be a contradiction in terms. There is thus a “natural” desire for the supernatural, the disproportion of which must be accepted as a “paradox.” Przywara, by contrast, argues that theologies construing grace as an inner necessity of nature represent a respectable but incomplete perspective. “Historical” views of nature, such as de Lubac’s, must be complemented and corrected by “systematic” views of nature,

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which emphasize the integrity of nature and of the natural end. On Przywara's view, the created consciousness that understands the whole truth concerning nature and grace turns out to be not any individual genius' but the Church's, inasmuch as the Church contains and endorses both "historical" and "systematic" traditions. This irresolvable "parallax view" brings us face to face with our creaturely limitations and orients us to the ever-greater God.

The ensuing conversation followed several different paths. Of particular interest was the question directed toward Pidel and Gardner on the Ignatian inspiration of de Lubac's and Przywara's writings. Each replied that there was some plausibility in the conjecture. Ignatius emphasizes experience and desire, which are evident in de Lubac's and Blondel's phenomenological orientations. Ignatius also emphasizes a balance between "positive" and "scholastic" approaches to theology, which is evident in Przywara's "parallax" view of both historical and systematic styles. Nguyen received several questions regarding the degree to which de Lubac may have consciously modeled his theory of nature and grace on de Chardin's Mariology. She replied that their mutual friendship and intellectual exchanges indicate an influence stronger than the few explicit references would suggest. In response to a question concerning the danger that de Chardin immanentizes the Incarnate Word by making him the Omega of cosmic evolution, Sr. Nguyen noted that Marian dimension keeps de Chardin's system from becoming an evolutionary pantheism. Because Mary remains the highpoint of the spiritualization of nature, yet remains distinct from Christ, she marks the abiding distinction between Creator and creature.

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