

HENRI DE LUBAC—SELECTED SESSION

- Topic: Apocalypticism and Mysticism at the End of Modernity:  
New Studies on Henri de Lubac
- Convener: Andrew Prevot, Boston College
- Moderator: Peter Casarella, University of Notre Dame
- Presenters: Joseph Flipper, Bellarmine University  
Andrew Prevot, Boston College  
Patrick Gardner, University of Notre Dame

Henri de Lubac is well known for his works on theological anthropology, ecclesiology, sacramental theology, and biblical exegesis. Flipper, Prevot, and Gardner embraced these familiar features of de Lubac's theology while shifting the focus toward neglected areas of his thought. They reframed de Lubac's project as a *mystical-apocalyptic theology of history*. From different angles, they examined de Lubac's historical engagements with the Christian tradition and the crises of secular modernity; moreover, they connected these historical engagements with de Lubac's treatments of realities that both transpire and transcend history, namely mystical union with God and the apocalyptic end of time. This new way of reading de Lubac may assist theologians seeking to revitalize Christian life within a postmodern context.

In "Henri de Lubac and the Return of the Apocalyptic," Flipper traced the development of de Lubac's apocalyptic theology of history through three historical phases. First, the Neoscholastic context of de Lubac's early formation reduced eschatology to an abstract eternity; at the same time, apocalyptic images of a final spiritual battle began to take hold of the anti-modernist Catholic imagination. Second, around the Second World War, de Lubac and other *nouvelle* theologians formulated a new theology of history, inspired by the church fathers and modern apostolic social movements, which sought to address the material and spiritual needs of humanity without succumbing to Marxism. Finally, near the end of his career, de Lubac struggled against the secularizing side of Joachim of Fiore's "spiritual posterity," which envisions an age of the Spirit (beyond that of the Father and Son) that is little more than a realized, anthropocentric eschatology. Flipper helpfully opposed this de-Christianizing strand of Joachimism to the robustly Christian apocalyptic theology of history, rooted in Origen, which de Lubac retrieves in *History and Spirit* and *Medieval Exegesis*.

In "The Unity and Plurality of the Mystical in the Writings of Henri de Lubac," Prevot argued that de Lubac should be recovered as a source for contemporary Christian mystical theology. Although de Lubac never finished his anticipated project on mysticism, he employed the adjective "mystical" (*mystique*) and the noun "mysticism" (*la mystique*) at many crucial points throughout his works while also drawing on the testimonies of many mystics (*les mystiques*). The plurality of these references reflects de Lubac's admirable commitment to a historically mediated mystical theology. At the same time, this plurality discloses three deeper levels of unity. First, the meaning of the mystical is unified; it implies creaturely participation in the mystery (*le mystère*), i.e., the Trinity's incomprehensible creative and salvific interactions with the world. Second, the mystical unifies distinct aspects of de

Lubac's theology, including his teachings on nature and grace, the senses of Scripture, the triplex body of Christ, and other related topics. Finally, the mystical leads us through history into an at least incipiently eschatological, in some special cases nearly eschatological, and in the end fully eschatological union with God and others in Christ.

In "De Lubac's 'Mystical Confrontation' with Nietzsche," Gardner clarified how much de Lubac perhaps surprisingly shares with Nietzsche, the great prophet of the "death of God" and, moreover, why de Lubac is nevertheless quite justified in disagreeing with him. De Lubac and Nietzsche share an aversion to the Enlightenment ideal of apodictic, disincarnated reason (whether in theistic or atheistic form). Against this rationalistic construct, they advocate a mystical union with life. However, there is a crucial difference. For Nietzsche, this mystical union is characterized by a neopagan, mythological, immanentist fatalism. The liberation and vitality promised in the figure of the *Übermensch* cannot overcome the fatalism of the eternal return. By contrast, de Lubac proposes a mystical union with the living God who enters into history through Christ and bestows an eschatological gift of trinitarian freedom and love. Gardner also helpfully observed that, more clearly than Nietzsche's mysticism, de Lubac's mysticism humbles natural reason while preserving a valuable place for it.

In the rich, rewarding discussion that followed, audience members raised questions about de Lubac's participation in debates surrounding Nietzsche's anti-Semitism; the post-Vatican II context of de Lubac's anti-Joachite writings; the relation of de Lubac's mystical thought to political, liberation, and feminist theology; the influence of Teilhard de Chardin on de Lubac's theology of history; and a variety of related topics. The session as a whole demonstrated that there is ample room for further study of de Lubac's historically engaged, mystical, and apocalyptic theology. We are just beginning to appreciate the many ways that de Lubac may prepare theologians to deepen their contemplation of the Christian mystery while conversing at high levels with formidable representatives of postmodern theory.

ANDREW PREVOT

*Boston College*

*Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts*