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SACRAMENT AND ESCHATOLOGICAL FULFILLMENT IN
HENRI DE LUBAC'S THEOLOGY OF HISTORY

by
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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

SACRAMENT AND ESCHATOLOGICAL FULFILLMENT IN
HENRI DE LUBAC'S THEOLOGY OF HISTORY

Joseph Simeon Flipper, B.A., M.A.

Marquette University, 2012

Henri de Lubac, S.J. (1896-1991) led one of the most important developments within twentieth-century Catholic theology, the movement known as the *nouvelle théologie*. De Lubac's signature move was to return to early church sources to renew contemporary theology. This dissertation explores de Lubac's recovery of patristic eschatology for the contemporary age. While certainly responding to secularization, de Lubac also sought to respond to the "messianic" and apocalyptic shape of modern religious experience and political ideology. He argued that the source of secular messianisms was a dictotomy within Christianity between mysticism and the apocalyptic. The *nouvelle théologie* movement of the 1940s—from the wartime underground journal *Cahiers du Témoignage chrétien* (The Christian Witness Journals) to the post-war controversy over Christianity and communism—witnesses to the clash of differing eschatologies at the heart of twentieth-century Catholicism. De Lubac's response—his recovery of a patristic exegetical hermeneutics—must therefore be examined with an eschatological lens. De Lubac borrowed from Origen to recover an eschatology that synthesizes a transcendent-oriented mysticism with a future-oriented hope. De Lubac then showed how two historical developments—Pseudo-Dionysian spirituality and Joachimite history—diverged from the traditional patristic eschatology. Dionysian mysticism ejected the historical, while Joachimism's apocalyptic theology of history evacuated authentic transcendence. Both lost a dynamic tension inherent in patristic thought. De Lubac argued that the dichotomy between the *invisibilia Dei* and the *futura* lay at the origins of rationalistic and apocalyptic ideologies in the twentieth century. In the end, this study argues, de Lubac creatively appropriated patristic "anagogy" and made eschatology the fundamental structure for his sacramental thinking, his understanding of the church, his Christology, and his mysticism. The dissertation shows that de Lubac's "anagogical" imagination effected a rapprochement between eschatological impulses within the twentieth century and responded to the needs of a divided Catholicism.

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INTRODUCTION

Henri de Lubac's writings on the history of exegesis (especially *Exégèse médiévale* and *La Posterité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore*) have been enigmatic for historians and theologians alike. The four volumes of *Exégèse médiévale* (1959-1964) cataloged a patristic and medieval biblical hermeneutic of spiritual interpretation that had long been superseded within Protestant exegesis and arguably within Roman Catholic biblical circles as well.¹ “Spiritual interpretation” was a method of finding spiritual meanings beyond the letter of the text. However, at a time when Catholicism was rediscovering the depths of the biblical texts with the help of historical and critical interpretive methods, spiritual interpretation appeared to be a step backward. If intended as an argument for a particular exegetical hermeneutic, *Exégèse médiévale* was never seriously received by biblicists.² Historians of Christian exegesis did not know what to do with *Exégèse médiévale*. It appeared to overlook the irreducible pluralism of patristic and medieval exegesis, over-distilling this pluralism into the “fourfold sense of scripture.”

De Lubac's *La Posterité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore* (2 vols.) (1979-1981) posed a similar difficulty. Analyzing the exegesis of the medieval apocalyptic theologian

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- 1 I use the French title *Exégèse médiévale* rather than the English *Medieval Exegesis* to refer to the entire four-volume work because volume four of *Exégèse médiévale* has not yet been translated into English. In what follows I depend upon the English translation of volumes one to three and the French version of volume four. For the sake of consistency, I refer to the untranslated volume in the French (Book 2, Part 2) as *Exégèse médiévale* 4.
 - 2 David M. Williams states, “His effect on biblical exegetes, especially those outside France, was at best negligible.” Williams points to several concerns raised by de Lubac’s work for exegetes, above all, “doubts regarding the depth and reality of his commitment to the role of history in biblical interpretation.” David M. Williams, *Receiving the Bible in Faith* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 170.

Joachim de Fiore, de Lubac traced “Joachimite” thought from the medieval period to the contemporary. He employed several criteria for identifying “Joachimite” thinkers: their use of a Trinitarian schema to divide history, the expectation of a new age of the Spirit, and an apocalyptic view of the future age to come. The initial reviewers of *La Posterité spirituelle* differed significantly in their assessments, generally depending upon whether they were historians, theologians, or philosophers.³ Again, historians primarily objected to the wide net in which de Lubac ensnared theologians, philosophers, political and social theorists, tyrants, and poets. Among those treated as Joachim’s “spiritual posterity” were G. E. Lessing, Friedrich Schleiermacher, G. W. F. Hegel, Hughes Felicité Robert de Lamennais, Adolf Hitler, Jürgen Moltmann, and de Lubac’s former student, Michel de Certeau. To characterize all of them as Joachimite appears unjustifiable in purely historical terms and somewhat rash.⁴

Recent scholarship, however, makes sense of de Lubac’s studies on the history of exegesis by placing them in the context of his theological commitments, and not only his exegetical or historical ones. Kevin L. Hughes, in a recent assessment of *Exégèse médiévale*, explains that de Lubac attempts to recover a theological *mentality* rather than

3 James Pambrun, a systematic theologian, interpreted de Lubac’s books on Joachim as an extension of de Lubac’s fundamental theology. James R. Pambrun, “La Posterité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore, vol. 1-2,” *Église et théologie* 16, no. 2 (May 1985): 256–60. Marjorie Reeves, a medieval historian, gave a positive review, but found fault with the criteria for determining who is counted as Joachim’s “spiritual posterity.” Marjorie Reeves, “La Posterité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore, V 1: De Joachim à Schelling,” *Theological Studies* 32, no. 1 (April 1981): 287–94. See also William Kluback, “La Posterité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore, Vol. 2: De Saint-Simon à nos jours,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 15, no. 3 (1984): 192–95.

4 Natalie Zemon Davis, for example, objects to de Lubac’s criticism of de Certeau’s Joachimism. Natalie Zemon Davis, “The Quest of Michel de Certeau,” *New York Review of Books*, May 15, 2008.

a method.⁵ *Exégèse médiévale* analyzed the history of spiritual interpretation (also called spiritual understanding and spiritual exegesis), the practice of reading beyond the letter of scripture to its depth-dimension. It was believed, for much of the Christian tradition, that the scriptures have spiritual meanings beyond the literal. The fourfold division of the meanings of scripture—historical, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical—exemplified the development of this spiritual sense within the exegetical tradition. Beyond the literal reference of scriptures, the events spoken of in scripture signify future and spiritual realities. Spiritual exegesis embodied a theological understanding of historical events in light of their spiritual depth or purpose. According to Hughes, de Lubac intended to discern a common mentality underlying patristic and medieval exegetical practices rather than to identify a common method of exegesis, which in patristic and medieval thought consisted of a dizzying pluralism. While de Lubac admitted that the exegetical methods of the patristic and medieval periods could not be revived, he argued that something of the spirit of their interpretation should be recovered for the contemporary age.

Hughes's insight may also be applied to *La Posterité spirituelle. Exégèse médiévale* treats the *historical* influence of Joachim of Fiore's exegesis on an exegetical tradition of the literal interpretation of the book of Revelation. *La Posterité spirituelle* takes up aspects neglected, though alluded to, within *Exégèse médiévale*. It proposed to reveal a trajectory inspired by Joachim de Fiore, but not limited to his direct influence or

5 Kevin L. Hughes indicates the problem of reading *Exégèse médiévale* as a purely historical work, rather than as a theological one. He suggests that de Lubac's intention is to outline a theological "mentality" within the tradition. Kevin L. Hughes, "The 'Fourfold Sense:' De Lubac, Blondel and Contemporary Theology," *The Heythrop Journal* 42, no. 4 (2001): 451–462.

to purely theological expressions of his thought. *La Posterité spirituelle* examines a “spiritual line with numerous ramifications, that of the thinkers or men of action (whether or not quoting him as their authority but all more or less betraying his dream) tend, like him, to conceive of a third age, an age of the Spirit, succeeding that of Christ of which the Church was the guardian.”⁶ “Spiritual posterity” signified a lineage *sharing the same spirit*. In addition, “spiritual posterity” refers to those who expected *a new age of the Spirit* that would occur within this world and history. The spiritual posterity of Joachim consists of those who inherited a certain apocalyptic worldview from Joachim. De Lubac's research into Joachim de Fiore investigated a mentality with roots in the practice of spiritual exegesis but in many ways opposed to it.

Both books share a common argument but develop it in different ways. Both aim at discovering a broader worldview or mentality underlying exegetical practices. While *Exégèse médiévale* outlined a mentality that de Lubac wished to recover from the patristic and medieval periods, *La Posterité spirituelle* traced an apocalyptic sense of history underlying dangerous political movements and social philosophies that posed a present threat. As I will argue, de Lubac privileged the mentality characterizing patristic exegetical practices and embodied in the patristic-medieval “fourfold sense of scripture” because he discovered within it an authentically Christian understanding of history.

According to de Lubac, the *ressourcement* of a patristic-medieval understanding

6 Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings* (San Francisco: Communio Books, 1993), 156. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits*, Chrétiens aujourd'hui 1 (Namur: Culture et vérité, 1989).

of history could respond to a modern historical consciousness while affirming the Christian doctrinal tradition. It served to affirm the reality of God's intervention in history, the eternal significance of the present, and a Christian understanding of history's end. It suggested a future fulfillment of God's promises without succumbing to utopias.

The meaning of history and eschatology is a theme found throughout Henri de Lubac's writings and is a central theme within his thought. Through his understanding of history and its fulfillment, de Lubac attempted to respond to some of the most significant controversies affecting French Catholics and French Catholic theology of the twentieth century. Moreover, de Lubac's theology of history and eschatology form the lens through which he developed his understanding of sacramentality, his ecclesiology, his Christology, and his reflections on mysticism.

In what follows, I first outline the obstacles to any reductionistic interpretation of de Lubac's corpus. Second, I examine proposals for understanding the theological unity of de Lubac's work from Hans Urs von Balthasar, Susan K. Wood, Aidan Nichols, Brian Daley, and Hans Boersma. Third, I indicate the unifying role of history and eschatology within de Lubac's work.

I. Difficulties for the Interpretation of de Lubac's Corpus

Many of de Lubac's writings were historical studies with systematic theological intent. They ranged across early church history, medieval history, ecclesiology, the engagement with modern atheistic thought, renaissance studies, and literary criticism.

These studies, however, were far from disengaged narration of the past. De Lubac's initial academic appointment was as a professor of apologetics at the *Institut catholique de Lyon*. His article, "Apologetique et théologie" (1930) was a provocative reconception of the relationship between philosophy and theology, and faith and reason.⁷ His controversial work on nature, grace, and the supernatural arose through historical research on the genesis of the idea of pure nature in Scholastic thought. His first book, *Catholicism* (1938), suggested new directions for Catholic ecclesiology through a narration of patristic thought.⁸ His book *Corpus Mysticum* (1944) sought a recovery of an ancient notion of church and sacrament for the present day.⁹

While de Lubac's works exhibit an engagement with the problems of his day, these works are notoriously difficult to reduce to clear systematic positions. Establishing the coherence among his various writings remains a problem. De Lubac even characterized his writings as occasional, the choice of topics determined by situations imposed upon him rather than by some preconceived plan.¹⁰ He likened the development of some of his writings to a disorderly evolution or autogenesis. In an interview with Angelo Scola, he admitted that *Exégèse médiévale* grew "in a rather vague order, without any preconceived plan, and with enormous *lacunae*."¹¹

7 Henri de Lubac, "Apologetique et théologie," *Nouvelle Revue théologique* 57 (1930): 361–378.

8 Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988). Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Unam Sanctam 3 (Paris: Cerf, 1938).

9 Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds, C.J., Faith in Reason (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: l'eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen âge. Étude historique*, Théologie 3 (Paris: Aubier, 1944).

10 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 369.

11 Henri de Lubac, *De Lubac: A Theologian Speaks* (Los Angeles: Twin Circle, 1985), 32.

In addition, de Lubac's work is characterized by an idiosyncratic theological method, a characteristic also shared by the *nouvelle théologie* as a whole. The *nouveaux théologiens* generally resisted the neo-Scholastic monopoly on theological method in favor of theological pluralism. In general, they resisted the ahistorical methods of neo-Scholasticism in favor of methods attentive to historicity. These theologians were forced to improvise, drawing resources from the patristic and medieval periods and from the wider Christian tradition. The break with neo-Scholasticism left a vacuum difficult to fill. The apparent clarity of method and sources within neo-Scholasticism, which gave it the appearance of a “science,” is lacking within the *nouvelle théologie*. Marie-Dominique Chenu, Jean Daniélou, Yves Congar, and Henri de Lubac were attentive to historical development and methods of interpreting historical sources. Before Vatican II in particular, the implications of their shifts in theological methodology were uncertain. The problem of coherence within de Lubac's work touches upon the problem of the coherence within the *nouvelle théologie* movement during a time of radical upheaval in theological method.¹²

12 A growing body of literature attempts to interpret the *nouvelle théologie* as a theological movement. See Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor to Vatican II* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010); Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); A. N. Williams, “The Future of the Past: The Contemporary Significance of the Nouvelle Théologie,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 347–61; Brian Daley, “The Nouvelle Théologie and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and the Science of Theology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 4 (October 2005): 362–382; Étienne Fouilloux, “‘Nouvelle Théologie’ et Théologie Nouvelle (1930-1960),” in *L’histoire religieuse en France et en Espagne: Colloque international, Casa de Velázquez, 2-5 avril 2001: Actes*, ed. Benoît Pellistrandi, vol. 87, Collection de la Casa de Velázquez (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2004), 411–425; Agnès Desmazières, “La nouvelle théologie, prémisses d’une théologie herméneutique? La controverse sur l’analogie de la vérité (1946-1949),” *Revue Thomiste* 104, no. 1/2 (2004): 241–272; Aidan Nichols, OP, “Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie,” *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 1–19.

Even in comparison with other *nouveaux théologiens*, de Lubac exhibited a particular allergy to theological systematization and methodological foundations.¹³ Scholars have noted that his writing often avoids speaking in his own voice, but rather expresses his own opinions through the explication of the theology of others. Hans Urs von Balthasar explained that de Lubac wanted the voice of the ancient church to have a clear expression within his writings.¹⁴ John Milbank, on the other hand, suggests that de Lubac's writings took on an increasingly historical and third-person form after 1950, when he was removed from teaching and his writings were under suspicion. Milbank develops the theory that de Lubac hid his authentic but heterodox theological opinions under the cover of historical studies.¹⁵ Whatever the underlying cause may be, his third-person voice combined with the sheer diversity of his corpus resists the easy discovery of a unifying method or systematic consideration guiding his work.

A final obstacle to describing a theological unity within de Lubac's work is its incompleteness. In his autobiographical reflection, *At the Service of the Church*, he admitted that the idea at the center of his thought, a projected book on Christ and mysticism, could never be completed:

I truly believe that for a rather long time the idea for my book on Mysticism has been my inspiration in everything. I form my judgments on the basis of it, it provides me with the

13 David Williams declares that “a less systematic systematician is difficult to imagine.” *Receiving the Bible in Faith*, 132.

14 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, Communio Books, 1991), 26–7.

15 John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 8. I fail to find any evidence for esoterism in de Lubac's work.

means to classify my ideas in proportion to it. But I will not write this book. It is in all ways beyond my physical, intellectual, and spiritual strength.¹⁶

This admission reflects de Lubac's appropriation of the notion of paradox—that conceptual formulation always falls short of theological truth—and is consistent with his tendencies away from theological system.¹⁷ The heart of his theology remains unexpressed; the center remains empty. The incompleteness of de Lubac's work stands as a caveat against oversystematic interpretations of his thought. At the same time, it proposes something positive about his theological vision: authentic transcendence requires that complete synthesis occur only beyond the present horizon. The incompleteness of his work testifies to its eschatological character and its apophatic tone.

II. Discovering an “Organic Unity”

Despite obstacles, several authors have helpfully recognized a coherence among the diversity of de Lubac's various projects. There are signs of a consistent theological vision that permeates de Lubac's diverse historical and systematic works.¹⁸

¹⁶ De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 113.

¹⁷ It is more than coincidence that his inability to express the center of his own thought reflects his theological anthropology in which the human being, as the Image of God, can only acquire self-knowledge in light of the transcendent mystery. He writes, “[w]e shall understand more and more as we experience it, and as we see better and better that we do not yet understand it, and never shall understand it, what this astounding thing, the discovery of God, means—for it will never cease to astonish us.” Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 166. Originally published as *Sur les chemins de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1956).

¹⁸ Rudolf Voderholzer writes, “Henri de Lubac left no masterpiece of systematic theology, no comprehensive summa of his thought. His work is both many-faceted and versatile. His writings do not carry out a long, preconceived plan.” Rudolf Voderholzer, *Meet Henri De Lubac*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 107. Instead of speaking of his “systematic theology,” Voderholzer refers to his “synthetic thinking” and “synoptic presentation.” *Ibid.*, 108–9. Susan K. Wood speaks of an “organic unity.” Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 129. Similarly, Balthasar referred to an “organic unity” amidst a “multiplicity of themes.” Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 10.

A. Hans Urs von Balthasar: Natural Desire for the Supernatural

Hans Urs von Balthasar's *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (1991) places the organic center of de Lubac's thought in his understanding of the creature's natural desire for God:

De Lubac is not the only great author who understood and experienced all his completed works as an approximation to an ever-unattained center. This form gives the reader a chance of seeing how seemingly disparate elements converge upon a center and thus of grasping them in their secret intention. In the case of de Lubac...an objective fundamental insight corresponds to the subjective admission quoted above, namely, the role of an undeniably positive dynamism in the knowing and willing of the creature that tends through all finite intrawordly reality, but also, through all the negations of a 'negative theology' toward a goal that cannot be reached 'from below' but is nevertheless necessary. Here we have reached the center of de Lubac's principal problem.¹⁹

Balthasar's brief book offers an overview of de Lubac's major writings and themes, which are systematically connected with the hub of natural desire of the creature for God.

Balthasar connects the natural desire to three theological areas: fundamental theology, the theology of salvation history, and cosmology-eschatology.²⁰ He explains that the “same fundamental structure [occurs] in the three areas of inquiry.” Balthasar asks how the created order (or the First Testament) can be directed interiorly to its fulfillment in grace (or in Christ), “without in the least possessing this latter in anticipation, that is, without being able to claim it for [itself].”²¹ Adding that each theological theme cannot be reduced to another, he contends that all shares a common “structural principle of the divine

19 Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 12. The title of the German original is more suggestive of unity within diverse themes: *Henri de Lubac: Sein organisches Lebenswerk* (*Henri de Lubac: His Organic Life's Work*) (1976). The conclusion of *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* was taken from Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Le cardinal Henri de Lubac, l'homme et son oeuvre*, *Chrétiens aujourd'hui* (Brussels: Culture et Vérité, 1983).

20 Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 62.

21 Ibid., 61.

plan.”²² He further notes that, in *Exégèse médiévale*, “the theory of the senses of Scripture is not a curiosity of the history of theology but an instrument for seeking out the most profound articulations of salvation history.” De Lubac wished to illuminate the structure of this divine plan rather than the minutiae of exegetical technique.²³

B. Susan K. Wood: Sacrament and History

Susan K. Wood extends Balthasar's argument.²⁴ Like Balthasar, she argues that *Exégèse médiévale* is not primarily about exegesis, but instead concerns a theology of history. She shows that the pattern of salvation history is the basic structure that informs de Lubac's ecclesiology and Eucharistic theology. *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* traces the theological connection between de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum* and *Exégèse médiévale*. Wood demonstrates the parallel between the senses of scripture (literal, allegorical, anagogical), the multiple meanings of the “Body of Christ” (historical, sacramental, ecclesial), and multiple significations of liturgical practice (memorial, presence, anticipation). De Lubac's theology of scripture, sacraments, and church constitutes expressions of an underlying theology of history in which Christ fulfills what came before him and anticipates the fullness of the kingdom. For Wood, the theology of history forms a structure permeating de Lubac's writings on ecclesiology,

²² Ibid., 63.

²³ Ibid., 76.

²⁴ Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*; Susan K. Wood, “The Nature-Grace Problematic within Henri de Lubac's Christological Paradox,” *Communio* 19, no. 3 (1992): 389–403; Susan K. Wood, “The Church as the Social Embodiment of Grace in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1986).

scripture, and sacraments. This theology of history functions as a basic method that unites various aspects of de Lubac's thought.

C. Aidan Nichols: Unite in Order to Distinguish

Aidan Nichols recently observed that despite the diverse array of writings produced by de Lubac, "unity" remains an underlying theme.

Unity, however, is an obvious preoccupation throughout—unity of God with man in *Le Drame* [*The Drama of Atheist Humanism*], of human beings with each other in and through God in *Catholicisme*, the unity of nature and grace in *Surnaturel* and its later refinements, the unity of Scripture in *Exégèse médiévale*, the Eucharistic unity of the Church in *Corpus mysticum*, her mystic and social unity in his other ecclesiological writings, the unity of philosophy and theology in *Pic de la Mirandole*, the unity of salvation history in his critique of Joachimism.²⁵

Moreover, de Lubac appealed to the "unity" of the diverse "witnesses" of the Christian tradition living by the light of the same Spirit. According to Nichols, de Lubac's work appealed to the unity within a living Christian theological tradition to correct divisions that inserted themselves into modern life and theology.

In the place of the Thomistic axiom "distinguish in order to unite," de Lubac "preferred the more gnostic—paradoxical?—formula *unir pour distinguer*."²⁶ Nichols explains that although de Lubac's emphasis on unity could partially be "temperamental," it is congruent with the incomplete center of his theology, which always eluded him. Nichols proposes that the *visio Dei* was for de Lubac the mystical center toward which converged the diverse unities within his writings.

In the perspective thus outlined, his total *oeuvre* may be said to represent Hans Urs von

²⁵ Aidan Nichols, OP, "Henri de Lubac: Panorama and Proposal," *New Blackfriars* 93, no. 1043 (January 2012): 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

Balthasar's "missing" transcendental, for Balthasar's trilogy should really have been a tetralogy, with the same analogical imagination set to work on *unum*, the one, as was shown with *pulchrum*, the beautiful, in the theological aesthetics, *bonum*, the good, in the theological dramatics, and *verum*, the true, in the theological logic.²⁷

In Nichols's view, de Lubac's aspiration for unity always escapes formulation, the various elements remaining in tension. Yet, to avoid distortion, it is necessary first to understand philosophy and theology, faith and reason, God and humanity, and salvation history as united.

D. Brian Daley: Spiritual Interpretation in the *nouvelle théologie*

A number of recent studies have examined the unity of the *nouvelle théologie* as a whole movement from historical and systematic perspectives.²⁸ Daley's "The *Nouvelle Théologie* and the Patristic Revival" argues that the *nouvelle théologie*'s recovery of patristic and medieval exegetical practices—namely, the figural or spiritual interpretation of scripture—was central to its shift away from both neo-Scholastic ecclesiology and theological methodology.

The ecclesiology of neo-Scholasticism and the manualist tradition emphasized the church as institution and its authority in order to defend the church from Protestant critics and attacks from secular governments. According to Daley, beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, there was a considerable shift in Catholic ecclesiology, in part due to the patristic

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Theologie - New Theology*; Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*; Hans Boersma, "Sacramental Ontology: Nature and the Supernatural in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac," *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1015 (2007): 242–273; Daley, "The Nouvelle Théologie and the Patristic Revival."

revival. The *nouvelle théologie* rediscovered, from Gregory of Nyssa and Origen, the sacramental dimensions of the church as a sign pointing beyond itself to the eschatological kingdom.

Moreover, modern neo-Scholasticism conceived theology as a deductive “science” along Aristotelian lines, moving from the data of revelation to more universal and general conclusions. The neo-Scholastics of the twentieth century looked upon medieval Scholasticism as the high-point of a theological evolution whereby theology finally took a “scientific” form. Surveying the *nouvelle théologie*, Daley remarks that its authors departed from the deductive methodology of neo-Scholasticism, instead placing an emphasis on subjectivity, personal faith, and history. Their *ressourcement* of the exiled voices from the Latin and Greek patristic tradition suggested a shift in theological methodology. While many of the *nouveaux théologiens* did not question the idea of theology as “science,” they did recognize that “theological truth was always radically bound up in the historical limits of human language and culture, because God has revealed himself in the events and words of human history.”²⁹

Daley concludes that the patristic revival in the *nouvelle théologie* allowed for a broadening of theological methodology and a revival of a sacramental mentality:

the *nouvelle théologie* was really about the rediscovery of sacramental modes of thought, through renewed contact with Christian authors who thought and read scripture in sacramental as well as literal terms....Figural exegesis, in its way of reading all history as really speaking of Christ, was the heart of the *nouvelle théologie*, the greatest lesson it had learned from reading the Fathers.³⁰

Daley’s suggestion that the recovery of spiritual exegesis was central to the *nouvelle*

²⁹ Daley, “The Nouvelle Théologie and the Patristic Revival,” 381.

³⁰ Ibid., 382.

théologie is most evident in the work of Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou. The scriptural inspiration of the *nouvelle théologie* also explains its growing appeal to Protestant theologians as a resource for theology and ecumenism.³¹

E. Hans Boersma: Sacramental Ontology

Following Daley, Hans Boersma interprets the *nouvelle théologie* through the lens of its recovery of sacramental modes of thought. He theorizes that the *nouvelle théologie* recovered a metaphysics—possessed by neither Roman Catholic Modernism nor neo-Scholasticism—which functioned as a common systematic method. He labels it “sacramental ontology.”³² In an earlier article, Boersma identifies “sacramental ontology” as the systematic link between the theology of nature and the supernatural and the theology of the church in de Lubac's thought.³³ He states that sacramental ontology concerns the “sacramental character of all created existence,” which character informs de Lubac's reflections on both ecclesiology and the nature-supernatural relationship.³⁴ His recent book, *Nouvelle théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery*, expands these ideas in an effort to identify the internal coherence within the *nouvelle*

31 See Bryan C. Hollon, *Everything Is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009); Bryan C. Hollon, “Ontology, Exegesis, and Culture in the Thought of Henri de Lubac” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2006).

32 Boersma borrows the term “sacramental ontology” from Dennis Doyle, who writes that de Lubac's doctrine of the supernatural “provides an ontology that allows for speaking of knowledge of God in an historical and critical framework,” which assumes that the historical nature of God's revelation does not occlude knowledge of God, but is a means to knowledge of God's self. Dennis M. Doyle, “Henri de Lubac and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 60, no. 2 (1999): 209–227.

33 Boersma, “Sacramental Ontology,” 243.

34 Ibid., 224. He adds that this sacramental ontology contributes to de Lubac's understanding of scripture and non-Christian religions. Ibid., 244, note 5.

théologie as a whole.³⁵ The heart of the *nouvelle théologie* is an account of created, sensible realities as signs, anticipations, and mediations of divine realities.

Boersma suggests that de Lubac's sacramental ontology is characterized by a vertical sacramentalism, which he believes is inspired by neo-Platonism. While other theologians of the *nouvelle théologie* emphasized the divine condescension—Christ becoming human and emptying himself—de Lubac's sacramental ontology focused on the created ascent: “[drawing] on the Greek Church Fathers and the Neoplatonic tradition [he] emphasized the sacramental link in its upward direction: nature pointed upward to the supernatural and made it present.”³⁶ For Boersma, the most important implication of de Lubac's theology of the supernatural is that God is made present through historical realities. Created realities become signs that mediate God's presence.

Boersma's observation that the key to de Lubac's theology is its sacramental ontology is a significant contribution. He illumines a critical element in de Lubac's thought, namely the “sacramental” relationship between historical, visible realities and the mystical depths of those realities. De Lubac's sacramentalism indicates a correlation between his understanding of history and the capacity of created realities to symbolize and mediate divine realities. However, Boersma may suggest a too-prominent place for neo-Platonist ontology within de Lubac's work, thereby understating the role of his theology of history.

35 While Boersma admits that the theologians associated with the *Nouvelle Théologie* did not constitute a homogeneous theological school, he contends that their approach to diverse theological problems—including the interpretation of scripture, the theology of history, the development of doctrine, nature and grace, and ecclesiology—evinced an underlying sacramental view of reality.

36 Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 88. I disagree with Boersma's characterization of de Lubac as Neoplatonist, but will take this up in detail in Chapter 2.

F. Conclusions

Though emphasizing distinct aspects, Balthasar, Wood, Nichols, Daley, and Boersma indicate that the historical economy of salvation plays a significant role in the theological coherence of de Lubac's work. Nichols's suggests "unity" as the inspiration that suffuses de Lubac's writings. I believe that Nichols's insight is substantially correct. A reader of de Lubac will discover a sensibility and yearning for unity in his writings, especially in *Catholicism*. It is not entirely clear how "unity" functions in de Lubac's theological method or in the content of his writings. In other words, while it is clearly elemental to de Lubac's deepest sensibilities, "unity" remains somewhat vague. With the other commentators, Nichols explains that the notion of a unified economy of salvation is important for de Lubac's engagement with the history of medieval thought. Daley, moreover, believes rightly that the engagement with history is central to the methodology of the *nouvelle théologie* as a whole. Balthasar and, to a greater extent, Wood emphasize the historical economy of salvation as a structure that de Lubac analogously applied to fundamental theology, sacraments, and the church. Boersma too recognizes history as central to de Lubac's work, emphasizing history as the sacramental sign that makes present divine realities.

The various emphases of these authors are complementary to an extent. They suggest a certain theological coherence in de Lubac's exploration of the theological meaning of history in his various writings. I take up this direction in chapter two, where I indicate that de Lubac, through his recovery of Origen and patristic theology, intended to

develop a theological understanding of history. Specifically, de Lubac was concerned to articulate the relationship between history and its fulfillment, drawing his inspiration from the spiritual interpretation of scripture in the patristic and medieval period.

III. Toward an Eschatological Unity

While de Lubac's work should not be interpreted in an overly systematic or foundational manner, it is possible to see an “organic unity” among numerous “centers” of his thought. De Lubac's various theological interventions—his understanding of sacramentality, his Christology and ecclesiology, his understanding of mysticism and of nature and grace—evinces a common pattern or structure organized around the relationship between history and its fulfillment:

1. Jesus Christ in his historical reality is the “sacrament of salvation,” that is, the means to the *totus Christus* (the whole Christ), which reaches its perfection at the end of time.
2. The present communion of the church is a sacramental anticipation of the eschatological communion of all humanity.
3. Mysticism—even in non-Christian forms—is an anticipation of the consummation of the Mystery, which is both present to us and something to come.
4. The natural desire for the supernatural, while not already supernatural in ontology, is an anticipation of a future communion.

Although de Lubac never elaborated a systematic eschatology that would coordinate the various aspects of his thinking, there appears to be an eschatological vision or pattern upon which de Lubac depended. In what follows, I argue that de Lubac's eschatology,

which arose as a response to diverse streams of Christian eschatology in modernity, shapes his various theological interventions.

The first chapter of the dissertation examines the resurgence of an eschatological consciousness within Catholicism and within the wider cultural sphere during the late nineteenth century and twentieth centuries. I elaborate the historical context of de Lubac's theology of history in the eschatological turn within Catholicism in the twentieth century and particularly in the “theology of history” debate, arising during the Second World War. I argue that the debate between Henri-Marie Féret, Gaston Fessard, Joseph Huby, and Jean Daniélou concerning the “theology of history” was an attempt to evaluate the eschatological impulses of French and European culture in light of the Christian faith. These debates also had significance for the struggle against fascism and as a response to the eschatological tendencies of an emerging French communism. One of the questions that emerged from these debates deals particularly with the interpretation of the Book of Revelation and in what sense it speaks of future realities.

The second chapter treats de Lubac's retrieval of a patristic theology of history manifested in the “spiritual sense” of scripture. Origen is the dominant figure for de Lubac because Origen's spiritual interpretation of scripture constitutes a theological understanding of history—that is, an understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament, the New Testament, and eschatological fulfillment. Origen's biblical exegesis, in which the letter of scripture hides “spiritual realities,” reflects a Christian belief that the surface of history hides what de Lubac calls an “ontological fecundity.” In the

allegorical sense, the figures of the Old Testament signify not “transhistorical realities” (as in Greek allegorization) but the concretely historical reality of Christ. For Origen, history is not just phenomena but interconnected “events” of God's intervention into history. The inner orientation of the events of the Old Testament to the New becomes a paradigm for the inner yearning of all history for its eschatological destiny. As the source for the tradition of Christian allegorization, Origen transmitted an implicit understanding of history to his exegetical progeny.

Chapter Three treats de Lubac's understanding of the last spiritual sense of scripture, *anagogy*. According to de Lubac, Origen's anagogy concerns both the consummation of creation and the ascent of the mind to the transcendent. Again in anagogy, the biblical hermeneutic reflects an implicit understanding of history. For de Lubac, it is key that anagogy unites *futura* and the *invisibilia*. The practice of spiritual interpretation reflected a Christian belief that the events of history were part of a great development toward a future fulfillment. He explains that the *anagogical sense* “designates also 'something else,' the very reality of which (not merely the manifestation of it) is to come.”³⁷ Anagogy, therefore, is a contemplation of a reality that is not only “above” or “always present,” but the anticipation of a future consummation. Yet, we contemplate that future through the present. By recovering Origen, de Lubac attempted to recover an understanding of history that loses neither transcendence nor the reality of history, but binds sacramentally history to its eschatological goal.

De Lubac believed that modern eschatology, especially in secular and political

³⁷ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 172.

forms, traces its roots to a dissolution of a patristic-medieval understanding of anagogy. During the patristic period anagogy is “heavenly” and “future” (the *invisibilia* and the *futura*.) In the twelfth century, a dissociation between “heavenly” and “future” emerged; this division engendered two principal eschatological impulses that are Pseudo-Dionysian and Joachimite in form. The former engendered a mysticism that viewed the historical figures and realities of the Bible as figures for the unthematizable transcendent. This impulse threatened to disregard the historical character of Christianity and see history as a myth. This Joachimite impulse was radically historical insofar as it projected a form of fulfillment into a historically future age, an age just around the corner. De Lubac believed that Joachim was the source for a host of secular and political eschatologies of the modern age. Both the Pseudo-Dionysian and Joachimite forms tended to undermine the reality and efficaciousness of Christ's actions in the economy of salvation.

My fourth and final chapter argues that de Lubac's eschatological synthesis—which maintains a tension between invisible and future—structures his understanding of the sacramentality of historical revelation, of Christ, of the church, and of mysticism. For de Lubac, an authentically Christian eschatology unites the “vertical” dimensions of Pseudo-Dionysius with the “horizontal” dimensions of Joachim. The sacraments of the eschaton both make the eschatological present in our everyday reality and conduct the church to that reality. I argue that, while de Lubac does not present a systematic eschatology, his account of the sacraments, Christ, the church, and mysticism unite a

future eschatology with a realized eschatology in an attempt to bridge divergent strands of thinking in Catholic modernity.

CHAPTER ONE: TIME AND ETERNITY IN *LA NOUVELLE THÉOLOGIE*

I. Eschatology as the “Storm Center”

This chapter narrates the rise of an eschatological consciousness within twentieth-century Catholic theology. While Catholic theology of an earlier period produced systematic eschatologies in the form of treatises on the last things—death, judgment, heaven, and hell—twentieth-century Catholic theology more explicitly articulated a consciousness of this present time as preceding and anticipating the end. By the early twentieth century, an eschatological renewal within Christian theology was already afoot, in part due to the influence of the rediscovery of the eschatological message of the Gospels by biblical scholars.¹ Soon, as Hans Urs von Balthasar claimed, these eschatological themes spread everywhere:

Eschatology is the storm center of our times. It is the source of several squalls that threaten all the theological fields, and makes them fruitful, beating down or reinvigorating their various growths. Troeltsch's dictum, “The bureau of eschatology is usually closed,” was true enough of the liberalism of the nineteenth century, but since the turn of the century the office has been working overtime.²

This eschatological renewal in the twentieth century was the outgrowth of an intensifying historical consciousness within Christian theology in the nineteenth. It also, as I will argue here, was in concert with a growing eschatological awareness outside of strictly theological or strictly Christian circles. In many respects, the themes treated by Christian

1 Particularly, the work of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer was a catalyst for rethinking the eschatological content of the Gospels.

2 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology: The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A. V. Littledale and Alexander Dru, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 255.

theologians intersected with a broader European eschatological imaginary and a broader feeling of living at the end of history.

There are reasons to believe that this eschatological storm was not solely a response to the traumatizing experience of World Wars I and II, as significant as these events were. It was being worked out and anticipated in cultural, ecclesial, literary, and political arenas before it reached European Christian theology. A significant apocalyptic consciousness is manifest within Catholic magisterial documents of the nineteenth century and within the antimodernist movement in advance of the eschatological renewal in theology.

If “eschatology was the storm center,” as Balthasar puts it, the *nouvelle théologie* became the eye of the storm in Roman Catholicism from the 1930s to the 1950s. Many of the theological conflicts suppressed during the Catholic Modernist Crisis (1902-1907) reemerged in the *nouvelle théologie*: the historically embedded nature of Christian dogma, the epistemological status of concepts, the role of apologetics, and the nature of divine revelation. The papal promulgation of documents like *Pascendi dominici gregis* (1907) and *Lamentabili sane exitu* (1907) had the intention of suppressing Catholic Modernism and of supporting a homogeneous program of Catholic education grounded in the neo-Thomist revival. With the suppression of Catholic Modernism, however, similar conflicts reemerged at the center of Thomism itself.

My contention is that Roman Catholic culture and theology in the nineteenth to twentieth centuries reflected a broader struggle within European modernity to grapple

with the meaning of history and to re-imagine the relationship between time and eternity. Specifically, neo-Scholasticism and Catholic antimodernism not only suffered from an allergy to history but also contributed to an intense consciousness of history. Catholicism's response to modernity depended upon a “metanarrative” of the contemporary age as a culmination of decadence and of the present as the last age. Ironically, Catholicism combined an eternalism with a thoroughly modern and apocalyptic sensibility concerning the present age. This is the soil in which the *nouvelle théologie* grew and also to which it responded. The challenge to relate the changing and unchanging, time and eternity, and the historical and the eschaton figured prominently within the *nouvelle théologie*. In particular, these themes emerged following the First World War and during and after the Second World War in the debates over the theology of history.

In what follows, I first describe the emergence of eschatological and apocalyptic thinking in nonecclesial settings in the *fin de siècle*. Second, I narrate the “return” of eschatology to the center of twentieth-century Catholicism. Third, I examine the World War II debate over the theology of history in the *nouvelle théologie*—specifically the work of Henri-Marie Féret, Joseph Huby, Gaston Fessard, and Jean Daniélou—as a struggle over the interpretation of time and eternity.

II. Temporality and an Eschatological Modernity

The re-emergence of eschatological thinking in twentieth-century Europe took a variety of forms. According to Joseph Ratzinger, the rediscovery of the eschatological

character of Jesus's preaching in the work of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer impacted biblical studies but had little immediate impact on systematic theology: "As far as systematic theology was concerned, they had not the faintest idea of what do do with their discovery."³ However, as Ratzinger explains, Karl Barth's 1919 *Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* initiated a revolution. Barth stated: "A Christianity that is not wholly eschatology and nothing but eschatology has absolutely nothing to do with Christ."⁴

Barth's radical break with liberal Protestantism and his eschatological turn is often associated with a disillusionment with modern ideologies of progress triggered by the experience of the World War I. The war indeed acted as a ferment for a theological reawakening to eschatology. Yet, this reawakening also occurred in the midst of a period of re-evaluation of the meaning of time and eternity beginning in the nineteenth century. From around the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, a broad crisis of adequately representing temporality and the eternal was unfolding within scientific, literary, economic, philosophical, and artistic spheres:

The structure of history, the uninterrupted forward movement of clocks, the procession of days, seasons, years, and simple common sense tells us that time is irreversible and moves forward at a steady rate. Yet these features of traditional time were also challenged as artists and intellectuals envisioned times that reversed themselves, moved at irregular rhythms, and even came to a dead stop. In the *fin de siècle*, time's arrow did not always fly straight and true.⁵

No single theoretical model accounts for all the different shifts in temporal representation

3 Ratzinger, Joseph, *Eschatology, Death and Eternal Life*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 47.

4 Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 314.

5 Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983), 28.

and eschatological consciousness during the period. It suffices, for my purposes, to indicate that the confusion over the meaning of time and its end existing within European modernity had an affect on Roman Catholicism's representation of time and eternity.

A. Representing Time in a Changing World

According to David Harvey, prior to the mid-nineteenth century, an Enlightenment sense of space and time was dominant among the bourgeoisie. This Enlightenment sense emphasized the rational, objective, quantifiable, and universal characteristics of time and space.⁶ For example, the production of maps increasingly represented the earth in those aspects necessary for navigation and commerce, evacuating space of the “sensuous” qualities developed in medieval cartography: “Maps, stripped of all elements of fantasy and religious belief, as well as any sign of the experiences involved in their production, had become abstract and strictly functional systems for the factual ordering of phenomena in space.” The Enlightenment gave a “totalizing” sense of space insofar as the whole world could be conceived as existing in a “single spatial frame.”⁷

The Enlightenment conception and production of time was similarly totalizing in its prioritization of the neutral, objective, quantifiable, and infinite qualities of time. The chronometer provided a fixed division for time's flow, allowing its exact measurement and, significantly, its conception as a linear progress. Newton's *Principia* envisioned

6 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford; Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989), 245.

7 Ibid., 249–50.

space as a kind of envelope or container for materially extended things, and time was a receptacle for change. Absolute time is mathematical in its qualities and extends into the past and future infinitely. Although Newtonian space and time had its challengers in Leibniz and Kant, they left undisturbed the emphasis on the universal, neutral, and quantifiable temporal qualities.

The conception of temporality of the Enlightenment project was not seriously challenged until the mid-nineteenth century, with the genesis of literary, artistic, and cultural phenomena known as “modernism.” Technological development is significant to the story of modernism because new technologies reordered how Westerners experienced their world and how they experienced time. In brief, the increasing speed of communication and transportation during the nineteenth to twentieth centuries led to a shrinking world. As a result, heterogeneous local practices of measuring time—often governed by agricultural, local commercial, liturgical-religious, and seasonal cycles—were put in conflict. The development of the telegraph and the expansion of railways joined different local times together, exposing their differences. Kern notes that travelers on a cross-continental journey by railroad in 1870 would pass through over two hundred different local times. In 1870, there were over eighty time zones used by the railroads in the United States.⁸ The confusion between different systems had a detrimental effect on the efficiency of railroads and, in 1883, a uniform system of measuring time for the railroads was created. In the following year, the Prime Meridian Conference organized the twenty-four time zones. The increased speed of communication and transportation led

⁸ Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 12.

to various systematic orderings of time across space, joining previously separated peoples and economies. This was a vast but chaotic reorganization and creation of “public time,” the uniform and measurable progression of moments to which local times would have to conform.

According to Harvey, modernism as a “cultural force” formed under the “crisis of representation...derived from a radical readjustment in the sense of time and space in economic, political, and cultural life.”⁹ The interconnectedness of the international economy, the increased speed of commerce, the unification of monetary systems, and the development of new communication technologies were elements of “space-time compression.”

Enlightenment thought operated within the confines of a rather mechanical “Newtonian” vision of the universe, in which the presumed absolutes of homogeneous time and space formed limiting containers to thought and action. The breakdown in these absolute conceptions under the stress of time-space compression was the central story in the birth of nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of modernism.¹⁰

Thus, “time-space compression” brought the tensions between public time and private time, the universal and the particular, the international and the local into the foreground.

The awareness of new configurations of space and time played out in art and literature, notably in the writings of James Joyce, Gustave Flaubert, and Charles Baudelaire. Joyce and Flaubert expressed the “simultaneity” of modern life, in which actions and events in different places paralleled and affected one another. Just as different places were being absorbed under a single economy, these authors tried to represent the relationship between heterogeneous “times.” Closely related to “simultaneity” is the

⁹ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 260.

¹⁰ Ibid., 252.

feeling that modern life is riddled by constant change, insecurity, and ephemerality.

Baudelaire's attempt to reconcile “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent” with “the eternal and the immutable” is characteristic of the “aesthetic thrust of modernism” as a whole “to strive for this sense of eternity in the midst of flux.”¹¹

The attempt to reconcile time and eternity in literary modernism is consonant with the work of French philosopher Henri Bergson. For Bergson, the discrete units of mathematical or clock time fail to capture the dynamic flow of reality, life as a dynamic energy, and of the experience of *durée* (duration). According to Bergson, consciousness is a stream rather than a “conglomeration of separate faculties or ideas.”¹² He distinguished between a relative knowledge of reality through the symbols or language that ultimately distort it, by breaking it up into various pieces, and the absolute knowledge of reality through a form of intuition. In his conception of *durée*, he appealed to a mystical experience of time and of reality beyond our power to represent. In a sense, Bergson's temporal mysticism was an attempt to reconcile the sense of eternity with an evolutionary view of a constantly changing world.¹³

The technological advancements that were the cause of economic and cultural unification impacted the representation of time and eternity in literature and philosophy.

¹¹ Ibid., 10, 206.

¹² Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 24.

¹³ Bergson is known to have had a keen antipathy toward clocks. As Kern notes, Bergson's appeal to the experience of temporality and his emphasis on intuition is consonant with Charles Péguy, who “explained the spiritual death of Christianity by its mindless repetition of fixed ideas: layers of habit stifle the dynamic energies of true faith.” Ibid., 26. Bergson's lectures inspired Christian thinkers like Pierre Rousselot, Jacques Maritain, and Gabriel Marcel.

Additionally, modern life also forced the rethinking of the relationships between past, present, and future.

B. Representing the Future

Just as the meaning of time was being rethought, *fin-de-siècle* Europe witnessed the contested meaning of the future in the form of challenges to Enlightenment notions of uniformity and progress. Increasingly, eschatological and apocalyptic understandings of time took center stage in cultural, literary, and political arenas. These new conceptions of time and history depicted qualitatively different times and caesuras between eras. They announced ruptures between the past and present, and between the present and future, and represented this age as the beginning of the end. The apocalyptic sentiment of living just before the end was a wide-ranging cultural expression of this contested “future.” A version of this sentiment is manifested in the Futurist Movement's admiration of technology, speed, and violence that usher in a new world. The Futurist infatuation with a new humanity or posthumanity united to technology spilled over into politics; many Futurists became fascists.¹⁴

The awareness of the near future was not always the expectation of a glorious future era. In some cases, it was an expectation of a decline. The theory of the heat death of the universe, embodied in the second law of thermodynamics, exercised an influence over popular imagination, particularly in the French Decadent Movement of the late-nineteenth century. The entropy of all available energy in the universe—no matter how

¹⁴ See Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996).

far in the future it would occur—symbolized a feeling of the late nineteenth century of being on the verge of the end. David Weir states, “Whether the late nineteenth century was actually a period of decadence is open to debate; but it clearly was perceived as such, as a time when all was over, or almost over: not the end, but the ending.”¹⁵ H. G. Wells's *Time Machine* foretold a catastrophic future in which humanity would degenerate, “overpowered by the forces of nature and society, leading to...an ultimate extinction of the species.”¹⁶ The protagonist first arrives in a posthuman future and then takes his time machine far into the future to witness a barren planet tumbling through space. Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* echoed the theme of the degeneration of society. According to Spengler, the modern world is uniquely obsessed with time and the future; moderns measure the meaning of the present by its projected end.¹⁷

In fields of art, politics, and history, a dominant trope was emerging. Whether the coming era was perceived as the dawn of a new era of history, or the initial winding down of a tired universe, at the *fin de siècle* the present age was seen to be one of transition to a new era. Furthermore, to imagine the future was to represent the *telos* of the present. While the *fin de siècle* representations of the present moment ranged from intoxicated enthusiasm to despair, they interpreted the present time in terms of its *telos* and represented the modern age as just before the end. In the next section, I indicate that *fin-*

15 David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 17.

16 Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 91.

17 Spengler stated, “The theory of Entropy signifies today [the] world's end as completion of an inwardly necessary evolution.” *Ibid.*, 105.

de-siècle Catholicism shared in this representation of the modern age as “just before the end.”

III. A Return of Eschatology in Nineteenth- to Twentieth-Century

Catholicism

The challenge to Christian theology of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries was to confront and appropriate a new historical consciousness arising within various fields adjunct to theology and within European culture generally. Historical consciousness is a multifaceted and ambiguous term that often refers to an awareness that we are historically located, that our experience of the world is affected by historical circumstance, and that the categories of our thinking are affected by our historical experience.¹⁸ As I will argue below, it is true that neo-Scholasticism, the theological school of thought promoted by the Catholic magisterium at the end of the nineteenth century, lacked this historical consciousness. In fact, it was purposefully organized against it in the attempt to protect

18 Lawrence F. Barmann describes historical consciousness by distinguishing between “thinking about history” from “thinking with history.” Thinking about history is the attempt to recover the past by analyzing evidence available to the historian. Thinking with history is the perception of ourselves within the stream of history: “In this mode one perceives the past as a process in which we ourselves are located consciously and culturally that is what I would mean by “historical consciousness.” And it is this sense that forces one to acknowledge the relativity of all finite reality, i.e., of all that ordinarily impinges on our human consciousness, because it is always and necessarily in flux, moving, unstable, incomplete, partial.” Lawrence F. Barmann, “Defining Historical Consciousness” (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Denver, November 2001), 2. Historical consciousness, for Barmann, implies that human knowledge is not a “view from nowhere,” but rather is somehow tied to its particular and localized conditions.

In a 1966 lecture, Bernard F. Lonergan made a similar observation when he distinguished between a “classicist world-view” and “historical-mindedness” as “differences in horizon, in total mentality.” Bernard J. F. Lonergan, “The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical-Mindedness,” in *A Second Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 2. The classicist worldview takes the unchanging as the starting point for rational inquiry whereas historical mindedness takes the changing world of experience as its starting point: “One may work methodically from the abstract and universal towards the more concrete and particular” or “begin from people as they are” concretely.” Ibid., 3.

eternity from the wages of time. However, the neo-Scholastic school and the anti-Modernist Roman Catholic culture arising during the same period promulgated a keen consciousness of history, an awareness of human beings as historical agents, and an apocalyptic or cataclysmic view of the modern world.¹⁹

A. Eternalism in Catholic Anti-Modernism and Neo-Scholasticism

The common narrative concerning Catholic theology—in its neo-Scholastic and anti-Modernist forms—from the middle of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth is that it lacked historical consciousness.²⁰ First, it was reluctant to accept the results of historical research, or the relative independence of historical investigation from theology. This was a resistance to questions of the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and a resistance to recognizing the difference between the content of the Bible and that of later Christian doctrine. Second, there was the opposition to the idea of historical development or evolution, especially when it appeared to challenge the “unchanging” nature of truth.²¹

19 Neo-Scholasticism refers to a theological movement that arose in the middle of the nineteenth century as a recovery of medieval theology. Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* (1879) endorsed the theology of Thomas Aquinas as the primary intellectual vehicle for a Catholic response to the challenges to Christian belief in the modern world. Based on *Aeterni Patris*, theological schools employed neo-Scholastic thought for the intellectual formation of priests.

Neo-Scholasticism is historically related to what Joseph Komonchak calls the “construction” of Roman Catholicism, a distinct subculture or sociological form that Catholicism took as a response to modernity. Joseph A. Komonchak, “Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism,” *Christianesimo Nella Storia* 18, no. 2 (1997): 353–385. A resistance to the “modern world” was characteristic of this subculture. Generally, “anti-Modernist” refers to those authors and their writings who suppressed the Modernists, those considered overly sympathetic toward modern philosophy, critical methods, political philosophy, and culture during the early twentieth century and particularly during the Modernist Crisis (1903-1907). In what follows, I use the term “anti-Modernist” quite broadly to refer to the negative assessment of modernity in Roman Catholicism, which often functioned as the background narrative to neo-Scholasticism.

20 See Gerald McCool, *Nineteenth Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 9–11; T. M. Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology, 1800-1970* (Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist Newman Press, 1970), 35–36.

21 The Scholastic systems were more prepared to respond to the attacks on revealed religion by the

Scholasticism's model of scientific knowledge prioritized unchanging essences over changing events. History and particularity did not fit well within this model.

Anti-Modernist arguments against the Modernists and the later neo-Scholastic grievances against the *nouvelle théologie* almost always returned to the same theme: the loss of a notion of truth as unchanging. Pope Pius X's *Lamentabili sane exitu* (1907) condemned a host of errors attributed to Modernist Catholics, which were perceived as undermining the authority of the “teaching church” and orthodox doctrine. Among the theses proscribed: “53. The organic constitution of the Church is not immutable”; “58. Truth is no more immutable than man himself, since it evolved with him, in him, and through him”; “64. Scientific progress demands that the concepts of Christian doctrine concerning God, creation, revelation, the person of the Incarnate Word, and redemption be re-adjusted.” The follow-up encyclical, *Pascendi Dominici gregis* (1907), targeted a Kantianism in which human minds cannot rise beyond “phenomena.” Thus, God cannot be known by the light of “natural reason.” *Pascendi* goes on to say that the Modernist presumes that the “representations of the object of faith are merely symbolical” since the

rationalists than they were to face the challenge of historical research into the continuity of Christian dogma with the Bible. The idea of development, change or evolution within doctrine and theological systems, found in the theology of John Henry Cardinal Newman just years before, was met with *anathema* by *Pascendi* and *Lamentabili*. Indeed, Newman was considered suspect by many anti-Modernists. It is not that the neo-Scholastics rejected all development of doctrine. Rather, Newman's organic model of doctrinal or theological development was rejected in favor of a theory of logical development. Theological development—such as the doctrine of the hypostatic union—results from the application of metaphysics to biblical propositions, resulting in a syllogism. Historical research into scripture threatened not only the truthfulness of certain revealed propositions found in scripture, but also the model of conceiving doctrine. Thus, the work of biblicists like Marie-Joseph Lagrange was alarming because it assumed a *relative* independence of historical research from theology. Although neo-Scholasticism in the nineteenth century appears to be “classicist” due to its rejection of development and resistance to historicity, it also had much in common with the empirical turn within the sciences and history in the nineteenth century. T. M. Schoof states that during the mid-19th century, there is a philosophical and cultural shift away from German idealists and toward the trust in empirical data, from synthetic methods toward analytic. Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology*, 33.

mind must construct these representations from the phenomenal and changing world. In sum, the anti-Modernist preoccupation was with preserving the *constancy* of Christian doctrine.

Nearly forty years later, the neo-Scholastic attacks on the *nouvelle théologie* returned to the same issue.²² Marie-Michelle Labourdette's 1946 article, "Théologie et ses sources," raised questions over the series *Théologie* and *Sources Chrétiennes* for their recovery of the thought of the patristic period. While he did not object to the recovery of patristic theology, he suspected that the authors and editors of these series lacked a respect for theological truth in its "scientific state" embodied in the neo-Scholastic system. The implication of the recovery of an earlier theology in these series implied a historical relativism—that truth did not remain the same for each time period—and an "experiential relativism" in which the object of faith is an expression of an inner experience that might differ from person to person or from age to age.²³

Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, called the *monstre sacré* (the sacred monster) of

22 The condemnations against the Modernists and the end of the Modernist Crisis, generally traced to 1907, ended discussion on a range of philosophical, exegetical, and ecclesiological debates. It did not, however, "resolve" those debates by any means, but instead shifted the loci of these conversations to the safety of the Papally-endorsed Thomistic thought. Jean Daniélou suggested that the solutions of the Modernists were insufficient, but the questions that they asked were valid. Their condemnation only prolonged the crisis. Jean Daniélou, "Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse," *Études*, no. 249 (1946): 5–21. The same debates were continued within Thomistic and scholastic categories and through the interpretation of St. Thomas. By stifling "modern" thought and expelling it to the periphery or outside of the Catholic Church, and by dismantling pluralism through the enforcement of scholastic or Thomistic theology, this same pluralism re-emerged within Thomism itself, and not even a generation later. See Gerald McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992). Walter Cardinal Kasper's assessment that "the outstanding event in the Catholic theology of our century is the surmounting of neo-scholasticism" is valid. However, those theologians who most successfully surmounted it considered themselves as part of its tradition. Walter Kasper in Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), vii.

23 Aidan Nichols, OP, "Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie," *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 3–4.

Thomism, led the neo-Scholastic denouncement of what was called the “new theology.”²⁴ In his article “La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?” (“The New Theology. Where Is It Going?”), Garrigou-Lagrange dropped what Aidan Nichols called the “A-Bomb” of the *nouvelle théologie* controversy. Henri Bouillard had written in *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin* (1944) that “a theology that would not be contemporary [*actuelle*] would be a false theology.”²⁵ Garrigou-Lagrange asked the question, “How can ‘*an immutable truth*’ be held if the two notions that are united by the verb *to be* [the subject and the predicate] are *essentially changing*?”²⁶ He claimed that, promulgating a form of historical relativism, the *nouvelle théologie* was headed straight toward Modernism. For Labourdette as for Garrigou-Lagrange, the first line of defense against Modernism was a Thomistic metaphysics and epistemology that enabled a secure possession of unchanging truth against the backdrop of an ever-changing world.

These examples from Labourdette and Garrigou-Lagrange are fragmentary do not provide a complete picture of the neo-Scholastic movement but it is sufficient to state that both neo-Scholasticism and anti-Modernism betrayed a desperate anxiety to preserve a metaphysics of unchanging truth and displayed a correlate allergy to historicity. The neo-Scholastics very clearly foresaw a contemporary challenge to Catholicism under the form of historicity and attempted desperately to hold on to truth as eternal, unchanging, and

24 Richard Peddicord, O.P., *The Sacred Monster of Thomism: An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2004).

25 Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., “La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?,” *Angelicum* 23 (1946): 127.

26 Ibid., 127; See Agnès Desmazières, “La nouvelle théologie, prémisse d’une théologie herméneutique? La controverse sur l’analogie de la vérité (1946-1949),” *Revue Thomiste* 104, no. 1/2 (2004): 241–272. Garrigou-Lagrange’s preoccupation with the “unchanging” is illustrated in his unyielding opposition to Henri Bergson, the philosopher of process.

readily available to human reason. Their apologetics, epistemology, metaphysics, and dogmatics depended upon a profound dichotomization between historical reality and eternal truth. However, they mistakenly attributed to the writings of the Modernists and of the *nouvelle théologie* a form of relativism rather than a search for a responsible way out of it.

In another sense, the “eternalism” and “essentialism” of the neo-Scholastic system depended upon a vibrant consciousness of history and of its contingency. In the next section, I argue that this consciousness of history developed within neo-Scholasticism and anti-Modernist Catholicism under the form of an apocalyptic interpretation of the modern age.

B. The Consciousness of History: The Return of the Apocalyptic within Roman Catholicism

I have already indicated that a strong resistance to historicity marked Roman Catholic culture. The counterpoint to this ahistorical viewpoint was an intense historical consciousness on another level. Specifically, neo-Scholasticism and anti-Modernism betrayed a cognizance of the contemporary age as one of decadence. Roman Catholicism was driven by a profound consciousness of the difference between the modern and medieval ages in that this age emerged from a fracturing of the medieval synthesis between faith and reason, and church and state. It was a form of consciousness of the emerging place of the church in modernity, and a consciousness of the self as an agent that can affect this history. This awareness reflected a profound anxiety over the church's

place in modernity that manifested itself as what Emile Poulat calls a “cataclysmic eschatology.”

Within nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism, “secularization,” both as a sociological process and as a seizure of church property, was given an apocalyptic interpretation. Even earlier, as Jean Ségué notes, there was an apocalyptic stream in French and Italian Catholicism before, during, and after the French Revolution.²⁷ As Joseph Komonchak indicates, the French Revolution

was seen as a decisive battle, perhaps the final one, in the great warfare between God and Satan. The three great heroes of the Restoration, de Bonald, Lamennais, and de Maistre, bequeathed to subsequent generations an interpretation of the Revolution as Satanic in root and branch.²⁸

According to Cardinal Manning, secularization's “various features represented the great apostasy which must shortly precede the appearance of the Antichrist.”²⁹ In the Italian annexation of the Papal States in 1870, Catholics witnessed the loss of the “ideal” relationship between religious and civil society—that is, a unity of throne and altar. The political struggle was interpreted as the struggle for the soul of society. This “catastrophic” eschatology became a dominant stream in Catholicism's self-interpretation within the nineteenth century and was employed by papal encyclicals.

A certain narrative about the modern age formed the backdrop to the rise of neo-Scholasticism. Three Jesuits particularly helped link an interpretation of history with the

27 Jean Ségué, “Sur L’apocalyptique Catholique,” *Archives De Sciences Sociales Des Religions*, no. 41 (1976): 165–172. Émile Poulat states: “This Catholic *catastrophism* that seems to surprise us today... dominates the whole of the nineteenth century and maintained its vigor for a long time.... In its way, the Catholic nineteenth century manifested an acute consciousness of the Reign of God.... The religious climate of the time is of a ‘tragic ultramontanism.’” Émile Poulat, *L’Église, c’est un monde: L’ecclésiosphère*, Sciences humaines et religions (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1986), 255.

28 Komonchak, “Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism,” 359–60.

29 Ibid., 358.

neo-Scholastic system: Giovanni Perrone, Matteo Liberatore, and Joseph Kleutgen.

Giovanni Perrone (1794-1876), one of the founders of neo-Scholasticism, promulgated the idea that the recovery of Aquinas can overcome the division between faith and reason characteristic of the modern age. Matteo Liberatore (1810-1892), who co-founded and edited the popular journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, connected the political problem to the theological one. For Liberatore, eternal, unchanging principles derived from revelation and the church must govern civil and political society, not vice versa.³⁰ The unmooring of civil society from those unchanging principles initially occurred in the Protestant Reformation, which effects were being worked out in contemporary life. The recovery of the medieval theological-philosophical synthesis held the promise of overcoming secularization.

Joseph Kleutgen's (1811-1883) *Die Theologie der Vorzeit verteidigt* [*Defense of the Theology of the Past*] (1860-1873) and *Die Philosophie der Vorzeit verteidigt* [*Defense of the Philosophy of the Past*] (1878) provided an intellectually robust account of the differences between medieval and modern philosophy. Kleutgen interpreted modern rationalist and empiricist philosophy as a dissolution of a previous medieval epistemological synthesis. According to John Inglis, Joseph Kleutgen and Albert Stöckl “were consciously ‘recovering’ a philosophical tradition in order to provide an alternative

30 “Against the view that the church should submit to political authority, Liberatore argues that since the church is a divine and unchanging institution while the state is earthly and changing, the church should not be subject to the state. How can we submit what is eternal to the temporal? Since the eternal cannot submit to the temporal, the church should never submit to the state. Any other view, we are told, is Protestant and therefore wrong.” John Inglis, *Spheres of Philosophical Inquiry and the Historiography of Medieval Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 76.

to what they took to be the inherent skepticism and individualism of modern philosophy.”³¹ They offered an alternative to the histories of philosophy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that interpreted the faith of the medieval period as a detriment to human reasoning. According to Kleutgen, the realist epistemology of the medieval period united the respect for observation of the concrete (in the spirit of modern empiricism) with an emphasis on universals (in concert with modern rationalism).³² The premise upon which the neo-Scholastic revival was based was the need for a circumnavigation of a modern separation between philosophy and theology, and between civil society and the church.

The early neo-Scholastics were generally quite sober and not very amenable to apocalypticism. However, the neo-Scholastic narrative concerning modernity—modernity as a perfidious time in which faith and reason are estranged, and the basis for social cohesion is lost—fit well with an apocalypticism and would contribute to an apocalyptic reading of modernity in the papal encyclicals and popular journals.³³

The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* of the First Vatican Council saw in the theologies of the Protestant reformers a source of challenges to the faith. Moreover, the challenges to the faith were threats to the unity and cohesiveness of human society.

The abandonment and rejection of the Christian religion, and the denial of God and his Christ, has plunged the minds of many into the abyss of pantheism, materialism and

31 Ibid., 11.

32 Ibid., 296.

33 Liberatore had a popular influence through his journal *Civiltà Cattolica*, which supported integrism between the church and state. Kleutgen directly influenced official ecclesial documents. He consulted the first Vatican Council as a theological expert in the writing of *Dei Filius* (1870) and later composed the first draft of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), which established Scholasticism at the heart of the Roman Catholic Church's intellectual response to modernity.

atheism, and the consequence is that they strive to destroy rational nature itself, to deny any criterion of what is right and just, and to overthrow the very foundations of human society.³⁴

Five months after the promulgation of *Dei Filius*, the Italian army invaded the Papal States and surrounded the Vatican. As Komonchak stated, the loss of the Papal States was felt by many Catholics to be an attack on Christianity's public and social role (not just political) and a suppression of the exercise of the faith.³⁵ The suppression of the public role of the Catholic Church in France over the next forty years would deepen the crisis, confirming the anxiety over the disintegration of Christian and European unity.

Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*, written nine years after the annexation of the Papal States, interprets the outward crisis as a spiritual and intellectual crisis. "False conclusions concerning divine and human things, which originated in the schools of philosophy, have now crept into all the orders of the State, and have been accepted by the common consent of the masses."³⁶ As the intellect guides the will and the will guides public life, the misguided philosophies of the moderns have exercised a deleterious influence on the public order. *Aeterni Patris* presents the restoration of Scholastic thought, with its unity-in-distinction of philosophy and theology, as the primary intellectual response to this situation. Given the historical context in which *Aeterni Patris* was written, the document is quite measured. While its analysis is incomplete from a contemporary perspective, it does not contain the vitriolic language of subsequent papal encyclicals in reference to modern thought.³⁷

³⁴ *Dei Filius*, 7.

³⁵ Komonchak, "Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism," 338–39.

³⁶ *Aeterni Patris*, 2.

³⁷ The document does contain some apocalyptic language: "In these late days, when those dangerous

Pope Leo XIII, however, freely elaborated a “catastrophic eschatology” elsewhere. The most dramatic of these is the legend that arose surrounding the “Prayer to Saint Michael,” which Leo added to the “Leonine Prayers” said at the end of the low Mass. In 1884, Leo modified previous prayers to make them into intercessions for the freedom of the church throughout the world. The “Prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel” was added in 1886. While the prayer may have its inspiration in a mystical experience of Leo, a millenarian legend about the origins of the prayer developed later. A long version of the prayer contains vibrant apocalyptic imagery. It explains that the devil has taken the form of an angel of light and invaded earth, sending wicked people against the Church:

These most crafty enemies have filled and inebriated the church... with gall and bitterness, and have laid impious hands on her most sacred possessions. In the Holy Place itself, where the See of Holy Peter and the Chair of Truth has been set up as the light of the world, they have raised the throne of their abominable impiety, with the iniquitous design that when the Pastor has been struck, the sheep may be.³⁸

This prayer's lively apocalyptic images linked recent political events directly to the spiritual warfare between the angels and the devil.

The Catholic antimodernism of the early twentieth century only intensified this apocalypticism. In 1907 Pius X promulgated *Pascendi*, the premier document of the anti-Modernist movement. *Pascendi* suggested that a cataclysmic contest between good and evil was presently occurring and dividing the Catholic Church itself. The church, Pius

times described by the Apostle are already upon us, when the blasphemers, the proud, and the seducers go from bad to worse, erring themselves and causing others to err, there is surely a very great need of confirming the dogmas of Catholic faith and confuting heresies” (*Aeterni Patris*, 14). Leo's language here is a quotation from the sixteenth-century pope, Sixtus V, whose bull *Triumphantis* confirmed the perennial utility of Scholastic theology in combating error.

38 *Rituale Romanum*, 6th ed. post typicam (Ratisbon: Pustet 1898), 163.

wrote, has always needed to be vigilant against those who will mislead it. Yet, “it must be confessed that the number of the enemies of the cross of Christ has in these last days increased exceedingly...[They are] striving, by new and subtle arts, to destroy the vital energy of the Church, and, if they can, to overthrow utterly Christ's kingdom itself.”³⁹ In his first encyclical, Pius set his pontificate the task of “restoring all things in Christ” with God's grace. With allusions to the French Revolution, Pius states that the extinction of God in the public and private realm is perhaps a foretaste of the last days. The “Son of Perdition...may already be in the world.” For St. Paul, he writes, the “distinguishing mark of the Antichrist, man has with infinite temerity put himself in the place of God.” Pius states that human beings have usurped God's place in the Temple.⁴⁰ For Pius, the events of the French Revolution, the annexation of the Papal States, and the challenges of the modernists offer an insight into the underlying meaning of modernity and where it is heading. Recent attacks against the Roman Church unveil the revolt of the devil against God and God's church: this age is the site of a cataclysmic contest between good and evil. Furthermore, for Pius, these recent events unveil the ultimate trajectory of the Protestant Reformation, which culminates in the siege against the church.

The apocalyptic mentality of nineteenth- to twentieth-century Roman Catholicism complicates any neat division between “classicism” and “historical-mindedness” (in Lonergan's terminology). Neo-Scholasticism did not successfully integrate the historical consciousness of the age. Yet Roman Catholicism, as a whole, was increasingly

39 Pope Pius X, “Pascendi Dominici gregis,” in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, vol. 40, 1907, 593–94.

40 Pope Pius X, “E Supremi,” in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, vol. 36, 1904, 131–2.

organizing itself around a cataclysmic eschatology found in political interventions by lay Catholics, in the messages contained in the alleged appearances of Mary, and in official Catholic pronouncements. The contrast is striking between the serene, rational “eternalism” of neo-Scholasticism and the apocalypticism of the encyclicals. This apocalypticism functioned as a religious explanation for the church's confrontational relationship with modern thought and politics, as well as a justification for the ecclesial response. Both a classicist neo-Scholasticism and apocalypticism were joined within Roman Catholicism in a form of historical experience and a manner of interpreting the contemporary world.

Although Roman Catholic apocalypticism and neo-Scholasticism reinforced each other, the apocalyptic was not theologically integrated with neo-Scholasticism. Neo-Scholasticism had an understated eschatology at best. Within the neo-Scholastic manuals of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, eschatology comprised a discrete subject within dogmatic theology. It exclusively focused on the *last things*: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Not only did neo-Scholasticism not generally integrate a contemporary apocalyptic sensibility, but Scholasticism as a whole resisted millenarian tendencies. In part, this resistance was due to the traditional opposition of the medieval Scholastics to the apocalyptic imagination present in the Franciscan Spirituals and other marginal or heretical groups. Ironically, many of the same proponents of the neo-Scholastic system employed apocalyptic images to make sense of current crises within the church and society (Liberatore, Leo XIII). This apocalyptic sensibility envisioned a form of the

ultimate drama occurring as a present prelude to the ultimate fight between good and evil. There is definitely a tension between the apocalyptic sensibilities and eternalism within Roman Catholicism at the *Fin de siècle*, specifically among the proponents of the neo-Scholastic system. The debates before, during, and following the second World War over the “theology of history” addressed this tension directly.

The feeling of being at the end of an era and of the present time as a foretaste of the end had much in common with the growing eschatological consciousness in European modernity. Similar to the conflict over the meaning of time within cultural and literary modernism, Roman Catholicism reflected a preoccupation with the relationship between time and eternity. In nineteenth-century Catholicism, the church is the spatially and temporally extended outpost of the eternal within time. The papal encyclicals treat various challenges to church authority as “incursions” into the social space occupied by the church. With the loss of the Papal States in 1870, that “space” has collapsed: the sociopolitical world that was Catholicism's medium was coming to its end. History was unhinged from eternity, giving an impetus for an already-existing apocalyptic view of the modern age.

After the First World War, the new situation of Catholicism spurred a reimagining of “social Catholicism” in France, especially in the work of Henri de Lubac, Gaston Fessard, Jacques Maritain, and Teilhard de Chardin. It also spurred a new theological reflection on history that sought to integrate a modern historical consciousness with a traditional interpretation of Christianity.

IV. Theology of History in the *nouvelle théologie*

One of the most prominent characteristics of the *nouvelle théologie* was its attempt to honestly face the challenges of a modern historical consciousness and to integrate it with traditional sources of theological reflection.⁴¹ The *nouveaux théologiens* criticized neo-Thomists for their poor understanding of the relationship between theology and history.⁴² The debate over the “theology of history” (1943-1962) arose over differences among themselves over modern historical consciousness, the interpretation of scripture, and the theological interpretation of human history.

The debate was initiated by Henri-Marie Féret's book, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean: Vision chrétienne de l'histoire* (1943). After the liberation of France, a flurry of articles in the journals *Dieu vivant*, *Études*, and *Recherches de science religieuse*

41 Yves Congar's article “Déficit de la théologie” (1934) in *Sept* magazine implied a reimagining of theological methodology in light of the present human condition. Theology, he explained, had become a “closed domain,” cut off from other disciplines and human activity. “As long as we talk about Marxism and Bolshevism in Latin, as I have seen it done in classes and conferences of theologians, Lenin can sleep in peace in his Moscow mausoleum.” Quoted in Jürgen Mettepenning, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor to Vatican II* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 45. Marie-Dominique Chenu's *Le Salchoir* (1937) proposed that theology was the impact of God's gift upon the human intellect. Analogous to the incarnation, because human beings are in time and history, theology is going to take a historical form. Chenu suggested reorganizing theological education around the study of history. The so-called Catholic Modernist authors—such as George Tyrrell, Alfred Loisy, and Friedrich von Hügel—were part of a previous generation engaged precisely with the issue of the methodological impact of history on the discipline of theology.

42 It would be a simplification, however, to merely oppose the *nouvelle théologie* to neo-Scholasticism. There was significant continuity between neo-Scholasticism and the *nouvelle théologie*. First, most of the *nouveaux théologiens* considered themselves to be “Thomists” in some sense of the word. Second, like its neo-Scholastic counterpart, the *nouvelle théologie* was an attempt at a *ressourcement* of the Christian intellectual heritage in order to address contemporary problems. Third, reflecting the inheritance of anti-Modernist Roman Catholicism, the *nouvelle théologie* reflects a keen consciousness of the present moment as a confrontation between Christianity and the secular world. The *nouveaux théologiens* expressed an awareness of living within a modern age and that a rift has occurred between our age and an earlier time. While theologians like Marie-Dominique Chenu and Jean Daniélou are more open to the élan of modern thought, they retain a negative theological assessment of modernity as falling away from a previously attained ideal of Christianity.

responded to this book, taking up themes from earlier debates. The participants included Henri-Marie Féret, OP (1904-1992), Jean Daniélou, SJ (1905-1974), Joseph Huby, SJ (1878-1948), Gaston Fessard, SJ (1897-1978), and Jean Mouroux (1901-1973), a secular priest of the diocese of Dijon.⁴³ De Lubac's contribution to this debate came out in his books on Origen, the history of medieval exegesis, and his two books on the posterity of Joachim of Flore. Daniélou cited de Lubac's earlier *Catholicism* (1930) as an inspiration to the recovery of a patristic understanding of history. The debate over the theology of history did not so much go away as it diffused itself into broader theological themes.⁴⁴

In what follows, I provide an introduction to the historical context of this debate, then examine the theological interventions of Féret, Huby, Fessard, and Daniélou. My purpose is to show that eschatology and apocalypticism were persistent themes within this debate, and that this debate forms the backdrop for de Lubac's subsequent eschatological synthesis.

A. The Socio-Political Context of a Debate

At the end of the nineteenth century, French Republicans tried and succeeded to remove from France the Catholic religious congregations and their hold on public education. Prior to 1879, the religious congregations were permitted to function even if the law heavily circumscribed their activity. From 1879 to 1889, France began to expel

⁴³ The last three are sometimes not included in the usual rosters of the *nouvelle théologie* authors. Huby, who was de Lubac's teacher, was really from a previous generation. Gaston Fessard, though he was caught up in the *nouvelle théologie* controversy of the 1950s, is often not numbered among the "New Theologians." For example, Jürgen Mettepenningen hardly mentions Fessard in *Nouvelle Theologie - New Theology*.

⁴⁴ Mettepenningen locates the end of this debate as the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, in which history became a prominent theme.

some religious congregations. At the same time, the French government created a system of free, obligatory primary school education without religious instruction. It is at least symbolic that, at a time when there was a concerted effort to remove the public footprint of Catholicism from France, an iconic expression of technical modernity, the Eiffel Tower, was being erected as the most visible structure on the Parisian skyline to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution.

In 1889, Action française rose as an antirevolutionary movement that advocated the return of the monarchy and the return of the Catholic Church as a state religion in France. Charles Maurras, the principal spokesman for the movement, was an agnostic who wished to capture the power of social cohesion of Catholicism for the French state. While Action française attracted many Catholics, others were quite suspicious of the movement. The Dreyfus Affair put Catholics on the defensive yet again.⁴⁵ Under the French Concordat of 1801, the church held a place of privilege and was subsidized by the government. From 1899 to 1914, Catholics were excluded from government and public office. Religious orders, including the Jesuits, were exiled. The Law of 1904 forbade the religious to teach. In 1904 France broke diplomatic relations with the Holy See because Pope Pius X refused the French government the power to name bishops. In response, French Republicans took away the church budget. In 1905, the Law of Separation allowed the church to organize itself as it pleased, but provided for lay associations for

⁴⁵ Alfred Dreyfus, an army captain of Jewish descent, was condemned to life imprisonment for giving military secrets to the Germans. When it became clear that another man had committed treason and that antisemitism was behind his condemnation, his case was reopened in 1899. The case split France as well as French Catholics. Members of the Augustinian religious order joined a rush to condemn him, triggering an anti-Catholic backlash. Yet prominent Catholics were among the Dreyfusards, including Charles Péguy.

the conservation of church property. Due to the latter provision, Pius X unwisely condemned the Law of Separation. The Catholic Church never established associations, so church properties were given by the state to other organizations.

The aftermath of the Great War put Catholics in a very different situation. Returning from exile abroad, religious served as chaplains, medics, and soldiers, thus they could no longer be seen as the enemy. Foreign affairs and domestic economic problems dominated French politics, which no longer had a place for anticlerical politics. Religious congregations were allowed to return, though the law banning them remained on the books until 1942. In 1921 France and the Holy See resumed relations. In 1924, a modification of the French law allowed the church was allowed to own property. An anti-Catholic government was elected in 1924, but fell quickly in 1925. In 1926, Pope Pius XI condemned Action française, precipitating the search for new models of Christian involvement in the social and political realm.

The theological renewals in France in the 1920s and 1930s occurred during a time of political truce between integrist Catholicism and republicanism. At least in part, the generation of theologians of the 1920s to 1930s were not as tied to the political establishment as those of the previous generation.⁴⁶ This generation was less inclined to believe that partisan political interests were aligned with the spiritual needs of Catholics. Between the wars and following, pastoral initiatives and domestic missionary work

⁴⁶ The priests under the concordat were largely rural and pious, and the state treated them like government officials. They tended to align themselves politically with those parties and organizations that advocated a return of the monarchy. The priests after the separation of 1905 (and especially after World War I) were mostly urban, bourgeoisie or working class and not tied to the political establishment.

outside the institutional church sought to engage the laity.⁴⁷ The re-claiming of the theological virtues, mysticism, and spirituality became a central pastoral task, especially as so many Catholics were disengaged from moral and outward practices of the Church. Significantly, the post-war context saw the re-thinking of “Social Catholicism,” a vision of the social and political space of the church as the haven for society. The amelioration of tensions between the French government and Catholics allowed for this re-envisioning to take place apart from seeking the restoration of a pro-Catholic monarchy.⁴⁸

Furthermore, French literary Catholicism was blossoming. The work of Leon Bloy, François Mauriac, Georges Bernanos, Charles Péguy, Gabriel Marcel, and Paul Claudel had an immense influence on those who would form the *nouvelle théologie*. Bernanos and Marcel especially treated apocalyptic and eschatological themes as modes of understanding the relationship between Christianity and secular society. Marcel raised the specter of a “post-human” technological society, which wipes away any traces of subjectivity and human authenticity.⁴⁹

47 Henri-Marie Féret was involved in founding three pastoral initiatives just before WWII: *Journées sacerdotales*, retreats for priestly formation, *Cours Saint-Jacques*, a parallel retreat for lay people, and *Groupe évangélique*, a women's bible study. Henri de Lubac participated in *Semaines sociales*, an annual conference on the social dimensions of Christianity for laity.

48 Turn of the century initiatives from Catholic philosophers, theologians, and writers contributed to seeking new forms of Christian social witness. The philosopher Maurice Blondel was a prominent participant in the Catholic “social congresses” from the late nineteenth century to early twentieth century. Under the inspiration of Leo XIII's social vision for Catholicism, Marc Sangnier founded *Le Sillon* [The Furrow] in 1894. *Le Sillon* was a liberal Catholic labor movement and political alternative to Marxism. The group was endorsed by the Pope until the 1905 law of separation, which *Le Sillon* supported. In 1912 *Le Sillon* was condemned by Pius X. These political interventions lead to Catholic social philosophies of the 1920s and 1930s. Jean-Yves Calvez names Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, Gaston Fessard, Teilhard de Chardin, and Henri de Lubac as the most significant theorists of social Catholicism. Jean-Yves Calvez, “The French Catholic Contribution to Social and Political Thinking in the 1930s,” *Ethical Perspectives: Journal of the European Ethics Network* 7, no. 4 (December 2000): 312–315.

49 His philosophy highlighted the experience of living in a broken world in which the awe of being is lost and transcendence is quashed. Marcel described this as the human being reduced to “function.” Marcel's

The advent of the Second World War and the occupation of France divided Catholics politically. In general, those involved with the debate over the theology of history were active participants in the “spiritual resistance” against the État Français, which collaborated with Germany, and the German occupiers. The administrative center of the État Français was in Vichy, located a mere 150 kilometers from Lyon. East of Lyon was an area of Italian occupation. The southern zone in general, and Lyon in particular, became a bastion for resistance movements.

The underground journal *Cahiers du témoignage chrétien* became an organ of the Catholic “spiritual resistance” that attacked the Vichy and German governments.⁵⁰ In 1941, in Lyon, the *avant garde* editor and art critic Stanislaus Fumet arranged a meeting between the Jesuits Pierre Chaillet and Gaston Fessard, and Henri Frenay, the head of the *Combat* network of resistance movements. Fumet and Frenay encouraged Chaillet to start a clandestine paper that criticized Nazi ideology from a Christian perspective. The first edition of *Témoignage chrétien* appeared under the title *France, prends garde de perdre ton âme* [*France, Take Care to Not Lose Your Soul*] in 1941. From 1941 to 1945, Pierre Chaillet, Gaston Fessard, Stanislaus Fumet, Henri de Lubac, Georges Bernanos, Yves de Montcheuil, and Jean Lacroix were among the authors. Jacques Maritain was among the editors. Many of its contributors, including de Lubac, who were located near Lyon, had a

example in *The Philosophy of Existentialism* was of a person who does repetitive tasks and regulates life around a “time table.” Technological progress functioned to regulate the self and even to see the self as a function, which Marcel saw as degrading the experience of being and mystery.

50 *Cahiers du témoignage chrétien* was one of a series of publications that criticized Nazism. *Temps présent*, which became *Temps nouveau*, was shut down by the authorities in 1941. *Sept*, *Esprit*, *L'Aube*, and *Semaine religieuse* were all under surveillance by the authorities. Guy Boissard, *Quelle neutralité face à l'horreur: le courage de Charles Journet* (Saint-Maurice, Switzerland: Éditions Saint-Augustin, 2000), 215.

greater freedom of movement and communication that allowed for the publication of the journal. Yves de Montcheuil, a scholar at Institute Catholique de Paris, distributed *Témoignage chrétien* through his networks in occupied Paris. De Montcheuil's writings exuded an apocalyptic interpretation of the present time.⁵¹ While ministering to students in the armed resistance movement *le maquis*, he was captured and killed in 1944.⁵²

While the writers for *Témoignage chrétien* were united in their opposition to “collaboration” with Nazism, this unity frayed almost immediately in the post-war period. Maritain and Bernanos had anti-revolutionary leanings and ties to Action française, and they supported anti-communist regimes.⁵³ On the other hand, for many French resisters, communism appeared to be a viable political alternative. In 1947, writing in the journal *Esprit*, Emmanuel Mounier and Jean Lacroix took a stance against the “fascism come to France” of General de Gaulle. They appealed to non-fascists, including Catholics, to “collaborate” with communists. The contributors to *Témoignage chrétien* had diverse responses to this invitation. Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou were more sympathetic to the social and eschatological impulses of communism and sought to understand it in light of a Christian understanding of history. In July 1947, De Lubac's , Mounier's, and Lacroix's joint participation in *Semaine sociales de France* (an intellectual retreat for Catholic laypeople) contributed to the perception of the emergence of a leftist

51 Yves de Montcheuil, “Communisme,” *Courrier français du temoignage chretien* 5 (1943); Yves de Montcheuil, “Perspectives,” *Courrier français du temoignage chretien* 9 (1944): 384–386.

“Perspectives” is particularly apocalyptic, in which he interprets the present totalitarianism in terms of the beasts of Revelation.

52 Aidan Nichols, OP, “Henri de Lubac: Panorama and Proposal,” *New Blackfriars* 93, no. 1043 (January 2012): 20.

53 Bernanos had supported Franco during the Spanish Civil War, but became disillusioned with the brutality of the war. During and after World War II, he supported Charles de Gaulle.

Catholicism in Lyons.⁵⁴ In private letters to Henri de Lubac, Gaston Fessard indicated that he saw a community of thought developing in Lyon that was open to communism. De Lubac denied that his proximity to this group in Lyon played a significant role in his thinking.⁵⁵

The debate over the theology of history that would unfold extended from the reflection over the social space of Catholicism in the modern world in the 1920s and 1930s and from the spiritual resistance to fascism in the 1940s. Many of the writers associated with the *Témoignage chrétien* also contributed to this debate. While the '*théologie de l'histoire*' concerned primarily the understanding of God's interventions into history, the political question remained in the background.

B. The Debate over the '*théologie de l'histoire*'

1. The Exchange Between Henri-Marie Féret and Joseph Huby

Roger Aubert correctly claimed that Henri-Marie Féret's book *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean: Vision chrétienne de l'histoire* (1943) initiated the debate over the theology of history within the *nouvelle théologie*.⁵⁶ As suggested above, Féret's project to give an interpretation of history in light of the Book of Revelation had precedents within magisterial documents of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as cultural

⁵⁴ Lyons was home to the *Fourvière*, the Jesuit seminary in Lyons, from which the *Cahiers du témoignage chrétien* was launched. It also was the home to the new series *Sources Chrétiennes* and *Théologie*, which would come under increasing criticism from neo-Thomists. Mounier and Lacroix, editors of *Esprit*, were also living in Lyons, as was Fumet.

⁵⁵ Frédéric Louzeau, "Gaston Fessard et Henri de Lubac: leur différend sur la question du communisme et du progressisme chrétien (1945-1950)," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 84, no. 4 (2010): 531.

⁵⁶ Roger Aubert, "Discussions récentes autour de la théologie de l'histoire," *Collectanea Mechliniensia* 33 (1948): 129–149.

and political precedents. Jürgen Mettepenningen states, “not only did he give an initial impetus to a biblical-theological explanation of the course of history, but also evidently to a theology of history, i.e., a theological reflection on history that took seriously history and endeavored to integrate it to the full.”⁵⁷ Written during a time of messianic politics, Féret's book attempted an interpretation of history through a biblical lens and spurred the reflection on the methodological implications of history on theology. *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean* advanced an apocalyptic interpretation of the bible, giving voice to a powerful religious intuition of the presence of God in history and God's providence over its outcome.

Féret argued that the Book of Revelation provides the “concrete details” concerning the development of God's plan in history, particularly with regard to the church. The history of the church is composed of three periods: a time of persecution by the Roman Empire; a time of battle against the church's political opponents; and a time during which there is a “progressive amelioration of the situation: through numerous difficulties, spiritual and religious values would little by little take the place that they should.”⁵⁸ The “conversion of the Jews” and the beginning of the establishment of Christian civilization (the thousand-year reign of Christ) would follow long periods of struggle. During this era, the fight between good and evil would continue within each individual, while religious and civil society would find peace. At the end of this period

⁵⁷ Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Theologie - New Theology*, 59–60.

⁵⁸ Aubert, “Discussions récentes autour de la théologie de l’histoire,” 133.

would come a resurgence of evil in the world, followed by the final intervention of God who would destroy evil and bring about a “new heaven and a new earth.”

Féret states that the last stage of history has begun in Christ. Rejecting the “messianism” of both Marxism and liberalism, he states that the Christian cannot look to a new revelation or a new age. At the same time, “the cause of Christ is assured of triumph, not only on the plane of individuals who arrive in heaven, but on the plane of a humanity, who in this world will experience...an organization of the world here below conformed to the truth of the Gospel.”⁵⁹ While avoiding the kind of temporal hope that characterized fascism and Marxism, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean* sought to describe a situation in which humanity is conformed to the Gospel, visibly and in its social organization and not just individually or spiritually. Furthermore, because conformity to the Gospel must occur in this world through human relationships, it must occur through human action and cooperation with the Gospel.

In “Apocalypse et histoire,” Joseph Huby responded to Féret's book in order to correct its specious interpretations of the Book of Revelation.⁶⁰ Huby took the position that the apocalyptic discourse in this book, as a “succession of visions that reveal the designs of God,” serves to reveal the ultimate meaning of conflicts between the church

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Joseph Huby, S.J. (1878-1948) was a professor of apologetics at Ore Place, Hastings (1913-1917), professor of scripture at Ore Place (1923-1926), and professor of scripture at Lyon-Fourvière). See Henri de Lubac, Marie Rougier, and Michel Sales, eds., *Gabriel Marcel - Gaston Fessard: Correspondence (1934-1971)* (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1985), 322. As de Lubac's teacher at Ore Place from 1924 to 1926, Huby encouraged de Lubac to begin the body of research that would become *Surnaturel*. As a biblical scholar, he was also philosophically astute. De Lubac called him “the most faithful disciple of Fathers de Grandmaison and Pierre Rousselot.” Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings* (San Francisco: Communio Books, 1993), 20.

and the world in the time when it was written and in the present. The Book of Revelation lifts the veil, not on the future, but on the present. “Revelation has as its object a present, contemporary mystery....”⁶¹

First, according to Huby, the representations of the end of history in the apocalyptic genre are only a “contingent manner by which to represent this end.”⁶² While the apocalyptic genre represents God's judgment over history as occurring within time, this temporal judgment is “one with the universal judgment at the end of time (or the 'eschatological' judgment).”⁶³ These temporal representations of catastrophe symbolize that we must be torn from our temporal condition to reach our end.

Second, the Book of Revelation is thoroughly Christocentric, which the future eschatology of Féret makes us forget. For Huby, the book does not as much signify the reign of God in the historical future as it reveals the reign of God already intervening in the world through Christ. “Among the revelations that this book brings us, the most important concern not so much particular events as the person of Christ himself and the reciprocal relationships between Christ and his faithful.”⁶⁴ The church will remain in conflict with the world until the end of time as a sign of contradiction. However, through the church militant, the saints, and the martyrs, the eschatological “church triumphant” is already made present. Avoiding any form of millennialism, Huby indicated that the reign of God is already realized in Christ but will remain in tension with the present age.

Féret responded to Huby in “Apocalypse, histoire, et eschatologie chrétiennes,” a

61 Joseph Huby, “Apocalypse et Histoire,” *Construire* 15 (1944): 84.

62 Ibid., 89.

63 Ibid., 84.

64 Ibid., 95.

clarification and development of his original thesis. At the outset, Féret distanced himself from any crass, literal millenarian reading of John's Revelation. Instead, he developed the outlines of a theory of symbol that could support the “prophetic” message of the scripture.

According to Féret, the realities about which the apocalyptic text speaks “are presented—and without doubt first of all known to the inspired author—only through symbols.”⁶⁵ The meaning of the text is conveyed through symbols and images—the horsemen, the lamb, the lamp stands, the beasts, the woman—that are polyvalent. These symbols usually possess a historical referent from the time of the author. In addition, they often possess a prophetic character. Apocalyptic symbols, “save exceptions sufficiently marked by their meaning or contexts, are normally overt about the future or announcing it... We cannot contest that they...predict the future.”⁶⁶

Féret claims that the apocalyptic genre in the Old Testament possessed a messianic content, since it awaited a further completion. The authors of the New Testament recognize that, while the messiah has come, Christians await his return:

In faith the Christian lives inseparably by the fulfillment of the ancient promises made by God to his people—a fulfillment inaugurated in the first place by Christ—and in expectation of their fuller blossoming—a blossoming that the parousia or second coming of the same Christ at the end of time will realize. It is on the future that the eschatological fragments of the New Testament project their own light, in their way, according to variable stages.⁶⁷

God's promises have been fulfilled with Christ. However, those same promises are oriented to a development into the future, as the extension of that fulfillment in time.

⁶⁵ Henri-Marie Féret, “Apocalypse, histoire, et eschatologie chrétiennes,” *Dieu Vivant* 2 (1945): 119.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 122–23.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

In opposition to Huby's account, Féret argued that the temporal characteristics within prophecy are significant. The millennial prophecy (Rev. 20:1-6) symbolically portrayed an era of peace. While we lack explicit knowledge of the concrete mode of that “era,” we cannot neglect that it points to the historical future. The prophetic symbols in scripture prefigure the “aspect of the mystery of the Church in its future evolution.”⁶⁸ The temporal mode of prophetic expression is itself of importance and should figure into our interpretation of the New Testament.

Féret argued that the neglect of the “prophetic perspective” is “of grave consequence not only for Christian eschatology...but already for the prophetic documents [of the Old Testament].”⁶⁹ He feared that, by not recognizing the element of prefiguration in scripture, we would reduce the symbols of scripture to “some general atemporal truths.”⁷⁰ As a result, the content of Christian hope would be an abstraction and would no longer have any bearing on the present church and its current struggles.

Huby's response to Féret's article in “Autour de l'Apocalypse” witnesses to the closeness of the two authors in their basic understanding of scripture, but also to remaining differences. The point of contention was the manner in which we must interpret the “prophetic,” “messianic,” or “future” meaning of the Scriptures, particularly John's apocalypse. Féret had stated that prophetic inspiration really sees something “that appears to touch on the future.” Huby agreed that

any Catholic interpreter would not hesitate to admit with Fr. Féret that, in the Apocalypse as in the messianic prophesies, the “inspired author claims to glimpse and announce,

68 Ibid., 130.

69 Ibid., 125.

70 Ibid., 130.

through the symbols which he uses, something of the future.”.... It remains to be determined more accurately what this “something of the future” is and to show how this “something,” captured by a mode of knowledge other than that of history, is “really in continuity with another reality accessible to historical knowledge.”⁷¹

The question is precisely to what the prophetic glimpse into the future pertains and how the reality in the future is related to the reality in the historical context of the author.

According to Huby, some scriptural symbols, like the beasts of Revelation, refer both to the historical context of the author and to future realities. While the human author of scripture did not foresee the concrete realities in the future, the symbols that represent historical realities in turn bear an analogy to present-day circumstances. In a sense, the persecutions of the church throughout time are contemporaneous to the persecution occurring in the time of the author.

I believe that this “contemporaneity” of the Apocalypse to each of the great fights of the church permits one to call the visions of Saint John properly prophetic visions: through a supra-historical view they make him *present* to the spiritual crises that the church would have to cross before its final transformation in the heavenly Jerusalem. It is in this sense that I speak of a *legitimate* application, that is to say, conformed to the intention of the inspired author, of the teachings of the Apocalypse that Christians make to analogous crises of the Church from the persecution of Diocletian, without moreover causing the complete distinction of successive periods, which map in advance the contours of the history of the church, to enter into the Johannine vision.”⁷²

Huby affirmed that the Book of Revelation contains a prophetic meaning beyond the “historical plane” that tells us something of the future. However, he resisted “the tendency to conceive this prophetic or apocalyptic perspective as a *second plane itself also historical*,” that is, a perspective that would single out particular future events as precisely foretold by the scriptures.⁷³ Huby affirmed two depths of interpretation of

71 Joseph Huby, “Autour de l’Apocalypse,” *Dieu Vivant* 5 (1946): 125.

72 Ibid., 126.

73 Ibid., 124.

scriptural symbols, the historical meaning and the prophetic meaning. However, he opposed the notion that the prophetic meanings signify a new historical era in which those prophecies concretely come to pass. The scriptural symbols are analogous to and contemporaneous with the events throughout the life of the church.

In summary, Féret and Huby were divided on a point of biblical hermeneutics, a point which implicated their respective understandings of history. Importantly, both authors articulated the scriptural and theological grounds for a theological understanding of the historical future. Féret voiced the notion that the Christian must hope for and work toward an era in human history in which society, culture, and human institutions are conformed to the Gospel. His theology suggested that Christianity held a response to communist aspirations. Féret's critics attempted to formulate a theological understanding of history that avoided temporalizing the eschaton. Gaston Fessard developed an original reflection on the contemporaneity of the scriptural events.

2. Gaston Fessard's Dialectic of History

In 1947, Gaston Fessard, SJ intervened in the debate over the theology of history from the perspective of a philosopher rather than that of a biblical theologian. His previous writings in the 1930s and 1940s demonstrate his keen interest in social philosophy and its applicability to international relations, political authority, society, and the crises then enveloping Europe.⁷⁴ He warned of “tactical alliances” between Christians

⁷⁴ Gaston Fessard, *“Pax nostra”: examen de conscience international* (Paris: Grasset, 1936); Gaston Fessard, *Le Dialogue catholique-communiste est-il possible?* (Paris: Grasset, 1937); Gaston Fessard, *Épreuve de force: réflexions sur la crise internationale* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1939); Gaston Fessard, *Autorité et bien commun* (Paris: Aubier, 1944); Gaston Fessard, *France prends garde de perdre ta*

and communists in *France, prends garde de perdre ta liberté*, a political as well as a religious intervention. According to Fessard, communism possessed a similar underlying view of history and human agency as the fascism against which he had fought. He believed that the theology of history proposed by Féret and others represented a loss of a genuine Christian eschatology and a close approximation of Marxism. “Théologie et histoire” appeared in *Dieu Vivant* in 1947, serving as Fessard’s response to Féret. This article was the initial articulation of a theology of time that would culminate in *De l’Actualité historique*.⁷⁵ “Théologie et histoire” sought to articulate, beginning from the Pauline dialectic between the pagan and the Jew, a theology of history, a synthesis between “essentialism” and “existentialism,” and a resolution to the problem of the supernatural. Here I wish to trace the basic outlines of Fessard’s objection to the “apocalyptic” or “prophetic” interpretations of scripture offered by some of his contemporaries.

Fessard recognized that Apocalypse of John had a resonance in the contemporary age: “a time of world conflicts and atomic bombs seems to place in question the very existence of humanity and to presage its end under the form of a cosmic drama.”⁷⁶ A recent commentary in *Dieu Vivant* opposed the “Constantinian” Christian who “hopes for

liberté (Paris: Témoignage chrétien, 1946).

75 Gaston Fessard, “Théologie et histoire,” *Dieu Vivant* 8 (1947): 37–65; Gaston Fessard, *De l’actualité historique* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1960); See also Michel Sales, *Gaston Fessard, 1897-1978: Genèse d’une pensée*, Presences 14 (Brussels: Culture et Vérité, 1997); Michèle Aumont, *Philosophie sociopolitique de Gaston Fessard, S.J.* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2005); Mary Alice Muir, “Gaston Fessard, S.J.: His Work Towards a Theology of History” (M.A., Marquette University, 1970); Nguyen Hong Giao, *Le Verbe dans l’histoire: la philosophie de l’historicité du Pere Gaston Fessard*, Bibliothèque des Archives de philosophie 17 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1974).

76 Fessard, “Théologie et histoire,” 39.

salvation by social institutions and identifies the victory of the Lamb with the concept of Christian civilization” with the “‘apocalyptic’ Christian which knows that the work of the church here below is, like the terrestrial life of Christ, doomed to failure, so that he must live ‘under the scope of a rupture of historical time.’”⁷⁷

According to Fessard, the work of Féret and Charles Journet suggests that the prophetic meaning of the Scripture must come to pass temporally. Specifically, Fessard examines Journet's argument that the “conversion” or “salvation” of Israel in Romans 11 is an expectation of a *time* in which Jew and Gentile will be united. Yet the opinion handed down from the Fathers and Thomas Aquinas envisions the restoration of Israel occurring at the end of time. Referring also to writings by E. B. Allo and Jacques Maritain, he states, “Here then are three or four theologians, philosophers and exegetes, whose affection toward St. Thomas is not in doubt, who do not hesitate to abandon the opinion of their Master, on a secondary matter it is true, in appearance at least.”⁷⁸

The abandonment of the “traditional opinion” on this precise matter illustrates, for Fessard, a more generalized shift toward a hermeneutic that interprets the symbolic language of Scripture as prophecies of future historical events rather than evoking its deeper meaning. The traditional hermeneutic allowed for the “spiritual interpretation” of the literal sense of scripture: “What distinguishes essentially sacred prophecy from the profane divination, is that it claims to discover less the superficial and transitory phenomena of history than—if one can say it—its ‘noumena,’ its intelligible essence, in

⁷⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 43.

brief what gives a religious meaning to the event.”⁷⁹ Fessard suggested that the Fathers and Thomas Aquinas read the “prophetic” content of scriptures in terms of its spiritual meaning, because their conception of history supported such a move. He explains that if the Fathers

were not tempted to place [the conversion of Israel] in time, it is also that their conception of history, the foundation of their exegesis, more spiritual than literal, allowed them to perceive in the pagans and the Jews less the phenomenal realities than “historical categories,” of which the opposition clarifies the whole mystery of Christ and of the redemption of the universe. We know that, spiritual or allegorical, the exegesis of the fathers considered the history of the world to be divided in two by relationship with Christ, and that the whole content of the Old Testament was “shadow,” “figure” or “type,” finding its reality, its truth or its fulfillment in the New. Thus, Adam by relationship to Christ, the Law and the synagogue in the face of Charity and of the Church. On the basis of this notion of “type” in particular, the imagination of the Fathers could be abused. But its scriptural and theological foundation is not less solid...⁸⁰

Fessard suggested that prioritization of the “spiritual sense” in the Fathers and Thomas justified a manner of relating the temporal realities of Scripture to a broader, more universalized set of meanings. Thus, the Pauline prophecy of the conversion of the Jews and pagans contains, in seed, a glimpse of the union of all humanity in Christ.

Fessard's principal text is Romans 11, in which Paul explains his apostolate to the Gentiles as something that would contribute to the salvation of Israel itself.

Before Christ, Paul had been the Jew proud of his election in the face of pagans without God and without promise in this world; once seized by Christ, he became the apostle to the idolatrous Gentiles whom he called to conversion, while the Jews were rejected for their incredulity. He unveiled the meaning and the end of the dialectical process in the final unity of “All Israel saved” and of “the mass of Gentiles entered into the Church.” Naturally, in the course of this reflection, pagans and Jews who are first phenomenal historical realities, are stylized, so to speak, into “existential attitudes” characterizing the diverse positions of man in the face of God, so that finally “the pagan” and “the Jew” appear as “historical categories” of which the interplay—the function of the *before* and

79 Ibid., 47.

80 Ibid., 48.

the *after* of Christ—defines the *future-Christian* in each man as in the whole of humanity, by relationship to the second Coming, the end of history.⁸¹

In Fessard's account, the Jews and pagans are, first of all, phenomenal realities and historical people. In Christ, the enmity between Jew and Gentile, man and woman, slave and free, rich and poor is dissolved. The historical realities—reconciled in Christ—are reinterpreted in light of the mystery of Christ. According to Fessard, the “pagan” and “Jew” become “existential attitudes” within humanity that are to be reconciled within each person and each epoch. Furthermore, only at the end of time will all of humanity be fully reconciled in Christ. The “pagan” and “Jew” as existential poles within humanity—while already healed through Christ—are completely united and reconciled only at the Second Coming.⁸²

Fessard believed that there were serious theological, as well as exegetical, shortcomings in the recent “apocalyptic” interpretations of Scripture which placed the conversion of Israel within time. These shortcomings concern the loss of the eschatological meaning of the present. He says that we know from experience that the divisions that characterize our present history cannot be entirely overcome while we live. Those who project the conversion of Israel and the Gentiles within time—and by extension expect the realization of a perfected Christian state within time—reduce Christianity to a perfection of the natural or social world:

They have forgotten that one cannot *be* Christian as one is French or English, blond or brunette, intelligent or dull: in other words, that Christian existence [l'être chrétien] must never be conceived as a mode of a *natural* reality. For the reason simply that the genesis of this existence is essentially *supernatural*. This is what Kierkegaard meant when he

81 Ibid., 49.

82 Ibid., 52.

said: one is never—in the full sense of the word—Christian, but it is always something of the future.⁸³

For Fessard, “Christian existence” or the “New Man” is something that must always remain in expectation until the end of time, lest we reduce the supernatural life to an aspect of the natural.

Furthermore, Fessard claimed that the historical-future eschatology of Journet and Féret limited the meaning of scriptural symbols to particular times and eras, thereby losing the sense in which they are applicable universally. Although they wish to avoid the implication that the meaning of scriptural prophesy is a series of abstract and atemporal truths, in reality, Journet and Féret make those prophesies merely “relative” to a particular people or age. To say that there will be a point in history at which the “new man” is fully established, in other words, when the oppositions that characterize our history are resolved, would be to undermine the theological meaning of the present. Instead of the “pagan” and “Jew” referring to a particular group of people or to a particular era of history, they describe “existential attitudes” in every era. According to Fessard,

the pagan and the Jew are very exactly “historical categories,” or “existential attitudes” of which the value, far from being relative to an epoch or a part of humanity, transcend time. And in order to discover the extraordinary profoundness of the Pauline analysis, it suffices...to find in his dialectic the image even of the most simple act of faith. It appears then that *the dialectic according to the before and after, of these historical categories*, reveals precisely *the genesis of Christian existence, or of the supernatural life in us as in the world.*”⁸⁴

Though he did not use the term, Fessard's purpose was to support a “realized

⁸³ Ibid., 53.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 54.

eschatology.” In other words, he desired to articulate a dialectic that describes the concrete condition of humanity in the present as already conducing to its future eschatological completion. By emphasizing the “contemporaneity” of the Scriptures, he attempted to defend the promise of salvation entering into the situation of every person at all times, though never as fully realized until the end of time.

3. Jean Daniélou's Fulfillment Theology

Jean Daniélou (1905-1974) was a theologian of history par excellence. This younger Jesuit confrere of de Lubac earned a doctorate in theology from the Institut catholique de Paris with a dissertation on Gregory of Nyssa. He served on the editorial board of *Sources Chrétiennes*, and he edited the first volume of the series, Gregory of Nyssa's *La vie de Moïse* (1942). In 1943 he was appointed as professor at the Institut catholique de Paris and became editor-in-chief of *Études*, an established Jesuit journal. Daniélou's *Sacramentum futuri* (1950) and *Essai sur le mystère de l'histoire* (1953) exemplify his “fulfillment theology,” in which the historical events of salvation history are “types” or sacraments of future events which will fulfill them.⁸⁵ These essays were given over to an elaboration of a Christian understanding of history that can respond to present-day understandings of progress and evolution.

Two brief articles published in 1947—“Christianisme et histoire” and “A travers les revues: Christianisme et progrès”—exemplify Daniélou's intervention into the debate

⁸⁵ See Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie - New Theology*, 89; Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 168–90.

over the theology of history.⁸⁶ This controversial 1946 article “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,” published in *Études*, gave the context for this debate. “Les orientations présentes” argued that contemporary theology (that is, neo-Scholastic theology) was not sufficient for the authentic needs of living souls and unresponsive to the current intellectual world. He stated that Scholasticism had lost contact with the movement of philosophy and science, having remained fixed in earlier thought forms.⁸⁷ Anti-Christian Marxism and existentialism appear to address the questions that modern humanity is asking, while the church appears to be silent. Daniélou aimed to identify the salient features of modern thought to which Christianity must respond.

The study of patristic thought—he names Gregory of Nyssa, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine—was elemental to this response. The church fathers “are the nourishment most modern for people today,” he writes, because we find in them an understanding of history relevant for today. Whereas history is critical for modernity, “the notion of history is foreign to Thomism.”⁸⁸ For Daniélou, the recovery of a Christian notion of history goes hand-in-hand with establishing deeper contact between theology and life. Daniélou mentions new pastoral and social initiatives taking place in France—the movements of *Action Catholique* and *J.O.C.* (Christian Working-Class Youth), as well

86 Daniélou, “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse”; Jean Daniélou, “A travers les revues: Christianisme et progrès,” *Études* (December 1947): 399–402; Jean Daniélou, “Christianisme et histoire,” *Études* 80, no. 254 (1947): 166–184.

87 Daniélou was deliberately provocative. Many neo-Scholastics claimed that Scholasticism integrates the truths of other disciplines into a unified “scientia.” By implying that Scholasticism no longer could account for modern science and history, Daniélou was announcing its death.

88 Daniélou, “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,” 10.

as Emmanuel Mounier, whose work was sometimes sometimes associated with leftist movements.⁸⁹

Daniélou's essay "Christianisme et histoire" traces the outlines of a theology of history to be further elaborated in *Sacramentum futuri* and *Essai sur le mystère de l'histoire*. He presents the justification for a theology of history as follows:

The search for a vision of history that permits an interpretation of reality and gives meaning to human action is, after a century, at the center of the preoccupations of philosophers. It suffices to speak here of the philosophy of history of Hegel, the historical materialism of Karl Marx, the creative evolution of Bergson, the Spenglerian theory of the birth and decline of civilizations, the role of temporality in the anthropology of Heidegger. This is a new dimension that is now overt in thinking. For the old philosophy, the future is the world of illusion and of multiplicity, which is opposed to the world of being. The conception of time as a positive value, of creative duration is an acquisition of modern thought. But modern thought received this conception from Christianity.⁹⁰

Daniélou is aware that modern historical consciousness in Hegel, Marx, Bergson, etc., in part, derives from a Christian worldview.

Daniélou contrasted the Christian understanding of history with its first and second century competitors, Hellenistic philosophy and Gnosticism. His choice is influenced by his reading of Irenaeus, whose understanding of history was shaped by his opposition to second-century Gnosticism. On the one hand, he characterized history in Hellenistic thought as the "eternal return." The divine world is the unmoving world of ideas.

Immutable laws of the cosmos and of the city are the visible reflection of this eternity of the invisible world. Movement itself is an imitation of this immobility. It is conceived, in fact, as cyclical, in the regular movement of the stars as in the eternal return that

89 Ibid., 18.

90 Daniélou, "Christianisme et histoire," 166.

regulates the movement of history and according to which the same events are eternally reproduced.⁹¹

In this scheme, the events of history are merely reflections of the eternal ideas. On the other hand, Gnosticism depended upon a metaphysical dualism between the inferior or evil god of creation and the god of salvation. The god of salvation represented an “irruption... of a new world without relationship to the old.”⁹² Hellenism evacuated history entirely, Gnosticism made history entirely discontinuous. Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, with a “chain of heterogeneous civilizations” is an example of this Gnostic tendency.

According to Daniélou, Christianity concerns historical events more than abstract doctrine. Through these irrevocable events, God initiates the slow pedagogy that brings humanity from infancy to maturity, in which one dispensation prepares for the next. Each historical dispensation must pass away in order to make way for a new stage of fulfillment. The passage from Judaism to Christianity, as its succession and fulfillment, is analogous to the passage from the temporal to the future age: “Thus this entire world has to pass away, undoubtedly not in its very being but in its form, in order to make way for the future age, which is built here below by the invisible operation of charity and will be manifest on the last day.”⁹³ The Christian must look forward in hope to the fulfillment of the present.

While Daniélou admits that this understanding of history has analogies in evolutionary systems, these systems lack a key trait of Christianity. “Christianity ... is not

91 Ibid., 168.

92 Ibid., 169.

93 Ibid., 172.

only a progress, but the term of progress.” Christianity is eschatological, he states, in three ways. First, history is not just an undending process, but has a definite fulfillment. Second, Christianity is that term: “Christ is presented as coming at the end of time and introducing the definitive world. Thus, there is nothing beyond Christianity. It is truly 'eschatos,' 'novissimus,' the last.” Third, the end has already arrived in Christ's death and resurrection: “the last of things exists already.”⁹⁴ Christians are now living in the last days awaiting the transition from the temporal to the eternal. While death and evil have been vanquished in Christ, we nonetheless await the ultimate triumph in the rest of creation. Daniélou describes this period of waiting as analogous to the time between the moment of victory in the war and the victorious entrances into Paris.⁹⁵

For Daniélou, the Christian lives in the tension between the future and past. The eschatological is already present now, albeit in anticipation. “The future age is already, but in mystery, under the sacrament.”⁹⁶ Yet, the present is also a culmination of a temporal process. In a rather unclear passage, he explains:

The Christian is divided between two successive worlds that are found to coexist. The mystery of the present time is in fact that it brings this simultaneous presence of a past world, that survives itself, and a future world that is already existing in an anticipated fashion. This is to say that in fact there is not a present world, or that this world is only a passage. For the Christian, the world of natural life and of science, the world of the temporal city and of economic life has something essentially anachronic. It is radically transcended [*dépassé*] by the world of the Church, which is the future already present. The world of the Church, in its turn, seems in relationship to political society, “catachronic” in the measure that it appears in the future. Juxtaposition of a past and future, such is the Christian present.⁹⁷

94 Ibid., 173.

95 “This moment is the resurrection of Christ. Then will come the *Victory Day* [*Viendra ensuite le Victory Day*], the day when we pass under the arches of triumph.” He was referring to the parades through the Arc d'Triomphe in Paris following Germany's surrender to the Allies.

96 Daniélou, “Christianisme et histoire,” 182.

97 Ibid., 183. He defines *catachronique* as an antonym of *anachronique*, as “the anticipation of a reality to

Daniélou's understanding of Christianity is thoroughly eschatological. While he maintains that Christ has brought a definitive fulfillment, the present is characterized by anticipation (anachronic or anterior) of that fulfillment. In the “world of the Church,” the eschaton exists already. Thus, Christianity appears as the “future” of political society. Living between two times, the Christian awaits their convergence.

Daniélou's theology of history gives rise to his response to the political question. In “Christianisme et histoire,” he explains that “human progress is ambiguous.”⁹⁸ “A travers les revues: Christianisme et progrès” fills out his understanding a little more. He claims that a belief in human progress—he envisions both technological and political advancement—may be an “elementary form of religion,” that is, a basic component of religious faith that takes into account humanity's creative role in the temporal. However, the presentation of human progress in Marxism takes an idolatrous turn insofar as it awaits the salvation of humanity by human power.⁹⁹ The conception of human progress advanced by Marxism is one that lacks transcendence. “The progress of history, according to Christianity, is not a process of continual accumulation, as technological progress.... It is ascent.”¹⁰⁰ While Daniélou sees in a Marxist philosophy of history an “idolatrous pretension,” he does not hesitate to find something valid in its underlying hope.

come.” Ibid., 183, note 1.

98 Daniélou, “Christianisme et histoire,” 183.

99 Daniélou, “A travers les revues: Christianisme et progrès,” 400. Daniélou says that Marxist understandings of history betray the “great heresy of the modern world,” to believe that by human effort we can save ourselves.

100 Ibid., 401, quoting Emmanuel Mounier.

V. Conclusion

In the post-war context, the debate over the theology of history manifested an intense interest in eschatology and a fragmentation of the interpretation of Christian eschatology. Although this debate did not treat directly of the political question, its backdrop was the restructuring of French civil and political society after the Second World War and the variety of Catholic responses to this restructuring. Opposed opinions with regard to Communist-Catholic collaboration of Fessard, Daniélou, and de Lubac indicate the importance of the political question for their theological deliberations.

The debate over the theology of history was dominated by the question of how to represent the historical present and future from a Christian theological perspective. As I have indicated, the subject of this debate shared much in common with the questionings within the wider culture. One of the cardinal problems of European Modernism—how to recognize the eternal in the midst of flux—became a fundamental concern for the Roman Catholic response to modernity, though it was addressed in widely divergent ways. The Catholic apocalyptic response—which envisioned the present moment as a decline of the current temporal order, (often) the emergence of a new era, and an ultimate battle between good and evil to come—mirrored the responses to modernity found in the Futurist Movement, the Decadent Movement, forms of Fascism, and Marxism. While, traditionally, Scholasticism rejected all forms of millennialism, in the late nineteenth century, “catastrophic eschatology” of anti-Modernism began to merge with the serene “eternalism” of neo-Scholasticism. A tension between the two still remained.

In the “theology of history” debate, the political, cultural, and theological questions converged and were made the explicit subject of theological inquiry. The primary question was eschatological: *Theologically, what is the relationship between our historical world—experienced in the church and secular history—and its promised consummation? What is the Christian understanding of history and its fulfillment?*

Three correlate questions surfaced in this debate. First, *to what extent can the contemporary eschatological and historical consciousness (such as that present in Marxism) be reconciled to a Christian understanding of history?* Fessard opposed Féret, in part, because he believed that Féret's future eschatology too closely mirrored an understanding of history undergirding both fascism and communism. On the other hand, Féret and, more explicitly, Daniélou believed that an authentic Christian eschatology served as a corrective to both ahistorical neo-Scholasticism and the dialectical materialism of Marx.

Second, *what form of eschatology preserves the eternal significance of the present moment and the social space of Christianity?* Although Féret and Fessard disagreed on this question, both were concerned to preserve the theological significance of the present, as well as the importance of a lived Catholicism in which God is encountered through the concrete realities of social existence. Daniélou employed the language of sacrament to interpret the present as an anticipation of the eschaton. Huby's notion of the “contemporaneity” of the Scriptures figured into his desire to preserve the applicability of the Scriptures in each moment.¹⁰¹

101 The question of the applicability of Christianity to the social world would be addressed in widely

Third, *in what sense is Christianity essentially an eschatological reality?* The selected authors agreed substantially on this point. For Fessard and Daniélou, Christianity is something “to come.” Fessard spoke of “Christian existence” or, alternatively, the “New Man” as a reality yet to come and not fully present now. For Daniélou, the church is where the future is made present under the sacrament. Féret suggested that the conformity of the church to the Gospel awaits a future completion. Similarly, de Lubac would give a robust account of Christianity as an eschatological reality.¹⁰²

Henri de Lubac's intervention in this debate came primarily through his *ressourcement* of patristic writings. In *Catholicism*, he had already suggested that Christianity held the corrective to two views of human existence: an ahistorical Hellenism in which the goal is to flee the world; and the historical immanentism of Marxism, which lacks a transcendent goal. The understanding of history present in the Fathers, he believed, united history and transcendence.

Similar to the other participants in the debate over the theology of history, de Lubac sought the foundations for an understanding of history within scripture. Féret, Huby, Fessard, and Daniélou each depended upon the notion that the scriptures signify something beyond the historical or literal meaning. De Lubac's work toward the *ressourcement* of the “spiritual sense” of scripture had a precedent in the disagreement among Féret, Huby, and Fessard concerning the future or prophetic meaning of the text.

With Huby and Fessard, de Lubac rejected the idea of a new historical era of fulfillment

varying directions before Vatican II in the work of Gaston Fessard, Jacques Maritain, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and Maurice Montuclard, among others.

102 In chapter 4, I will treat de Lubac's account of the eschatological dimensions of the sacraments, the church, Christ, and mysticism.

after Christ, and he was critical of a Joachimite tradition of biblical interpretation. While he does not single out Féret, de Lubac appears to reject the millenarian aspects of Féret's exegesis. At the same time, de Lubac was sympathetic with Féret's attempt to interpret the “prophetic” meaning of the biblical texts as the “aspect of the mystery of the Church in its future evolution.”¹⁰³ As I will indicate, de Lubac's theology of history approaches that of Daniélou, for whom historical events are the sacraments of future fulfillments. The disagreement that arose between Daniélou and de Lubac over the terminology of spiritual interpretation—Daniélou preferred the term “typology” while de Lubac preferred “allegory”—testifies to how close their understandings of history were.

De Lubac's contribution to a theology of history came primarily through his *ressourcement* of Origen, the second- and third-century African theologian. De Lubac's groundbreaking book on Origen, published a few years after the exchanges between Féret, Huby, Fessard, and Daniélou, sought to address the issues that arose from their debate. It argued that Origen's characteristic “spiritual interpretation” of the Scripture preserved a Christian understanding of history necessary for today. De Lubac would emphasize that Origen's treatment of *anagogy*, the final “spiritual sense” of scripture, united both the anticipation of the future and the contemplation of the transcendent. Origen appeared to offer a synthesis and harmony between the divergent eschatological positions of Henri-Marie Féret, Gaston Fessard, Joseph Huby, and Jean Daniélou. In the following chapter, I examine de Lubac's recovery of Origen as a theologian of history and as the basis for de Lubac's eschatological synthesis.

103 Féret, “Apocalypse, histoire, et eschatologie chrétiennes,” 130.

CHAPTER TWO: EXEGESIS AND THE STRUCTURE OF HISTORY

Henri de Lubac devoted more of his writing to the history of scriptural exegesis than to any other theological topic, including nature and grace, and ecclesiology. Composed over several decades, these writings focused on the spiritual interpretation of scripture, especially the fourfold sense. In 1948, he published a short article “On an Old Distich: The Doctrine of the 'Fourfold Sense' in Scripture.”¹ This article argued that the “spiritual meanings” embodied in the fourfold sense of scripture not only influenced a long tradition of Christian interpretation of Scripture, but also that their logic structured the relationship between theological disciplines. De Lubac's groundbreaking *History and Spirit* was published two years later.² It claimed that Origen was largely responsible for systematizing the Christian teaching on the spiritual meaning of Scripture and refuted the then-dominant opinion that Origen's spiritual sense of scripture was primarily Hellenistic in character. In “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory” (1959), de Lubac argued that Christian allegory (particularly in Origen) constituted the antithesis of Hellenistic allegory. His monumental multi-volume work *Exégèse Médiévale* (1959-1964) is often cited for its recovery or *ressourcement* of the fourfold sense of scripture. *Exégèse Médiévale* took a diachronic approach to the spiritual sense, tracing a development from the patristic period to the early modern period.

1 Henri de Lubac, “On an Old Distich: The Doctrine of the ‘Fourfold Sense’ in Scripture,” in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 109–28. Originally published as “Sur un vieux distique: La doctrine du 'quadruple sense,’” 347-366 in *Mélanges offerts au R. P. Fernand Cavallera* (Toulouse: Institut Catholique, 1948).

2 Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007). Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et esprit : l'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène*, Théologie 16 (Paris: Aubier, 1950).

De Lubac's *ressourcement* of patristic and medieval exegesis is sometimes interpreted as a reaction against critical methods in biblical studies. However, his writings on the history of exegesis were not intended to reestablish the fourfold sense as a contemporary biblical hermeneutic. He did not merely intend for his studies on the history of exegesis to break perceived constraints of historical-critical exegesis. His goal was not primarily exegetical. He explained that his research on spiritual interpretation in Origen was a window to the recovery of a partially lost vision of reality:

The subject I had first envisioned assumed a broader scope in my eyes...It was no longer even a matter solely of exegesis. It was a whole manner of thinking, a whole world view that loomed before me. A whole interpretation of Christianity of which Origen, furthermore, despite many of his personal and at times questionable traits, was less the author than the witness. Even more, through this 'spiritual understanding' of Scripture, it was Christianity itself that appeared to me as if acquiring a reflective self-awareness. This is the phenomenon, one of the most characteristic of the early Christian period, that, in the final analysis, I sought to grasp.³

De Lubac wanted to understand the mentality, the doctrinal vision and the sense of history, which supported Origenian practices of spiritual interpretation. Spiritual interpretation was both an epiphenomenon of the creed and ethos of the early church and also that by which the church attained a doctrinal “self-awareness.” So Origen's exegesis belonged not only to biblical interpretation, but to an entire way of looking at reality that was the shared inheritance of the early church.

Moreover, de Lubac sought to recover the roots of an early Christian reflection on history and revelation for the contemporary age.⁴ Against what he believed was a

³ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 11.

⁴ Recent interpreters have focused on the significance of de Lubac's recovery of ancient Christian exegesis for his understanding of the supernatural, culture, and ecclesiology. See *Susan K. Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998); Bryan C. Hollon, *Everything Is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology*

resurgent Hellenistic view of history within modern thought, he argued for a recovery of an authentically Christian understanding by turning to patristic and medieval sources. In response to an empiricist separation between history and metaphysics, he proposed the vast ontological interconnection of historical realities. And, in response to an increasingly secular and humanist historical consciousness, he proposed a Christocentric view of history.

In Chapter 1 I surveyed twentieth-century debates over the theology of history and the development of a renewed eschatological focus within Catholic theology. In this chapter, I draw from de Lubac's writings on the Christian exegetical tradition in order to discover the key components and structure of his theology of history. Although he does not compose a discrete theology of history apart from eschatology, an analysis of his specifically historical reflections helps to contextualize his eschatology.

I first examine de Lubac's argument that the early Christian exegetical tradition was a reversal of the Hellenistic view of history. Second, I argue that, according to de

of Henri de Lubac (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009); Bryan C. Hollon, "Ontology, Exegesis, and Culture in the Thought of Henri de Lubac" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2006); Hans Boersma, "Sacramental Ontology: Nature and the Supernatural in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac," *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1015 (2007): 242–273; Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Other scholars have interpreted de Lubac's historical studies for their value in recovering an ancient biblical hermeneutic for today's biblical exegesis. See See Marcellino G. D'Ambrosio, "Henri de Lubac and the Recovery of the Traditional Hermeneutic" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1991); David M. Williams, *Receiving the Bible in Faith* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004). Williams expresses consternation that de Lubac composed no clear methodology for uniting contemporary scientific exegesis with ancient allegorical methods. However, de Lubac's guiding interest became theological rather than exegetical. De Lubac himself indicated that his studies on ancient exegesis were not for the purpose of establishing it anew: "Does this mean that we would propose returning to it as a guide for today's exegesis and theology? No one would seriously dream of that." De Lubac, "On an Old Distich," 124. While de Lubac's studies on ancient exegesis may have a bearing on contemporary exegesis, I will emphasize that de Lubac's primary interest was in the theology of history underlying the procedures of interpretation.

Lubac, the multiple senses of scripture represent an epiphenomenon of a Christian understanding of history in which there is an “ontological bond” between realities. Third, I explain this ontology in terms of an “historical exemplarism” that de Lubac appropriates from Origen. This exemplarism envisions the historical life of Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament figures and the signified of previous signs. Fourth, I examine de Lubac's understanding of revelation and salvation for the rationale for this Christocentric view of history.

I. Spiritual Meanings and the Hellenistic View of History

De Lubac argued that the spiritual interpretation of scripture, a dominant mode of exegesis in the ancient and medieval church, was a correction to Hellenistic thought. First, I provide a brief summary of what de Lubac meant by spiritual meaning and the fourfold sense. Second, I examine de Lubac's contrast between Hellenistic allegory and Christian allegory. Third, I argue that de Lubac saw in the fourfold sense an epiphenomenon of a particularly Christian view of history that reversed or corrected a Hellenistic view of history.

A. Spiritual Meanings and the Fourfold Sense of Scripture

The exegetical consensus of the early Christian tradition, especially the pre-modern tradition of exegesis, is that scripture contains meanings beyond and beneath the literal, that is the plain meaning of the text. The reading of scripture should also involve a penetration of the text, and the text's penetration of the believer, so that she or he might

attain to its hidden depths. Various theological formulations of this teaching were proliferated during the Middle Ages. De Lubac argued that these formulations generally had a common structure.

A medieval formula summarized and systematized this traditional teaching in a short rhyme:

Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
 Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia
 [The letter teaches what took place, allegory what to believe
 The moral what to do, anagogy what goal to strive for.]

The foundational meaning, upon which the others were based, was the literal sense. De Lubac describes the literal sense as essentially an historical meaning, insofar as the text truthfully conveys what occurred, namely God's interventions into time. The literal sense is an historical sense. Beneath the letter, there is a spiritual sense, which was sometimes divided into multiple spiritual senses. "Allegory" (often called the "mystical sense") described the Christological meaning of the scriptures. It suggested that the events narrated in the Scriptures are fulfilled in the "event of Christ" and that this fulfillment extends through the church. The "moral sense" (often called the tropological meaning) denotes the implication of the historical meaning for the individual soul and for the church. The anagogical sense denotes the last meaning, the ultimate fulfillment at the end of the world.

De Lubac saw the fourfold sense exemplified by the Christian interpretation of the city of Jerusalem.⁵ The historical city of Jerusalem is symbolic of the city of God

⁵ Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 108. Originally published as *Exégèse médiévale, I: Les quatre sense de l'Écriture* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959). Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The*

“renewed in Christ”; but it also symbolizes the reign of God in the soul; and, finally, the historical city of Jerusalem ultimately refers to the heavenly city. The Old Testament reference to Jerusalem is assumed into a broader interconnection of scriptural realities and images.

While de Lubac recognized a terminological anarchy during the patristic period with regard to the meanings of scripture, he argued that the various terminology often contained a common structure. In his usage, the “spiritual sense” is inclusive of the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses in contradistinction to the “historical sense.” The primary division between letter and spirit expresses the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament: the New Testament *is* the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament history. Indeed, the title of his monograph on Origen, *History and Spirit*, reflects this division. The basic meaning of the division between letter and spirit is articulated within various formulations of multiple spiritual senses. The fourfold sense (history, allegory, tropology, anagogy) in medieval thought is basically the same as Origen's trichotomy (history, allegory, anagogy). As the first of the spiritual senses, de Lubac often identifies “allegory” with the spiritual sense as a whole, inclusive of the moral and allegorical senses. However, at times, he specifically distinguishes allegory from the other spiritual senses.

Four Senses of Scripture, trans. E. M. Macierowski, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 199. Originally published as *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sense de l'Écriture* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959). De Lubac, “On an Old Distich,” 115.

B. Hellenistic Allegory and Greek History

Patristic and medieval theologians employed allegorical interpretation (also “spiritual interpretation” and “mystical interpretation”) to read the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. Admittedly, this procedure resulted in extravagant interpretations of the Bible and, in many cases, appeared to have few hermeneutic controls. In the Latin Middle Ages, the predominant use of the Latin text and the distance of medieval culture from the Greek language resulted in a loss of the textual criticism developed by some church fathers, including Origen. The rebirth of Greek studies during the Renaissance and the doctrinal battles of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation led to a renewed focus on the literal meaning of the text. New tools of exegesis developed during the Enlightenment lead to critical exegesis and to broad challenges to traditions of spiritual interpretation and allegorization.

Nineteenth-century biblical scholarship, especially the work of Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), constitutes the broad context for de Lubac's studies on spiritual meaning, the fourfold sense, and Origen. Employing the tools of critical exegesis, Harnack developed what is described as the “Hellenization Thesis.” In *History of Dogma* [*Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*] and in a more popular work *What Is Christianity?* [*Das Wesen des Christentums*], Harnack argued that the early Christian development of dogma was “Hellenistic.” Christianity developed away from the Gospel through its increasing focus on philosophical truth.⁶ In other words, Hellenistic thought-forms

6 According to Harnack, Hippolytus and Tertullian contributed to identifying elements of the Christian faith with Greek philosophy, for example, by identifying the *Logos* with the Son of God. Origen

infiltrated the Hebraic-Christian thought-forms, overshadowing them from the second century to the time of the Reformation. Thus, the doctrinal development of the earliest councils—including the Trinitarian doctrine, *Logos* Christology, the doctrine embedded in the Creeds—are suspected of being Greek at their core. Harnack's Hellenization thesis suggested that the major theological developments of patristic thought served to mutate the Gospel into a species of Greek philosophy.⁷ The allegorization of Scripture reflected a development whereby the Greek philosophical milieu permeated Christian interpretation of the Scriptures.

Harnack impacted the French Catholic theological milieu through the work of Alfred Loisy, a Catholic priest and scholar, whose *L'Evangile et l'Eglise* (1902) challenged Harnack's assertions in *What is Christianity?* Although Loisy's resolutions were unacceptable to the French Catholic bishops and the Holy See (Loisy was excommunicated in 1907), he brought attention to a series of issues that would dominate early twentieth-century Catholic theological debate.⁸ De Lubac believed that many French historians—including Aimé Puech, Pierre Batiffol, and Louis Duchesne—repeated Harnack's claim that much of third century Christian thought had “transformed

(Harnack calls him the “Christian Philo”) was responsible for “recasting” Christian faith as a dogma, in order to compete with the neo-Platonic systems of his day. He sought to transcend the Gospel for the sake of speculation. Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 2 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1896), 11.

7 For an overview of Harnack's dichotomization of historical interpretation and metaphysical speculation, see James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 287.

8 To what extent was Christianity's doctrinal development the result of a permeation by Greek or Platonic philosophy? And was this development a negation of the Gospel? Is the metaphysical form of Scholastic thought fundamentally at odds with the historical form of the Scriptures? The response often adopted by Catholic apologists generally responded to Harnack's Hellenization thesis by denying differences between the New Testament teaching and latter dogmatic formulations, arguing that the later formulations were a development, but a logical development necessitated by the Scriptures themselves.

Christianity into a philosophy.”⁹ Indeed, contemporary scholarly opinion regarded Origen as promulgating a “tool for obtaining a 'timeless superunderstanding' of the Bible,”¹⁰ a hermeneutic that saw the events narrated in scripture as mythical expressions of a philosophical reality.¹¹

While scholars of early Christianity criticized the spiritual interpretation of Scripture, especially in Origen, for its mythological reading of scripture, Rudolf Bultmann's influential program proposed a “demythologization” of Scripture itself. Bultmann suggested that God's sovereign actions in history are themselves transcendent and ineffable. The Bible contains the report of God's actions clothed in the worldview of its writers. Demythologization was, in effect, the process of translating the mythical vestment of biblical narrative into the historical and existential categories of contemporary humanity. The culture-bound mythical formulations of Scripture must now find a transposition into modern language, the language of existentialism. Bultmann's biblical criticism, according to de Lubac, established a radical break between God's

9 The quotation is taken from Aimé Puech, *Recherches sur le discours aux Grecs de Tatien* (1903) in de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 93 note 258. See also 259-261. These scholars, de Lubac argued, misunderstood Origen's allusions to the need to pass to a deeper meaning or a “higher teaching.” For them, it expressed a gnostic doctrine: that the historical events of redemption, including Christ's sacrifice, were only for beginners; that to advance spiritually, one must pass beyond the external and corporeal events of salvation; that there exists a more profound knowledge—a philosophical, gnostic meaning—for those who are “spiritual.” De Lubac also mentioned Alain Guy, who stated that allegory derived a “philosophical meaning” from the Bible and used the Bible as a “kind of philosophical code and a springboard for ontological mediation.” Henri de Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 175. Originally published as “Allégorie hellénistique et allégorie chrétienne” *Recherches de science religieuse* 47 (1959): 5-43.

10 De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 174.

11 *History and Spirit* outlined the two principle criticisms of Origen. First, Origen “infused Hellenism broadly into the biblical tradition” and...substituted a 'metaphysical truth' received from another source for the 'absurdity of the text taken in its literal sense.” De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 15. Second, Origen refused the historicity of the meaning of scripture, distancing himself from the literal meaning of the text. *Ibid.*, 17. Others imagined that Origen was a Platonist or that he anticipated idealist philosophy.

actions and the form by which they are communicated.¹² In his own work, Bultmann reproduced what was criticized in Origen, the transposition of biblical narrative into the philosophy of the day.

C. De Lubac's Assessment of Hellenism within Christian Theology

De Lubac essentially agreed with the now-classic contrast between Greek metaphysics and Christian historical thought. However, he differed from Harnack on whether early Christianity in general and Origen in particular followed the pattern of Greek metaphysics. *History and Spirit* and “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory” challenged the position that “all Christian allegory is bound to be related, in its origins and characteristics, to the doctrines of intellectual paganism that allegorized its myths and to Philo's exegesis.”¹³ De Lubac noted, “the main question that comes up with respect to Origen is less of knowing whether he was an intellectualist or a mystic, or in what measure he was one or the other, than of knowing whether he was fundamentally 'Hellenist' or Christian.”¹⁴ De Lubac did not dispute the profound influence of the Hellenistic milieu on Christian theology or the use of Greek categories by the Church Fathers. Yet, de Lubac argued that early Christianity developed allegory, not as a

12 Henri de Lubac, “La Révélation divine: Commentaire du préambule et du chapitre I de La Constitution ‘Dei Verbum’ du Concile Vatican II,” in *Révélation divine – Affrontements mystiques – Athéisme et sens de l’homme*, vol. 4, Œuvres complètes (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2006), 70. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *La Révélation divine: Église Catholique Romaine, Concile Vatican II [1962-1965]* (Lyon: La Bonté, 1966).

13 “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 165. De Lubac writes that Philo “develops a timeless allegory that maintains no internal relation with biblical history. This is not at all the case with Origen.” De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 22.

14 Ibid., 48. De Lubac states that he intends to show that Origen distanced himself from “a 'Platonic gnosis.’” Ibid., 93.

repetition of Hellenistic categories, but as a reflection upon the realities expressed in the Gospel.

The essential difference between Hellenistic thought and early Christian thought was a differing understanding of history. De Lubac explains,

There are two features in the allegorism of the philosophers that appear constantly whatever the text on which their work is based or the system that they deduce from it; whatever purpose guides them or the precise nature of the method they use. For on the one hand they reject as myth what appears as a historical account, and deny to its literal sense what they claim to reveal in its meaning as a mystery: their *ὑπόνοια* [esoteric meaning] is, in the strictest sense, an *ἀλληγορία* [allegory]. On the other hand, if they “spiritualize” in this way whatever purports to be historical, it is not for the purpose of a deeper understanding of history. They do not see mythical events as symbols of spiritual happenings; but perceive beneath the historical veil scientific, moral or metaphysical ideas.¹⁵

Hellenistic allegorical interpretation reinterpreted unseemly and irreverent exploits of the gods in Homer and the poets by recasting those stories as allegories or myths for philosophical or scientific truths.¹⁶ In sum, pagan philosophical allegory, for de Lubac, refused the historical account in favor of discovering the “power of nature,” the “harmony of the universe,” or “the original matter,” in these myths. This form of allegorization also influenced Philo of Alexandria, a first-century Jewish philosopher. While Philo did not deny that the events of Scripture occurred, he believed that “they are of no interest save through what they symbolize.”¹⁷

15 *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 166. Originally published as *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Coll Unam Sanctam 3 (Paris: Cerf, 1938).

16 “For the philosophers, in all the stories that serve as material for their theories, it is not a question of personal beings or spiritual facts; the tangible individuality of heroes or gods is transformed under their eyes into the nature of things or of the human soul or of divinity diffused everywhere; their ‘allegory’ (their *ὑπόνοια* [esoteric meaning] dissipates all history, all real drama; it makes everything ‘vanish into the elements of the world.’” De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 21.

17 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 167. In “Hellenistic Allegory,” de Lubac cites Jean Pépin, whose studies argue the early Christian tradition adapted a method from Stoic philosophy. De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 117-118. Interpreting a kinship among the allegorical interpretation of St. Paul,

According to de Lubac, Hellenistic allegorical method exemplifies certain presuppositions concerning the meaning of history, which, in *Catholicism*, he attributed to Platonism, Buddhism, certain Indian religions, and Christian heresies such as Manichaeism, Docetism, and Gnosticism.¹⁸ These religions and philosophies envisioned human destiny as an individualist escape from history.¹⁹ This pattern of conceiving history is circular, dualistic, and phenomenal. Despite their diversity, de Lubac asserts, “running all through these many differences there is always agreement about the basis of the problem and its presuppositions: the world from which escape must be sought is meaningless, and the humanity that must be outstripped is without a history.”²⁰ Within this pattern, history is cyclical and what occurs in time will return again *ad infinitum*.²¹

Origen, Porphyry, and Sallust, Pépin argues “that the essential attitude of Christians toward the Bible was the same as that of the Greeks toward their myths.” Ibid., 178, note 82.

18 Susan K. Wood noted this correlation between exegetical methods and philosophies of history. She indicates that de Lubac interprets the fourfold sense as a theology of history. In other words, de Lubac does not treat the fourfold sense for its own sake, but only insofar as it proposes a particular understanding of temporality. The correlation is present early in de Lubac's career in *Catholicism* (a chapter entitled “Christianity and History” directly precedes and corresponds with the one entitled “The Interpretation of Scriptures.”) *Catholicism* is significant for two reasons. First, de Lubac's first book anticipates many of the themes that are developed later in his career. Second, it provides a broader perspective on how de Lubac understands the alternatives to a Christian conception of history. His other writings on the history of exegesis often make only glancing allusions to problems that he is attempting to resolve. In contrast, *Catholicism* provides a wider lens for de Lubac's fundamental concerns. It is therefore important to read his writings on exegesis in light of his earlier *Catholicism*.

19 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 140–41. *Catholicism* identified an opposite stream of thought within contemporary thought, exemplified by Marxism, that envisions a purely historical destiny of a corporate humanity. *Catholicism* made little effort to explicate this second stream of thought or philosophies of historical progress that underly it. However, the main argument of the book is that Christianity possesses a different view of the social unity of humanity than do philosophies of historical immanentism. The context for *Catholicism* is the balkanization of the Catholic Church amidst the rise of totalitarianism and nationalism throughout Europe and the loss of the Church's social cohesion. *Catholicism* was published in 1938, prior to the German invasion. The pressing need was to assert the social and historical dimensions of Catholicism in the face of a growing spiritual individualism. During and after the German occupation, de Lubac more directly emphasized the narratives of history within atheistic humanism. He suggested that those philosophies proposing an escape from history and those proposing a historical immanent human destiny shared certain fundamental tenants.

20 Ibid., 139.

21 “The 'eternal return,' from which nothing may be expected, each of its phases—the Great Year,

Insofar as the events of history will perpetually recur, history itself is phenomenal and unessential. In this historical cycle—de Lubac calls it an “infernally cycle”²²—there is no true forward movement. Salvation or fulfillment consists in an escape from materiality and history, a spiritual ascent to the One, or the escape from the desires of this world. The world itself is something from which we require salvation or escape.

Platonic metaphysics in particular supported a phenomenal view of history. It posed a dichotomy between the world of ideas—made up of stable and unchanging essences— and the world we experience, the world of appearances. Platonic dualism—the sensible and intelligible, temporal and eternal, appearance and reality, illusion and truth—affected its appraisal of history.²³ History, of course, falls on the side of the sensible, temporal, appearance, and illusion. It is not that the events of history are unimportant, but they symbolize in movement what exists eternally. Historical reality is 'this moving image of unmoving eternity,' 'this eternal image without end' which is 'unfolded in a circle following the law of numbers’²⁴ De Lubac recognized within Hellenistic thought in general, and Platonism specifically, a tendency towards a phenomenal view of historical events whereby history is always something to be eclipsed.

The Greek philosophical view of mythical narrative reflected this dualism. To attain the intelligible truth, the particularity of history or myth must be stripped away.

Mahâkalpa, Jubilee or whatever it is called—the end of one being the beginning of another, with never a forward movement, how overpoweringly monotonous it all is!” Ibid.

22 Ibid., 142.

23 De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 186.

24 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 141–42.

According to Plotinus, “myths distribute throughout time and separate from each other beings who are not separated in reality...they cause to be born what was never begun, they divide it, thus teaching what they can and leaving to one who understands the task of recomposition.”²⁵ According to Sallust, “it is not that these things [myths] never happened, because they always exist; but the discourse can express only successively what the understanding sees and grasps at the same time”²⁶ In other words, Hellenistic religious myth served as a metaphoric vehicle or an allegorization of the truth which has always been.²⁷

In sum, the central theme running throughout these works is that Hellenistic thought vacates history of meaning, leading to a mythical interpretation of religious narratives. Possessing no truth in themselves, these histories symbolize atemporal truths, whether philosophical, moral, or cosmological. Allegorical interpretation, in its pagan forms, was the tool used to discover a deeper philosophical truth beyond religious myth. However, de Lubac would argue that Christian allegorical interpretation, far from negating the importance of history, was the primary tool Christians used to preserve its meaning.

25 De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 182.

26 Ibid., 182.

27 De Lubac suggested that the Christian docetistic heresy especially bore the mark of a Hellenistic conception of religious myth and history. By conceiving a divide between the mere human appearance of Jesus and his divinity, Docetism repeated the Hellenistic pattern whereby that which occurs in time is unsubstantial and phenomenal and in which the events of salvation become a mere appearance or a sign that points to a reality that they do not themselves embody. De Lubac stated that Christianity overturns the “docetist mitigation” of history. De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 141. Additionally, “Gnosticism tends toward a universal docetism,” thereby repeating a pattern inherited from Hellenistic thought. Ibid., 145 note 29.

D. Christian Allegory as a Subversion of Hellenism

Despite superficial similarities with Hellenistic thought, De Lubac argued, early Christian exegetical practices diverged significantly from Hellenism.²⁸ He suggested that the allegorical interpretation of Scripture (which, as de Lubac claims, influenced the entire development of Christian theology) was neither a syncretistic melding of Greek philosophy with the Scriptures, nor was it a transformation of the Gospel into philosophical categories. In practice, de Lubac claimed, Christian allegory and its conception of history functioned as an 'antithesis' or subversion of Greek allegory.²⁹ By drawing the opposition between Greek and Christian allegorical interpretation, de Lubac could counter the supposition that the Christian doctrinal tradition was merely a repetition of Greek ontological categories.

Yet some current literature suggests that the *nouvelle théologie* in general and de Lubac in particular espoused a recovery of Neoplatonism or depended upon Neoplatonic ontology. Wayne J. Hankey, John Milbank, David Grumett, Guy Mansini, and Hans Boersma have each, to some extent, attributed Neoplatonism to de Lubac.³⁰ In general

28 De Lubac, "Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory," 183. The value of history is a critical and consistent claim running through *Catholicism*, "Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory," *History and Spirit*, and *Exégèse Médiévale*.

29 Susan K. Wood notes his anti-Platonism within both his understanding of exegesis and in his ecclesiology. See Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 46 and 100.

30 Wayne Hankey suggests that the ressourcement of the Greek Fathers within the *Nouvelle Théologie*—especially de Lubac and Daniélou—and within the series *Sources chrétiennes* was indeed a turn to a Platonic ontology. He writes, "Those who were seeking an alternative to Thomism, whose scientific divisions of this kind they associated with its Aristotelianism, generally saw Platonism as involving the desired integration for the sake of theology understood as mystical itinerarium." Wayne J. Hankey, "Neoplatonism and Contemporary French Philosophy," *Dionysius* 23 (December 2005): 143. Following Hankey, John Milbank concludes that de Lubac's entire work is informed by a Neoplatonic ontology. Milbank attributes a thoroughly neo-Platonic ontology to de Lubac (and to Thomas Aquinas!). John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand

they appeal to Neoplatonic ontology in order to explain aspects of de Lubac's theology of grace, his theology of the supernatural, or his challenge to the Scholastic theory of “pure nature.”

Boersma, particularly, has claimed a link between de Lubac's theology and Neoplatonic ontology. He interprets de Lubac's opposition to the theory of “pure nature” as a critical adoption of a roughly Christian Neoplatonist ontology derived from the Greek Fathers. This ontology, according to Boersma, envisions created realities as sacraments of the divine and eternal. The invisible is made present in the visible; the transcendent is made present in the immanent; the supernatural is made present in the natural; the divine is made present within history.³¹

Boersma further argues that the *nouvelle théologie* adopted a “unified view of reality,” expressed by the term *néoplatonisme belgo-français*.³² Although he stops short of stating that the *nouvelle théologie* expressly depended upon Neoplatonic ontology, he affirms fundamental commonalities. In a subsequent book, he doesn't hesitate to align Neoplatonism and Christian sacramental thinking.³³

Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 26. David Grumett believes that de Lubac's denial of the theory of pure nature requires an ontology found within Teilhard de Chardin, which he suggests resembles Neoplatonism. David Grumett, “Eucharist, Matter, and the Supernatural: Why De Lubac Needs Teilhard,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 2 (2008): 165–78.

31 By framing the relationship between the historical (visible) and the mystical (invisible) in terms of natural and supernatural, Boersma misses how, for de Lubac, the historical is not merely “natural” because it is the place of God's self-revelation. Indeed, the “natural-supernatural” distinction is ultimately unsuitable for explicating the relationship between history and revelation.

32 Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 114.

33 Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 117. It is somewhat unclear what Boersma refers to the “Platonizing tendencies” within de Lubac's thought. Boersma, “Sacramental Ontology,” 273. He concretely points to de Lubac's insistence that human beings have a natural desire for God with a Platonic sensibility: “De Lubac was unyielding on the issue of *desiderium naturale* [natural desire] because it provided an essential theological link with a patristic, more or less Neoplatonic mindset, which had been sacramental in character.” Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 98.

Boersma recognizes several instances where de Lubac affirms the gratuity of grace by strongly distancing his theology of grace from Neoplatonic ontologies that fail to distinguish between the created order and God's redeeming grace.³⁴ Boersma writes, de Lubac's anti-Platonic "comments may seem to make it difficult to look to de Lubac as a resource for the recovery of a more sacramental ontology that relies in part on the Platonic tradition."³⁵ By implication, a sacramental view of reality requires something like a Neoplatonic ontology. Boersma explains that de Lubac's anti-Platonism was an obligatory defense against his critics, who accused him of losing the gratuity of grace. The question left unanswered is whether, in Boersma's view, de Lubac's theology of grace and understanding of sacraments requires support from a Neoplatonist metaphysics.

The attribution of Neoplatonism or elements of it to de Lubac is misleading on several counts. First, parallels between Neoplatonism and de Lubac's theology are not, strictly speaking, unique to Neoplatonism. De Lubac himself recognized similarities within a general mystical tradition found in Hellenism, Philo, Origen, and patristic theology, including Origen and Augustine, through the Medieval period.³⁶ Second, these

Boersma's reasons for closely relating Neoplatonism and sacramental ontology are not entirely clear. He suggests that Platonism has certain broad characteristics that make it amenable to sacramental ontology: the visible is a sign of the invisible; the universe is destined to ascend to the One; the immanent is open to be lifted up to the transcendent. If the natural universe can be a sign of the supernatural, one might suppose that natural could mediate the supernatural. Yet two aspects of Platonic thought cannot be easily fitted to Christianity: first, its lack of clear delineation between the created and uncreated orders; second, its lack of respect for history. The neo-Scholastics accused de Lubac and the *nouvelle théologie* of the first; the writers of the *nouvelle théologie* accused the neo-Scholastics of the second. Both accused each other of having too close allegiances to Greek metaphysics.

34 Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 89.

35 Ibid., 90.

36 "[I]n the Bible so many things 'are given in parables and enigmas.' It is all 'full of mysteries.'" De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 184. "This way of thinking, which Origen shares with Philo as well as others, would more or less be that of the whole patristic age. It would persist as well into medieval theology." Ibid., 185. However, he states that is was not sufficient for understanding the threefold sense, which "had the merit of bringing out Christianity and its interpretation of the Bible in all their originality,

scholars interpret a congruence with Neoplatonism primarily in de Lubac's writings on nature, grace, and supernatural finality.³⁷ Yet they neglect the clear anti-Platonic themes within his writings on exegesis.³⁸ As a result, the anti-Platonism within de Lubac's theology of history is overlooked.

De Lubac's monograph on Origen, *History and Spirit*, highlights the anti-Platonic intention of his work. It argues that although Origen was indebted to the broader Hellenistic milieu and the Scriptural interpretation of the Hellenized Jews of Alexandria, the fundamental spirit of his exegesis is different.³⁹ More generally, the Christian allegorical and symbolic interpretation of the first centuries overcame a Hellenistic view of history: "As paradoxical as this might appear to a modern mind, was not one of the

especially in contrast to Philo." Ibid.

- 37 De Lubac drew from the Greek and Latin fathers in order to recover a theological anthropology in which human beings possess a single, supernatural finality. De Lubac's critics find his theological anthropology to inadequately preserve the autonomy of nature and the gratuity of grace, reflecting a more or less Platonic ontology. While it is beyond the scope of this project to address de Lubac's theological anthropology, I should mention that his conception of human finality reflects his understanding of finality within the historical order. An adequate assessment of de Lubac's theological anthropology would need to examine his theology of history, in which his anti-Platonism is key.
- 38 For example, against Daniélou, de Lubac argued that early Christian allegorical interpretation of Scripture was fundamentally distinct from its Hellenistic and Platonic counterparts. See Henri de Lubac, "Typology and Allegorization," in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 129–164. Originally published as "Typologie et allégorisme" *Recherches de science religieuse* (1947): 180–226.
- 39 De Lubac was quick to point out the "Hellenic factor in the Origenian synthesis." He admitted that Hellenistic and Philonic interpretation had a great influence upon Origen, and in many respects Origen is similar to Philo. De Lubac explained the reason that many scholars group Origen and the wider Christian allegorical tradition with Philo: "Seen from a distance, certain doctrinal groupings or certain patterns might seem closely related because a slight common atmosphere envelops them. There has been much confusion, between the spiritual exegesis of the Fathers of the Church and the allegorism of the Greek philosophers, of which it is the exact opposite." De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 182. De Lubac asks us to "perceive, beneath the surface of resemblances, the antagonism of fundamental assertions, and beneath the apparent borrowings, the radical transformations." Ibid., 22. More broadly, de Lubac argued that while early Christianity distinguished "letter from spirit, or biblical history and the mystery borne by it, or figure and fulfillment, or shadow and truth, they do not in the least draw their inspiration, even indirectly, from the Platonic distinction between opinion and true knowledge." Henri de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 165. Originally published as *L'écriture dans la tradition* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1967).

motives for this symbolism in the Christian thinking of the first centuries, precisely to assure history a meaning that pagan antiquity had denied it?”⁴⁰ Rather than transposing Greek categories upon the Gospel, this exegesis subverted those very categories to communicate a particular understanding of time.

Hellenistic allegory, is structured around two poles: the sensible and intelligible, temporal and eternal, appearance and reality, illusion and truth. Like Hellenistic allegory, Christian allegory was based on a duality. Yet in early Christian allegory, the duality was no longer between a changing history, on the one hand, and the unchanging atemporal truth, on the other. Instead, it was built upon the duality between two events *within* history: the events of Old Testament and the Christ event that fulfills them:

Two meanings that make one, or of which the first, very real in itself, must step aside for another from the moment that the creative transfiguring Event takes place, are not at all the same as two meanings that exclude each other in the way that appearance and reality, or “illusion” and truth do.⁴¹

According to de Lubac, the Christian duality between the “letter” of Scripture and its “Spirit” was fundamentally a relationship between the Old Testament and New Testament.⁴² Christian allegory assumes that God has truly intervened in the events narrated in the Old Testament. The “allegorization” of that Old Testament history is its interpretation in light of another, more ultimate intervention.

In “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” de Lubac characterizes Christian allegorization as the “antithesis” or reversal of Greek allegory:

⁴⁰ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 9.

⁴¹ De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 186.

⁴² De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 194. De Lubac adds that the “general relation between the letter and the spirit” is seen by Origen as “a first principle of Christianity.” *Ibid.*, 195.

Just as the τυπικά [types] or the συμβολικά [symbols] of the Old Testament or the literal reading of the Gospel is not a misleading appearance, the ἀληθινά [truths] or the νοητά [intelligible things] of the New Testament or the final ends are not some kind of essences or immaterial ideas. Jesus is the “truth,” he is “full of truth,” because he has made “all shadow and cloud” vanish by putting an end to the literal observance of the law. But the law was no less genuinely historically promulgated and observed For Christians, the πράγματα [things] of Christian allegory, its “invisible realities,” are also “future benefits,” eschatological, the participation promised as Christ's legacy. Hence far from being analogous, even vaguely so, to the Greek opposites to which they have been compared, the Christian opposites—letter and spirit, darkness and truth, history and mystery—are their antitheses. The union of the two terms in the distinction, which is also the distinction of the two “Testaments” from each other, reveals a world of thought that philosophers reflection on and refining their myths never suspected might exists.... Thus, the very structure of the symbolism used by the two groups is different.⁴³

In opposition to Hellenistic allegorization, Christian allegorization of the Old Testament affirms that the Old Testament events are authentic interventions by God in time.

Significantly, this allegorization does not interpret the Old Testament as a myth for an atemporal truth. Instead, allegories are the Old Testament promises fulfilled in the future, the objects of hope and expectation.

According to de Lubac, Christian allegory preserves the notion the events of history are critical for salvation:

Far from showing that the Christians shared the same idea (at least formal) of “religious philosophy” as the Greeks, far from constituting—following an old polemical expression—a sign of the contamination of the Christian idea by the Greek idea, Christian allegory expresses the inverse idea: the idea of the spiritual significance and consequently the primary importance of the very reality that man experiences in the course of time and of the event itself; the idea that in this reality there are “radical changes, absolute initiatives, veritable interventions,” producing a history worthy of its name, a history of mankind's salvation...; the idea, above all, of a more radical change than any other, as extraordinary in the spiritual order as the miracle of the water changed to wine in Cana was in the perceptible one....It was a “conversion,” a “transposition,” a “transfiguration.”⁴⁴

The Christian allegorization of the Old Testament, instead of discovering moral,

43 De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 187.

44 Ibid., 196.

scientific, or metaphysical principles, reflects a theology of history that has been shaped at its root by God's intervention into history.

While de Lubac was aware of a great diversity within Christian biblical interpretation, he asserted that a stream of allegory from St. Paul to the medieval period diverged significantly from Hellenism. In *Exégèse médiévale* he argued that Origen systematized and transmitted this Christian form of allegorical interpretation of Scripture that became the inheritance of patristic and medieval thought. And it was this exegetical tradition which preserved a uniquely Christian comprehension of history, of the intervention of the divine Word into history, and of the relationship of events to the Word. De Lubac's anti-Hellenistic argument functioned to allow a space for the absolute intervention in, and transformation of, history by God.

II. Spiritual Interpretation and the Structure of History

In the previous section, I indicated how de Lubac contrasted Christian and Hellenistic allegory. He argued that the two fundamentally differed in their understanding of history. This section develops a reading of de Lubac's theology of history based on his affirmations concerning the spiritual interpretation of scripture. I argue that de Lubac's ressourcement of spiritual interpretation is essentially a reflection on the historical economy of salvation and that, in his view, spiritual interpretation constitutes an epiphonemenon of a Christian understanding of that historical economy. First, I show that, for de Lubac, "spiritual meaning" indicates that history possesses a depth beyond its phenomenal surface. Second, I explain how the unity among the multiple meanings of

scripture have their basis in the unity of the history of salvation. As a result, for de Lubac there is an interconnection between the events of history that de Lubac describes as an “ontological bond” between historical realities of different eras.

A. Spiritual Meaning as the Depth of the Historical Event

De Lubac noted that some patristic and medieval theologians promulgated a subjective or mystical explanation for spiritual interpretation. They suggested that the Old Testament authors had a privileged insight into Christ, and therefore when they spoke they were also vaguely speaking of Christ. While de Lubac did not entirely dismiss this idea, he wished to attenuate what he called a subjective interpretation, today untenable, that the prophets were privy to a mystical vision of Christ in advance.⁴⁵ Instead of looking on the level of mystical psychology, he affirms what Dom Charlier says about looking for it “in the objective realm of realities in a living development. That presence [of Christ in the Old Testament] transcends consciousness and man; it is in the profound logic of events and ideas.”⁴⁶ In de Lubac's interpretation of the traditions of spiritual exegesis, the underlying rationale for “spiritual meaning” was an ontological relationship among the realities of history themselves. It assumed that somehow Christ is already-interior to the realities narrated in the Old Testament.

Within *Catholicism*, de Lubac initiated a theme running throughout his writings:

⁴⁵ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 464, note 110. De Lubac noted that it may be possible to affirm a kind of “implicit knowledge,” grounded in the “dynamism” of the spirit, by which the rites of the Old Covenant carried out in faith were joined to those of the New Covenant. Yet, he avoided a justification for this “implicit knowledge” in a mystical psychology of the authors of the Old Testament. *Ibid.*, 464, note 108.

⁴⁶ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 465.

the historical form of salvation.⁴⁷ Because salvation is realized and progresses historically, de Lubac could no longer think of history as composed of mere facts or occurrences. The facts of history are “no longer phenomena, but events, acts.”⁴⁸ History, he wrote, “possesses... a certain ontological density and fecundity.” As de Lubac explained, this “ontological density and fecundity” is due to the fact God acts within the historical world, gives history a depth that it would otherwise not contain.

God acts in history and reveals himself through history. Or rather, God inserts himself in history and so bestows on it a “religious consecration” which compels us to treat it with due respect. As a consequence historical realities possess a profound sense and are to be understood in a spiritual manner, *ἱστορικὰ πνευματικῶς*; conversely, spiritual realities appear in a constant state of flux and are understood historically: *πνευματικὰ ἱστορικῶς*.⁴⁹

Because God acts within history, there is an infinite depth to those actions and history possesses symbolic or sacramental dimensions. The “ontological density” or spiritual depth of history undergirds the Christian practice of finding “spiritual meanings” within the events narrated by Scripture.

De Lubac explained that although the exegetical tradition extrapolated multiple spiritual senses of scripture (allegory, tropology, anagogy), these senses initially form a unity. “Each of these meanings,” de Lubac claimed, “is at first expressed in the singular.”⁵⁰ The multiple senses are first the “spiritual sense.” De Lubac explained that the spiritual sense represents primarily the inner meaning of the events of salvation, and only secondarily does it function as a hermeneutic for interpreting the details of scripture.

47 “So in close connection with the social character of dogma there is another character, equally essential, and that is the historic[al].” De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 141. If salvation is the salvation of the whole human race, and the human race develops in time, then salvation takes a historical form.

48 Ibid., 142.

49 Ibid., 165.

50 De Lubac, “On an Old Distich,” 122.

The practice of spiritual interpretation of scripture is primarily a Christian reflection on the interior depths of history. De Lubac admitted that many particular spiritual interpretations of the patristic and medieval periods were fanciful. At the same time, by emphasizing that multiple senses are first singular, he indicated that the basis for spiritual interpretation as a whole is an authentically Christian reflection on history. De Lubac at once indicated the roots of the practice and deemphasized the most questionable features of spiritual interpretation.

According to de Lubac, spiritual interpretation reflected a belief that historical events contained hidden spiritual depths. He explains,

The Bible brings him [the Christian believer] a history that is the history of salvation: “*magnum sacramentum spei ac salutis nostrae a saeculis antiquis depositum*” [a great mystery of our salvation and hope is stored up from the ages of old]. This mysterious history is completely imbued with a profound significance, which is its spiritual or mystical meaning, in turn, allegorical, moral and anagogical.⁵¹

De Lubac argued that, for the great tradition of Christian exegesis, the “spiritual meaning” found in the texts was not primarily *in* the text. Instead spiritual meaning was primarily within history and reality.⁵² “The spiritual meaning, then, is to be found on all sides, not only or more especially in a book but first and foremost *in reality itself*.”⁵³

51 Ibid., 122.

52 De Lubac claimed that Origen's spiritual interpretation is primarily concerned with discovering the inner meaning of history. This idea is echoed by Augustine, who says “In the very fact itself...we ought to seek the mystery.” De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 169 note 14.

53 Ibid., 169. In “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory” de Lubac similarly explained that “Christian exegesis was *claiming to discover a spiritual meaning in history*.” De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 195. See Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 36. Mary Healy sums up de Lubac's understanding of the spiritual sense: “As de Lubac has demonstrated, the spiritual sense, correctly understood, is not a property of texts but of history. The spiritual sense does not refer to a literary relationship but an ontological relationship.... Thus the spiritual sense is not an additional meaning retrospectively superimposed upon the texts in light of new events, but something that was *already hidden* in those things written about in the texts.” Mary Healy, “Inspiration and Incarnation: The Christological Analogy and the Hermeneutics of Faith,” *Letter and Spirit* 2 (2006): 34.

Thus, the events occurring within human historical experience contain a deeper, salvific meaning; spiritual meaning is, above all, a function of the spiritual depths of historical reality.

The language of exterior phenomena and interior mystery is another way to describe this spiritual depth. Spiritual interpretation suggested, for de Lubac, the movement from the exterior, material, perceptible, and phenomenal event to its secret or mysterious interior.⁵⁴ He wrote, “facts...would be perceptible in one respect and divine in another.”⁵⁵ The exterior materiality of historical facts cannot convey their complete significance. Similarly, de Lubac characterized spiritual meaning in terms of a “mystery” found already within the facts of history: “The mystery is not only announced, prefigured or assured by the facts: the facts themselves have an interior that in diverse ways is already pregnant with the mystery.”⁵⁶ The “mystery” is something *already interior* to the bare event, but not exhausted by their pure materiality.

In summary, de Lubac distanced Christian spiritual interpretation from Greek allegory in order to show that spiritual meaning was found *within*, rather than beyond, historical experience. In his account, the perception of a spiritual meaning of scripture is the perception of the reality expressed through the events of the history of salvation, and it is the perception of the significance of human historical experience.⁵⁷ His emphasis on spiritual interpretation reflected a broader emphasis within his writings concerning the recovery of a 'sense of the sacred' and the mystical depths of everyday experience.

54 De Lubac, “On an Old Distich,” 112.

55 De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 195.

56 De Lubac, “On an Old Distich,” 117.

57 De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 196.

B. The Fourfold Sense and the Ontology of History

De Lubac explained the duality of the letter and spirit of Scripture in terms of the mystery hidden within the depths of history. However, the traditions of spiritual interpretation that de Lubac traced expanded this duality into multiple spiritual senses, often into a trichotomy (history, allegory, anagogy) or a quaternary (history, allegory, tropology, anagogy). As mentioned above, de Lubac's preferred example was the city of Jerusalem. In patristic biblical interpretation the historical city of Jerusalem becomes a figure of the church, but also of the soul, and of the heavenly Jerusalem. Events and persons narrated in scripture are symbolic anticipations of future realities. Within the trichotomy and quaternary, the fundamental metaphor shifts from a depth within the letter to a network of symbolic meaning.

I argue here that de Lubac explains the multiplicity of spiritual meanings—allegory, morality, and anagogy—in order to relate the interconnected events in the historical economy of salvation. He explains their unity primarily in terms of the unity of the historical economy of salvation. As a result, the fourfold sense of scripture and threefold figuration suggests that the events of history are interconnected with each other in God's historical plan. First, I examine de Lubac's understanding of a progressive and unified historical revelation. Second, I explain how biblical figuration rests on the ontological bond between events in history.

1. A Progressive and Unified Historical Revelation

The movement from one level of meaning to another—from history to allegory to morality to anagogy—was far from arbitrary. In “On an Old Distich,” de Lubac explained that the four levels of meaning comprise an interconnected unity: “These four levels of meaning do not fan out in different directions: they follow each other in a continuous series and form a simple whole.”⁵⁸ Several images drawn from the Fathers illustrated this unity. De Lubac noted Jerome's image of the construction of a building, in which history was the foundation, dogma constituted the walls, morality constituted the furnishings, and anagogy was the roof. He also noted the image of excavation by which deeper and deeper levels are extracted from the *Sacra Pagina*.⁵⁹ Each level of meaning is interlinked, but each subsequent level presupposes the previous as its basis.

De Lubac explained that the images of excavation and construction were insufficient. De Lubac noted in *Exégèse médiévale* that texts from the medieval period, though employing the fourfold sense, often do not reveal the “secret soul of the theory.”⁶⁰ First, each of the meanings possesses a unitary identity:

We speak, as indeed we must, of diverse senses..... One superimposes them, juxtaposes them, or opposes them; one enumerates them and parades them in succession as if they were so many independent entities. This is an unavoidable flattening arising from language, which did not deceive the ancients—any more than a good Thomist would take the principles of being of which he asserts the real distinction as so many “things.” Just as one ancient author says of the four degrees of contemplation, so ought we say of these four senses that they are interlinked like the rings of a priceless chain: *concatenati sunt ad invicem*.⁶¹

58 De Lubac, “On an Old Distich,” 116–17.

59 Ibid., 117.

60 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:201.

61 Ibid.

The senses of scripture reflect a single reality. But second, each level of meaning leads to the next as through different stages towards fulfillment:

Each of them possesses a propulsive force such that the one leads to the other “through increments of understanding, as it were by certain steps of the mind.” “The word of history” is brought to completion by “the sense of allegory,” and, in their turn, “the senses of allegory” of themselves incline “to the exercise of morality.” We pass by means of a natural and necessary movement “from history to allegory, and from allegory to morality.” Allegory is in truth *the truth* of history; the latter, just by itself, would be incapable of bringing itself intelligibly to fulfillment, allegory fulfills history by giving it its sense. The mystery that allegory uncovers merely makes it open up a new cycle; in its first season, it is merely an “exordium”; to be fully itself, it must be brought to fulfillment in two ways. First it is interiorized and produces its fruit in the spiritual life, which is treated by tropology; then this spiritual life has to blossom forth in the sun of the kingdom; in this [blossoming forth consists] the end of time which constitutes the object of anagogy.⁶²

Thus, each stage finds its fulfillment and completion in the next. The senses of scripture are suggestive of a succession from one phase to another.

“On an Old Distich” affirms that the multiple senses form a unity and that there is a succession from one to the other:

But even that [previous] explanation is incomplete, because there is not only an essential interdependence among the four meanings, there is also a dynamic continuity. They truly engender each other in a way that makes their internal connection very strong. As we have just explained, they are not just parts of the same whole: the same reality exists in each of them; it is just that its different parts are viewed successively. The mystery is not only announced, prefigured or assured by the facts: the facts themselves have an interior that in diverse ways is already pregnant with the mystery.⁶³

The meanings of scripture form more than *parts* of a single whole. Instead, de Lubac explains, “*the same reality*”—which de Lubac calls the “mystery”—“*exists in each of them.*” The unity of diverse senses of scripture reflects the singleness of the *mystery* in each stage of its development.⁶⁴ Second, the meanings of scripture possess a “dynamic

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ De Lubac, “On an Old Distich,” 117.

⁶⁴ Moreover “same reality” existing in each of the meanings of scripture is the “*mystery* of salvation” which gradually unfolds within history. De Lubac described a “mystic identity” among each meaning of

continuity.”⁶⁵ This is because each meaning brings about the next: “Each sense leads to the other as its end.”⁶⁶

These two characteristics of the senses of Scripture—an organic development whereby one sense of scripture finds its truth in another and the unitary identity among them—share a single point of convergence, namely the unity and coherence of God's actions within history. The continuity between the senses of scripture primarily concerns historical realities about which Scripture speaks. The development from one meaning to another “is first of all temporal. In time history precedes the mystery; it is 'prefiguration.'”⁶⁷ The phenomenon of prefiguration in Scripture presupposes this relationship in the realities of which scripture speaks, the prefiguring temporal reality and the prefigured temporal reality.

scripture. Within his writings, the term *mystère* has resonances with the Greek patristic *mysterion* and the Latin patristic *sacramentum*. *Mysterion* essentially meant God's plan of salvation as it develops within history, culminating in Christ. In Pauline usage, *mysterion* referred to “the sacred plan of God from the unfolding of the history of the world.” The mystery encompasses both Christ's historical existence and his prefigurations in the Old Testament. The Greek patristic period generally followed Paul. *Sacramentum* becomes the standard translation of *mysterion* within the Latin Fathers. John D. Laurance, *Priest as Type of Christ: The Leader of the Eucharist in Salvation History according to Cyprian of Carthage*, vol. 5, American University Studies VII: Theology and Religion (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 52–65. De Lubac's frequent use of *mystère* almost always denotes “God's design for man, whether as marking the limit of or the means of realizing this destiny.” Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, trans. James R. Dunne (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1969), 13. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxe et mystère de l'Église* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1967). “Mystery” is de Lubac's convention for the “economy of salvation,” either salvation itself in its final consummation or the progressive historical stages of this salvation. Therefore, de Lubac's claim that the same “mystery” exists in each meaning of scripture expresses an unfolding of God's unitary plan of salvation. Further, de Lubac's use of *mystère* may suggest an interpretation of his writings on nature and grace (including *The Mystery of the Supernatural*) that incorporates his understanding of the historical economy of salvation.

65 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:201; de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 217.

66 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:203. Footnote 49 quotes from Gregory *In Ez VI*, h. 3, n. 18: “*per litteram ad allegoriam tendimus*” [we extend to allegory through the letter].

67 *Ibid.*, 2:202.

A compact passage from *Exégèse médiévale* summarizes de Lubac's view of the evolution of the mystery through time:

In the mystery, nothing suffers separation. Through each of its phases the coming of Christ “is something indivisible.” If the traditional understanding of Scripture perfectly assures, within the history of our salvation, this “junction of the event and the sense,” which, for every reflective mind, is one of the major preoccupations, it is by Christ and in Christ that the understanding assures that junction at each of its stages. It is always pointing to the mystery of Christ in its indivisibility. This is the selfsame unparalleled mystery which is again the mystery of ourselves and the mystery of our eternity.⁶⁸

Here, de Lubac indicates that each phase of history is “indivisible” from the next. This is because each phase of salvation represents a gradual evolution of the mystery of Christ. History is the gradual unfolding of God's mysterious plan for humanity. And since each stage of this plan is an essential stage of growth, there exists an underlying unity among them.

In sum, de Lubac's explanation of the unity of the fourfold sense in *Exégèse médiévale* is essentially a recapitulation of his evolutionary view of history found within *Catholicism*. History itself contains an organic development towards a goal. Therefore, earlier stages of salvation possess the seeds, so to say, of what will occur later. The unity of God's plan forges unity among events in history, reflected in the fourfold sense.

2. The Ontological Bond between Events

According to de Lubac, the concept of a graduated and progressive salvation engendered the idea that events in history share a “mystical identity” or interior relationship to further temporal and eschatological fulfillments. They share likeness to

⁶⁸ Ibid., 2:203.

what follows because they will *become* what follows. Fundamentally, the two covenants are fundamentally interconnected:

There is only one God, author of both Testaments, faithful to himself throughout both, and it is the same gesture of that God that is manifested by both, each in its own way; it is the same salvation that each announces. For every Christian, the first Testament already contains Christ in a mysterious way, but it is consequently only understood through him.⁶⁹

But also, according to de Lubac, the traditional symbolic correlations between biblical events—expressed in the concepts of figure, type, image, shadow, and anticipation—were far from arbitrary. These terms reflected a view of the integral relationship between events of history. In *History and Spirit*, he explains:

If, for example, the manna is really the figure of the Eucharist, or if the sacrifice of the paschal Lamb really prefigures the redemptive death, the reason for this is not extrinsic resemblance alone, no matter how striking this might be. There is actually an “inherent continuity” and “ontological bond” between the two facts, and this is due to the same divine will which is active in both situations and which, from stage to stage, is pursuing a single Design—the Design which is the real object of the Bible.⁷⁰

The term “ontological bond” is an emphatic affirmation that there is an interior relationship among the events themselves.⁷¹

According to de Lubac, Thomas Aquinas grasped this “ontological bond” between historical realities better than many who followed him. Thomas summarized and systematized this interconnection between the meanings of Scripture in the first question of the *Summa Theologiae*.⁷² He posed the question “Whether in Holy Scripture a word

⁶⁹ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 190.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 462; de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 37.

⁷¹ De Lubac’s language of interiority is joined by an ontological and sacramental language. De Lubac speaks of the relationship between history and allegory in terms of the relationship between *res* and *veritas*. For an extensive treatment of de Lubac’s understanding of the “mutual interiority” of the senses of scripture, see Matthew T. Gerlach, “Lex Orandi, Lex Legendi: A Correlation of the Roman Canon and the Fourfold Sense of Scripture” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 2011), chap. 8–9.

⁷² See de Lubac, “Typology and Allegorization,” 140. De Lubac states that Thomas brought clarity to an ambiguity within the tradition of allegorical interpretation by distinguishing between a “typical”

may have several senses?” The response grounds the multiple senses of Scripture in a relationship between realities.

I answer that, The author of Holy Writ is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things themselves. So, whereas in every other science things are signified by words, this science has the property, that the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification. Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it.⁷³

For Thomas, the words of scripture signify realities, realities which in turn already exist within a web of signification. Since God created the realities referred to within the Bible, those realities themselves signify other realities, including the realities of salvation.

Yet, de Lubac provided a slightly different emphasis than Thomas. De Lubac attributes to the patristic tradition a more explicit consciousness of the role of the *historical economy* in the multiple senses of scripture, and draws from this consciousness for his own understanding. The biblical symbolism that arises within patristic exegesis presumes an interior and ontological relationship between events in history.

III. Origen and “Infinite Ontological Difference”

This section continues to develop an interpretation of de Lubac's theology of history based on his affirmations concerning spiritual interpretation. Above I argued that de Lubac emphasizes that the continuity between the senses of Scripture is based ultimately on an ontological interconnection between events in history. I described this

meaning and a “metaphorical” meaning of allegory. Ibid., 156.

73 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 1, 5 vols., Second and Revised. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947) I, 1, art. 10.

correlation as “ontological” because the events of history are not merely related in concept but the underlying reality itself is somehow conjoined. Here, I show that de Lubac draws from Origen's exegesis for the rationale for this “ontological bond between events.” First, I briefly examine de Lubac's defense of allegorization due to its preservation of the difference between letter and spirit. De Lubac argued that Origen's exegetical principles suggested not only an organic development within historical economy salvation but also an ontological difference between stages in that economy. Second, I argue that de Lubac drew from Origen's leitmotif “the newness of the Gospel” to explain the difference between Christ and his anticipatory figures. Third, developing the idea in section I. of the uniqueness of the Christian view of history, I argue that de Lubac understands the unity of salvation history to result from a unique Event, an “historical exemplar.”⁷⁴ Specifically, de Lubac envisioned a particular historical event—the Christ event—as that which all of history images and anticipates.

A. Allegory and Typology According to de Lubac

Contemporary scholarship on the early church, according to de Lubac, interpreted two competing modes of biblical interpretation at work in patristic exegesis:

We would thus have, on one side, the partisans of the divine “condescension” adapting itself to people who are still unrefined in order to elevate them gradually, through a wise “economy,” to a more pure religion; and on the other side, theorists of an allegorism thanks to which what appears to be an entirely material prescription unworthy of the Divinity can receive a sublime sense.⁷⁵

The difference consisted in how the church fathers interpreted the symbols and figures of

⁷⁴ While de Lubac did not deploy the term “exemplarism” with any systematic consistency, I find it useful to express the uniqueness of the Christ event in relationship to all of history.

⁷⁵ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 284–5.

the Old Testament. On the one hand, there was an allegorical mode of interpretation, epitomized by Alexandrian exegetical traditions that emphasized that Old Testament figures were symbols of the truth found in the New Testament. On the other hand, church fathers such as Irenaeus emphasized that the Old Testament was a pedagogical preparation for the New. This historical and supposedly Hebraic mode of thought emphasized a progressive economy where biblical types pointed forward to their antitypes. As de Lubac noted, patristic scholarship in the 1940s contrasted symbolism to pedagogical preparation, or, as they called it, “allegory” to “typology,” respectively.⁷⁶

A Jesuit and former student of de Lubac's, Jean Daniélou, developed the contrast between “allegory” and “typology.” Daniélou's research grew out of his collaboration with *Sources chrétiennes*, a series of publications and translations into French of early Christian writings. The first volume was a translation of Gregory of Nyssa's *The Life of Moses* (1942), to which Daniélou wrote the editorial introduction. Daniélou wrote that Gregory of Nyssa, like Origen, integrated elements from Philo's symbolism with more historical mode of interpretation derived from the New Testament. He discerned a contamination of Greek allegory in the symbolism of the Alexandrian theologians. In a series of studies, Daniélou suggested that Origen followed Philo's exegesis too closely. He proceeded to further oppose Origen's allegory from a Christian mode of interpretation, which he called typology and that depended more closely on historical events.⁷⁷ In studies

⁷⁶ See de Lubac, “Typology and Allegorization,” 129, note 1. Contemporary scholarship remains divided on whether the distinction between “allegory” and “typology” adequately describes differences between patristic authors. See Peter W. Martens, “Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction: The Case of Origen,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 283–317.

⁷⁷ Jean Daniélou, “Traversée de la Mer Rouge et baptême aux premiers siècles,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 33 (1946): 492–30; Jean Daniélou, “La typologie d’Isaac dans le christianisme primitif,”

that followed, he sought to distinguish an authentically Christian view of history.⁷⁸

Daniélou's recovery of a patristic understanding of biblical interpretation—which he called “typology”—was linked to his constructive development of a theology of history. He sought to discern a Christian theology of history within patristic exegesis in order use it to address the historical awareness within the contemporary age, especially as exhibited by Marxist thought.⁷⁹

The term “typology” derives from St. Paul's reference to *types* (τύποι): Adam is the “type of the one to come” (Rom. 5:14 NAB); the punishments of the Israelites in the Old Testament “happened as examples (τύποι) for us” (1 Cor. 10:6 NAB). Typology, as Daniélou conceived it, was the discernment of a series of analogical correspondences between events and persons within salvation history. According to Boersma, a type bears a likeness to a future reality that it signifies, which prepares for this future reality, without itself being that reality.⁸⁰ Typology discovers a really existing pattern joining the events of history and the sacramental life of the church.

In a 1947 article, de Lubac challenged Daniélou's opposition to “allegory” in favor of “typology” and Daniélou's interpretation of Origen.⁸¹ De Lubac departed from

Biblica 28 (1947): 363–93; Jean Daniélou, “Les divers sens de l'Écriture dans la tradition chrétienne primitive,” *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 24 (1948): 119–26; Jean Daniélou, *Origène* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948).

78 Jean Daniélou, “Christianisme et histoire,” *Études* 80, no. 254 (1947): 166–184; Jean Daniélou, *Sacramentum futuri: Études sur les origines de la typologie biblique*, Études de théologie historique (Paris: Beauchesne, 1950); Jean Daniélou, *Essai sur le mystère de l'histoire*, nouvelle édition. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1982).

79 Jean Daniélou, “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,” *Études*, no. 249 (1946): 5–21; Daniélou, “Christianisme et histoire.”

80 Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 174.

81 One should not overemphasize the division between Daniélou and de Lubac. As co-founders of *Sources chrétiennes*, they had a shared theological project. De Lubac's intentions and historical methods were similar to Daniélou's.

Daniélou on several matters of historical interpretation: first, he argued that “typology” is a modern idea and was not distinct from “allegory” in the first centuries; second, the term “allegory,” despite the problems it often caused, was a dominant and traditional mode of exegesis; third, Christian allegory developed by Origen was fundamentally different from that of Philo and Hellenism. Whereas Daniélou sought to separate out the “typological” from the “allegorical” in order to distinguish a Christian understanding of history from what was a foreign import, de Lubac argued that Origen's allegorization itself preserved a Christian understanding of history. Here lies their methodological difference.

De Lubac believed that Daniélou, to some extent, bought into a false dichotomy between an historical and an allegorical exegesis persistent within contemporary early Christian studies. The choice between Irenaeus, whose theology was that of an historical pedagogy, and Origen, whose theology saw the Old Testament as a symbol for heavenly realities, was specious:

This schema also lacks nuances. It is based on a false *a priori* that does not seem to be essential rather than on the study of the texts..... Why would the preparation for a coming reality not be symbolic of that reality? And why would the symbol have no pedagogical value? One whole modern school, as we know, has wished to see in supernatural beliefs both a stage toward adult humanism and its anticipated symbol. In Proudhon's eyes, Catholicism as a whole symbolized socialism, which was to complete it by eliminating it. Christian antiquity, in any case, never seems to have perceived any opposition between an explanation of the ancient religion of Israel by symbolism and an explanation by divine “condescension” and the development of revelation.⁸²

Not only was this dichotomy false, but Origen himself combined historical preparation and symbolism within his allegory. The mutual opposition between allegory and pedagogy, or symbolism and history, was a thoroughly modern one, driven by a modern

⁸² De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 285.

dichotomization of history and metaphysics.⁸³ De Lubac's preference for Origen's theology and its lack of a dichotomy between historical development and allegory reflects his refusal to mutually oppose history and metaphysics.

Although he agreed that the language of “allegory” lead to misunderstandings, de Lubac insisted against Daniélou that allegory contained an idea essential for a Christian interpretation of history: the transcendence of Christ in relationship to his anterior anticipations. While Daniélou maintained the superiority of Christ to his Old Testament figures, the language of typology suggested only a difference of degree. Typology suggested a series of analogous realities within Scripture (e.g., God's presence in the tabernacle, the temple, the physical body of Christ, the church), but failed to adequately express the transcendence of the Christ event. De Lubac claimed that allegory preserved the “worth of facts...endowed them with a sublime significance, in view of magnifying still another Fact.”⁸⁴ This Fact is the historical life of Christ, which categorically transcends his anticipations. Unlike typology, Christian allegorization preserved a radical difference between the “letter” and the “spiritual meaning,” between figure and

83 In “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory” de Lubac briefly indicates that the modern opposition between history and metaphysics is thoroughly Hellenistic in form. He compares the ancient interpreters of myth (Heraclides, Sallust, Proclus) with modern ones (Julius Wellhausen, D. F. Strauss, G. L. Bauer). Like the Greeks, who make religious stories into a myth opposed to metaphysical truth, the modern historians interpret biblical narratives as myths indicative of some moral or “cosmological knowledge.” De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 194–5.

84 Ibid., 194.

fulfillment.⁸⁵ While maintaining the inner ontological bond between an historical figure and its fulfillment, “allegory” served to also maintain their ontological difference.

B. Christian Newness and the Transcendence of Allegory

De Lubac defended Origen's allegorical interpretation especially because it preserved two elements in harmony. First, it maintained the ontological bond between historical realities (e.g. Israel and the church) that reflected a development of salvation through time. Second, it maintained an ontological difference between those realities (e.g. the heavenly Jerusalem is not just a later stage in development of the city of Jerusalem, but is ontologically or categorically different). While de Lubac did not develop this second idea in a systematic manner, his *History and Spirit*, *Exégèse Médiévale*, and *Scripture in the Tradition* developed the idea that allegory implies this ontological difference between figure and fulfillment.

Newness and Transcendence: De Lubac borrows a theological vocabulary directly from Origen: “newness of the spirit,” “newness of life,” “newness of Christ,” and “newness of Christianity.”⁸⁶ “Newness” encapsulates the idea that the coming of Christ is something unprecedented in a long history of preparations. To speak of the *Newness* of Christ, or the *New* Testament is an ontological claim as much as a temporal claim. The

85 The principles of Origen's exegesis, therefore, expressed a theme within de Lubac's *Catholicism*, that Christianity alone unites “both the transcendent destiny of man and the common destiny of mankind.” De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 140–41. In other words, Christianity unites vertical (transcendent) and horizontal (historical and social) dimensions of salvation. In de Lubac's reading, modern Catholicism exclusively emphasized the vertical dimension of salvation to the neglect of the horizontal dimension. De Lubac recognized that the desire for a salvation of the social and temporal has re-emerged without the vertical dimension, allowing it to take dangerous forms in Nazism, Fascism, Communism.

86 De Lubac entitled the final chapter of *Scripture in the Tradition*, “The Christian Newness.” The idea, however, is found much earlier. See *Ibid.*, 177, 269–70, 391.

New Testament is *new*—that is, categorically different from the Old—because it speaks of a fundamentally new situation between humanity and God, and not only because it comes later in time. The textual reality reflects an historical reality: Christ brings all newness in relationship to the law and the prophets. Allegory, therefore, encapsulates the idea of the absoluteness of the “act of Christ” in relation to previous figures.

While “newness” describes the categorical difference of allegory to history, de Lubac employs another term—transcendence—to describe the same phenomenon in his writings on Christology, nature and grace, and apologetics. In “The Light of Christ,” de Lubac described a chimerical notion of transcendence which emphasizes the supernatural origin of Christianity by ignoring the human and historical conditions of its development. He said that this transcendence can also be called “exteriority.”⁸⁷ On the other hand,

there is another transcendence, a true transcendence, of which the first was only, at best, the naïve transcription. An intrinsic transcendence, in virtue of which a given reality, considered as a synthesis, in what comprises its own being, surpasses essentially the realities of the same kind that surround it.... Any true synthesis is always more than synthesis.... It is, in a phenomenal continuity, the passage to a new, higher, incomparable order.⁸⁸

While de Lubac is describing the transcendence of Christianity to preceding religious forms, his notion of transcendence closely aligns with his understanding of “allegory.” Allegory recognizes a continuity between the historical city of Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem within scripture, all the while allowing for a radical difference and disjunction.

Ontological difference: De Lubac describes this radical difference as an ontological difference. The transcendence of the New Testament in relationship to the

⁸⁷ Henri de Lubac, “The Light of Christ,” in *Theology in History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 205.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 205.

Old Testament epitomizes this relationship. But Christ is what effects this transcendence.

As de Lubac explains, allegorical meaning is possible only due to a new principle brought about by Christ:

[The Christian] relationship of “allegory” to “history” is primarily, as we know, a relationship of “after” to “before.” But... it is not this alone. It not only makes us pass, as St. Augustine says, “*ex illis quae facta sunt usque ad ista quae fiunt*” [from past facts to present facts], but also, and by the same movement, makes us pass from things “*quae sub umbra legis historialiter accidisse leguntur*” (which one reads as having occurred historically under the shadow of the Law) to those which “*spiritualiter eveniunt in populo Dei tempore gratiae*” [occur spiritually in the people of God in the age of grace]. Thus, it is also in the qualitative order.⁸⁹

The Christic interpretive principle of the facts belongs to a different order of reality than the facts themselves, protecting the difference between history and allegory.⁹⁰ The truth of the literal meaning, he stated, “does not, even from an entirely formal point of view, correspond to the truth” of its spiritual, that it allegorical, meaning.⁹¹ De Lubac makes it even more explicit, describing “an infinite ontological difference” and “an infinite qualitative difference” distinguishing anticipation and fulfillment.⁹²

Infinite Difference as a Principle of Continuity: Commonly, we think of a radical difference as a break or disruption. A likeness between one thing and another depend upon a shared quality or characteristic, which places the two things within the same category. Growth of an organism requires a continuity of identity with a change in characteristics (height, weight, age). For it to change into something completely different

⁸⁹ De Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 159.

⁹⁰ De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:117.

⁹¹ Ibid., 2:103. Susan K. Wood observes something similar in de Lubac's Christology: “De Lubac's sense of the transcendent quality of grace and the radical rupture and newness achieved in Christ enable him to maintain the distinction between the two orders [of grace and nature].” Susan K. Wood, “The Nature-Grace Problematic within Henri de Lubac's Christological Paradox,” *Communio* 19, no. 3 (1992): 401.

⁹² De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:98; de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 159.

would be its cessation of existence or loss of identity. The principle at work within de Lubac's understanding of allegory is different.

There is an “infinite qualitative difference” between history and its allegorical fulfillment in a later event. But, according to de Lubac, this infinite difference establishes continuity: “To misunderstand it [this infinite qualitative difference] would be to make out of the allegorical sense, which is a *spiritual* sense, a new literal sense; and this would practically negate the interiority of the Christian mystery.”⁹³ It would be a misunderstanding to conceive Christ as the last prophet in the series, or even the best. Likewise, it would be a misunderstanding to conceive the Old Testament prophecies as being fulfilled merely on the literal-historical level. His presence and sacrifice “fulfill by surpassing.”

The concrete example and perennial problem of supercessionism within Christian thought helps to illustrate. A Christian emphasis on absolute uniqueness and transcendence of Christ in relation to the Old Testament may risk negating the validity of the Old Covenant or endorsing a form of supercessionism. For example, the first-century theologian Marcion endorsed an extreme disjunction between the Old and New Testaments and ended by rejecting the validity of the Old Testament. Likewise, such a radical difference between anticipation and its Christological fulfillment in scripture conceivably could support an idea that the New replaces and invalidates God's covenant with the Jews.

However, de Lubac suggested the opposite is true. He explains that Origen

93 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:99. See de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 160.

“appealed to spiritual interpretation in order to defend that Old Testament against adversaries that rejected it.”⁹⁴ By interpreting the New Testament as the “spiritual meaning” of the Old, Origen was able to defend the validity of the New Testament against the Jews and the validity of the Old Testament against the Gnostics and Marcionites. The categorical or ontological difference between the two, allowed them both to exist in harmony. On the other hand, a mere linear progress from Old to New would “make out of the allegorical sense... a new literal sense.” It would imply that God has given a New law that replaces the Old. A correct understanding of the infinite ontological difference actually preserves Christianity from a crude supercessionism.

Within orthodox Christianity, exemplified by Origen, the emphasis on the “trancendence” and “newness” of the Gospel preserved a twofold awareness of the unprecedented nature of Christ's work and the continuity of his work with that of the Old Testament. De Lubac's affirmation of an “ontological bond” between realities and an “infinite ontological difference” between them allowed him to develop his understanding of the symbolic relationship between historical events.

C. Symbolism and History in Origen's Exemplarism

De Lubac discovered in Origen's allegory a principle by which to understand the relationship of anticipation to fulfillment. According to de Lubac, by integrating symbolism into an historical schema, Origen reversed a Platonic “exemplarism,” thereby preserving a Christian meaning.

⁹⁴ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 57, see 54-58.

De Lubac's anti-Platonic argument was an important challenge to dominant interpretations of Origen. According to these interpretations, Alexandrian allegorical and symbolic theology purportedly intimated a Platonic “exemplarism” in which empirical, earthly realities are imperfect imitations of divine realities. Platonic cosmology contrasted the *kosmos noetos* (world of existence) with the *kosmos aisthetos* (sensible world). The *eidos* (ideas/forms) were the exemplars which were the sufficient cause of empirical things in the sensible world; empirical things were the imitation.

Origen himself drew a dichotomy between the “sensible” and the “intelligible” to describe the relationship between history and its spiritual meaning.⁹⁵ However, in the case of Origen, de Lubac preferred to speak of a “Christian transposition” of Platonism, rather than a “Platonic transposition” of Christianity.⁹⁶ Within Origen, the dichotomy between sensible reality and intelligible reality takes on a new meaning precisely due to its integration into a historical schema. Origen, rather than copying Platonic exemplarity, reverses and baptizes it.⁹⁷

In Origen's hands the Platonic dichotomy between the sensible and intelligible became a trichotomy—shadow, image, truth—which reflected the historical division of

95 De Lubac admitted, “The opposition that he places between the αἰσθητά (objects of sense) and the νοητά (intelligible realities) is at times disturbing. His anagogical vocabulary has been judged suspect.” Ibid., 325. De Lubac argued, Origen's division between sensible and intelligible is biblical rather than Platonic. Origen drew from St. Paul's division between the “invisible perfections” of God and the visibility of God's works (Rom. 1:20) and drew from Hebrews, which construed Jewish worship as “a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary” (Heb. 8:5 NAB). Similarly, St. John drew a distinction between the world below and the world above.

96 Ibid., 326.

97 More precisely, Origen expands upon a transformation of exemplarism already present within Paul and the Letter to the Hebrews. Speaking of the symbolism in Paul and Hebrews, de Lubac writes, “Exemplarist thinking and allegorical processes would be borrowed from the ambient culture and profoundly transformed.” Ibid., 469.

the Old Testament, the New Testament, and heaven. His schema reflects his threefold division of the meaning of scripture: history, allegory, and anagogy. For Origen, the Old Testament (history) is a figure for the New Testament (allegory), which in turn is a figure for the heavenly reality (anagogy). Although Origen continued to employ a language of “sensible” and “intelligible,” the meaning had shifted significantly. This is because, unlike the Platonic exemplarism, a fulfillment of the Old Testament occurs *within* history, in the New Testament.

As a result, the intelligible realities are not “pure essences” or ideas or “abstractions.”⁹⁸ Instead, they are a *future* fulfillment. The literal meaning of the Old Testament “designates also 'something else' the very reality of which (not merely the manifestation of it) is to come.”⁹⁹ Old Testament figures are both prophetic (“προφητικά σύμβολα [prophetic symbols]: a declaration, a foreshadowing, προτύπωσεις”) and a preparation.¹⁰⁰ They are not inadequate images of a prior transhistorical reality.¹⁰¹ Instead, they invoke a fulfillment of a future reality.

These “heavenly things” toward which he has us raise our eyes are for him, as for the Letter to the Hebrews, to be taken in their fullness, future realities in relation to the signs of them contained in the Bible.... They are “the mysteries of the age to come”.... They are always related to a future situation, and they always presuppose the Mystery of Christ.¹⁰²

98 Ibid., 327.

99 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 172.

100 Ibid., 172.

101 “The events of Jewish history clearly continue to herald the future Jerusalem. There is no 'reversal' that would make of them 'the image of an earlier and higher history, the reflection and the result of a past celestial history instead of being the prefiguration of a celestial history to come.’” De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 331.

102 Ibid., 327–8. De Lubac notes that there is some ambiguity in whether these Old Testament figures are related to the first coming or the second coming of Christ.

Old Testament figures point to and prepare for a future reality. But this future reality is, at the same time, a transcendent event. Allegory, he explained,

goes from history to history. It relates the unique facts with another unique fact, divine interventions that have already taken place with another divine intervention, equally real and incomparably more profound. It does so in a such a way that everything culminates in a great fact, which in its completely unique singularity is the carrier of all spiritual fecundity. Thus, its result is simultaneously completely “historical,” “mystical,” and “celestial.” It is, we repeat, the fact of Christ, both unique and universal.¹⁰³

The events and symbols of which Scripture speaks point to and culminate in a *future* Event that utterly transcends what occurred before.

The principles of allegory drawn from Origen are consequential for de Lubac's view of history. For de Lubac, Christ becomes the *historical* exemplar of Old Testament history:

The whole Christian fact is summed up in Christ—as the Messiah who was to come... who had to be prepared for in history, just as a masterpiece is preceded by a series of rough sketches; but as the “image of the Invisible God” and the “first born of all creation” he is the universal Exemplar.... Christ, in so far as transcendent and existing before all things, is anterior to his figures, yet as a historical being, coming in the flesh, he appears after them....this living synthesis of the eternal and temporal is one in its duality: Christ existing before all things cannot be separated from Christ born of the woman, who died and rose again.¹⁰⁴

Allegorical interpretation becomes the vehicle to express a paradox that could not fit into the Hellenistic pagan world view. The concrete life and death of a human being is the transcendent eternal mystery prefigured in time.

This represents, for de Lubac, a reversal of Platonic exemplarism.¹⁰⁵ It is the particular Christ event which becomes the exemplar of historical realities. The

103 De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 195.

104 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 174.

105 “The body follows its shadow, the exemplar its 'type'.... The rough sketch is the preparation for the archetype, the imitation (μίμημα) comes before the model.” Ibid., 172.

“spiritual fecundity” of history, exemplified by the practice of spiritual interpretation, is less a universal law of which Christ is an example than a consequence of Christ himself. Rather than the universal constituting the sufficient reason for historical particular, the historical particular (the Christ event) becomes the sufficient reason for the universal pattern in which all things find a fulfillment in Christ. De Lubac employs this principle as a brand of Christianity itself, wherein all things find their fulfillment in Christ: philosophical knowledge is an anticipation of Christian revelation; non-Christian religions anticipate their completion in Christ event; creation anticipates redemption.¹⁰⁶ De Lubac's understanding of salvation, religious epistemology, and the finality of the created order each exhibit an underlying pattern traceable to or exemplified by Origen.

IV. History and Christological Fulfillment

In section II, I showed that for de Lubac, the senses of scripture share an identity, described as an ontological bond, that represents the unity of events in the history of salvation. Just as the letter is oriented toward and finds fulfillment in allegory, so history

¹⁰⁶ Susan K. Wood notes this very principle within de Lubac's ecclesiology and in his defense of Teilhard de Chardin's mariology. She writes: “In spite of the strong exemplarism in Teilhard, the most Christian element in his thought here may be the principle that the universal exists because of the particular. Specifically, the ideal universalized as feminine exists in its unitive and spiritually receptive function because a particular, concrete, historical woman embodied such perfection in her own being. This transforms Platonic exemplarism into its mirror image, in which all is reversed. The real is not dehistoricized so that the particular is only an imperfect image of an ideal and perfect reality, but the universal exists because it has been achieved in historical particularity. The concrete is not a symbol of the universal, but the universal is a symbol of the concrete.” Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 100. I would only add that within de Lubac's understanding of biblical exegesis and the fourfold sense, rather than the “universal” being a symbol of the concrete, it is prior events of salvation that become symbols of the concrete Event. Historical particulars symbolize the “exemplar,” which is the historical life of Christ.

is oriented from incompleteness to completion. In section III, I indicated the Christic fulfillment of the events narrated in the Old Testament is infinitely ontologically superior to those realities themselves. De Lubac's theology of history construes Christ as the historical exemplar, in whom all history finds fulfillment and to whom they are oriented.

This section articulates the role of Christ as the “exemplar” in relation to his prefigurations. Christ, both historical and transcendent, is the creative force who unites the historical economy of salvation in himself and, in doing so, becomes the focal point of salvation. Christ assumes all salvation history to himself and recapitulates it in himself. In doing so, he exercises a retroactive causality on the previous figures and anticipations. Yet the economy of salvation, for de Lubac, is the same as the economy of revelation. The same exemplarism occurs in the economy of revelation. Christ assumes all revelatory signs to himself, making all revelation converge upon himself, becoming the Sign to which all signs point.¹⁰⁷ De Lubac saw the exegetical-historical relationship between historical anticipation and fulfillment in the same way as he saw the relationship between sign and signified.

First, I examine de Lubac's *La Révélation divine* for its construal of the unity of the economy of revelation and salvation. Second, I look at Christ as the focal point of this economy, as the fullness and the ultimate means of salvation/revelation. Third, I examine the parallel that de Lubac creates between anticipation and fulfillment (in the economy of salvation) and sign and signified (in the economy of revelation.)

107 As “Sign,” Christ is the sign of the *totus Christus*, that is, the anagogical completion of the economy of salvation. I examine de Lubac's treatment of Christ as a sacrament or “sign” below (ch. 4, part III).

A. The Unity of Revelation and Salvation in Christ

Like many of his twentieth-century Catholic counterparts, de Lubac's work prior to the Second Vatican Council employed personal and historical categories to describe God's revelation. In his work as a theological advisor at Vatican II, de Lubac influenced the outcome of *Dei Verbum*, Vatican II's dogmatic constitution on divine revelation. *Dei Verbum* confirmed the emphasis on the personal and historical character of revelation.¹⁰⁸ De Lubac's subsequent commentary on the document, *La Révélation divine*, is a window onto de Lubac's thinking directly after the Council.¹⁰⁹

1. A Unified Economy of Revelation and Economy of Salvation

La Révélation divine develops around a core insight found in *Dei Verbum*: the concrete unity of the economy of revelation and the economy of salvation in Christ. In de Lubac's view, *Dei Verbum* maintains the indissociability of the “manifestation” of God and the “self-gift” of God. Quoting Bernard of Clairvaux, de Lubac explains:

Dando revelat, et revelando dat [by giving he reveals, and by revealing he gives]. It is impossible to dissociate, even in thought, if one wishes that it is maintained at the interior of revelation and in its proper perspective, the manifestation that God makes of himself and the gift that he makes of himself; in other words, revelation and its end: this

108 *Dei Verbum* shifted away from two inadequate characterizations of revelation. First, neo-Scholastic manual tradition and, arguably, Vatican I's *Dei Filius*, emphasized an over-intellectualist and abstract conception of revelation as the communication of truths about God otherwise unavailable to natural intellectual powers. Second, some Protestant theologies emphasized revelation as God's communication through the biblical text.

109 Because de Lubac was reticent to detail the workings of the commissions on which he served, his specific role in the formation of the document is unclear. As a result, there are hermeneutical difficulties in interpreting his theological commentary on a document which he had a role in drafting. He certainly considered this document an authoritative expression of the Catholic Church's faith. However, his commentary does function to affect the ecclesial reception of the document. Here, I interpret *La Révélation divine* as a reflection of themes encountered in his previous and subsequent work.

is what this whole first chapter of the Constitution *Dei Verbum* repeats. The one and the other are expressed by the same word: “eternal Life.”¹¹⁰

The “manifestation” of God is an analogue to “revelation”; the “gift of God” is an analogue to “salvation,” the end or purpose of revelation. The means by which God communicates with humanity (the self-manifestation) and the means by which God saves humanity (the self-gift) are united in the incarnate Word. God's revelation is and brings about salvation.

The object of revelation, de Lubac claims, cannot be merely ideas about God communicated through the Scriptures; rather, the act of announcing salvation is a realization of salvation. De Lubac writes:

the announcement of salvation contains the salvation announced. The object revealed does not consist in notions, by themselves without vital efficacy, which would hardly make for the purpose of making explicit a Christianity existing already in an “implicit” state, or of naming finally a reality up until then “anonymous.”¹¹¹

Dei Verbum expressed the unity of God's enactment of salvation in history with the words of revelation: “the plan of revelation (*revelationis oeconomia*) is realized by deeds and words (*gestis verbisque*) having an inner unity” (*Dei Verbum*, 2). De Lubac noted that some bishops at the Second Vatican Council opposed this formulation. They desired language that restricted revelation to “words.” According to de Lubac, an overemphasis

110 De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 57. *Dei Verbum*, according to de Lubac, affirms the unity of revelation and salvation in the concept of “eternal life” in the writings of Paul and the Gospel of John. John describes eternal life as knowledge of God and of Christ (Jn 17:3). Ibid. De Lubac explains: “Such a ‘knowledge’ [*connaissance*] can only come with ‘communion.’ Thus, in his circular thought, going from ‘life eternal’ to ‘life eternal,’ Saint John ends where he has begun.” Ibid., 57-8. “Knowledge” and “communion” are the subjective-noetic poles of God's revelation and God's salvation. Just as revelation and salvation are indissociable, knowledge and communion are indissociable.

111 De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 58–59. The reference to ‘implicit’ or ‘anonymous’ Christianity appears to be the language of Karl Rahner. Whether de Lubac is here criticizing Rahner is uncertain. De Lubac's point should be taken as an affirmation of the efficacy of historical events for salvation. On this, de Lubac and Rahner are in agreement.

on “words” to the detriment of “deeds” supposed a misunderstanding of the “Word of God.”¹¹² In contrast, the final conciliar text highlights the character of revelation as an historical event that effects what it proclaims. De Lubac claimed that the unity of revelation and salvation makes salvation decidedly historical, giving those salvific moments within history a revelatory import.

The summit of this economy is the sacrifice of Christ. Christ manifests God's being through his life, death, and resurrection. In *Catholicism*, de Lubac spoke of a unity of “the act of [Christ's] sacrifice” and the “objective revelation of his Person.”¹¹³ But, in “La Révélation divine,” he goes further to explain that the *kenotic* [self-emptying] personal actions of Christ both save us and manifest God to us. Here, de Lubac echoes a typically Balthasarian theme: divine revelation as such is kenotic. The Word must empty himself in order to speak to us, not just to save us. He writes:

“Already the divine Kenosis was announced in the Word of the ancient Law. In Jesus Christ, the temporality of the human experience and the eternal truth are rejoined” [quoting Balthasar]. It is in “emptying himself” and in taking “the form of a slave” (Ph 2, 7) that he is made present to us in history to reveal to us “what the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, what is come to the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him.”¹¹⁴

112 Ibid., 68. De Lubac criticized the intellectualist view of revelation, promulgated in theological manuals after the First Vatican Council, for an impoverished view of the event-character of revelation.. Neo-Scholastic manuals tended to distinguish between *revelatio supernaturalis*, communicated in words, from *revelatio naturalis*, communicated through facts or realities. This distinction served to protect the supernatural character of Christian faith against deism while preserving the access that all people have to knowledge of God, even without the gift of faith. However, the distinction deployed an opposition between revelation that takes place through prophecy (*verba*) and revelation operative through natural realities (*facta*). Ibid., 68–9. Vatican II, by speaking of *gesta verbisque* (deeds and words), avoided this problem. According to de Lubac, revelation is essentially “bound” to events experienced within a particular history. The same Word who is operative in realizing God's designs in history also communicates to us using human words. Thus, “supernatural” revelation should not be opposed to the concrete facts and realities through which salvation is enacted.

113 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 226.

114 De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 117.

Appealing to the Philippians Christ Hymn, de Lubac explains that the historical presence of the Son results from the divine condescension and self-emptying. In sum, de Lubac unites two aspects of Christ's action—salvation and revelation. The self-revelation of God saves; the saving act of God reveals.

2. The “Christological” Concentration of Revelation and Salvation

The events of salvation through which God is revealed have a culmination and total realization in Christ. De Lubac borrowed Karl Barth's term “Christological concentration” to describe Christ as the focal point of God's revelation.¹¹⁵ This term, elaborated in the theology of “La Révélation divine,” aptly captures de Lubac's understanding of the christocentrism of revelation and salvation. Revelation reaches its apogee in the person of Christ himself. De Lubac describes the “fulfillment” of revelation in Christ as equally an assimilation, a transfiguration, and a surpassing of previous revelation.

As de Lubac noted, Pope Pius XI's *Mit brennender Sorge* stated that “in Jesus appeared the fullness of revelation.” *Dei Verbum*'s language was stronger: “Jesus is this plenitude.”¹¹⁶ By identifying the fullness of revelation as Christ, the Council avoided the pitfalls of a too-abstract concept of revelation or a purely textual revelation: “revelation described by the Constitution is truly *Christian* revelation, and not some or other

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 116.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 72. He noted that during the commission's deliberations one father of the council asked that the line “*qui est la plénitude*” (who is this plenitude) be replaced by “*en qui est ...*” (in whom is...). By refusing this request, the commission upheld an intensely Christocentric and personalistic view of revelation. Ibid. note 1.

revelation of a philosophical or gnostic kind'—nor even...a simple *biblical* revelation. 'It is Christ who is the Author, the Object, the Center, the Summit, the Fullness and the Sign.'¹¹⁷ Christ *is* the “Event,” the “Fact,” the “Gesture,” and the “Act.” De Lubac's use of the majuscule both identified it with the divine, and indicated its characteristics as a proper noun. It is concrete and unrepeatable. The unprecedented entrance of the divine Word into history is the summit of the twofold economy of revelation and of salvation.¹¹⁸

While, in *La Révélation divine*, de Lubac described Christ as the fullness of the revelatory economy, de Lubac's writings on spiritual interpretation indicated why he is this fullness. Christ unites the entire economy of salvation in his person. De Lubac appealed to the patristic and medieval theme of the *verbum abbreviatum* (the abridged Word) in Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine, Rupert of Deutz, and Thomas Aquinas. The Word of God had previously spoken through the prophets. Christ, the *verbum abbreviatum* assimilates all of the previous prophetic “words” into himself. The *verbum abbreviatum* is the convergence of all the words scattered in history into one. Thus, Christ “concentrates” the entirety of the revelatory economy within himself.

The Incarnate Word's assumption of Old Testament realities to himself effects the fulfillment and unification of revelation. In *Scripture in the Tradition*, de Lubac explained, “The categories in which Jesus expresses himself are biblical categories; he

117 De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 74. Quoting René Latourelle,

118 The concentration of revelation in the concrete life of Christ is, what de Lubac, argues was the basis for patristic allegorization. Christian allegory, he says, relates what takes place in history to a unique historical event. De Lubac, “Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory,” 195. “Christian exegesis... is an act of faith in the great historical Act which has never and never will have an equal, for the Incarnation is unique.” De Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 147.

sublimates them and unifies them by making them converge on himself.”¹¹⁹ A passage from *History and Spirit* reads similarly:

Even in the very consciousness of Jesus—if we may cast a human glance even into this sanctuary—the Old Testament was like the matrix of the New or the instrument of its creation. That means much more than external preparation. The categories in which Jesus expresses himself about himself are the old biblical categories. He explodes them, or, if you prefer, he sublimates and unifies them, by making them converge on himself. But they are in some way necessary to him, and, on the other hand, in this renewed use, they do not become various abstract categories.¹²⁰

His personal action is the spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament, through which he internalizes the Old Testament, assuming it to himself, and uniting it all in his person.¹²¹

In this sense, he *is* the “spiritual interpretation” of Scripture.

The fulfillment of revelation also goes beyond and surpasses what came before:

The plan of God for humanity is composed of a series of privileged times (*kairoî*), which come to culminate in a unique Time (*Kairos*). Jesus himself says that he has come 'to fulfill.' But this accomplishment is a going beyond [*dépassement*]. This unification is at the same time a mutation: the new principle transcends what it unifies; 'the new covenant' takes the place of the ancient, henceforth 'Old.'

And as a result of fulfilling previous revelation, he goes beyond. He “surpasses them all [previous prophetic revelations] by fulfilling them.”¹²² By fulfilling prophecies, Christ brings about a unification of those prophecies in himself.¹²³

In sum, de Lubac construes Christ as the pinnacle of salvation and revelation.

Although he does not prioritize any single concept of the action of Christ, he describes its

119 De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 111, note 3.

120 De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 437.

121 The Messianic consciousness of Christ ties together the Old and New: “He is conscious of fulfilling and transfiguring at the same time, of fulfilling by transfiguring. He is carrying out the oracles of the prophets, but he knows that he is doing still more: he takes, in his supreme act, a wholly prophetic religion and reveals in its absolute essence, or rather completes its reality, the great divine Gesture, which up until then had been wholly symbolic...” Ibid., 465–66.

122 De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 113.

123 “In fulfilling the prophecies, Jesus Christ fulfills and unifies divine revelation in himself. In him are 'the fullness' and the summit.” Ibid., 110.

singularity as an assumption of previous revelation, a unification of revelation in his person, a transformation of it, and as something that surpasses it. We should note that though he does not articulate a theology of self-gift as does Balthasar, de Lubac sees the divine *kenosis* in Christ as the locus and concentration of both salvation and revelation. Christ's life, death, and resurrection, therefore, is the Event that unifies and transcends all previous revelatory events.

B. The Convergence of Signs in the Word

The entirety of this chapter aims at explicating the implications of the spiritual interpretation of Scripture for a theology of history. Specifically, it aims to show that the spiritual sense, for de Lubac, reflected a meaning given to history by a new and transcendent principle inserted into it. According to de Lubac, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is that principle. It “creates” the spiritual meaning of scripture, introducing a new reality at the heart of history. Better yet, Christ *is* the spiritual meaning. The Christ event is not “confirmative” of an already-existing spiritual meaning but is rather creative of that meaning.

1. Christ Objectively Re-Orients His Figures

Above, I noted de Lubac's desire to avoid subjective or mystical explanations of Christ's prefiguration in the Old Testament. In Origen's exegesis, de Lubac discovered the seeds for an historical and objective justification for “spiritual meaning.” The spiritual

meaning, insisted de Lubac, was at the depth of the Old Testament by virtue of a new principle:

This exegesis is aware of being developed by virtue of a creative, or more precisely a transfiguring, principle, but it does not posit this principle. It merely draws from this principle the infinite consequences, by using the tools which each age offers it. Christian exegesis believes in Jesus Christ, who bestows this meaning on the Scriptures. It believes in Jesus Christ, who has transformed all things and renewed all things. In him the ancient Scripture is “converted.”¹²⁴

Christ transfigures the scriptures, “bestows meaning” on the Scriptures, brings about a “transcendence,” brings all newness, and effects the bond between the Old and New Testament.

Christ does not merely effect a profound understanding of the spiritual depths of the Old Testament, as if the Old Testament contained those depths on its own. Instead, the entrance of Christ into history effects the meaning of the Old Testament events themselves:

Through this Christian event the Old Law has become spiritual. Which does not mean only that we can now, thanks to the light of Christ, finally see the spirit that was in this law; rather, it means that this very spirit is a creation, a radiation from the Christian event. This event alone makes, not so much our understanding, as, first of all, the things themselves pass from the 'obsolescence of the letter,' where we could have stagnated indefinitely, to those 'heights of spiritual newness' that transform the whole horizon. To tell the truth, Jesus Christ, therefore, does not come to *show* the profound meaning of the Scriptures like a teacher who has no part in the things he explains. He comes, actually, to *create* it, through an act of his omnipotence.¹²⁵

The Old Testament anticipates Christ *because* the transcendence of Christ affects that which precedes it. This creative act of omnipotence is “none other than [Christ's] death on the Cross, followed by his Resurrection.”¹²⁶ Christ, so to say, objectively (re)orients

124 De Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 147.

125 De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 310.

126 Ibid., 310.

previous realities, making them anticipations of himself. Since Christ himself is the absolute fullness of what God wishes to communicate, previous prophetic figures and types receive their “total fulfillment” in him.

Instead of entirely dismissing the Old Testament anticipation of the New Testament or justifying it by appeal to a prescient mystical knowledge, de Lubac sees it as the result of an interior relation between events brought about by Christ:

Is this to say that, outside of a kind of wholly implicit knowledge that we have just defined, no ray ever filtered, under the Old Law, of that light which was to shine in Jesus? Assuredly not. But these rays, like those of the dawn, were already from the coming Sun. We could just as well call them a shadow, as Origen did. They thus did not constitute a stage that was in itself independent from the stages that were to follow. The important fact in this order, the one that permits us to say that the Old Testament anticipates the New, was not a present spiritualization of the earlier history or institutions of Israel. It was not even absolutely the eschatological orientation of Israel's reflection on its great memories. It was the proclamation of a future spiritualization thanks to the insertion of a Principle that would be given from above, the proclamation of a total and definitive renewal.¹²⁷

De Lubac initially employs the metaphor of the Sun casting its light to describe the relationship between the figure and its reality. Sunlight at dawn is an image of a positive anticipation of something else. But then de Lubac adds the Pauline image of “shadow” to supplement the image of sunlight.¹²⁸ Unlike the ray of sunlight, the shadow is caused by the Sun but does not belong to the same category as the Sun.

Christ is the new principle which creates the anticipation in the Old Testament. We might say that the objective basis for the Old Testament's “anticipation” of the New

127 “Christ, in so far as transcendent and existing before all things, is anterior to his figures, yet as a historical being, coming in the flesh, he appears after them. Late in historic time, but prior in priority to all time, Christ appears to us preceded by the shadows and the figures which he himself had cast on Jewish history.” *Ibid.*, 466–67.

128 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 174. De Lubac sees a similar relationship of letter to spirit, type to antitype, shadow to body in Saint Paul. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 468.

Testament is the retroactive effect of Christ.¹²⁹ By assimilating Old Testament into himself, he *became* its spiritual meaning. As a result, the glory of the Christ event radiates backwards, casts its shadow backwards, causing the Old Testament to symbolize and anticipate him.

2. The Convergence of Signs in Christ

In *La Révélation divine*, the same fundamental precepts of salvation history—the unification of revelation in Christ and the retroactive causality of Christ on his figures—are at work in de Lubac's account of revelation. Revelation is mediated historically through outward realities. Christ perfects revelation through his self-manifestation in exterior signs, according to *Dei Verbum*, his “words and deeds” and his “signs and wonders.”¹³⁰ All of Christ's exterior actions are symbolic communications that one must penetrate to discover, at its depth, his self-manifestation.¹³¹

According to de Lubac, Christ constitutes the “concentration” of all signs. He constitutes the unification of all signs of God's transcendence and he radiates his glory through all those signs that he unifies:

Every revelation furnished by the Word made flesh is condensed in his personal

129 De Lubac's notion that Christ effects an ontological anticipation in the Old Testament is the basis for his affirmation of Origen's exemplarism. The historical exemplar will be important for de Lubac's understanding of the symbolic structure of reality insofar as it indicates that the universal depends on particular and that symbols are now directed to a particular historical realization.

130 Christ “perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth” (*Dei Verbum*, 4).

131 “In relationship with a general doctrine of symbolism, it explains also that the visible works of Christ are not comparable to a drawing, that one would only have to contemplate without searching further, but rather as the letters of a text, that it does not suffice to admire, even if it is good calligraphy, but which one must be forced to penetrate the meaning: after having seen, and praised, one must read, and understand.” De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 122.

presence, so it is for the signs of his mission: [Christ], “in his historical reality, comprised by his conduct, his words, his miracles, the accomplishment of prophecies, etc., constitutes a global “figure,” the great Sign that we have to perceive. In other words, to believe in the mission of Christ and of his message will be to perceive the convergence in him of all signs, a convergence that confers on him their total signification. But in reality, “the signs of revelation are not exterior to Christ.” They are Christ himself, in the radiation of his power, of his holiness, of his wisdom. In this radiation, we perceive his glory of the Son of the Father: we pass directly to reflect on the source. One must moreover add that the lone “figure” of Christ must be—perhaps—the sufficient sign, and more meaningful than any other, in order to believe in him.”¹³²

De Lubac is working with a subtle reflection on the Incarnation. By assuming, assimilating, or integrating all signs into himself, the Word unites sign and meaning, making himself the point of convergence of all signs.¹³³ As a result, those signs gain their properly revelatory value insofar as the glory of God radiates through them.

De Lubac's comments on *Dei Verbum* are suggestive of his understanding of apologetics. Faith does not result as a conclusion from certain signs or marks of revelation exterior to revelation itself. Rather, it results from penetrating those signs to their source, who is Christ. It results in seeing the glory of the Son radiating through all signs, indeed making them signs. The fundamental structure of figuration and fulfillment within de Lubac's theology of history parallels de Lubac's understanding of revelatory signs and symbols. Just as Christ brings about his anticipation within the Old Testament, he also radiates God's power, holiness, and wisdom through external signs.

In summary, de Lubac follows a Christian exegetical tradition of spiritual interpretation. The Old Testament is an anticipation of Christ, and Christ is the spiritual

¹³² Ibid., 124.

¹³³ “In the thought of the Council, the facts and signs of the Gospel, miraculous or not, do not have only an apologetical value. They have...a properly revelatory value. By them, the Word made flesh ‘fulfills revelation’ at the same time that he ‘confirms’ it. Himself, by all himself, is the great Sign, not only ‘confirmative’ but first and entirely ‘figurative.’ He is ‘the great efficacious sign, the universal Sacrament by which God enters into communion with us.’” Ibid., 125–6.

meaning of the Old Testament. The Old Testament does not foreshadow Christ on the level of the letter, but only through allegory. It is anticipatory because of the creative and transformative power of Christ. By assimilating Old Testament history into himself, causing those realities to “converge” on himself, Christ forms what de Lubac calls an ontological bond within history. As a result, his concrete human life becomes the unique Sign, the “exemplar,” through which all other signs must be understood. The historical actions of Christ transfigure all previous anticipations and radiate God's self-manifestation both historically and cosmically.

V. Conclusion

De Lubac's theology of history is arguably the organic center of his thought. His research on the history of exegesis traced the broad contours of his insights into history. First, I argued that de Lubac conceived patristic allegory and symbolism as allowing a depth-dimension to history rejected by Hellenism. Hellenistic and Platonic understandings of history did not permit the coincidence of events and ultimate meaning as did the patristic understanding of revelation. De Lubac's *ressourcement* of the patristic allegorical and symbolic traditions of exegesis was an anti-Platonic and anti-Hellenistic move.

Second, I indicated that de Lubac construed the “spiritual sense” as the depth of history and the fourfold sense of scripture as the exegetical epiphenomenon of a Christian understanding of history. This understanding construed an intimate interconnection

between historical events by viewing some of those events as symbols and preparations of other events fulfilling them.

Third, I argued that de Lubac's defense of Origen's allegorical interpretation centered on Origen's emphasis on the “newness” and “transcendence” that Christ brings. For de Lubac, allegory represents a principle transcendent to everything that came before. It is a principle of transformation, which explains the ontological relationship between figure and truth, or anticipation and fulfillment. While de Lubac did not use the term, I described the Christian event as the “historical exemplar.” Unlike Platonic exemplarism, for Origen, history finds its ultimate meaning within a concrete historical event—the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Fourth, I examined de Lubac's Christocentric understanding of revelation and salvation to find the rationale for this bond between realities in history. De Lubac especially notes the creative character of the Christ event, which bestows the “spiritual meaning” on the Old Testament, which creates the ontological bond between events, and which creates the relationships of anticipation and fulfillment. By assimilating and interiorizing the reality of the Old Testament, Christ unites in himself the Old Testament realities. Christ becomes “spiritual meaning” in person. The action of Christ has a retroactive effect on the Old Testament symbols and figures. As a consequence, Old Testament symbols are interiorly and ontologically related to Christ. In a similar manner, de Lubac saw the incarnate Word as the compendium of all signs of revelation, uniting all

signs in himself. As a result, they become signs in virtue of the radiation of Christ's glory through them.

As noted above, de Lubac did not write a discrete theology of history apart from eschatology, or a discrete theology of anticipation apart from fulfillment. The inner identity of the anticipation or figure is, ultimately Christ, and cannot be fully understood apart from the coming of Christ, its exemplar. Prefigurations do not anticipate Christ by way of an exterior relation. It is the entrance of Christ into history that brings about the relationship of figuration. It is the exemplar that orients everything else. De Lubac's construal of the relationship of anticipation and fulfillment in Christ becomes a pattern driving de Lubac's broader understanding of the eschatological *finality* of the created world. In sum, de Lubac's theology of history lays the ground for understanding his panoramic eschatology: the supernatural finality of nature, the finality of the church in the *totus Christus*, the finality of mysticism for its mystery, the theological finality of philosophy. The subsequent chapter will focus on the eschatological implications of de Lubac's theology of history.

CHAPTER THREE: ANAGOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY

As mentioned above, Henri de Lubac never developed a discrete eschatology. The array of themes traditional to eschatology—death, the resurrection of the body, judgment, heaven, hell, purgatory, the fulfillment of God's promises, the end of history, the final coming of Christ, the unity of the cosmos with God, the beatific vision—are not gathered in a single place in de Lubac's work or treated systematically. This is due, in part, to his tendency to view eschatology through corporate and communal lenses instead of prioritizing the fate of the individual soul. De Lubac's eschatology takes primarily the form of an ecclesiology that envisions the relationship of the present church to the future and celestial church. De Lubac's eschatology is distributed especially throughout his writings on the history of exegesis insofar as he treats anagogy, the last of the spiritual senses of Scripture.

In this chapter, I argue two interrelated theses regarding de Lubac's eschatology. First, the fundamental tensions in de Lubac's eschatology are best understood through the lens of “anagogy.” Second, de Lubac's narrative concerning early Christian understanding of anagogy and its subsequent fate colors his eschatology. His eschatological thought develops out of a retrieval of Origen's eschatology read against the medieval and modern fate of “anagogy.” My objective here is to articulate significant strands of de Lubac's narrative concerning the historical origin, evolution, and fate of the final sense of Scripture in Christian thought.

Two works, in particular—*History and Spirit* and *Exégèse médiévale*—contain

this narrative. De Lubac discovered in Origen of Alexandria the roots of a scriptural hermeneutic that effected a synthesis between Christian eschatology and spirituality. The basic shape of this synthesis, according to de Lubac, held until the twelfth century.¹ De Lubac proposed that in the twelfth century eschatology became detached from spirituality, to the detriment of both. Coincident with this development, a tradition of mysticism inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite effectively lost its foundation in the history of salvation while, at the same time, a counter-tradition, launched by Joachim of Fiore, emphasized history to the detriment of transcendence. In the first, “anagogy” became a “vertical” mystical ascent to “higher realities”; in the second, it became the “horizontal” expectation of a utopian future.

I caution that my summary of de Lubac's narrative, by necessity, surveys and simplifies both the argument of *History and Spirit* and of *Exégèse médiévale*, and the historical developments they examine.² *Exégèse médiévale* has a particularly broad scope. It treats anagogy in numerous contexts but nowhere provides a unified account. By focusing on the historical development of anagogy, I do not intend to negate other factors that contributed to a separation of eschatology and spirituality. Yet, for de Lubac, the spiritual interpretation of scripture (including anagogy) was both an epiphenomenon of a

1 Some authors have read *Exégèse médiévale* as if it merely catalogued a static hermeneutic, constituted by the fourfold sense of scripture, from the patristic period through the medieval. While de Lubac certainly emphasized a continuity within a long exegetical tradition, he also indicates the points of rupture. He notes particularly important developments that will eventually engender new forms of theology.

2 A limitation of my survey, which is also a limitation of de Lubac's work, is that it takes the perspective of the history of ideas without a corresponding examination of the social and historical context. A more robust narrative of the history of the splintering of mysticism and eschatology would require an appeal to shifts in religious practices, textual practices, the social place of the mystic subject, and practices of theological and spiritual formation.

broad Christian mentality and an exegetical practice that contributed to that mentality. As such, spiritual interpretation remains important for understanding the nexus of ideas and practices that constituted the developing Christian eschatological world view.

I. Anagogy and Anagogies

In *Exégèse médiévale*, de Lubac explained that the term anagogy was borrowed from Greek paganism but was given a new meaning within a Christian context. The Latin term *anagogia* is a transiteration of the Greek *anagōgē*, meaning “ascent.” Its ending *ia* followed the pattern of *historia*, *allegoria*, and *tropologia*. As de Lubac noted, some authors explained the etymology of *anagogia* as the confluence of *ana* (upward) and *agōgē* (leading), Greek words equivalent to the Latin *sursumductio*.³ Anagogy became the sense “which leads the thought of the exegete 'upwards.’”⁴

De Lubac does not identify the precise origin of anagogy's association with the meanings of scripture. He noted that in the first few centuries of Christianity, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Didymus the Blind, and Jerome employed anagogy as “one of the names of the spiritual sense in general.”⁵ For these authors anagogy had not yet acquired the specialized meaning that we find in Pseudo-Dionysius, that of intellectual contemplation. However, de Lubac suggests that in Cassian, anagogy became more specialized and that Cassian's anagogy was a step toward that of Pseudo-Dionysius. De

3 Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E. M. Macierowski, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 179–80. Originally published as *Exégèse médiévale, 2: Les quatre sense de l'Écriture* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959)

4 Ibid., 2:180.

5 Ibid.

Lubac's central point in this part of *Exégèse médiévale* is that the early tradition had not yet made anagogy a specialized term. It united several elements which would later be distinguished and separated. Using a series of quotations from Aelred of Rievaulx, Venerable Bede, Robert of Melun, John Cassian, and Augustine, de Lubac compiled definitions of anagogy:

Anagogy is first off ... “a sense of the things above.” It leads the mind's consideration “from things visible to those invisible,” or from things below “to things above,” i.e. to “the divine things.” It is this sort of allegory “which lifts the understanding of the mind through visible things to the invisible,” or “through which speech is borne over to the invisible things to come.” More concretely, this will be the sense that lets one see in the realities of the earthly Jerusalem those of the heavenly Jerusalem: “for a certain part of the earthly city has been made an image of the heavenly city.” Although these things no longer belong to time, nevertheless, for us who trudge and toil through time, they are things yet to come, objects of desire and of hope.⁶

Anagogy is a spiritual movement, the movement of the mind or spirit from the visible to the invisible; it is a manner of seeing *through* visible and present realities to those of heaven. But it is also associated with the virtue of hope because these heavenly realities are future for us.

In a section of *Exégèse médiévale* entitled “A Twofold Anagogy,” de Lubac described two general perspectives by which anagogy would be understood by exegetes. There are two anagogies: “the one which fulfills the doctrinal formulation of the fourfold sense; the other, which fulfills the spiritual formulation of the threefold sense.”⁷ Both anagogies represent the end-point of the exegetical enterprise. De Lubac's description of “two anagogies” is somewhat ambiguous. First of all, the fourfold sense (history, allegory, tropology, *anagogy*), he claimed, constituted the *doctrinal formulation* because

⁶ Ibid., 2:180–1.

⁷ Ibid., 2:181.

the placement of allegory after history gives a Christological and ecclesial tone.⁸

However, it is unclear whether the “spiritual formulation of the threefold sense” refers to the same formulation in three parts (that is, history, allegory, anagogy) or to the Philonic variant (history, tropology, allegory/anagogy). The latter, de Lubac argued, took on non-Christian meanings and was associated with “a kind of moral anatomy and physiology.”⁹ Second, de Lubac did not specify whether these two anagogies constitute divergent exegetical traditions within early Christianity. In its early stage of development, the last spiritual sense of scripture possessed elements of *both* anagogies. It appears that de Lubac's elaboration of two anagogies looks forward to later developments in which these differing “anagogies” would become distinguished and separated. This separation, according to de Lubac, would signal and contribute to a division of disciplines within theology.

For de Lubac, these two anagogies are complementary. “The standpoint of the first anagogy is objective and doctrinal; that of the second pertains to subjective realization; in other words, the one is defined by its object, and the other by the manner of apprehending it.”¹⁰ He explains that “the first '*declares* the sacraments of the future age,' or 'disputes about the life to come,' whereas the second leads 'to *beholding* the mysteries of the age to come,' 'to *contemplating* the heavenly mysteries.’”¹¹

8 See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 146–7. Originally published as *Exégèse médiévale, 1: Les quatre sense de l'Écriture* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959)

9 Ibid., 1:146–7.

10 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:181.

11 Ibid., 2:181. Matthew Gerlach perceptively describes anagogy as containing a double perspective: (a) the things above and transcendent and (b) that which is not yet. Matthew T. Gerlach, “Lex Orandi, Lex Legendi: A Correlation of the Roman Canon and the Fourfold Sense of Scripture” (Ph.D. diss.,

We over-emphasize the opposition; but, as we shall see, it is justified. Let us say that the first of the two anagogies teaches that part of Christian dogmatics called “eschatology”—which itself is further subdivided into two parts, according as the ultimate end of each person or that of the universe as a whole is concerned. As to the second anagogy, it introduces us here and now into the mystic life; at the terminus of its movement, it fulfills that “theology” which is made etymologically the equivalent of “theoria” and which is the contemplation of God. In modern terms, the one is speculative; the other, contemplative.¹²

The principal distinction is between the objective and the subjective, between the transcendent and heavenly reality and the contemplation of that reality.

According to de Lubac, the first, the doctrinal and objective anagogy, was a Christian “modification” of a thoroughly eschatological Jewish prophetic tradition. Leading up to the time of Jesus, Jewish prophecy conceived the fulfillment of God's promises, brought about by the messiah, as a heavenly dwelling and a heavenly temple. The coming of the messiah would closely coincide with the end of time.¹³ When Christ came, however, time did not come to an end. The Christian expectation of an imminent end of the world was slowly transformed in the consciousness that Christians now live in the *interim*: “A gap opened up between the first and the last coming. In that gap the Church would unfold its existence for an indeterminate period.”¹⁴ Christ introduced a division in time that would require a reconception of the present with regard to the future: “It would seem necessary, then, to conceive the New Testament as truth in respect to the

Marquette University, 2011), 339–40. This double perspective, I will argue, is at the center of de Lubac's eschatological thinking. To be precise, however, de Lubac's quotation from Cassiodorus, Bede, Origen, and Aimon, indicates that both anagogies include a future-oriented element: “future age,” “life to come,” “age to come.” Here, the primary distinction is between the objective (disputes, declares) and the subjective (beholds, contemplates).

12 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:181.

13 Ibid., 2:182.

14 Ibid.

Old, but as a mere 'image' with respect to the ultimate reality still to come.”¹⁵ The present time is a “pledge” and “exemplar” of what is to come; the church is a “forerunner” of the “age to come.”

From the very beginnings, a tension marked the shape of Christian eschatological hope. Christ constituted the salvation offered by God, and the Christian now possesses it. However, time has not yet come to an end, and this salvation is not yet possessed in its fullest intensity and luminosity:

Notwithstanding the gap opened by the first coming and the still unchanged conditions of our knowledge, notwithstanding the sorely felt distance between the *nunc* [“now”] of the earth and the *tunc* [“then”] of eternity, it is in fact the very reality of salvation which henceforth is inserted into history and immediately offered to us. By faith, the believer...can paradoxically say “night is illuminated as day.” He already holds “the substance of the things that he hopes for”; he has already, albeit still secretly, penetrated into the kingdom. The primitive Christian community ... from the first instant ... had “an intense awareness of being at once the Israel of God and the heavenly kingdom anticipated on earth.”¹⁶

The doctrinal formulation of anagogy is founded on an inner identity between the present state and the future state, the church militant and the church triumphant. We could call this a sacramental relationship, in which the present church is an effective sign of the church to come.

The second anagogy is subjective, completing “the movement of mystical tropology.”¹⁷ De Lubac describes no longer the object of contemplation, but the act. It is contemplative rather than speculative. By Gregory the Great, anagogy is associated with

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2:183.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2:188. There is some ambiguity in de Lubac's account. De Lubac earlier spoke of this second anagogy as that which fulfills the “spiritual formulation of the threefold sense” (i.e. history, allegory, *anagogy*) Ibid., 2:181. However, he later calls it the completion of the movement of mystical tropology enumerated within the fourfold sense (i.e. history, allegory, tropology, *anagogy*.) Ibid., 2:188.

the “*volatus*: flight, impulse, no longer intellectual representation but spiritual movement, anagogy.”¹⁸ For Richard and Hugo of Saint Victor, anagogy is a “real ascent of the soul.”¹⁹ Subjective anagogy is not an intellectual method, but a spiritual flight of the mystic or poet, who not only speculates about the heavenly mysteries but is united with them. De Lubac explains that “the fully concrete anagogy, total anagogy, is reserved for the 'fatherland.' Mystical contemplation is not yet vision. So however high anagogy leads, it always leaves something to look for and always with greater fervor, because it still doesn't uncover the Face of God.”²⁰ For Origen as for Gregory of Nyssa, the anagogical movement of the soul is not arrested even in heaven, since God always remains a mystery and the human being must always seek a deeper realization of the mystery.

De Lubac speaks of a unity within anagogy of the objective and subjective, and the doctrinal and mystical dimensions:

Anagogy realizes the perfection of both allegory and of tropology, achieving their synthesis. It is neither “objective” like the first nor “subjective” like the second. Above and beyond this division, it realizes their unity. It integrates the whole and final meaning. It sees, in eternity, the fusion of the mystery and the mystic. In other words, the eschatological reality attained by anagogy is the eternal reality within which every other has its consummation.²¹

Ideally, these different dimensions are united within anagogy. De Lubac's description of the two anagogies in *Exégèse médiévale* anticipates the late medieval period, during which anagogy would no longer be strictly associated with biblical exegesis. The objective anagogy will develop into a theological discipline concerning the last things and the end of time, while the subjective anagogy will develop into a distinct discipline of

18 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:193.

19 Ibid., 2:190.

20 Ibid., 2:194.

21 Ibid., 2:184.

mysticism or spirituality. The anagogical meaning of scripture in Origen of Alexandria is pivotal to de Lubac's story, for Origen's biblical exegesis united both mysticism (the subjective anagogy) and eschatology (the objective anagogy) into a single whole. The period antecedent to this division is therefore critical to de Lubac's narrative.

II. *Anagogia* in Origen

In eschatology as in the theology of history, Origen is a significant figure in de Lubac's historical interpretation and theological construction. De Lubac identified Origen as the source of both the threefold and the fourfold senses of scripture, which governed the shape of Christian theology for a millennium.²² With some caveats, Origen became the norm against which de Lubac adjudicated the subsequent exegetical tradition. A thorough account of de Lubac's interpretation of Origen is beyond the scope of this chapter.²³ Instead, I wish only to highlight key elements that de Lubac drew from Origen for his understanding of anagogy.

Two characteristics of Origen's anagogy reappear in *Exégèse médiévale* as the cardinal attributes of what de Lubac advances as the normative eschatological tradition. First, congruent with the exposition above, Origen's anagogy is both objective and subjective. Second, Origen's anagogy envisions the heavenly realities as also future, the object of hope.

²² *Exégèse médiévale*, vol. 1 argues that Origen is the primary patristic source for what would be established as the fourfold sense of scripture.

²³ For an overview of de Lubac's reading of Origen see Michel Fédou, "Henri de Lubac, lecteur d'Origène: l'hospitalité de la théologie et sa source mystique," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 77, no. 2 (April 2003): 133–46.

A. Objective and Subjective Aspects of “Spiritual Understanding”

Exégèse médiévale describes two aspects of anagogy, indicative of the objective realities that constitute the ultimate things and as a subjective, mystical participation in those things. In *History and Spirit*, the objective and subjective aspects belong to the “spiritual sense” as a whole. In other words, the objective and subjective aspects that de Lubac ascribes to *anagogy* are promulgated in Origen as characteristics of “spiritual understanding” generally, but inclusive of *anagogy*.²⁴

De Lubac explains, “the spiritual sense, understood as the figurative or mystical sense, is the sense that, objectively, ends in the realities of the spiritual life and that at the same time, subjectively, can be given only as the fruit of a spiritual life...the Christian mystery, in fact, is not to be contemplated with curiosity as a pure object of science; rather it must be interiorized and lived. It finds its fullness in coming to completion in souls.”²⁵ The object of the spiritual understanding is Christian mystery. Subjectively, Christians know this mystery by entering into the mystery and living the mystery: “The whole process of spiritual understanding is identical, in principle, to the process of conversion. It is its luminous aspect. 'Intellectus spiritualis credentem salvum facit' (The spiritual understanding saves the believer).”²⁶ In Origen, de Lubac argues, the objective

24 De Lubac indicated that Origen, as well as much of patristic thought, lacked rigid systematization of terminology. He associates anagogy with the spiritual sense as a whole: “For some then, the spiritual sense is entirely anagogy: 'mystic anagogy,' Origen used to say, or again: 'the allegories according to anagogy,' or simply: 'according to anagogy.’” De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:35.

25 Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 466. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et esprit : l'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène*, Théologie 16 (Paris: Aubier, 1950).

26 *History and Spirit*, 466, quoting Augustine. “There is a reciprocal causality between that conversion to Christ and the understanding of the Scriptures” Ibid., 467.

content attained through spiritual understanding, at its base, is the same as the process of conversion to it.

In de Lubac's interpretation, Origen's spiritual understanding consists of an unending process of assimilating oneself to God's mystery:

The sacred text is truly understood, insofar as it is given us to understand it, only in a perpetual effort of transcendence, in a "flight," in a never-completed movement of *anagogy*. This anagogical movement is also an interiorizing movement. And in this respect, too, it is without end. For the understanding of Scripture is at the same time the vital assimilation of its mystery. It does not consist in ideas, but it communicates the very reality of the One whose riches are unfathomable. It can grow indefinitely, because it expands to the nature of the mind's capacity to receive it.²⁷

The understanding of scripture participates in both prayer and conversion. The ultimate meaning of scripture is both objective and subjective because the Christian's appropriation and interiorization of the mystery is a component of that ultimate mystery itself. Another way to explain it is that the anagogical meaning consists of the transcendent realities signified in the Scriptures, but these transcendent realities include the believer herself in union with the transcendent: "The Word of God, a living and efficacious word, reaches its real fulfillment and its full meaning only by the transformation that it works in one who receives it."²⁸

The anagogical meaning of scripture is not an entirely objectified and discrete intellectual content. As the personal reception and conversion to a personal God, the anagogical movement of the soul more closely approximates what Thomas Aquinas calls the *intellectus* (the simple and intuitive intellectual gaze) rather than the *ratio* (the

²⁷ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 382.

²⁸ Ibid., 447.

discursive reason). “It is a matter of attaining, with 'the eyes of the soul' an '*intellectus simplicior*.’”²⁹

According to de Lubac, Origen identifies spiritual understanding with his most controversial teaching, the notion of the final restoration of all things (*apocatastasis*). De Lubac underplayed the controversial aspects of Origen's teaching on the *apocatastasis*, namely the conversion of all created intellectual beings to God, including the damned and the devil, and the links between *apocatastasis* and Neoplatonic and Stoic cosmology. Spiritual understanding, de Lubac states, “is itself this 'apocatastasis' in which God does not appear as a distant third part with whom we could discourse or as the object of an impersonal contemplation; rather he presents himself to the soul in view of a dialogue of love.”³⁰ *Apocatastasis* is, for Origen, a synonym for the conversion to God and the conversion of the church to Christ. The final stage of the movement of spiritual understanding is then, ultimately, both a transformative conversion and a definitive ecclesial-cosmic fulfillment.

As a result, the coextensive growth of spiritual understanding and conversion is not an individualistic process. The spiritual interpretation of scriptures is the end and means of an ongoing spiritual dialectic of which the church as a whole is the subject.

It is a unique movement, which, beginning with initial incredulity, is raised by faith to the summits of a spiritual life whose end is not here on earth. Its unfurling is coextensive with the gift of the Spirit, with the progress of charity. The whole Christian experience, with its various phases, is thus contained in it in principle. The newness of the understanding is correlative with the “newness of life.” To pass on to the spiritual

29 Ibid., 383.

30 Ibid., 384.

understanding is thus to pass on to the “new man,” who never ceases to be renewed *de claritate in claritatem* (from glory to glory).³¹

The dialectic of spiritual understanding is the same as the process of conversion and the growth of charity. De Lubac suggests that spiritual understanding is coextensive with the historical dialectic, the growth of the church as a spiritual organism and its passage on to the “new man.” Therefore, anagogy, as another name for spiritual understanding, designates the process, and the final phase of the process, of conversion whereby the church as a whole is transformed by charity and unified with Christ.

B. Heavenly and Future Aspects of Origen's Anagogy

Closely related to the unity of objective and subjective anagogy, the unity between transcendent and future aspects of anagogy in Origen is also emphasized by de Lubac. The object of anagogy is both a heavenly reality and a future realization. The anagogical ascent of the soul is likewise the progress through history towards an ultimate fulfillment at the end of time or beyond time.

The structure of Origen's theology of history illuminates the meaning of anagogy as heavenly and future. Origen's theology of history consists of a threefold structure: the Old Testament, the New Testament, and heaven; or Israel, the Church, the Assembly of the Kingdom. The historical division reflects a tripartite and progressive symbolic structure: “shadow,” “image,” “truth.”³² The Old Testament contains symbolic prefigurations of the New Testament realities. But similarly, the New Testament symbolizes a future, final

31 Ibid., 448.

32 Ibid., 250.

fulfillment. Thus, the Old Testament is a mere shadow of the coming truth; the New Testament is its image. The Old Testament is oriented toward its fulfillment in the New. But the New Testament is oriented to a future fulfillment as well: “It is the whole New Testament, understood as the complete progress of the Christian economy up to the last day, that also appears to him to be oriented toward a more profound, absolutely and solely definite reality; a reality that has the duty to make known by preparing for it, serving thus as intermediary between the Old Law and the 'eternal gospel.’”³³ Thus, for Origen, the New Testament itself contains symbolic prefigurations of a promised fulfillment.

The prominent Origenian theme—the “eternal gospel”—illuminates the structure of his tripartite theology of history. For Origen, “the eternal gospel” (Revelation 14:6) reveals the mysteries of which Christ's actions and words were the figure. Christ announces the realities of the kingdom, not yet fully manifest. “Thus, just as each object from the Old Testament was a sign announcing the New, so each object of the New is in turn a sign whose reality is found 'in the ages to come.’”³⁴ As the Book of Revelation presents itself as a vision into a heavenly drama, it announces the eternal gospel of which the words of Revelation are a sign. So just as the adherents to God's law awaited its fulfillment, the Christian awaits a further, subsequent fulfillment of the Gospel in the future age.

Origen's formulation could be interpreted to suggest that the Gospel given by

³³ Ibid., 248.

³⁴ Ibid.

Christ and transmitted by the apostles must be superseded by another, just as the Gospel supersedes the Law. De Lubac addressed this difficulty, contrasting Origen's interpretation of the eternal gospel with that of Joachim of Fiore: "There is not really anything more in common between Origen and Joachim of Fiore than this name, eternal gospel—but this is a biblical title drawn from the Apocalypse—and the idea that this eternal gospel consists in the thorough spiritual interpretation of the Gospel—but they completely disagree on the nature and time of this interpretation." First of all, the "time" of the eternal gospel is different: Joachim awaits the eternal Gospel and a future spiritual society "in time" while Origen's eternal Gospel is no longer in time.³⁵ Origen's "eternal gospel is the antithesis and anticipated antidote of that of the Calabrian monk. It is no less opposed to that arbitrary and unhealthy problem which, ever since the time of Montanus has so often reappeared in the history of the Church. In brief, it is completely eschatological."³⁶ In other words, the object of the eternal gospel transcended time for Origen, but was temporal for Joachim.

Second, the nature of the eternal gospel is different as well. Origen's "eternal Gospel" shares an identity with the Gospel. A tripartite theology of history—Old Testament / Gospel / Eternal Gospel—frames Origen's use of the phrase "eternal Gospel." However, de Lubac added, "this trichotomy tends to be resolved into a dichotomy."³⁷ Origen's "eternal gospel remains in close relation to the Gospel that was proclaimed to us.

³⁵ Ibid., 252.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 253. Thus, the trichotomy Old Testament / Gospel / Eternal Gospel is reduced to the dichotomy Old Testament / Gospel → Eternal Gospel (or shadow / image → truth).

It constitutes another state of it, not something added to it.”³⁸ The eternal Gospel is the future state of the present Gospel, at which point the mysteries revealed in figures will be unveiled in truth.

Thus, de Lubac explains that the historical realities that constitute the Gospel have a mediatory role. In a sense, they existed only to pass into their fulfillment. In other words, the realities recounted in the Gospel have solely the function of drawing us into the Gospel in its final state:

Linked to the mystery of the Incarnation of the Logos, history, if it is in fact mediatory, must not hold us indiscriminately. Its whole role, on the contrary, is to *pass on*. History, in any case, is essentially what passes on. Thus the events recounted in the Bible ... all exhausted, so to speak, their historical role at the same time as their factual reality, so as no longer to survive today except as signs and mysteries. Thus, in its entirety, up to its final event, history is a preparation for something else. To deny that is to deny it. The truth to which it introduces us is no longer [of] the order of history.³⁹

The Gospel, both historical and spiritual, is a preparation for and figure of its future state, which is completely spiritual.

The relationship between the Gospel and the eternal Gospel (or image and truth, or New Testament and eternity) in Origen's theology of history reflects the paradox of Christian eschatology. On the one hand, the Gospel and eternal Gospel share a profound identity, between the present economy of salvation and its final fulfillment. The veil must only be removed from our eyes for us to experience the splendor of God's salvation given to us now. On the other hand, the figures of the present order will pass away, existing only to transfer us to eternity. We exist in a time of waiting.⁴⁰

38 Ibid., 252.

39 Ibid., 322–23.

40 De Lubac suggested that this tension is present in Origen, who in different places emphasizes the Old Testament as a symbol for eternity, the New Testament identified with its celestial fulfillment, or the eternal as something yet awaited “whether the mediating term is omitted, the spirit being elevated from

The structure of history in Origen situates anagogy within the exegetical-spiritual process. Allegory draws out the figural meaning of the Old Testament “history,” which meaning is the New Testament. However, it is not sufficient to see in the Old Testament the figures of the New.

In its turn then, in order to be understood as it must be, in its newness, which is to say, in its spirit, in order to merit its name as New Testament, the content of this second Scripture must give way to a perpetual movement of transcendence. The spirit is discovered only through *anagogy*: τὴν ἐπὶ τὰ πνευματικὰ ἄπταιστον ἀναγωγή (the uninterrupted anagogical ascent to spiritual realities). We must consequently always ἀνάγειν τὴν ἱστορίαν (ascend above the history).⁴¹

Anagogy completes the exegetical procedure in a movement from the historical figures of the New Testament to the transcendent realities that they figure.⁴²

It is critical that the object of Origen's anagogy is understood as being both heavenly and future. Anagogy treats the *mysteria futura saeculi*, “mysteries of the age to come.”⁴³ The “things above” are also the “last things.” De Lubac explains: “anagogy” is no more independent of ‘eschatology’ for him than for Saint Paul or Saint John. These ‘heavenly things’ toward which he has us raise our eyes are for him, future realities in

an earthly bond of Israel to ‘supra-celestial places,’ from the sacrifices of Israel to the Sacrifice that is consummated in the Temple on high—or whether the last two terms are fused together into one by the awareness of their profound identity, since it is a matter of the same Priest, the same Sacrifice, the same Victim, of the same Master of Truth whose ‘words do not pass away’—or whether, finally, the third term is less expressed than intended, through a movement of ‘transcendence’ or ‘anagogy’ that is not completed, for ‘insofar as the Son has not returned in his glory,’ the depth of his mysteries cannot be explored.” Ibid., 253.

41 Ibid., 323.

42 For de Lubac, “anagogy” is a synonym for transcendence. Transcendence is a particularly modern term, imported into the Catholic vocabulary with the help of the Roman Catholic Modernists. De Lubac's use of the term reflects his dependence upon Blondel and his familiarity with the Modernists.

43 De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 478. See also *ibid.*, 326–28, 422–3; Henri de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 52. *Scripture in the Tradition* was originally published as *L'Écriture dans la tradition* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1966).

relation to the signs of them contained in the Bible. They form this 'intelligible world' that can be seen only by pure hearts. They are the 'mysteries of the age to come.'⁴⁴

Even if, for Origen, anagogy is a movement beyond history, de Lubac claims that the realities of which it speaks are to be fulfilled in the future. In essence, the anagogical is the future orientation of the present, and thus remains an object of hope rather than something already complete.

Significantly, by emphasizing that anagogy concerns the “mysteries of the age to come,” de Lubac also insisted that the age to come is always mediated. Origen conceives the anagogical meaning of scripture to be mediated by the concrete events of the New Testament:

The anagogical sense, just as much as the tropological or moral sense, is dependent on the allegorical or mystical sense. It is also an eschatological sense. The exemplarism has thus been reversed. If it is thus true that in the final analysis “Origen seeks in the historical events of the Old Testament the image of transcendent realities,” this is not without the mediation of the things, both historical and spiritual, that constitute the New Testament.⁴⁵

The ascent to the eschatological is a passage *through* the historical events narrated by the New Testament. In similar terms, the New Testament history is a sacrament of eternity. The future-orientation of anagogy ensures the essential role of the sacramental-historical economy as a mediation of eternity.

In summary, Origen's anagogy was at the same time heavenly and future, objective and subjective. The temporal gospel shares an identity with the eternal Gospel, uniting the present economy of salvation with its final fulfillment. At the same time, for

44 De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 327.

45 Ibid., 328.

Origen, the history narrated by the temporal Gospel exists as a figure of the eternal, and will pass away. Because of the continuity between the two, the temporal Gospel mediates the eternal, existing as the sacrament of that final fulfillment. For Origen, anagogical ascent to the transcendent and celestial requires the mediation of the present and is a progress to a future not yet achieved. Anagogy is, for Origen, both subjective and objective because the objective historical dialectic of the church, its earthly pilgrimage toward its eternal destination, is also a dialectic of interior conversion and of mystical ascent.

III. The Specialization of the Spiritual Senses

Medieval Exegesis narrated a development of what de Lubac considered a core hermeneutical tradition from the patristic period to the early modern period. De Lubac suggested that this core tradition remained intact through the medieval period, but that developments within patristic and medieval thought obscured the logic of the hermeneutic of the fourfold and threefold senses. Yet the “specialization” of the senses of scripture is equally significant, especially for understanding the development of anagogy.

In what follows, I will examine how, according to de Lubac, patristic and early medieval shifts in the meaning of the spiritual senses contributed to a specialization of anagogy. First, I examine the process whereby the mystical meaning of the scriptures, originally understood as the spiritual meaning of history, becomes associated with more narrow mystical experiences. I treat this process under two headings: (a) the fate of

allegory; (b) the fate of tropology. Second, I then indicate how these evolutions affected the Victorine School and Scholasticism, both of which were important to anagogy.

A. The Specialization of Mysticism

De Lubac observed a process whereby there was a gradual shift in association of the “mystical” meaning of Scripture from the allegorical, to the tropological, and finally to the anagogical. This shift in association points to a gradual shift in meaning of “mystery.” It evolves from a Pauline sense of the “plan of God” that is unfolded in history and beyond to a more static meaning referring to those things above. In other words, a Pauline meaning of mysticism, in which mysticism was intimately connected with the “mystery” of the economy of salvation, underwent a process of narrowing, de-historicizing the “mystical meaning” of scripture.

1. The Separation of Doctrine from Mysticism (The Fate of Allegory)

Within early Christianity, spiritual interpretation functioned as both a spirituality and an apologetic, evolving as a response to both paganism and Judaism. Paul used it to defend Christianity against the Jewish rejection of the New Testament. The Gnostics, however, claimed to possess a deeper, spiritual meaning that would supersede all biblical revelation. Origen, “saved the unity of biblical revelation” by claiming the New Testament was the deeper spiritual meaning of the Old Testament.⁴⁶ He defended a

⁴⁶ Ibid., 59.

spiritual interpretation “through an explanation taken from Scriptures, for the needs of the spiritual life they [the heretics] claimed to satisfy.”⁴⁷ Within Origenian thought, “apologetics continued in spirituality, and the doctrine of the 'spiritual sense' saw its field of application grow indefinitely.”⁴⁸

As a result, de Lubac claimed, patristic thought associated the mystical meaning of scripture with allegory in particular: “the mystical understanding of Scripture counted among the essential components of theology; to be more precise, particularly of that part of theology which, at the time of the Fathers, was called the 'economy.' From that time forward, the so-called mystical or allegorical sense was always considered to be the doctrinal sense par excellence, the one that sets forth the mysteries relating to Christ and the Church.”⁴⁹ Thus, the “allegorical” sense and the “mystical” sense designated the same reality. The allegorical sense was also the doctrinal (theological) sense because allegory interpreted the “mystery” present within the historical meaning of Scripture, which mystery *is* Christ and his fulfillment of the Old Testament.

However, de Lubac claimed, a specialization of allegory evolved in two ways. First, during the early Middle Ages, de Lubac claims, a change in context for spiritual interpretation occurred. The apologetic context for the spiritual sense was lost, in part, due to the loss of a constant contact with a living tradition of paganism, which until the medieval period was alive in the Christian consciousness. The idea that there was a fundamental difference between Christian and pagan allegory was no longer an issue.

47 Ibid., 60.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 474.

Christian allegory had won out. As a result, there was not much interest in the apologetic criticism of pagan allegory as non-historical or the corollary defense of Christian allegory as faithful to history. More importantly, the key to patristic allegory—that the New Testament is the spiritual depth of the Old Testament—was no longer as critical to the medieval practitioners of allegory. Thus, during the Middle Ages, the connection between the exegetical procedure of allegorization and the progressive economy of salvation was obscured.

Second, “mystical” meaning was gradually detached from the doctrinal meaning of scripture. Allegory in Origen was simultaneously doctrinal and spiritual because the interpreter of scripture examines the words for their depth, their spiritual meaning. This spiritual meaning *is* doctrine.

As doctrine appeared more settled even in its least details, moreover, the sense relating to the spiritual life thus acquired a kind of independence. They crossed through the obscure layer of “allegories” more rapidly in order to penetrate the “secret delights” of which they were the promise. Mystical exegesis was no longer of great help for reflection on the mystery: from this point of view, its active role was past; but it remained a marvelous springboard for the inner impulse. The spiritual sense of Scripture became particularly the sense of the contemplative.⁵⁰

After the great doctrinal debates of the patristic period and the ecumenical councils, the fundamental doctrine of the faith appeared more secure. The practice of searching the depths of Scripture was not as essentially tied to doctrinal understanding. As a result, spiritual interpretation continued but became associated with more contemplative practices and took on a more subjective and interior flavor.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

2. The Separation of Spirituality from Exegesis (The Fate of Tropology)

Tropology, the moral sense of Scripture, denotes the personal implications of the biblical story for the believer. It “is not entirely a 'doctrine of interior illumination.' It is the doctrine of the interiorization of the biblical datum: its history and its mystery. Neither this history nor this mystery is denied or forsaken, as it would at least be possible to believe among those who speak of a birth of the *Word* only within the contemplative soul.”⁵¹ Although tropology is an “interiorization” of the mystery, it is not individualistic: it implicates a reciprocal relationship between individual spirituality and the entire life of the church.⁵² Tropology is the dramatic interiorization of the mystery of Christ and its extension to the individual and the church as a whole. Connected to the fate of allegory, tropology also underwent an evolution that would separate spirituality from the doctrinal (that is, allegorical) meaning of scripture.

Monastic exegesis especially contributed to a specialization of tropology. Although monasticism made salubrious contributions to a profound Christian awareness of the meaning of the scriptures for the individual, it also generated excesses. Christian monasticism centered itself on *lectio divina*, the reading of and meditation on the biblical word. It extended patristic mystical tropology, applying it to a particular mode of religious life. A hallmark of monastic culture—the distinction between the laity and the monks, between actives and contemplatives, in sum, between degrees of being Christian

⁵¹ De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:139.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2:136.

—affected its biblical interpretation.⁵³ Texts traditionally interpreted as referring to the church as a whole were transposed to the monastery.⁵⁴ The city of Jerusalem, commonly interpreted as representing the church, becomes a symbol for the Abbey of Citeaux. On the one hand, these transpositions from church to monastery manifested a creative application of traditional themes; on the other, they contributed to a spiritual elitism.⁵⁵

The association of tropology with the intense “delight” of contemplation exemplified a specialization. The Word of God contains a spiritual sweetness underneath its letter. The delight of mystical contemplation would be interpreted as the particular prerogative of the monks and directed toward individual experience.⁵⁶ While de Lubac claimed the vast majority of monks did not succumb to elitism, he believed that monasticism betrayed the tendency to focus on the experience of the monk as a more intense form of “spiritual nourishment.”⁵⁷

Monastic practices were in continuity with a wide-ranging tendency in medieval theology which led tropology to be placed in the service of an increasingly specialized “spirituality.”

53 As an example of the spirit that animated monasticism, de Lubac described its idea of “conversion.” Conversion describes a new orientation to Christ. To convert is to renounce the world for Christ. In the monastic culture, “A 'convert' is no longer a man that has come from error to the truth, from paganism or Judaism to the Gospel: it is the one who renounces the 'world' for the 'cloister.' The day of his entry into religion is the day of his 'conversion.’” Ibid., 2:145.

54 Ibid., 2:146.

55 Ibid., 2:150.

56 See the section of *Medieval Exegesis 2* entitled *Doctor mellifluus* on the “sweetness” of Scripture. The sweetness of honey is extracted from the comb as the spiritual understanding is extracted from the letter. Originally applied to the spiritual understanding as a whole, in the twelfth century it was applied by the Cistercians to the interiorization of the mystery in the soul. It indicated the need not only to know the mystery in an intellectual sense, but to understand by “experiencing” or “tasting” the mystery. Ibid., 2:174. Outside of the Cistercian order, this theme was transferred from the spiritual sense in general to tropology in particular.

57 Ibid., 2:150.

A trend is taking shape toward the beginning of the twelfth century, which tends more and more to put usefulness—and charm—on the side of tropology. With the organization of the ecclesiastical studies and the differentiation of the disciplines, allegory became more theoretical, more impersonal, in a certain way drier, and tropology, on the contrary, more practical, looking more to regulate external activity than to nourish the interior life. In our present categories, we would say that the first becomes the object of theological speculation, whilst the second tends to monopolize preaching.⁵⁸

Developments within monastic exegesis contributed to the specialization of both the allegorical and tropological senses. Allegory would become associated with a more objective and technical theoretical discipline of theology, while tropology was employed for interior edification. De Lubac called the shift in focus of tropology a “refinement and gratuitousness.”⁵⁹ The Scriptures become a mere springboard or “occasion” for spiritual self-edification and for spiritual experiences.⁶⁰ “Connections with the doctrinal meaning that formerly, even implicitly, still governed spiritual developments are, in practice, severed. Or else the Bible primarily provides a framework.”⁶¹ De Lubac indicates that as a whole, spirituality was in the process of making itself independent from biblical exegesis. “We have seen above how, following dogmatic theology, spirituality was little by little detached, methodologically, from exegesis, in order to follow its own ways.”⁶² The development of tropology as “practical” and interior, despite some positive development within medieval mysticism, tended to forget the connection of tropology with God's actions within the economy of salvation.

58 Ibid., 2:176.

59 De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 479.

60 Ibid., 479.

61 Ibid., 497.

62 Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'écriture*, vol. 4, Théologie 59 (Aubier: Éditions Montaigne, 1964), 487.

B. The Victorine School and Scholasticism

It is common to speak of a “renaissance” in the twelfth century during which radical changes affected medieval culture and thought. Like his Thomist contemporaries Etienne Gilson and Marie-Dominique Chenu, de Lubac traced significant changes in methods and institutions of Christian theology to the twelfth century.⁶³ Centers for theology shifted from monastic schools to the city schools and universities. Scholastic methods arose as powerful intellectual tools for all the sciences. The twelfth century witnessed the rise of the “summa”—a compendium of topically organized theological knowledge—which would eventually replace the biblical commentary as the dominant theological genre. Institutional and methodological changes point to an underlying shift in the model of human knowledge and the place that theology enjoyed therein. A linear history of salvation and an eschatological perspective no longer fit into this new model of knowledge.⁶⁴ In de Lubac's account, two schools of thought, on the surface were opposed,

63 See Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

64 Several factors, that de Lubac himself points out, are worth mentioning for their contribution to a new model of knowledge. First, dialecticians were “unmindful of the concrete history and revers[ed] the traditional methods to build their idea-palaces on new plans.” Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E. M. Macierowski, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 254. Originally published as *Exégèse médiévale, 3: Les quatre sens de l'écriture* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1961). Second, de Lubac described “resurgences of the platonic ideal, not particularly well-disposed to 'becoming.’” Ibid., 3:254. Third, de Lubac identified the “enthusiastic discovery of Nature” at the onset of the Renaissance of the Twelfth Century, which threatened to overtake previous models of theological knowledge. Ibid. Adelard of Bath, Bernard Silvestris, and William of Conches particularly adopted the categories of Aristotle and Platonism for the advancement of physical science as a universal model of knowledge. Fourth, he identifies “the insidious influence of a 'nominalist' logic, which was in danger of ending up 'somehow de-existentializing the chief facts of the *dispensatio* under the pretext of assuring the unity of faith and salvation through time.’” Ibid., 3:255.

colluded in their contribution to a new model of theology: the Victorine School and twelfth-century Scholasticism

I will only make the briefest mention of the most prominent of the Victorines, Hugh of Saint Victor and Richard of Saint Victor. These two contributed to two developments outlined in *Exégèse médiévale*. The first, attributed to Hugh, was the methodological separation between history and allegory. In a basically conservative attempt to secure allegorization, Hugh essentially divided theology into “two detached pieces”—history and allegory—which were “destined to become, in fact, quite independent of each other.”⁶⁵ De Lubac explained that the trajectory on which the Victorines set theology gave rise to a division. History would become “historical and literal exegesis,” then “positive scholarship,” and eventually “criticism.”⁶⁶ Allegory would loosen its ties to exegesis and become an “autonomous system.” “It will progress in rationality and in abstraction, to become the majestic edifice of the Summas of the great epoch.”⁶⁷ Although Hugh of Saint Victor resisted the dehistoricization of Christian theology in his time—he was part of the “resisting Augustinian environment”—he contributed to a methodological division that would become standard in the wider milieu.⁶⁸

65 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:313.

66 Ibid., 3:313.

67 De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, 4:314. “We have quite often pointed out this sort of split that intervenes between a theology, once it has become purely ‘speculative,’ and a spirituality where feeling and imagination are dominant—and which may secretly draw its principles from some non-Christian source. What may perhaps be less noticed, is that this split comes about as a consequence of the practical rupture of each of these two with exegesis, i.e., ‘the historical foundation,’ unless the unity of faith which serves as the foundation for them both should be attained in some other fashion.” De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:315.

68 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:254. De Lubac states that Hugh of St. Victor cannot be blamed for the widening division which was occurring. While his own theological synthesis showed signs of this

The second development, attributed to Richard, is the methodological separation of mystical theology, constituted by tropology and anagogy, from history and allegory. According to de Lubac, Richard of Saint Victor created a new genre of mystical literature which was detached from the literal and allegorical senses.

Thus a genre of spiritual literature begins to be established ... which will finally no longer have any visible organic attachment, as has been said before, either with exegesis or with theology properly so called. He continues in principle to tie the explication of scripture to contemplative process, and his mysticism is always chock full of doctrine. On the other hand, if we take his work as a whole, we recognize that the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius in him, as in Hugh, is allied with that of Saint Gregory, which remains very strong. But after him, the evolution rushes headlong, To an extent never previously attained, Saint Gregory gives way to "divine Dionysius," whose anagogy was, as we have seen, not very scriptural. Origen and Saint Augustine alike back away before him.⁶⁹

Tropology and anagogy would be "detached from the first two parts, so as to be constituted as a body of spiritual doctrine rather remote from its biblical foundations and from the newly constructed theology."⁷⁰

The increasing division between doctrine and spirituality within early Medieval thought was exacerbated and hardened with the shift of theological methodology that occurred within Scholasticism.⁷¹ Scholastic theology, by definition, was a theology of the "schools." With the establishment of cathedral schools during Carolingian Renaissance, the centers of theological erudition began a shift from the monasteries. Theology would shift from the "school of contemplation" to a "school of disputation."

De Lubac indicates that the mode of theology graduated from reading (*lectio*) to

division, he attempted to bind history and allegory together. Ibid., 3:317.

69 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:321.

70 Ibid., 3:315.

71 In perhaps an ironic jab at contemporary neo-Scholasticism, de Lubac described Scholasticism as "a new theology with new methods" that arrived on the scene. While de Lubac and other French theologians were accused of inventing a "new theology" (i.e., untraditional and modern), de Lubac indicated that Scholasticism in fact was new.

disputation (*disputatio*). The monastic *lectio* focused on reading and meditation, which was essentially in the form of an exegesis of Scripture. While the monastic *lectio* “took on a contemplative aspect,” the scholastic *lectio* concerned argumentation.⁷² Scholastic *lectio* eventually will become the “dialectical disputation,” the argument over a particular question. The *quaestio* called upon students to debate the theological question posed, in a response of yes or no. Although the traditional links between theology and mediative practices were preserved, the early medieval *disputatio* would change the characteristics of the theological discipline. According to de Lubac, dialectical thought “called upon the mystery 'to be reduced into categories that had already been constituted in their entirety.'”⁷³ The genre of the *quaestio* shifted the content from an explication of the depths of the text to answering a series of disputed questions. Significantly, the dialectical method worked under the assumption that the disputation could be resolved on the level of the “letter” without appeal to the mystical depths of the text.⁷⁴ The contemplative-mystical *lectio* became something extra, but not an essential component of this new mode of speculative theology. The twelfth-century change of theological genre therefore constituted a significant change in mentality.⁷⁵

72 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:61.

73 Ibid., 1:63. See *ibid.*, 1:55–66 on “New Questions”; Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds, C.J., Faith in Reason (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 229. *Corpus Mysticum* was originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: l'eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen âge. Étude historique*, Théologie 3 (Paris: Aubier, 1944).

74 While, in the twelfth century, de Lubac claims, the *quaestio* was not the “well-defined, technical genre” that it would later become, it already influenced the shape of theological reflection. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:67. By the thirteenth century, “the leap is thus made. The break has taken place. 'Dialectic' and its 'questions' have won the day, and the change in methodology is found to have been accelerated by the inroads of an entirely new set of contents, that of the philosophy of Aristotle. Teaching no longer has as its framework the triple or quadruple explication of the biblical text.” *Ibid.*, 1:73.

75 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:60.

Later Scholasticism emphasized theology as a “scientific” discipline subject to proofs. The new emphasis on proof effectively dismantled the interconnection between theology and mysticism. Proofs were primarily drawn from Scripture and increasingly focused on the literal sense of scripture. A proof could not depend upon a tenuous and uncertain “mystical interpretation.” As John of Paris claimed, “*mystica theologia non est argumentativa*” [mystical theology does not furnish proofs].⁷⁶ De Lubac noted that Thomas Aquinas himself declared that proofs can only come from the literal sense of scripture. The field of dogmatics had to depend upon a certain interpretation of the literal sense of scripture. Demonstration using the literal sense became the new ideal for theological knowledge. Scholasticism's new ideal appropriated the older categories of spiritual exegesis, but at the same time changed them. The great thirteenth century scholastics, including Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas, embedded “spiritual understanding” and the three spiritual senses within a new model for theological inquiry. After the thirteenth century, the “exposition of the fourfold sense remains an obligatory theme for the scholastic.” However, it was becoming “merely an empty repetition of an old theory. The application is entirely mechanical.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 482.

⁷⁷ De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, 4:310. The change of methodology, however, does not mean that medieval Scholasticism entirely lost an understanding of sacred history. Bonaventure melded scholastic method with a profound and original reflection on history in response to Joachimite thought among the Franciscan “spirituals.” In Thomas Aquinas, though less explicitly historical, theology and scripture remain united within *Scientia scripturae*. De Lubac claimed, following Congar, Spicq, and Chenu, that Thomas was doing nothing but putting to systematic use the traditional categories of exegesis. It was not a matter of innovation. See *ibid.*, 4:286; de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:315; Henri de Lubac, “Joachim de Flore jugé par saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas,” in *Pluralisme et oecuménisme en recherches théologiques: Mélanges offerts au R.P. Dockx, O.P.*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 43 (Peeters Publishers, 1976), 37; Henri de Lubac, “On an Old Distich: The Doctrine of the ‘Fourfold Sense’ in Scripture,” in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 109–28.

De Lubac insisted that “mystical knowledge” held an ambiguous place in the new ideal for theology which took root beginning in the twelfth century. While the exposition of the fourfold sense remained an obligatory structure for biblical interpretation, the tropological and anagogical senses of Scripture were placed outside of the realm of theology properly so called. As a result, the essential interconnection between mysticism and theology could no longer be assumed.

IV. A Narrowing of Mystical Ascent: The Pseudo-Dionysian Legacy

For Origen, anagogy is a mysticism that moves from the sensible to the intelligible and that moves to the end point of the economy of salvation. Origen incorporates the 'verticality' of mystical ascent with the 'horizontal' journey of the church towards the end of time, the eschaton. In de Lubac's interpretation, at the close of the twelfth century, the connection between the exegetical process and the historical economy of salvation was becoming attenuated. As a result, the last sense of scripture was no longer viewed as the endpoint of the progression of the historical economy towards its goal, but instead placed in the service of a mysticism disengaged from that economy. De Lubac described a corollary loss of the eschatological association of the anagogical sense of scripture. This change resulted in

an obscuring of the social and eschatological perspective. In the classical distinction between the four senses, the fourth was concerned with realities that were both heavenly and future, *mysteria futuri saeculi* [mysteries of the age to come]. In Origen himself, as we have seen, anagogy united these two characteristics; it contained the hope of the Church in progress. Now an exegesis essentially attentive to things of the interior life did not have to treat what we call today the “end of history.” Centered on the individual soul, it did not have to speak explicitly of the Church triumphant any more than it did of the Church militant. That was a legitimate specialization, from the moment that mysticism

thus disengaged remained based on mystery. But this habitual preterition was perhaps not without leading in the end to a certain narrowing of hope.⁷⁸

In sum, the anagogical sense was stripped of its social and eschatological reference, becoming more narrowly focused on the individual mystical ascent to invisible realities.

One of the most significant factors in the shift of the meaning of anagogy within medieval Christian theology was the influence of the fifth- to sixth-century pseudepigraphal writings of Dionysius the Areopagite. Dionysius's compositions melded a spiritual tradition stemming from Origen with Neoplatonic mystical traditions, resulting in an influential body of teaching concerning the mystical ascent to God and deification.⁷⁹ John Scotus Eriugena (ca. 815-ca. 877) translated Pseudo-Dionysius into Latin, making these writings available to early medieval monastic circles. According to de Lubac, although Pseudo-Dionysius was read from the ninth century on, his influence proliferated in the twelfth century: "Just as the march of the mind had passed through Aristotle, so will it pass through Dionysius."⁸⁰ De Lubac noted that the popularity of these writings was due, in part, to their false attribution to the disciple of Paul in Acts 17.⁸¹

Dionysian mysticism is characterized by an anagogical ascent to God that, beginning from material and symbolic representations, rises beyond them. Dionysius's mystical ascent is composed of three stages: the symbolic, affirmation, and negation. Symbols are the divine manifestations, which participate in the "emanation" of God.

78 De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 478.

79 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100 - 600)*, vol. 1, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (University of Chicago Press, 1971), 344–349.

80 *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:321.

81 *Ibid.*, 3:322.

They are the material representations of the divinity, including those found in Scripture. The second and third stages comprise a dialectic of affirmation (*kataphasis*) and negation (*apophasis*). Symbols are interpreted through this dialectic, by which what we affirm of God within the symbols must be subsequently negated to maintain the transcendence of God. For Dionysius, it is more fitting to say “not what [God] is, but what he is not.”⁸² According to Dionysius, positive representations of the Godhead—Word, Mind, Cause—are less fitting than the negative modes of representation—invisible, infinite. But in reality, Dionysius defends biblical imagistic representations of God as more appropriate, for it is implicit that the biblical representations, unlike the philosophical counterparts, point to rather than comprehend the divinity.⁸³ Yet the anagogical flight to God must rise above images and representations. The Dionysian dichotomy between God's invisible reality and the ultimately inadequate Scriptural forms of representation make the latter, even the narratives concerning God's historical interaction with humanity, akin to myths.

De Lubac had an overwhelmingly negative evaluation of Dionysius, finding a destructive strain of thought in his mysticism.⁸⁴ First, de Lubac ascribed to Dionysius a

82 Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 1:347.

83 "If, then, the negations respecting things Divine are true, but the affirmations are inharmonious, the revelation as regards things invisible, through dissimilar representations, is more appropriate to the hiddenness of things unutterable." *The Celestial Hierarchy* in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, ed. Colm Luibhéid, trans. Paul Rorem, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1987), 165.

84 De Lubac's evaluation of Dionysius is even more significant given the apparent parallels between Dionysius' understanding of *erōs* and de Lubac's theology of “natural desire.” Dionysius envisions *erōs* as the outpouring of God's love whereby creation comes to be and as the cosmic force whereby all things desire to return to the Good. God creates by giving himself over to that which is not God, while remaining God. Made possible by this creative gift, the mystic returns to God by an ecstatic outpouring of herself or himself in a return gift. De Lubac insists that human beings possess a desire for the vision of God that is essential to what it means to be human. This desire is made possible only by God's intention for humanity. Both Dionysian *erōs* and Lubacian “natural desire” have an “anagogic” dynamic.

tendency toward an individualist mysticism. Second, Dionysius's apophatic theology construed the material, historical, and symbolic realities narrated by Scripture as suited to an inferior stage of contemplation. Third, Dionysius loses the eschatological. The first reservation concerning Dionysius have been convincingly disputed by recent theologians seeking to recover Dionysius for contemporary theology. They have produced more positive, and perhaps fairer, interpretations.⁸⁵ Essentially responding to the charge of individualism, Mark A. McIntosh argues that corporate and ecclesial aspects of Dionysius's mystical theology resist divisions between individualistic “spirituality” and ecclesial faith.⁸⁶ The other charges—that Dionysius loses the historical dimension of salvation—is more difficult to shake. According to Balthasar, “what was once historical, temporally conditioned reality becomes for Denys a means for expressing an utterly universal theological content. The dimension of history and of Church history interests him not at all; only the eternal, only the divine interests him.”⁸⁷ However, Balthasar argues, Dionysius does not evacuate history altogether. He indicated that Dionysius does

85 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Clerical Styles*, vol. 2 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 144–210; Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 44–56; Tamsin Jones, “Dionysius in Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Jean-Luc Marion,” in *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, ed. Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 213–24.

86 McIntosh explains that Dionysius has been blamed for the transition from spiritual theology to a modern mysticism, from earlier communally-oriented mystical practices to a mysticism of individual interior states. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 44. McIntosh argues that instead, “the mystical depth encountered by the spiritual seeker is not found by a purely interior ascent of the soul, but rather that such a Neoplatonic itinerary has been re-contextualized in the sacramental life of the community.” *Ibid.*, 45.

87 Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 2:152. See also Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 1:346.

not negate the value of concrete symbols and intellectual constructions of the divine; rather this mysticism retains the value of symbols while recognizing their insufficiency.⁸⁸

De Lubac's reservations concerning Dionysius especially considered the reception of his writings. De Lubac explained that “anagogical” mysticism in monasticism and the early medieval milieu possessed an eschatological framework.

But when, laden with an insufficiently transformed Neoplatonism, the thought of Dionysius was introduced into the west, the risk of a disturbance in equilibrium arose, at the expense of supernatural historicity and of the eschatological component. This risk came to a head in the work of John Scotus. It was reinforced by the second Dionysian wave in the course of the twelfth century. This Dionysian anagogy, whereby one passes from the order of visions to that of pure contemplation or from symbolic theology to mystical theology, is neither first nor foremost in the end time of an exegesis: it is, as it were, the last spurt of a sort of cosmic energy raising each nature according to its hierarchic order in the graduated series of illuminations. It makes the mind, as Hugh of Saint Victor says commenting on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, penetrate “into the contemplation of higher things,” but these “higher things” would at the same time scarcely appear any longer as the “last things.” By anagogy, said Cassian, “speech is carried over to the invisible things to come.” This was, as we have seen, the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews and that of Origen; it was also to be that of many others. In the tradition influenced by Dionysius, however, a dissociation tended to develop between the *invisibilia* and the *futura*, as between the mystic life and the mediation on Scripture. No longer aware of a certain order of personal intimacy between the two liberties, the divine and the human, the mysticism formed by Dionysius spontaneously tended toward the “edification of the holy Church.” When these traits came to dominate, they profoundly differentiated the mysticism of Dionysius from that of Origen, Augustine, or Gregory. The history of the struggles for influence and of attempts at synthesis between these two mystical traditions would be extremely interesting to untangle. Here let us simply recall the explanation that Garnier of Rochefort soon gave us about the purification of the understanding which empties itself of every image so as to climb back to its “superessential” original. They no longer have any more than a very loose connection with Scripture. Now, try as they might to appeal to the authority of the *Soliloquia*, they in fact came straight from Dionysius.⁸⁹

88 Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 2:178–9. Despite the profound alliances between de Lubac's and Balthasar's theological projects, they diverge on the interpretation of Dionysius. The difference between Balthasar and de Lubac on this point is due in part to a different “optic,” a different set of problems to which they responded. Balthasar recovers Dionysius for his own theological aesthetics. Unlike Balthasar, nowhere does de Lubac assess the merits of Dionysius the theologian. Instead, his concern was for the historical impact of Dionysius in the Middle Ages and the enthusiastic reception of Dionysian thought into a new theological climate of the twelfth century. The Lubacian optic concerns what happens to biblical narrative under the strain of Dionysian thought, and especially the resultant impact of Dionysian thought on the anagogical.

89 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:194–5.

In this long quotation, de Lubac indicates that Dionysian thought contributed to a process whereby the earlier mystical tradition represented by Origen, Augustine, and Gregory was supplanted with what would be a modern form of mysticism. There was a “transition from mystical understanding to speculative mysticism—to wit, from Scripture to Dionysius.”⁹⁰ Dionysius is not singularly responsible for this transition; rather, his twelfth-century reception exacerbated theological trajectories already in place.⁹¹

Most significantly, for de Lubac, the fracturing of the *invisibilia* (invisible things) from the *futura* (future things) within Christian eschatology is the key to that transition. Dionysian anagogy passes beyond the symbols of God's manifestation in a dialectic of negation. In effect, it mitigated the mediation of the historical events of salvation. Moreover, Dionysian anagogy was insufficiently oriented to a future realization. The “higher” reality of Dionysian thought helped to establish the object of anagogy as the atemporal, ahistorical divine reality, whether contemplated directly after the use of signs and images is left behind or contemplated through the visible.

Twelfth-century definitions of anagogy, de Lubac tells us, give evidence of the underlying dissociations between the future and the invisible. For Peter Comestor (died around 1178), anagogy “deals with God and the things above the heavens,' as if it were a question of intemporal objects.”⁹² Rupert of Deutz (1075-1129) writes that with Scripture

90 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:322.

91 Among these trajectories were eternalism and a prioritization of interior experience. Eternalism is a tendency to regard only the universal and unchanging as dignified of divinity, thereby neglecting the particularity of the actions and events of the history of salvation. The second, the interiorization of Christian mysticism, consists of a direct (unmediated by external realities or histories) experience of the divine. Mysticism tends toward a “pure contemplation.”

92 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:195.

“we can weigh carefully at any time, not what or how God is, but what he is not, and that God is to be likened to no creature.”⁹³ Garnier of Rochefort (died around 1199), described anagogy as the vision “whereby it [the mind] strives to contemplate the most holy heavenly one as he is by the mind's climbing up and going out in nakedness and purity and without covering.”⁹⁴ For William of Ockham (ca. 1288-ca. 1348), it is “an explanation whereby the invisible things of God are seen to be understood through those that have been made.”⁹⁵

By the end of the twelfth century, the connection between the anagogical ascent of the mind and the last sense of Scripture was becoming tenuous. In the case of Meister Eckhart the history of salvation was “transposed dangerously in dialectical stages” of the ascent of the soul.⁹⁶ In the case of Jean Gerson, “the anagogical meaning of the *Cantique*, without precise reference to the mystery of the Church nor to an eschatological hope, is then the description of the 'anagogici excessus' of the perfect soul as Denys understands it.”⁹⁷ In sum, anagogical meaning was becoming almost entirely focused on the ascent of the mind to the detriment of eschatology and Christian hope.

V. Joachim of Fiore

According to de Lubac, Joachim was a voice of protest against the Dionysian

93 Ibid., 2:196.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid., 2:195. “In the same way, the 'sapientia anagogica' which authors like Hugh of Balma define especially according to Dionysius, will no longer be presented as the last moment of an exegesis; it will rather be the high point of a contemplation arising from the 'plane of history,' the 'planities historiae': he will allow it to be opposed to 'any speculative wisdom,' as that which comes from God and not men.” de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:316.

96 De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, 4:489.

97 Ibid., 4:494.

traditions dominating the medieval landscape.⁹⁸ Yet Joachim's eschatology depended upon the same dichotomy between the future and the invisible that governed Dionysian thought:

Two deviations threaten spiritual understanding at its peak. Spiritual understanding can forget that Christianity is eschatological and, effectively, suppress hope—at least the specifically Christian hope. On the other hand, by an inverse dissociation of the *invisibilia* and the *futura*, it can also conceive an eschatology upon earth and thereby transform hope—at least a primary phase of hope—into utopia. Some signs of the first tendency, due in part to the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius, had appeared for us with respect to anagogy and we have just picked up its trail once again. It remains to explore the second in its most illustrious instance: that of Joachim of Flora (ca. 1132-1202).⁹⁹

The first deviation is a *theologia* divorced from *œconomia*; the second is *œconomia* without *theologia*. The object of Dionysian anagogy was exclusively the “*invisibilia Dei*,” the object of Joachim's eschatology was a future historical state. Dionysian mysticism and Joachimite prophecy were products of similar dissociations between the future and the invisible. Though opposed, they thus shared a similar feature.

In part, Joachim reacted against proto-rationalistic tendencies within medieval thought in general and nascent Scholasticism in particular. He creatively synthesized the categories of an ancient exegesis into a new, powerful apocalyptic vision that projected Christian hope into the terrestrial future. His new synthesis was a corrective, but also contained dangers.

98 De Lubac testified to the expansive influence of Dionysius on the high Middle Ages and beyond: “After the 13th century, Denys invades everything: cosmology, metaphysics, ecclesiology, even politics, spirituality. But it is a multiform Denys. The Denys of Albert the Great and of the Thomists is not entirely the one of Thomas of Verceil, of Hugh of Balma, of Robert Gosseteste, and of the Franciscan community; their Denys is not the one of which the secular Guillaume de Saint-Amour had invoked the authority. In the time of Boniface VIII, the pontifical theologians, with a Giles of Rome, had constructed their teaching on a kind of amalgamation of Aristotle and Denys, and this same amalgamation is found a century later in the work of their successor John of Torquemada. However, all the spiritual currents are more or less Dionysian.” *Ibid.*, 4:494.

99 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:327.

A. Sources and de Lubac's Methods

De Lubac's earliest significant treatment of Joachim of Fiore appeared in 1950 in *History and Spirit*, in an extended contrast between Origen's and Joachim's use of the term "the eternal Gospel." De Lubac's *Catholicism* only referred to Joachim once, and not in the context of Joachim's exegesis or eschatology; Joachim went unmentioned in *Le Drame de l'humanisme athée* (1944) and *Sur les chemins de Dieu* (1956). De Lubac examined Joachim's exegesis and the Joachimite tradition of biblical interpretation in *Medieval Exegesis* 3 (1961) and *Exégèse médiévale* 4 (1964).¹⁰⁰ Three years later, de Lubac published an article entitled "Joachim de Flore jugé par saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas" that examined the Scholastic response to Joachim's historical thinking.¹⁰¹ The two volume *La Postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore* (1979, 1981) soon followed. De Lubac wrote more on Joachim than on any other historical figure, except maybe Origen.

Exégèse médiévale narrates the "exegetical posterity" of Joachim, namely those who followed his exegetical methods. This posterity consists of those who interpret prophecies of Scripture literally and historically. *La Postérité spirituelle* is an account of the "spiritual posterity," those who would hope for a third age of the Spirit or of the spirit.¹⁰² De Lubac argued that while Joachim's "exegetical posterity" lost its vitality long ago, his "spiritual posterity" remained a significant cultural force:

The first, which was not sustained by any élan of thought, is but a withered branch in the

¹⁰⁰ *Medieval Exegesis* 3:327-419 and *Exégèse médiévale* 4:325-344 contain the most extended interpretations.

¹⁰¹ De Lubac, "Joachim de Flore jugé par saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas."

¹⁰² This second posterity nonetheless has clear ties to Joachim's exegesis. Henri de Lubac, *La Postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore: de Joachim à Schelling*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions Lethielleux, 1979), 14.

present hour. The second is a dense forest. After the thirteenth century, it has constantly metamorphosed, and not only at the interior or on the margins of the churches, but as far as in the secular thought of modernity. More exactly, the Joachimite idea has not ceased to act like a ferment. In the variety of forms that it has assumed, learned or popular, it has constituted one of the principle channels conducing to secularization, that is to say of the denaturing of Christian faith, thought and action. It has served also to supplement or substitute mysticism [*mystique*] for processes of rationalization that couldn't by themselves arouse the necessary enthusiasm for their achievement. Today it has a surprising renewal of life.¹⁰³

De Lubac's method of interpretation of Joachim follows the pattern of his other historical works. His overriding interest was not the individual author, but the *Nachleben* of an idea. As Emmanuel Falque notes, for de Lubac, “every text, in particular on the matter of theology, is understood not only in its context, but also through the tradition that it engenders.”¹⁰⁴ In the case of Joachim, de Lubac was interested less in Joachim himself than in the traditions engendered by him. In particular, de Lubac wished to understand the shifts and ruptures within an intellectual tradition: “His method is entirely his own and original. Even before any historical reference to Joachim, I have said, he is attempting to generate 'the innovation of Joachim.' To track ruptures and transitions: such is the method constantly taken by de Lubac since *Exégèse médiévale*.”¹⁰⁵ De Lubac also traced that which contributed to those ruptures. Joachim was the beneficiary of an earlier tradition, which he creatively re-formed.

While de Lubac ascribed to Joachim a significant role in a rupture within Christian eschatological thinking and even saw in him the precursor of dangerous philosophical and political movements, he did not read Joachim in merely a critical

103 Ibid., 1:14–15.

104 Emmanuel Falque, “La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore ou le principe d’immunité chez Henri de Lubac,” *Revue des sciences religieuses* 77, no. 2 (April 2003): 189.

105 Ibid., 190. I would add only that this interest in rupture and transition was at the heart of de Lubac's historical focus since *Corpus Mysticum*.

mode. On the one hand, he paints Joachim as an innovator, whose exegetical methodology broke with a centuries-long tradition.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, he saw Joachim's thought within a historical evolution of "spiritual interpretation" and also as a response to forms of nascent rationalism within the church. De Lubac treats Joachim sympathetically, as a mystic who envisions a "regeneration in spirit" of the church.¹⁰⁷ "His 'internal dynamism' was consequently not an entirely aberrant force."¹⁰⁸ Joachim was probably not aware of the "disruptive" effects that his theology would have.¹⁰⁹

Consequently, Joachim's reception within the theological tradition was, perhaps, of greater importance than Joachim himself. The great scholastics, including Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, confronted Joachim's exegetical and eschatological thought. Bonaventure purified it and integrated it into his theology of history. Thomas Aquinas refuted it without such integration.¹¹⁰ The condemnations at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and the Synod of Arles (1263) of Joachim and of heresies spread under his name

106 De Lubac's opinion conflicted with that of Leone Tondelli, Francesco Russo, Antonio Crocco, and Marjorie Reeves, who championed the fundamental orthodoxy of Joachim. They argue that Joachim envisioned a purified church of the future whose institutions would remain intact. In contrast, de Lubac argued that Joachim proposed a radical discontinuity between the present and the past. Indeed, Joachim was quite aware of the novelty of his proposals. De Lubac, *Posterité spirituelle*, 1:22. Bernard McGinn, reviewing this debate, states that the differences between the positions could be partially bridged by avoiding the loaded contrast between heterodoxy and orthodoxy. Bernard McGinn, *Apocalypticism in the Western Tradition* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate/Variorum, 1994), 9: 34.

107 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:417. Joachim "struggled against the deadly dessication that seemed to menace the Church, both in her pastors and in her doctors" and "reacted against an inclination toward psychologism and subtlety." Ibid., 3:418.

108 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:418.

109 De Lubac, *Posterité spirituelle*, 1:17.

110 Bernard McGinn mentions that Thomas' refutation of Joachim split modern historians. Some, including Ernesto Buonaiuti, "have seen in Thomas' opposition to the abbot a sign of the loss of the historical and eschatological dimensions of Christianity in Scholasticism. Thomist scholars, on the other hand, like Y. Congar, M. D. Chenu, and M. Secklar, have risen up in defense of the doctor claiming that he saved the true dimensions of *Heilsgeschichte* in Christianity by attacking the false variety spawned by Joachim." McGinn, *Apocalypticism in the Western Tradition*, 40. De Lubac argues that Thomas himself preserved the historical dimensions of Christianity, but that the subsequent Scholastic tradition did not.

marginalized a growing Joachimite eschatological tradition. However, elements of his historical-eschatological and spiritual vision were transmitted, but increasingly stripped of their links to Christian theology. Thus, de Lubac writes, “defeated in the most beautiful of his dreams, Joachim of Fiore, in the manner of Nostradamus, triumphs in his hermeneutics. People borrow his prophetic historicism without wanting to retain anything of his hope.”¹¹¹ It was neither Joachim's particular prophesies of the end of time nor his exegetical method that was passed on into modernity; rather, it was his prophetic expectation of a new age within history.

B. Joachim's Radical Eschatology

Bernard McGinn describes the uniqueness of Joachim in terms of his explanation of the third age. “All medieval thinkers were eschatological in the sense that they accepted the Christian understanding of history that looked forward to the definitive event of the return of Christ and the end of time.”¹¹² Even Joachim's expectation of an imminent end of time was quite common. Joachim is unique, McGinn states, in that he envisioned the third age as “the age of the fullness of revelation and the triumph of the *viri spirituales*, the 'spiritual men.’”¹¹³ This would be the age of the Holy Spirit, “the perfection of the divine within history.” In sum, Joachim's eschatology was “radical” because the third age would be a future *historical* age of fulfillment. De Lubac agreed with McGinn's assessment that Joachim is not unique in seeing his own age as the last, or

111 De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, 4:344.

112 McGinn, *Apocalypticism in the Western Tradition*, 9: 34.

113 Ibid., 9:34.

in reading the scriptures the tribulations and triumphs to come. This was part of a long Christian apocalyptic tradition.

According to de Lubac, two lines of Christian thought converge in Joachim's theology. The first, is the notion of a "slow divine pedagogy in the advance of revelation."¹¹⁴ Throughout history, God's numerous interventions have been a gradual pedagogy and a growth of the human race in its knowledge of God. The writings of Irenaeus are a premier example, but this historical schema is ubiquitous in the early church. The second is, in part, inherited from monasticism, which presented the monks as realizing a "new age." De Lubac notes that the Dionysian notion of successive hierarchies, in which one stage of contemplation points to a higher one, is similar.¹¹⁵ Joachim essentially takes the notion of contemplative ascent through numerous ontological and epistemological stages and lays it on its side, interpreting it historically as a succession of historical periods.

Understood against the backdrop of the traditional division of the ages of salvation history, Joachim's division of history is the key to understanding the innovation of his system.

People distinguished generally, according to Saint Paul, in the history of salvation, three successive "ages," or three "states," or three "reigns," attributed respectively to three persons of the divine Trinity. These were the reign of the Father, which extended through the eight "days" of creation; then the reign of the Son, which was inaugurated by the promise of the redeemer made to Adam the day after his sin; lastly, the reign of the Spirit, covering all the time of the Church and was supposed to last until the end of this world: "a new and eternal testament."¹¹⁶

114 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:412.

115 Ibid., 3:313–14.

116 De Lubac, *Posterité spirituelle*, 1:19.

De Lubac noted that there were many variations on this division of history, which would characterize the Old Testament as the age of the prophetic Spirit (Irenaeus), or would contain a fourfold, sixfold, or sevenfold division. But these variations did not disrupt “the fundamental division, which carried the essential doctrine.”¹¹⁷

In Joachim, the traditional historical division was radically altered:

As many before him, on the other hand, Joachim divided the universal history into three parts, according to the sacred number of the Trinity, recommended by the scriptures. Only, he no longer placed the two caesuras, or the two thresholds in the same place. For him, the age of the father is extended until the hour of the redemptive incarnation; at that time was begun the age of the Son, which was the one of the present Church; but soon, already “initiated” or announced in figure, a third age (he said more willingly a third state or a third time) was supposed to succeed it, even on this earth, the last, which would be characterized by the reign of the Holy Spirit. This was a radical transformation.¹¹⁸

According to the traditional schema, the third age, “the age of the Spirit,” is the time of the present church. Perhaps motivated by the Scriptural account of Pentecost, the tradition has the Christian living in the final age of history under the reign of the Spirit. Because of a continuity between the present church and the future heavenly kingdom, eschatological expectation concerns the fulfillment and completion of the present order. In the case of Joachim, we are now anticipating the age of the Spirit and the bringing about of a new order of salvation history.

The rupture between the second and third age, in effect, governed other aspects of Joachim's thought. First, borrowing a title from the book of Revelation, he contrasted the “carnal Gospel” with the “eternal Gospel.” Both Origen and Joachim prominently used this latter term. For both, the “eternal Gospel” was a spiritual interpretation of the Gospel

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 1:20.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 1:21–22.

given to us in the New Testament. “But they completely disagree on the nature and time of this interpretation.”¹¹⁹ De Lubac states that for Origen, the “eternal Gospel” is the future state of the present Gospel, not an addendum. Origen's “eternal gospel is the antithesis and anticipated antidote of that of the Calabrian monk. In brief, it is completely eschatological.”¹²⁰ For Joachim, the eternal Gospel will supersede the carnal Gospel and will establish a new spiritual society within time.¹²¹

Second, but closely related to the first point, Joachim's biblical hermeneutics indicated a radical change in the spiritual interpretation of Scripture. Joachim's exegesis was governed by the “concord” between the three ages of history. Each age has an interior process of development, so that its initial “germination” is followed by a “fructification” and its “passing away.”¹²² The ages overlap; when one is just beginning, the previous has reached its midway-point of development. The first age corresponds to the Old Testament; the second corresponds to the New Testament; the third remains in the future. De Lubac argued that the relationship between the Old Testament to the New is no longer for Joachim a relationship of letter to spirit, but instead of one of “one letter to another letter.”¹²³ Joachim's exegesis mirrors the correspondence between “two external histories.”¹²⁴ The persons, figures, and events of the Old Testament have concordances

119 De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 252.

120 Ibid., 252.

121 Ibid.

122 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:334.

123 Ibid., 3:336.

124 Ibid. De Lubac notes that traditional principles of spiritual interpretation held apocalypticism, always present in the church, in check. “It is precisely that doctrine, that principle of interpretation, sometimes inexactly described as 'idealist,' which turns out to be missing in Joachim.” Ibid., 3:407–08.

within the New Testament, and also prophetically prefigure the persons, figures, and events in the third age, which is presently arriving.¹²⁵

Third, the hiatus between the second and third age affected how Joachim viewed the relationship between present ecclesial institutions and those of the future age. There is some debate about the extent to which Joachim believed that ecclesial institutions, the papacy, and the sacraments must pass away in history. However, he envisioned a disjunction between the institutions of the present age and those that come, between the Christians of this age, and the “spiritual men” of the subsequent age. Where Origen saw continuity between the present and the eternal, Joachim saw a rupture. According to de Lubac, the rupture between present and future introduced by Joachim goes so far as to endanger the centrality of Christ and the church in the coming era of salvation.

C. Effects of Joachim's Theology of History and Eschatology

The rupture that Joachim advances is between the second and third age. By locating the third age within history, he dissociated the events of salvation history and its future fulfillment. According to de Lubac, it is because the “time of the Spirit” intervenes between the Gospel and eternity that a rupture occurs between the present church and the eternal church, between the work of Christ and that of the Spirit.¹²⁶ The age of the Spirit

125 The principle of “concord” assured a correspondence between past and future events. De Lubac insisted that concord was fundamentally different from the principle of spiritual interpretation in Origen and much of the tradition. De Lubac describes concord as a correspondence of certain external characteristics between events, such that one historical figure is likened to another, one war is likened to another, one liturgical practice is like another. The guiding principle of spiritual interpretation, on the other hand, is “interiorization.” Christ recapitulates events of the Old Testament by subsuming them to himself. The “interiorization” of the New Testament is the spiritual recapitulation of the New in the life of the church.

126 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3:418.

will supplant the present economy of salvation. By placing the age of the Spirit within history, Joachim calls into question the “definitively fulfilling character of the work accomplished by Jesus Christ.”¹²⁷ As de Lubac indicates, “Joachim has compromised—without intending to, it seems—the full sufficiency of Jesus Christ.”¹²⁸

Additionally, for de Lubac, Joachim both contributes to and is the witness of a shift in a Christian understanding of eschatological expectation. The awareness that the “kingdom of God is near” is common in Christianity. In the early church, this awareness is an expectation of the imminent end of the world. Within Joachim, an expectation exists for a new temporal order, a spiritualization of the Gospel that is just beginning to take ecclesial and political shape. The spiritual tradition inspired by Joachim transmitted a future-oriented expectation of a new era, already germinating, in which humanity would come of age. This expectation carried well beyond the boundaries of biblical interpretation or theology, and well into modernity. In *La Posterité spirituelle*, de Lubac argued that this spiritual tradition would become entirely horizontal, historical, and secular.

VI. Conclusion

As indicated previously, the vertical and the horizontal, the mystical and eschatological elements of the Christian faith were important to de Lubac from his earliest work, *Catholicism*. In *Catholicism*, he contrasted Hellenistic images with

¹²⁷ Ibid., 3:387.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 3:418.

Christian images used to describe the movement from this world to the next.¹²⁹ The former envision an ascent of the individual soul through various levels of reality, each level being necessary for the attainment of the next. Christian images of “ascent” through history transformed the Hellenistic images: “the old image of the ascent of the individual from sphere to sphere soon gives way to that of a collective progress from one age to another.”¹³⁰ Patristic Christianity, he claimed, was fascinated with the notion of a collective journey through time, and the subdivision of ages. Christianity, unlike Hellenistic thought, brought together both collective progress through history and the transcendence beyond it.

De Lubac's historical narrative extended his claim in *Catholicism* concerning the patristic understanding of history and eschatology. By holding together eschatological hope and mystical ascent, Origen's eschatology exemplified the essential characteristics of this Christian synthesis. The subsequent dissociation between the *futura* and *invisibilia* within Christian eschatology, particularly during the twelfth century, engendered two principal eschatological impulses. The first was Pseudo-Dionysian in form; the second was Joachimite. The first engendered a mysticism that viewed the historical figures and realities of the Bible as figures for the un-thematizable transcendent. This impulse threatened to disregard the historical character of Christianity and see history as a myth.

129 He also associated Hellenistic images with Pythagoreanism, Neoplatonism, the Upanishads, and the Bhūmi of Mahayana Buddhism.

130 Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 145. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Unam Sanctam 3 (Paris: Cerf, 1938).

This second was radically historical insofar as it projected a form of eschatological fulfillment into the historical future.

It is supremely important to understand de Lubac's claim that Christianity unites *futura* and *invisibilia*, collective progress and transcendence. His criticism of Dionysian and Joachimite thought is for the purpose of uniting the two, or of recovering an eschatology that circumnavigates the division between them. These two aspects are held in tension, and the neglect of either results in a deformation of Christian faith.

For that is the expression of the Christian condition: tension, essential to these “last times” that we are living in the Church, between two characteristics—mystical and eschatological—of our faith. “*Spe enim salvi facti sumus*” (For in hope we are saved). The eschatological boundary is not purely in the future—nor will it ever become purely in the past. The words of the Lord ... have “begun to put an end to figures,” and of course they have done so still in images, accommodating themselves to the present state of our understanding, but this was already “so that the truth begins.” And on the other hand, as they will never pass away, they will always be in the process of being realized. The words of Moses and those of the prophets needed to be fulfilled, and once fulfilled by Christ, they had only to disappear. But the words of Jesus Christ are and always remain full—without that fullness ever becoming something past Origen adds: “*et in actu impletionis sunt semper, et quotidie implentur, et numquam perimplentur*” (and they are always in the act of being fulfilled, and they are being fulfilled every day, and they are never totally fulfilled). The Lord himself, who pronounced them, “is still there, but as someone who never ceases to arrive”: Is this not the meaning of *παρουσία* (*parousia*), at once presence and future?¹³¹

The tension maintained by Origen between the mystical and eschatological is the optic through which de Lubac narrates his subsequent tracing of Dionysian and Joachimite thought. This narrative enables us to understand de Lubac's criticism of contemporary theologies of hope or of interventions in contemporary debates over communism and the theology of history.

Furthermore, the tension between the mystical and eschatological is key to de

131 De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 261–62.

Lubac's understanding of the sacramental economy of salvation. Although de Lubac did not spell it out in these terms, the dissociation of the future and invisible within Dionysian and Joachimite eschatologies ruptures the sacramental-historical economy of salvation. The former threatens to ascend *beyond* the salvation enacted by Christ, leaving it behind for its deeper meaning. It threatens to see the historical or sacramental signs as things to be transcended. The latter threatens to progress *beyond* the present economy of salvation. By temporalizing the break between the second and third ages, and by placing the third age in the future, Joachim anticipates an age in history that has transcended signs or figures. In the next chapter, I will argue that de Lubac's theology of the church, the sacraments, and knowledge of God is governed by this eschatological tension.

CHAPTER FOUR: SACRAMENTS OF THE ESCHATON

The previous chapter presented the historical division described by de Lubac between a transcendent-oriented mysticism and a future-oriented apocalyptic. De Lubac's return to the patristic sources, especially to Origen, included a recovery of the unity between the transcendent and apocalyptic, between realized eschatology and future eschatology, between the “already” and the “not yet.” He wished to retain the tension between the ascent to God through creation that we find in Pseudo-Dionysius and later medieval traditions and the future-oriented eschatological tendencies in medieval thought.

In this chapter, I argue that de Lubac's eschatological synthesis structures his understanding of the sacramentality of historical revelation, of the church, and of mysticism or religious knowledge. I first explain how the divisions within medieval eschatology functioned to disrupt the sacramental economy of salvation. In sum, an overemphasis on either “realized” eschatology or “future” eschatology diminishes the sacramental dimensions of the historical economy of salvation. Second, I examine the eschatological structure of de Lubac's understanding of sacramentality. In general, de Lubac sees a sacrament as a visible “means” to salvation through which the “end” manifests itself. Third, I show that de Lubac narrates the centrality and efficacy of Christ in terms of this fundamental eschatological structure. Fourth, I examine de Lubac's ecclesiology as an eschatology. Finally, I show that de Lubac's mysticism or religious epistemology is governed by an anagogical perspective inspired by Origen. Present

contemplation of God depends upon the sacramental traces of God within the world, yet moves beyond those traces. The synthesis between kataphaticism and apophaticism remains for us future.

I. Eschatology and the Sacramental Economy

Simply put, history matters. In *Catholicism*, de Lubac claims that Christianity, unlike other religions and political ideologies, unites the mystical movement towards the transcendent with a consciousness of historical development. For de Lubac, Christianity weaves a path between making history its own goal by reducing salvation to a world process (as in Hegel and Marx), and divorcing revelation from historical events (as in Bultmann). For de Lubac, an overemphasis on either the *invisibilia Dei* or the inner-historical *futura* in Christian eschatology serves to disrupt the sacramental nature of the economy of salvation.

A. Dissociation between *invisibilia Dei* and *futura*

Problems arise in the Christian understanding of the sacramental economy from both a Joachimite and a Pseudo-Dionysian direction. Both dissociate the *invisibilia Dei* and the *futura*. Each eschatological emphasis ruptures the sacramental-historical economy of salvation by dividing *œconomia* (God's actions in history) from *theologia* (knowledge of God). According to de Lubac, Dionysian mysticism is a *theologia* divorced from *œconomia* while Joachimite eschatology is *œconomia* without *theologia*.¹

¹ De Lubac describes a unity of *œconomia* and *theologia* within pre-medieval theology. *œconomia* referred to God's actions in history from the very beginnings to the redemptive incarnation. *Theologia* describes the ultimate purpose or intention guiding the economy and, at the same time, God's fulfillment

The flowering of Joachimite and Dionysian systems of thought in the twelfth century came in the wake of developments in the history of biblical interpretation that methodologically separated history from allegory. The methodological separation of history from allegory implied a separation of economy from theology.

This separation was embodied in the fundamental shift of theological metaphor from the patristic era to the rise of Scholasticism. The divine *plan* became a *work* of divine wisdom. *Plan* suggests that God's intentions are unfolding and built up historically toward an eschatological fulfillment in the future. *Work* of wisdom, on the other hand, suggests God's eternal wisdom, of which the created world and the Bible are manifestations. This difference, however slight, is indicative of an increasing separation between economy and theology that manifested itself in late medieval theology, which attended more to philosophical problems than to the history of God's manifestation. In a sense, the notion that the Bible and creation are a *work* of eternal wisdom contributed to the division between the “invisible,” transcendent wisdom of God and the “future.”

The exclusive focus on the *invisibilia*, which de Lubac traced in Pseudo-Dionysian forms of thought, is an overrealized eschatology. Realized eschatology generally reflects the present-ness of the Kingdom of God in the Gospels: “Asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he said in reply, 'The coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed, and no one will announce, 'Look, here it is,' or,

of this plan. *Anagoria* was, at least, allied with *theologia*. At the same time, *theologia* affirmed God's transcendence even with regard to God's actions in history. Henri de Lubac, “La Révélation divine: Commentaire du préambule et du chapitre I de La Constitution ‘Dei Verbum’ du Concile Vatican II,” in *Révélation divine – Affrontements mystiques – Athéisme et sens de l’homme*, vol. 4, Œuvres complètes (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2006), 83. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *La Révélation divine: Église Catholique Romaine, Concile Vatican II [1962-1965]* (Lyon: La Bonté, 1966).

'There it is.' For behold, the kingdom of God is among you"' (LUKE 17:20-21 NABRE). In Luke, the kingdom is essentially bound to Christology. The kingdom is among us because Jesus is present among us. An overrealized eschatology intensifies the Lucan account: "the kingdom of God is *within* you."²

The Pseudo-Dionysian ascent of the mind is an ascent to a higher reality beyond history, *beyond* the events of salvation narrated in the gospels. Following the same pattern, some realized eschatologies accentuate the present moment in which God is made manifest to the conscience, the "now," and the divine presence in the "now." As de Lubac noted, Rudolf Bultmann's realized eschatology located revelation in the existential time of encounter and decision. For Bultmann, God acts historically. Yet, because of God's transcendence, the historical account of the Gospels can never adequately represent God's historical presence. The Gospels are mythologized accounts, created by the cultural prejudices of first-century Palestine, that articulate the inarticulable. The concrete events of salvation become a mere vehicle for *expressing* or *representing* the salvation already present that transcends human expression. Because the divine, for Bultmann, cannot be represented, "salvation history" is reduced to non-historical existential moments of encounter with the divine. On deeper inspection, by dissociating God's actions in history (*oeconomia*) from God's being (*theologia*), Bultmann appears to have repeated a pattern in Pseudo-Dionysian negative theology.³ The result of this intensified realized eschatology

2 *The Kingdom of God is Within You* is the title of Leo Tolstoy's manifesto on Christian anarchism and non-violence.

3 See de Lubac, "La Révélation divine," 83. Similarly, Kierkegaard's existentialism is a form of making oneself contemporaneous with Christ. But what is most important is the decision. Jacob Taubes sees apocalypticism manifest in both a historical tradition (Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx) and an existentialist tradition (Kierkegaard).

is the loss of the reality and efficaciousness of the historical events narrated in the Gospels for bringing about our salvation.

The legacy of Joachimite future-oriented eschatologies is the same, only turned on its side. Joachim leaves behind salvation history via a progression through history. For Joachim, salvation truly takes historical form. However, this salvation is future and yet to come. Historical progress is itself identified with salvation, that is, realization or actualization of the universe. Repeating the Joachimite pattern, Hegel and Marx conflate salvation—though it is conceived in differing ways—with the historical process. The process philosophy of Whitehead also proposes a kind of self-actualization of the universe. In each case, the universe has an intra-worldly goal. For de Lubac, the legacy of Joachim was theological as well as philosophical. Some contemporary theologians, de Lubac wrote, were incautious in reuniting protology and eschatology, or creation and fulfillment. Conflating “creation” and “covenant,” they envisioned the unfolding of history as the goal, rather than a means to a further goal beyond history. In these cases, prioritizing the historical *futura* results in a fundamental insufficiency or incompleteness in the salvific events of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Jesus is a sign and anticipation of the culmination of history, but no longer its focal point that takes history beyond itself. The concrete saving actions of Christ are, at best, ambiguous.

In contrast to the legacy of Joachim, de Lubac insisted that history's function is to pass into eternity. In “La Révélation divine,” de Lubac writes,

“The history of salvation is not its own end” (L. Malvez). Its purpose is to introduce us to the heart of the divine life. This is what overly-invasive notions of the history of salvation seem to forget. God *is revealed* to men as their Savior by intervening into their

history, he saves them through history, but that does not evidently signify that the final object of salvation and of revelation would be history.⁴

Again, he states, “The end of the messianic mystery is the mystery of participation in the intimate life of God, which is not history, but eternity.”⁵ De Lubac explains that history itself is not a “mediator” of salvation. The events of secular history are not “a supplement somehow to supernatural revelation, they are always 'ambiguous' and 'in waiting' [*en attente*], and they must be clarified for us by the light of the Gospel.”⁶

De Lubac's conception of history in *Catholicism* sought to hold together both transcendence and historical development in a unity. His later negotiation between Dionysius and Joachim reflected a continued attempt to negotiate a passage between the Scylla of modern realized eschatologies and the Charybdis of pronounced future eschatologies, especially in their secular forms. Both extremes, he argued, undermined the realism and efficaciousness of the actions of Christ in the economy of salvation.

B. The Twentieth-Century Biblical Context

De Lubac's understanding of the sacramental-historical economy of salvation navigates in a tension between realized and future. It is essential to provide a Lubacian characterization of the Christian sacramental economy, especially insofar as it attempts to meld together the two perspectives. The twentieth-century context is important for understanding what de Lubac had in mind.

Fin-de-siècle biblical studies rediscovered the eschatological aspects of the New

4 Ibid., 85.

5 Ibid., 86.

6 Ibid., 134.

Testament. Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer proposed that Jesus and the early church expected an imminent end of history, marked by the coming of the Lord. The primary context for understanding the historical Jesus was Jewish apocalypticism. The delay in the coming of the kingdom of God resulted in a subsequent development of the Gospel message that emphasized ethical action. In response to the future eschatology of Weiss and Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultmann and C. H. Dodd emphasized another New Testament theme: “the kingdom of God is among you” (Luke 17:21 NRSV). Bultmann and Dodd replaced the imminent expectation of the end with the notion that the end is already here. Bultmann interpreted the idea of the kingdom of God as the ultimate choice placed before human consciousness in the concrete world. C. H. Dodd wrote that the eschatological fulfillment was realized within the ministry of Christ himself.⁷

C. The Temporal Interim and Sacramental Economy

Generally, de Lubac agreed with Cullmann's characterization of the fulfillment of history. The Christ-event constitutes a new situation in which Jesus “inaugurates the eschatological era.”⁸ Jesus claims to fulfill all previous prophecies and bring an end to the

7 Today, many scholars recognize that the truth lies somewhere between future eschatology and realized eschatology. Oscar Cullmann's eschatology offered a mediating position between exclusively future and exclusively realized eschatology. His *Christ and Time* (first published as *Christus und die Zeit: Die urchristliche Zeit- und Geschichtsauffassung* in 1948) argued that the eschatological tension in early Christian writings is between present and future rather than between the immanent and transcendent, “time and eternity, or this world and the Beyond.” Philipp W. Rosemann, *Understanding Scholastic Thought with Foucault*, *The New Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 129. In Cullmann's understanding, the New Testament expects a fulfillment of the present time at the end of time, a fulfillment of history in history. Christ is at the center of history because he initiates its ultimate fulfillment. Cullmann also argued for the now-classic distinction between a Greek circular idea of time and a Jewish-Christian linear conception of time. His description of these differences bears a resemblance to de Lubac's own assessment of the difference between Greek and Christian thought in *Catholicisme* and *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*.

8 “Christ has inaugurated the eschatological era. His work fructifies, but not by appeal to another. The

era of waiting for the Messiah. In the context of Jewish prophesy, the coming of the Messiah marked the coming of the end. The coming of the Messiah was to bring the prophetic age to a close [OT → CHRIST-ESCHATON]. In a Christian context, Messianic time means living now in the last days in expectation of the imminent end and Christ's return. However, the drawing out of the eschaton changed things. The end of history was not imminent. Soon, Christians no longer awaited an imminent end, but rather an immanence of God in the present. The coming of the Messiah opened a temporal hiatus between the fulfillment of the Old Testament and its ultimate fulfillment [OT → CHRIST-----ESCHATON]. Christian life exists in a hiatus or interim between the two comings, where God prepares us for the ultimate consummation of God's plan.

According to de Lubac, both perspectives are conjoined in a Christian understanding of time. The time narrated in the New Testament is both the end time and a preparatory time. In Christ, the kingdom is already inaugurated and present; however, we remain in a period of preparation that is still symbolic and anticipatory of the final reality.⁹ The New Testament exists as present fulfillment *and* as a sign of what is to come. De Lubac calls this Christic time or evangelical time the “Interim.”¹⁰ On the one hand, the

'last times' have arrived; salvation is accomplished in Him, and for each generation 'the Church makes the end of history already present to time.'" De Lubac, "La Révélation divine," 93, quoting Jean Moroux.

9 "Insofar as the great 'Passage' is not crossed, history and allegory are not yet absorbed into each other. They are not yet fully unified in the 'Mystery.'" Ibid., 120. He adds, "The same ambiguity of evangelical time or the mystery of salvation is envisaged 'where it is lived by the Christ-Chief in the plane of our historical experience. There is a fragment of human time too difficult to characterize exactly: does it appear as a preparatory time or the "end time"?' On the one hand, it is anterior to the 'consummation of time' that constitutes the event of the Cross-Resurrection-Ascension (Heb. 9:11-12). But on the other hand, in the incarnate Word, heaven and eternity are already made present on earth and in time; the Kingdom is inaugurated in the person of Jesus (*autobasileia*, following the formula of Origen...)." Ibid, note 5.

10 Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E. M. Macierowski, vol. 2

eschaton is made present through Jesus. On the other, Jesus begins a temporal process of transcending time, a journey opening up for the church.¹¹ Even if Christ has already come and already brought fulfillment in himself, this fulfillment awaits an ecclesiological completion of which present realities constitute the sacraments.¹²

The time of the Interim, characterized by a tension between realized and future, already and not yet, end and preparation, marks out the terrain of the sacraments, which is also the terrain of mystery. This “terrain” makes sacramentality possible. In this vein, de Lubac writes that sacramental reality “is essentially related to our present condition, which is not one embodied in the epoch of figures pure and simple [that is the Old Testament], nor yet one which includes the full possession of the 'truth.'”¹³

II. The Structure of Sacramentality in de Lubac

For de Lubac, the Interim—the time between the time of figures and that of complete truth—forms the terrain of sacramentality.¹⁴ The sacrament is a figure of the

(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 183. Originally published as *Exégèse médiévale, 2: Les quatre sens de l'Écriture* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959).

- 11 “We are henceforth, until the end of time, within Christic time (which is the time of the end). The Incarnation of the Word of God ‘is a unique fact, not only in this banal sense, common to all facts, to all events, that it occurs only at one point in time; but it is still so in this completely unique, completely singular way. This Fact, alone among all, after having been prepared and prefigured by the long series of facts of the Old Covenant, does not cease since its first instant and will not cease to fructify within itself,’ with nothing that transcends it. It remains always current [*actuel*], always encompassing all of which he is the source: ‘*semper novum, quod semper innovat mentes, nec unquam vetus, quod in perpetuum non marcescit.*’” De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 131.
- 12 A significant convergence of themes occurs in the work of Jacob Taubes and Giorgio Agamben, who have indicated the impact of Paul on the western understanding of history. For Taubes, the Christian understanding of time opens doors to destructive and constructive forms of apocalypticism.
- 13 Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 204. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Méditation sur l'Église*, Foi vivante 60 (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1953).
- 14 While de Lubac did not generally use the adjective “sacramental” or noun “sacramentality,” he spoke generally of the attributes of sacraments. He does not explicitly examine sacramentality apart from particular sacramental loci, that is Christ, the church, and the seven sacraments. To speak of a

truth to come, making it temporal and teleological. In the language of symbol, the truth signified is the purpose or end of the sacramental sign. It is its future state. The sign's inner "intention"—its finality—overflows its bare materiality, making it participate in the reality signified while, at the same time, not yet bringing the reality signified to complete presence. The signified exercises a hidden power over the sign that makes the sign what it is. In what follows, I examine the key terms of de Lubac's sacramental lexicon, showing how they are embedded in the tension between realized and future eschatology, between *making present* and *anticipating* the future.

A. *Mysterium and Sacramentum*

Two of the most elusive and dynamic terms in de Lubac's theological lexicon—sacrament and mystery—are terms he employs frequently and are the most elemental to his theological vision. While these terms possess multivalent meanings, these meanings should nonetheless be understood as pointing to something common. De Lubac's terminology should be read synoptically. One of the complications, is that, as de Lubac notes, "sacrament" and "mystery" were used synonymously in the early church.¹⁵ The word "sacrament" is not found in the New Testament. *Sacramentum* became a Latin translation for the Greek μυστήριον (*mysterion*), which is prominent in the New

sacramental structure in de Lubac's work is, therefore, an abstraction from particular cases.

"Sacramental" or "sacramentality" can describe the underlying intelligibility of the seven sacraments. Paul McPartlan explains that in the early twentieth-century, Catholic treatment of sacraments followed, more or less, a polemical anti-Protestant defense of the seven sacraments. The apologetic of the number seven was deficient in showing the underlying intelligibility of the sacraments, or getting "behind the number seven." The theology of de Lubac and Karl Rahner, among others, influenced a shift in Catholic perspective towards grounding the intelligibility of the sacraments in Christ and in the church. Paul McPartlan, "Catholic Perspectives on Sacramentality," *Studia Liturgica* 38, no. 2 (January 2008): 219.

¹⁵ As noted above (Chapter 2).

Testament, especially in Paul's letters.¹⁶ The Greek *mysterion* received a Latin form, *mysterium*. In the early Christian tradition, de Lubac states, “sacrament” and “mystery” are often synonymous and refer to something sacred.

These synonyms began to be distinguished, at least in part. With Augustine, sacrament in particular began to possess the meaning of a “sign.”¹⁷ The sacrament is the visible sign of the mysterious secret. “The *sacramentum* would therefore play the role of container, or envelope, with regard to the *mysterium* hidden within it.”¹⁸ The two are opposed while united. De Lubac concedes that in the patristic tradition, the meanings of both *sacramentum* and *mysterium* floated between the two poles of “sign” and “secret,” depending on the author. The Augustinian understanding of “sacrament” and “mystery” as referring to the sacred is more or less retained until the twelfth century.¹⁹

In de Lubac's exposition, *mysterium* (mystery) floats between two poles. Apart from a substantive, inert meaning as a “secret,” it possesses a relational and active meaning. In this active meaning, mystery indicates not one or the other pole, but the

16 See McPartlan, “Catholic Perspectives on Sacramentality,” 223. For example, Paul's Epistle to the Colossians refers to the Word of God as the “mystery (*mysterion*) that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints” (Col. 1:26 NRSV). Similarly, Paul writes “with all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery (*mysterion*) of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9-10 NSRV).

17 “They always appear—beyond the permanent allusion to something sacred (*'divine and mystical'*, *'sacred and mystical'*) and all the resonances which such an allusion comprises—with the two fundamental senses, united in variable proportions, of sign and secret—*'arcanum'*—which are still the two senses attached respectively to our two words sacrament and mystery.” Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds, C.J., Faith in Reason (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 47. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: l'eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen âge. Étude historique*, Théologie 3 (Paris: Aubier, 1944).

18 De Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 47.

19 Ibid., 45.

relationship between them: between *tupos* (figure, type) and *aletheia* (truth).²⁰ Mystery indicates the *passage* from figure to truth. In this sense, “mystery of salvation” or “sacrament of salvation” conveys a *movement* from figure to truth and their unity at the same time. “Mystery” is not only the “secret thing” revealed, but an action joining the sign and secret signified, the type and truth.²¹ In *Corpus Mysticum*, he explains that the mystery is “the *secret power* by which the thing operates across the sign and through which the sign participates, here again in widely differing ways, in the higher efficacy of the thing.”²² We can speak of mystery as the active power drawing the visible sacrament into a participation with what it signifies. From another perspective, the mystery is the secret signified by the sacrament.

According to this Augustinian distinction-in-relation of mystery and sacrament, the sacramental reality is requisite for discovering the mystery. It is through the power of the mystery operating “across” the sacrament that the sacrament possesses its characteristic as a sign. The mystery is present in its visible aspect, the sacrament.

The relationship between sacrament and mystery helps to illumine de Lubac's characterization of sacramental reality in *Splendor of the Church*. Sacramental realities possess a twofold characteristic: first, a sacrament is a sign that must be passed through entirely to reach the mystery; second, the sacrament cannot be discarded at will.²³ The

20 Ibid., 53.

21 Ibid., 51–2. De Lubac invokes the “communication of idioms” or exchange of attributes to describe the mutual participation of sign and signified. The “communication of idioms” is especially pertinent when speaking of the humanity of Christ and the divinity, where it literally applies. He notes that depending upon the kind of sacrament about which we are speaking, this *communicatio idiomatum* will be different.

22 Ibid., 52.

23 “That which is sacramental—the sensible bond between two worlds—has a twofold characteristic.

sign, the outward visible reality, is not the truth of the sacrament itself. Thus, to stop at the sign is to be arrested by an idol. At the same time, the sacrament is indispensable and necessary to reach the reality of which the sacrament is a sign. De Lubac cryptically explained, "We never come to the end of passing through this translucent medium, which we must, nevertheless, always pass through and that completely. It is always through it that we reach what it signifies; it can never be superseded, and its bounds cannot be broken."²⁴ The sacrament is the singular way to approach the mystery and its necessity is never compromised. Yet we must envision the sacrament as a passage rather than the end, or rather as an unending passage.

B. Sacrament : Mystery :: History : Eschatology

For de Lubac, the unity and duality of *sacramentum* and *mysterium* is structurally the same as the unity and duality of history and eschatology. It is unsurprising to find the same structure involving this second pair because sacraments are always visible and historical events, realities, and rituals that signify a mysterious eschatological reality. The important point is that, for de Lubac, the sacrament is the visible reality that makes the mystery proleptically present and that mediates the eschatological consummation.

As mentioned above, the term *mysterium* "floats" between sign and secret. It likewise "floats" between historical reality and the eschatological consummation. This

Since, on the one hand, it is the sign of something else, it must be passed through, and this not in part but wholly. It is not something intermediate, but something mediatory; it does not isolate, one from another, the two terms which it is meant to link. It does not put a distance between them. It is essentially related to our present condition, which is not one embodied in the epoch of figures pure and simple, nor yet one which includes the full possession of the 'truth.'" De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 203–4.
 24 Ibid., 204.

last point requires explanation. According to de Lubac, “mystery” suggests God’s plan for salvation or God’s intention: “the mystery is somehow linked to God’s design for man, whether as marking the limit of or the means of realizing this destiny.”²⁵ In other words, it globally refers to the whole plan of salvation, but its meaning can be focused on the means by which this design is accomplished or the final reality accomplished.

The mystery always transcends human understanding. If restricted to the means, the mystery refers to its visible, historical, and tangible form. The mystery, de Lubac states, “concerns us, touches us, acts in us, reveals us to ourselves. To this end, it must have a tangible aspect, the incarnated Word of God, expression of the Inexpressible, the efficacious sign to realize the plan of salvation.”²⁶ “Mystery” can encompass the “end” or intended reality intended by God, but also the “means” of salvation by emphasizing the inner meaning or reality of that means. Sign or sacrament suggest the “means”—emphasizing its visible aspect—but always in union with the “end.”

For de Lubac, the eschatological is not merely the future, but the depth dimension of the present. “Mystery” is not an inert intention of God, but an active power of eternity reaching into history to bring it into eternity at the end. The mystery is the reality that actively draws the *signum* to be a participation in itself. More precisely, the mystery, as the final reality intended by God, makes its own visible aspect, the sacrament, a means to

25 Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, trans. James R. Dunne (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1969), 13. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxe et mystère de l’Église* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1967).

26 De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 14.

the final consummation, imbuing the sacrament with mystery.²⁷ In *The Splendor of the Church*, de Lubac draws the precise parallel between “mystery” and eschatology:

Like the whole of the Christian reality, of which she is the summing-up, the *Ecclesia Sanctorum* was in their eyes, when taken in the full sense of the words, something essentially eschatological. They were, of course, very far from regarding her as something which was merely “to come.” After all, the eschatological is not something simply absent from the present, any more than what is transcendent is exterior to everyday reality; on the contrary, it is the foundation of the present and the term of its movement—it is the marrow of the present, as it were, and exercises over it a hidden power.²⁸

De Lubac employs the same language of “exercising a hidden power” here to describe how the eschatological enters into the present as he does to describe the mystery's entering into the sacrament in *Corpus Mysticum*.²⁹

If we can summarize the perspective which illumines de Lubac's understanding of sacramentality, it would be in a twofold eschatological perspective.

1. From visible sign to signified: The inner “intention” of the sign overflows its bare materiality, allowing it to participate in the higher order of the signified. The visible and historical sacrament has a finality that makes it tend toward what it anticipates and signifies.

27 It is in this sense that de Lubac describes the *Sacramentum Molitio* from Augustine. Augustine interprets everything in light of a great idea “of which each is a particular expression.” The remark can be understood for the ensemble of ancient commentators, to refer to the whole of Scripture. The Model to come disposes and orders among them all its past imitations. These are organized in a homogeneous series, which develop throughout history. It is the elaboration of a single great ‘sacrament’—‘sacramenti molitio’—and by it we have understood at the same time the thing signified and its sign. It is ‘the order of prefiguration, begun with Adam.’ It is a ‘universal prophecy’ coextensive with duration until Christ. Prophecy in act, a vast and unique word.” Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l’écriture*, vol. 4, Théologie 59 (Aubier: Éditions Montaigne, 1964), 81.

28 De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 117.

29 Elsewhere, de Lubac emphasizes that the eschatological ensures the meaningfulness of history: “History only acquires a sense and meaning by a last judgment, which is precisely the end of history. The end of messianic mystery is the mystery of the participation in the intimate life of God himself, which is not history, but eternity.” De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 86.

2. From the signified to the visible sign: The signified exercises a hidden power over the sign, making it what it is. The eschatological signified “operates across the sign,” making the sign efficacious as a sign. The sacrament possesses the quality of signifying and bringing about because the eschatological enters into it, exercising a power over it.

Although this account of “sacramentality” abstracts from the particular cases—revelation, Christ, the church, the eucharist—it is useful to see a general structure of sacramentality. The next two sections treat the particular cases Christ and church, which are grounded by de Lubac's understanding of sacrament.

III. Incarnate Word as Sacrament of Salvation

Catholicism, de Lubac's earliest book, vibrantly portrays the sacramental dimensions of temporality in a Christian perspective:

Of necessity we must establish a foothold in time if we are to rise to eternity; we must use time. The Word of God submitted himself to this essential law: he came to deliver us from time, but by means of time—*propter te factus est temporalis, ut tu fias aeternus* [he was made subject to time on account of you, in order that you might be made eternal]. That is the law of the incarnation, and it must undergo no docetist mitigation.³⁰

De Lubac's characteristically unsystematic style raises questions. He appears to endorse the sacrality of time as a general principle, an “essential law,” which describes the functioning of the Word's incarnation.³¹ However, for de Lubac, Christ is the unique

30 Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 144. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Unam Sanctam 3 (Paris: Cerf, 1938).

31 Does the incarnation, though unique, exemplify a general principle common to all of history? Or does history contain sacral and sacramental dimensions because of the incarnation, because Christ is the leaven for all of history? To put it differently, is the potential of the created order to signify the divine, its sacramentality, a potential inherent in the created order itself? Or does the particular event of Christ open the created order to that potential? The question is rather abstract. Yet it has implications for the

revelation of God to humanity. His historical actions become sacraments of salvation. If we can speak of a general “law of the incarnation,” it is a law derived from and dependent upon the particular case of Christ. This perspective is made clearer in de Lubac's Christocentric theology of revelation. The general sacramental structure previously elaborated is the outcome of the historical revelation of the Word. Yet, the relationship between revelation in Christ and “cosmic” revelation remains ambiguous within de Lubac's writings.

I first examine de Lubac's interpretation of the structure of revelation and salvation in Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*. Second, I argue that, for de Lubac, Christ is the personal unity of salvation and revelation. Revelation and salvation are concentrated in the person of Christ. Third, I explain that salvation occurs not only through the mediation of the Father to humanity, but also through the mediation of humanity to the Father. Christ is the sacrament of this salvation, which occurs through his historical and visible presence.

A. The Sacramental Structure of Revelation and Salvation in *Dei Verbum*

Dei Verbum, Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, prioritized the historicity of revelation and Christ as the center of revelation. The document testified to a radical shift of perspective within Catholic thinking about revelation. De Lubac

significance of Christ, the church, and the particular sacraments. If the incarnation of the word is merely the particular instantiation of a general sacramental principle, the necessity of Christ, the church, and the reception of the sacraments are mitigated. The created order as such would seem to be an appropriate vehicle for mediating God's revelation or grace. If the Incarnation of the Word is the absolutely unique sacrament in which the temporal and eternal are united, the world might appear to be one in which God cannot be found in a sacramental or even analogous manner. De Lubac never attempts to resolve this tension directly.

played a role in the formation of the document. However, he did not reveal the precise nature of his role in the formation of the document in his autobiographical account of his writings.³² The final document, ratified in 1965, emphasizes the historical nature of revelation and its Christocentricity.

De Lubac's 1968 commentary on *Dei Verbum* is not only a commentary from a participant at Vatican II; it is also an attempt at influencing the reception of the document in the church. His commentary produces a radically historical understanding of revelation, one that envisions revelation to always occur sensibly or visibly. Revelation is the visible sacrament through which salvation occurs. According to de Lubac, salvation is already taking place through the revelation of the Incarnate Word, but it is nonetheless only complete in a future consummation.

32 In *At the Service of the Church*, he mentions that in 1960, he happened to read in a periodical that he had been appointed, along with the Dominican Yves Congar, as a theological consultant to the Preparatory Theological Commission for the Second Vatican Council. Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings* (San Francisco: Communio Books, 1993), 116. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits*, *Chrétiens aujourd'hui* 1 (Namur: Culture et vérité, 1989). While on the Commission as a theological expert, he relates, he “in particular gave the impression of being a hostage, sometimes even of being a defendant.” *At the Service of the Church*, 117. De Lubac's participation as a consultant to the Preparatory Commission lead to his appointment as a *peritus* (expert theological adviser) to the Council itself, which allowed him to attend meetings of the Theological Commission.

A sub-commission of the Preparatory Theological Commission, called “De fontibus Revelationis”, had produced a preparatory schema entitled *De fontibus Revelationis (On the Sources of Revelation)*. The working schema reflected classical positions taken as a development of the council of Trent and in the anti-protestant literature. While for Trent the “source” of revelation is the Gospel, in *De fontibus* Scripture and Tradition are thought to be the “sources.” Giuseppe Ruggieri, “The First Doctrinal Clash,” in *History of Vatican II: The Formation of the Council's Identity: First Period and Intersession, October 1962 – September 1963*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. 2 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 135. It sought to “resolve” open debates over the Catholic understanding of revelation, scripture, and tradition in favor of a neo-Scholastic and anti-Modernist school. Evidently, de Lubac had very little sway as a theological expert on the Preparatory Commission.

During debate over *De Fontibus* Schillebeeckx and Rahner provided widely-distributed and influential criticisms of the schema. *De fontibus Revelationis* became so controversial that it took an act of John XXIII to push the discussion over the document to the side. It is unclear what role de Lubac himself played in resisting the draft schema or in composing the new one, called the 1964 schema.

1. “*Dando revelat, et revelando dat*” (“In giving God reveals, and in revealing God gives)

De Lubac explained that the Council's intent is not to explicate the “doctrine on revelation,” but rather the “proclamation of salvation itself,” that is “revelation itself that is transmitted to us.”³³ The intimate union between the proclamation, that is revelation, and the salvation that it proclaims is made particularly clear in the Prologue, which quotes 1 John 1:2-3: “We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” In 1 John, the proclamation is of the “eternal” life who was with the Father and made manifest. The proclamation effects ecclesial fellowship and the fellowship with the Father and the Son, which constitute “eternal life.”

Following John, the entire first chapter of *Dei Verbum* attests to the “indissoluble union of revelation and salvation.”³⁴ De Lubac speaks of this union between revelation and salvation in two ways: first, revelation “contains” salvation; second, salvation is the object or end of revelation. First, revelation communicates the very reality of salvation:

The announcement of salvation contains the salvation announced. The object revealed does not consist in notions, by themselves without vital efficacy, which would just barely have as their goal to make explicit a Christianity existing already in an 'implicit' state, or to name finally a reality until then 'anonymous.'³⁵

³³ De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 58.

³⁴ Ibid., 59.

³⁵ Ibid. De Lubac's mention of an “anonymous salvation” sounds like a criticism of Rahner. It is possible that he had Rahner in mind, since Rahner had promulgated his thesis on “anonymous Christianity” prior to de Lubac's “La Révélation divine.” However, de Lubac did not read German.

De Lubac is criticizing an “intellectualist” notion of revelation as the communication of a series of abstract truths. “Intellectualist” theories of revelation tended to oppose “supernatural revelation” to “natural knowledge,” as that set of truths that the human mind could not attain by its own power. As a matter of course, they de-emphasized the historical nature of revelation because history could not easily be categorized into “natural” or “supernatural.” If revelation consists primarily of “concepts,” those concepts have no power to save. As a result, salvation would have to occur by other means. In contrast, de Lubac's theology of revelation is radically historical. Revelation consists in *events* that can be seen, heard, and touched. These events, and particularly the Christ event, “contain” the salvation that they announce.

Second, de Lubac speaks of salvation as an end or object of revelation. Again referring to St. John, de Lubac states that the object of divine revelation is “eternal Life,” that is salvation. The “life” of which the scripture speaks is identified with God. “The object of divine revelation, which we call '*Dei Verbum*' or '*Vita aeterna*,' is then God himself.”³⁶ This eternal life, the last end of revelation (*la finalité dernière*), is the communion with the Father and the Son.³⁷ For de Lubac, the gift of communion is brought about by the revelatory actions of God in history:

Dando revelat, et revelando dat. It is impossible to dissociate, even in thought...the manifestation that God makes of himself and the gift that he makes of himself; in other words, revelation and its end: this is what the whole first chapter of the Constitution *Dei Verbum* repeats. The one and the other are expressed by the same word: 'eternal Life.'³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., 51.

³⁷ Since God calls a whole people, “communion with God and communion among the faithful are then the two aspects of the same reality: the participation in eternal life.” Ibid., 56.

³⁸ Ibid., 57.

The revelatory manifestation and the salvific gift are united, yet the two are distinguished as means and end.

In de Lubac's understanding of revelation, revelation is always visible or sensible and historical. Salvation is thought of as the object or end of revelation, which de Lubac expresses as the “ultimate finality” (*la finalite derniere*). The relationship between revelation and salvation, united as means to end, can also be expressed in sacramental language, which I will explore in the next section.

2. “*Gesta Dei et consilium Dei*” [“The Deeds of God and the Plan of God”]

The second paragraph of *Dei Verbum* reads:

It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will [*Seipsum revelare et notum facere sacramentum voluntatis suae*] (cf. Eph. 1:9). His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature (cf. Eph. 2:18; 2 Pet. 1:4). By this revelation, then, the invisible God (cf. Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17), from the fullness of his love, addresses men as his friends (cf. Ex. 33:11; Jn. 15:14-15), and moves among them (cf. Bar 3:38), in order to invite and receive them into his own company. This economy of Revelation is realized by deeds and words [*gestis verbisque*], which are intrinsically bound up with each other. As a result, the works performed by God in the history of salvation, show forth and bear out the doctrine and realities [*doctrinam et res*] signified by the words; the words, for their part, proclaim the works, and bring to light the mystery they contain. The most intimate truth which this revelation gives us about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of Revelation.³⁹

Instead of speaking of scripture and tradition as “two sources” of revelation, *Dei Verbum* speaks of the “economy” of revelation manifested through the words and actions of God. Moreover, this manifestation is centered in Christ.

³⁹ “*Dei Verbum*,” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, vol. 1, rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 750.

De Lubac's commentary on *Dei Verbum* examines the "sacramental" relationship between the external actions and words within the historical economy and the salvation that they bring about. According to de Lubac, *Dei Verbum* overtly employs the language of the sacraments to confirm the efficacious character of God's interventions in history. *Dei Verbum* first states that revelation is communicated in *gestis verbisque* (deeds and words). But it elucidates and modifies this couplet with another phrase, *doctrinam et res* (teaching and things the words signify).

According to de Lubac, *res* was intended to evoke the *res sacramenti*, that which the sacrament signifies and brings about.⁴⁰ The *res* is not the external action or utterance but the profound reality united to the external action or utterance.

The "res" of which it [*Dei Verbum*] speaks overflows the "opera" or "gesta" taken in their sole visibility...because the "*res verbis significatae*" that it mentions designates a reality more complex and more profound than the "*gesta*": they [things that the words signify] comprehend at the same time the "*consilium Dei*" and, in their interior efficacy, the "*facta salutaria*." One will notice that the subject of the phrase is not simply "*revelatio*" but "*haec revelationis economia*"; the formula has been chosen to show that is a matter of revelation accomplished in time in the course of history, and not the announcement of it that is repeated incessantly since.⁴¹

According to de Lubac, the "*res verbis significatae*" of *Dei Verbum* comprehend both the salvific deeds (*facta salutaria*) and the plan or purpose of God (*consilium Dei*). The exterior "visibility" of the *facta salutaria* are interiorly connected to *consilium Dei* brought about through the *facta*. According to de Lubac, *Dei Verbum* makes explicit that the events of salvation are no mere exterior or phenomenal gesture but are sacramentally united to their salvific purpose and goal.

40 De Lubac, "La Révélation divine," 70 note 5.

41 Ibid., 70–71.

Just as de Lubac explicated the relationship between revelation and salvation in terms of sacrament, he uses the same structure in relation to the saving deeds (*facta salutaria*) and the plan of God (*consilium Dei*)

<i>Sacramentum</i>	<i>Res Tantum</i>
Deeds (<i>facta salutaria</i>)	Plan of God (<i>consilium Dei</i>)
Revelation (God's self-manifestation)	Salvation (God's self-gift)

In the language of the sacraments, by the visible sacramental sign (*sacramentum*), God effects the reality signified by the sign (*res tantum*). In de Lubac's commentary, the exterior or visible events of salvation (*gesta*) are efficacious in bringing about the salvific plan of God (*res*). This structure is at the heart of a Christian sacramentalism: external rites and realities are both signs of and mediations of a reality that surpasses them.

B. Christ, the Personal Unity of Revelation and Salvation

De Lubac's commentary on *Dei Verbum* speaks of the historical economy of salvation as a sacrament. In addition, it places the incarnation at the center of this sacramental economy. Because of the unity of humanity and divinity in Christ, his human actions both manifest the fullness of revelation and bring about the fullness of salvation. *Dei Verbum*, he argues, expresses the “concrete unity... of revelation and salvation, and, at the same time, the personal unity of the twofold object of revelation: the end to which it tends and the means willed to realize this end.”⁴² Christ himself constitutes the personal unity of revelation and salvation.

⁴² Ibid., 63.

The incarnate Word is the “absolute Presence of God among us.”⁴³ It is through him that God is revealed. Revelation is, therefore, identical to the “God-man” himself.⁴⁴ But the presence of God in Jesus is not divorced from his humanity:

The presence of Jesus Christ, illuminating and salvific at the same time, is the presence of the eternal Logos (Word), the only Word of God, the only Son of the Father. But it is at the same time a human presence, of a true man, a “man sent to men” in order to say from a human mouth “the words of God”: *et habitu inventus ut homo*.⁴⁵

In the mystery of the incarnation, God speaks to human beings and is present to them through a human presence. Thus, for de Lubac, the visible *humanity* of Jesus does not merely extrinsically signal the divine presence but mediates it: “The one who sees Jesus sees the Father—but one sees him through the humanity of Jesus.”⁴⁶ De Lubac refuses a monophysite theology of revelation that minimizes the humanity of the Son as precisely the site of the revelatory and salvific action of God.⁴⁷ The humanity of Jesus functions both as a sign of his divinity and a means of bringing about the divine presence.

How must we understand de Lubac's insistence that revelation and salvation are united in Christ? In “La révélation Divine,” de Lubac stated that the divine presence is totally human. But he immediately shifts to the theme of kenosis:

Already the divine Kenosis was announced in the Word of the ancient Law. In Jesus Christ, the temporality of the human experience and the eternal truth are joined together”

⁴³ Ibid., 116, quoting Rahner.

⁴⁴ “God speaks...to reveal himself and make us know the mystery of his will, 'hidden since the beginning,’” and who is “Christ among us, hope of the glory.” Ibid., 61, quoting from Eph. 1:9 and Col. 1:26.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 115, quoting Phil 2:7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁷ For de Lubac, however, it is not just the “hypostatic union” as a kind of ontological reality that mediates the Father, but Christ's concrete actions as both human and divine. “Any representation of the Incarnation that sees in the humanity of Jesus only the vestment that God uses in order to signal his speaking presence, is a heresy. And it is properly *this heresy*, rejected by the Church in its fight against Docetism, Apollinarianism, Monophysitism and Monothelitism, that is today considered as mythic, and refused as mythology, but not the authentic orthodox Christology.” Ibid.

[quoting Balthasar]. It is in "emptying himself" and in taking "the form of a slave" (Phil. 2:7) that he is made present to us in history to reveal to us "what the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, what is come to the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him."⁴⁸

The quotation from Balthasar supports de Lubac's previous explication of the incarnation: in sum, the divine revelation radiates through Jesus because in him human experience and eternal truth are united together.

Next, de Lubac appeals to the Philippians Christ Hymn to describe Christ's act of revealing. In Philippians, the kenosis of the Son is his being humble by taking on human form. In many accounts of salvation, the self-emptying of the Son is associated primarily with the passion and death and not with the incarnation. De Lubac interprets the kenotic act of the Son as the act by which the Son becomes historically and visibly present. De Lubac associates the self-emptying of the Son with his entire historical activity. It is through an act of self-emptying that God is able to speak to us, that the Word is articulated in history. As a result, de Lubac implies that revelation as such is kenotic, an act of self-emptying. The Word must empty himself in order to speak to us (revelation), not just to save us (salvation).

C. Christ as Sacrament of Salvation

Christ makes God present to us by emptying himself. While the kenosis-revelation connection is profound, it remains an underdeveloped theme in de Lubac's work. How does this kenosis pertain to the unity of revelation and salvation in Christ? Explaining this connection, I am going beyond de Lubac's text in what I think is a faithful articulation of

48 Ibid., 117.

its implications. Christ's kenotic self-revelation is indeed the same kenosis that constitutes the divine life. The Triune God *is* the kenotic perichoresis, the eternal and infinite exchange. De Lubac describes salvation as an entrance into the divine “eternal life,” that is, the communion between the Father and Son. The self-emptying of the Incarnate Word is the site where the divine and eternal kenosis (divinity) takes human and historical form (revelation). The historical appearance of the Son is “pro nobis” in the most intimate sense. The self-emptying of Christ in his humanity becomes both the temporal site of revelation and the efficacious sacrament of salvation that brings us into a share of the divine kenosis.

Christ is the personal unity of revelation and salvation. De Lubac more commonly referred to Christ as the “sacrament of salvation” or the “sacrament of God.”⁴⁹ In *The Splendor of the Church*, de Lubac wrote, “The Church is a mystery; that is to say that she is also a sacrament. She is ‘the total *locus* of the Christian sacraments,’ and she is herself the great sacrament which contains and vitalizes all the others. In this world she is the sacrament of Christ, as Christ Himself, in His humanity, is for us the sacrament of God.”⁵⁰ In “La Révélation divine,” he applies the phrase “universal sacrament” to Christ.⁵¹ In a similar way, in *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, he describes Christ as *the Mystery*.⁵²

For de Lubac, Christ is a sacrament of God because he is both a sign and a means:

“The mystery of Christ...in the unity of his person, is for us the ‘sacrament’ of God.” He

49 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 76.

50 De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 203.

51 De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 125.

52 De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 14.

notes that “*sacramentum* = at the same time sign and means.”⁵³ Calling Christ the sacrament suggests two interrelated characteristics. First, Christ mediates God's presence to us through his humanity, through the sign of his humanity. This is the symbolic or revelatory function of the sacrament. Second, as means, Christ is the way to salvation who draws us to the Father. This is the salvific function of the sacrament. The sacrament is not merely a window onto a transcendent reality, but it is the means by which we ascend to that reality.

In this perspective, Christ is the sacrament of God because his saving action is figurative in its function. He is the universal sacrament because he signifies or prefigures a future salvation of humanity. This salvation is envisaged as the *totus Christus*, the whole Christ, that is, Christ the head and members united to the head, who is united to God the Father. If, as mentioned before, salvation is both communion between the Father and the Son, and communion among the entire church, then salvation must be embodied socially. The saving actions of Christ, according to de Lubac, are what bring about this social salvation of humanity united in and through Christ. The same action by which he reveals God to us is the action by which he constitutes the church as the social locus of salvation. The church hopes for its future completion as the *totus Christus* at the end of time.

D. Excursus on Sacrament and Spiritual Exegesis

De Lubac's description of Christ as the universal sacrament could conceivably

⁵³ De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 63.

raise some objections. He describes sacraments as *means* to a future end, something that we pass through to reach that end. Yet the Gospel precludes the notion that Christ is a means to something else, something to leave behind once we reach the end of the journey. The often-employed binary language of de Lubac—type and antitype, figure and truth, sign and signified—used to describe the sacramental mediation from visible symbol to thing signified could lead to misinterpretation. Speaking of Christ as a sign or sacrament could wrongly suggest that he falls on the side of figure or sign but not on the side of the truth signified.

The counterbalance to such an interpretation is de Lubac's affirmation of the continuity of the “mystery of Christ,” from his earthly life to the eschatological consummation. While the historical actions of Christ signify a future, eschatological fulfillment, that fulfillment is essentially *in* Christ: “Everything is being produced right now, everything is living on and buckled up inside one and the same mystery: *Christ is substantially always the same; Christ signifies himself.*”⁵⁴ The careful balance between affirming the completeness of the work of Christ and an eschatological reserve is preserved in de Lubac's account of the spiritual interpretation of the New Testament.

The New Testament is the allegorization of the Old Testament letter; it is its spiritual meaning. The New Testament cannot, de Lubac, claims be allegorized in turn. He explains in *Exégèse médiévale*:

If it [the New Testament] is the spirit of the Old Testament, which is its letter, it is clear that we couldn't possibly treat it newly as a letter from which we could then extract the spirit. From here, we would be launched into a *processus in indefinitum*, a fruit of a wanton imagination, destructive of the Christian reality. To admit an explication of the

⁵⁴ De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:202.

New Testament analogous to this explication of the Old Testament that itself constitutes, would be to remove all the specific content from the word “spirit.” It would be to admit that the New Testament is susceptible, as the Old was, of an ulterior transformation or surpassing. It would be to make its very substance a call to something beyond itself. This would be to make the faith in Christ a relative and provisional faith, to see in Christ and in his Gospel the figures of another Savior to come, which would have in its turn the power to transform and surpass its figures “*in spiritualem intellectum*”—without doubt until that third Savior, who would no longer be the supreme and true savior.

To believe that the New Testament in its plain and complete meaning no longer contains an allegorical or spiritual meaning is simply to believe in Jesus Christ, of which his testament is “*novissimum*”—that is to say last, definitive, eternal, new—in an absolute sense. That is to believe that “with Jesus, eschatology has entered into history.” After Jesus Christ, we no longer have anything to understand or to receive. Outside Jesus Christ, we no longer have anything to hope for.⁵⁵

To say that there can be no allegorization of the New Testament indicates that Christ definitively transforms the world and that we await no other savior. It claims that Christ is definitive and last. It claims that any future world transformation, including that at the end of history, is a working out of the one already realized in his person.

The definitive nature of the Christ event is why, as de Lubac claims, tropology and anagogy follow allegory and are developed *within* it. Christ, who constitutes the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament, does signify additional meanings. Christ is a figure for the church and for the heavenly Jerusalem. Yet, de Lubac explains, there is a priority of the “sign” over the “signified.” The Old Testament was a figure of the New Testament, where the New Testament was the greater reality that fulfilled the Old. However, when we speak of the allegory as a figure of tropology and anagogy, the figure is the dominant reality.⁵⁶ The figure of Christ assimilates to himself (*concorporatio*) what he signifies.⁵⁷ Tropology and anagogy develop “within” allegory as the further

55 De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, 4:109–10.

56 Ibid., 4:112.

57 Ibid., 4:112–13.

explication and deepening of the meaning of Christ in the life of the church.⁵⁸ The movement of spiritual meaning is, in fact, incomplete without tropology and anagogy.

The New Testament allegory must engender further meanings:

It is really a sign, an efficacious sign. It is not any longer only mystery; it is the whole mystery in its principle. Tropology will describe only the fruit, anagogy will evoke only the consummation. It would not be grasped in its profoundness, it would even be truly mutilated if it were not contemplated in this double prolongation. But this word itself of prologation is inadequate, because in reality the investigation of the two last senses contributes nothing to the Mystery of Christ; it does not carry us outside of or beyond it; it only manifests its fecundity.⁵⁹

In this sense, there can never be a meaning that outstrips and supplants Christ. The New Testament can never be a letter for a new spiritual meaning.

However, de Lubac mentions that, in practice, the New Testament *was* interpreted as a “letter.” The Christ event is a sign pointing to the future salvation of the church, a salvation embodied in the tropological and anagogical meanings of Scripture. Although the Christ event was definitive, tropology and anagogy were something truly “to come.” In this way, without moving *beyond* Christ, the tropological and anagogical meanings are something more than allegory. De Lubac addresses this issue in *Exégèse médiévale*, where he asks whether the literal or spiritual sense is more important. If one is thinking of the Old Testament, he says, then clearly the New Testament, its spiritual sense, is more important: “the Mystery of Christ is superior to all its prefigurations.” However,

if one considers the New Testament, the response appears less simple. Here the literal

58 “At the same time it is the allegory of the Old Testament, its 'truth', its 'mystery', this great Fact constitutes up to a certain point the equivalent of what was, in the Old Testament, the *historia*. For it is really a real fact, happened in a certain place, in a certain time; it has then completely an exterior face, and, as the *historia*, it is really the foundation of all that there remains to inventory within the New Testament, that is to say, inside itself, by *tropologia* and *anagogē*. It is truly really the sign, or the figure of all that the establishment of the two last senses must expose.” Ibid., 4:111.

59 Ibid.

sense is itself spiritual, as the Mystery of Christ, even under its first aspect of historical fact, is the “truth,” that is to say, “the spirit” of the Old Testament. On the other hand, as this Mystery contains in itself, in the manner just explained, the two last senses which arise from its “letter,” this letter itself must be called the most dignified. The assimilating figure prevails clearly over the assimilated reality. The personal Act of Christ dominates the constitution of his “mystical body,” the Head is superior to the members. Nevertheless, this Act has for its end only the constitution of this “body.” The Head is desired for the members, the Word of God is incarnate only “*propter nos et propter nostram salutem*,” and the Church is the “pleroma” or the plenitude of Christ. More than the letter of the Old Testament, the intention of the Spirit is only that one remains at the letter of the New, and since the spirit of this letter, that is to say tropology and anagogy of which it is the sign and the foundation, does not surpass it really but finds in it all its substance, it is here not improper to say that it is the Mystery taken in its totality, the final reality wished by God, that constitutes the sense otherwise the most “dignified,” at least the most complete and, in the end, the most important.⁶⁰

God's ultimate intention, the mystery of Christ taken in its final state, takes priority. The actions of Christ recounted in the New Testament are truly anticipatory, prefiguring the eschatological consummation. When de Lubac speaks of Christ as the sacrament of salvation or the sacrament of God, he means that the historical actions of Christ are truly efficacious in bringing about a new situation between God and humanity. Furthermore, this salvation remains yet to come. The incarnation and his historical action remain the foundation and the sign of the accomplishment of salvation, which, though accomplished in his humanity, still awaits its full extension to the rest of humanity at the end of the world.

IV. Eschatology as Ecclesiology

Henri de Lubac's ecclesiology organically unfolds from Christology, just as, in spiritual exegesis, the allegory gives rise to tropology or anagogy. One of his predominant ecclesiological metaphors is the church as sacrament, which extends, so to

60 Ibid., 4:113–14.

speak, from Christ as sacrament. The sacramental metaphor relates the church in time to the church of eternity. Henri de Lubac's eschatology takes the form of an ecclesiology because the church at the end of time, the “whole Christ,” is the goal of all of God's salvific action. While a definitive account of de Lubac's sacramental ecclesiology is impossible here, I intend merely to relate the central ecclesiological theme, the church as sacrament, to his eschatology. I first briefly examine the treatment of his sacramental ecclesiology in recent literature, indicating the increasing prominence given to de Lubac's eschatology. Second, I examine the paradoxical nature of the church in terms of her being a “sacrament” of salvation. Third, I show that the structure of the church as sacrament is that she is the means to and signification of a future and heavenly communion.

A. De Lubac's Sacramental Ecclesiology in Recent Literature

De Lubac's treatment of the church and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, has received significant attention on several fronts in recent literature. De Lubac's writings have sustained interest for his communion ecclesiology and also for his understanding for the relationship between church and sacrament.⁶¹ The 2008 English

61 Hans Boersma, “The Eucharist Makes the Church,” *Crux* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 2–11; Francesca Murphy, “De Lubac, Ratzinger and Von Balthasar: A Communal Adventure in Ecclesiology,” in *Ecumenism Today: The Universal Church in the 21st Century* (Aldershot, England / Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 45–81; Lisa Wang, “Sacramentum unitatis ecclesiasticae: The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac,” *Anglican Theological Review* 85, no. 1 (December 1, 2003): 143–58; Robert Franklin Gotcher, “Henri de Lubac and Communio: The Significance of His Theology of the Supernatural for an Interpretation of Gaudium et Spes” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 2002); Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), chap. 4; Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998); David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996); Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993); Elie Koma, “Le mystère de l’Eucharistie et ses dimensions ecclesiales dans l’oeuvre d’Henri de Lubac” (Th.D., Pontificia Universita Gregoriana,

translation of his 1939 book *Corpus Mysticum*, which made this difficult text more accessible to English-speaking audiences, has spurred further debate over de Lubac's understanding of the social dimensions of ecclesial existence.

De Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum* argues that the term *corpus mysticum* (mystical body) applied within the late medieval and modern era to the church. At the time, “mystical body” was in the process of being opposed increasingly to the “real body.” The “real body” was that of Christ as really present in the Eucharist. De Lubac showed that these uses of the terms “mystical body” and “real body” came about through an inversion of meanings that took place primarily during the twelfth century. De Lubac revisited an earlier theology that envisioned the Eucharist as the “mystical body” and the church as the reality of which the Eucharist was the sign and sacramental means.

A dominant reading of *Corpus Mysticum*, from Michel de Certeau and Radical Orthodoxy, interprets de Lubac's recovery of the eucharistic meaning of *corpus mysticum* as a response to the individualistic spirituality that arose in modernity. The overemphasis on the Eucharist as the “real presence” of Christ (what Lawrence Paul Hemming calls the “fetishization” of the Eucharist), was a result of a spirituality that increasingly neglected the social dimension of salvation. By recovering the idea of the Eucharist as the “mystical body,” de Lubac shifted our attention to the assembled body of believers and their ecclesial practices as the object signified by the Eucharist.⁶²

1990); Marc Pelchat, *L'Église mystère de communion: l'ecclésiologie dans l'œuvre d'Henri de Lubac*, Collection Brèches théologiques 2 (Montréal: Éditions Paulines, 1988); Hubert Schnackers, *Kirche als Sakrament und Mutter: Zur Ekklesiologie von Henri de Lubac*, vol. 22, Regensburger Studien zur Theologie (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1979).

62 Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 158–166; John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*

As Lawrence Paul Hemming indicates, Catherine Pickstock and John Milbank interpret de Lubac to have spoken of the liturgical and social action of the visible church as the “site” of God's salvation. Not only is the work of Christ made present through the church, but the visible, assembled community is the site of the saving action of God: “What is being read back into de Lubac is precisely the visibility of the assembled community, the *ecclesia*, whilst at the same time an enforcement of the visibility of the work done as mystical.”⁶³ In other words, the visible ecclesial community is the “real body” of Christ that gathers to constitute the “mystical body,” the Eucharist, a sign and performative manifestation of the “real body.” Pickstock and Milbank, following de Certeau, collapse the saving action of God into the liturgical and social activity of the church.

This collapse of God's saving activity into the liturgical action of the church is consonant with John Milbank's interpretation of de Lubac's theology. First, Milbank advanced an interpretation in which de Lubac's understanding of the supernatural grounds all other aspects of his theology. De Lubac consistently rejected the Scholastic theory of pure nature, which proposes a hypothetical state in which humanity is not called to the beatific vision. As a correlate to the theory of pure nature, there developed a notion that human beings possessed a dual finality, a natural finality in virtue of possessing a human nature, and a supernatural finality “superadded” in virtue of the reception of grace.

Instead, de Lubac proposed that humanity possesses a single, supernatural finality.⁶⁴

(Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997).

63 Laurence Paul Hemming, “Henri de Lubac: Reading Corpus Mysticum,” *New Blackfriars* 90, no. 1029 (September 2009): 526.

64 See Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991). Originally

According to Milbank, de Lubac's opposition to "pure nature" and its consequences implied that he collapsed the distinction between "nature" and the "supernatural" and between the immanent and the transcendent.⁶⁵

Second, as a consequence, de Lubac also removes any distinction between social practice and grace, that is between ecclesial performance and supernatural life, or *praxis* and *theoria*. Milbank's ecclesiology reflects his understanding of the supernatural. Thus, Milbank's *Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* lacks any partition between Christology and ecclesiology, because, as John Webster puts it, Christ and the church are "co-constitutive."⁶⁶ To be fair, Milbank does not demonstrate absolute consistency in his

published in 1944. See also Henri de Lubac, *Le mystère du surnaturel*, Théologie (Paris: Aubier, 1965); Henri de Lubac, *Petite catéchèse sur nature et grâce*, Communio (Paris: Fayard, 1980).

65 For the pivotal texts on Milbank's interpretation of de Lubac, see John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005); John Milbank, "Henri de Lubac," ed. David F. Ford, *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Modern Theology since 1918* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005); John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 220–225; John Milbank, "The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy?: A Catholic Enquiry* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000), 33–45; John Milbank, "An Essay Against Secular Order," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 199–224.

66 John Webster is critical of Catholic communion ecclesiologies for their lack of partitioning between the agency of the visible church and God's agency. According to Webster, communion ecclesiologies share the characteristic of viewing salvation as something embodied within a particular ecclesial communion, as "essentially visible as a form of common life and part of the world's historical and material economy." John Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London / New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 161. While Webster recognizes the need to overcome an overly individualistic notion of salvation by re-integrating theology and church practice, he believes that most communion ecclesiologies fail to safeguard the "unparticipable perfection of God's triune life." Ibid., 163. They fail to recognize God's "utter difference" in relation to creatures and, as a result, risk minimizing God's freedom and grace with regard to the church: "The very density of the resultant ecclesiology can sometimes become problematic. Ecclesiology can so fill the horizon that it obscures the miracle of grace which is fundamental to the church's life and activity." Ibid., 155. While Webster takes particular exception to Milbank's theology, he believes that Milbank, Jenson, and de Lubac fall within a spectrum of the same teaching. De Lubac's ecclesiology, which he says depends upon a "metaphysical substructure" found within *Surnaturel*, is a principal example of a confusion of the divine and human within communion ecclesiologies.

Webster critiques a range of communion ecclesiology rather than offering a definitive interpretation of de Lubac. However, his understanding of communion ecclesiology in its Lubacian form is influenced by John Milbank's unfortunate interpretation of de Lubac's ontology. As a result, Webster understands a theology of communion to be a systematic consequence of the confusion

own theological program.⁶⁷

It remains, however, that the Radical Orthodox interpretation tends to distort de Lubac's ecclesiological vision by delimiting the scope of the “real body” to the present, visible communion. As Hemming states,

The result—caricature indeed—has been the fetishisation, not of the sacred species, the eucharistic host, but of the community itself, the one that has assembled for the Eucharist, and so the *Anwendung* of the interpretation has been a turning-in on ourselves, to intensify the objectification of the subjects for whom the host has become mere object.⁶⁸

The interpretation advanced by Milbank and others results in a misunderstanding of both de Lubac's ecclesiology and his understanding of sacraments.

I contend that de Lubac's sacramental ecclesiology corrects what Hemming calls the “fetishization of the assembly” and what Webster claims is a confusion of human and divine action within the church. However, de Lubac's ecclesiology must be read in an eschatological key. Hemming himself indicated the importance of eschatology for understanding de Lubac's theology of the church:

Only at the end of time is the Church in its entirety to be understood as fully present, and so only then is the identity of the Church with the Body of Christ visible and complete.

between creator and creature. First, Webster's view depends upon a misinterpretation of de Lubac's understanding of nature and grace. Second, Webster falsely believes that communion ecclesiology depends upon this confusion between God and creature. Instead, de Lubac vigorously defends the absolute transcendence of grace that makes communion possible.

⁶⁷ In *Theology and Social Theory*, he writes, “In the Incarnation, God as God was perfectly able to fulfil the worship of God which is nevertheless, as worship, only possible for the creature. This descent is repeated and perpetuated in the Eucharist which gives rise to the *ecclesia*, that always 'other-governed' rather than autonomous human community, which is yet the beginning of universal community as such, since it is nothing other than the lived project of universal reconciliation. Not reducible to its institutional failures and yet not to be seen as a utopia either, since the reality of the reconciliation, of restored unity-in-diversity, must presuppose itself if it is to be realizable (always in some very small degree) in time and so must be always already begun.” Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, xxxi. Rather than failing to distinguish between the *ecclesia* and Christ, or between the visible community and grace, here Milbank describes the church as the already-begun “universal reconciliation.”

⁶⁸ “Henri de Lubac,” 528.

At this point, sacraments, and above all the sacrament of the altar, cease to be, no longer needed as the mediation of the incompleteness of the *Corpus mysticum* (the end of time and the glorification of Christ's mystical Body, and the point at which the Body ceases to be mysterious, or a matter of significations, and is completed). Von Balthasar himself emphasises the importance of this eschatological aspect in de Lubac's work, and notes: "the Origenistic thought, which finds so strong an echo through history... that Christ and the blessed attain their ultimate beatitude only if the whole 'Body of Christ,' the redeemed creation, is gathered together in the transfiguration, is honoured in its lasting spiritual meaning." This occurs, von Balthasar tells us, only in "the heavenly Jerusalem." There is a hermeneutical key proposed in the text that most commentators have, as far as I can see, overlooked.⁶⁹

While Hemming is correct to locate the hermeneutical key in de Lubac's eschatology, he overlooks Susan Wood's *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church* in which she correlates de Lubac's understanding of Scripture, the church, and the sacraments. She notes that de Lubac did not explicitly capitalize on the eschatological orientation of spiritual exegesis in his work on the sacramentality of the church.⁷⁰ In other words, the correlation between scriptural anagogy, the eschatological church as *totus Christus*, and the *res sacramenti*, that signified by the sacramental signs, remains underdeveloped. In what follows, I draw from Wood's analysis of the church as sacrament to explicate this eschatological key to de Lubac's understanding of sacrament.

B. Paradox and Mystery: The Church as Sacrament

At the outset, we should note that de Lubac's ecclesiology weaves together the central biblical and patristic metaphors for the church: body of Christ, spouse, mother, mystery. Each metaphor is incomplete in itself and must be supplemented by the others. As Susan Wood notes, the church-as-sacrament supplements the "body of Christ"

⁶⁹ Ibid., 530.

⁷⁰ Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 127.

metaphor.⁷¹ The church as the “body of Christ” could suggest that the incarnation of the Word in Jesus extends through the church in an “ongoing incarnation,” which de Lubac himself employed to describe the church. The metaphor of sacrament, she writes, functions to moderate the body of Christ metaphor.

The sacramental metaphor for the church functions to bring together two sides of the church's paradoxical nature. In his post-Vatican II work, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, de Lubac examines the church in terms of paradox, opposing truths that must be somehow reconciled or joined together. To neglect either pole of the paradox would be to deform its reality. Paradox is characteristic of our present state, where we lack the intellectual perspicacity to rationally resolve both poles. The paradox is “resolved” only by recognizing the mystery, in which the parallel lines meet only at the horizon, the limit of history. “The mystery always transcends our definitions.”⁷² Referring to the church, de Lubac describes three paradoxical pairs: the church is of God and of humanity; the church is visible and invisible; the church is of time and of eternity.

First, de Lubac states the “Church is of God (*de Trinitate*) and she is of men (*ex hominibus*).”⁷³ De Lubac describes the church with the highest ecclesiological descriptors: she is “a mysterious extension in time of the Trinity,” “the incarnation continued,” the “presence of Christ on earth,” “the spouse of Christ and his body.”⁷⁴ He warns that these descriptions are inadequate because the church is also very human and sinful. We should avoid “ecclesiological 'monophysitism'” as well as Christological

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 18.

⁷³ Ibid., 23.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 24.

monophysitism. She is faulty and sinful. “The Church disguises her borrowed splendour in a shabby garment: the contradiction is, therefore, part and parcel of her nature and only the penetrating regard will know to discover the beauty of her face.”⁷⁵

De Lubac's high ecclesiology should make someone from the Reformed tradition, like Webster, uncomfortable. The first side of the paradox may not always match one's experience of the church. But, in what way does the church extend the Trinity in time? In what way is it the presence of Christ? De Lubac's intention is not to literally apply the incarnation of the Word to the ecclesial body. The church has a “borrowed splendor,” just as the moon borrows its light from the sun.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, this borrowed splendor can only be seen by penetrating her shabby humanity. The idea of “sacrament” remains in the background of this exposition, which will be filled out by two additional paradoxes.

Second, de Lubac describes the church as visible and invisible at the same time. Here the sacramental nature of the church becomes clearer: “The mystery, the efficacious sign, is not separated from that which it signifies and, on the other hand, what is signified can only be grasped through the mediation of the sign.”⁷⁷ De Lubac insists on the necessity of the visible, hierarchical, ministerial, and historical reality of the church as a sign pointing to its invisible reality. In the church, a “reciprocal interiority” pertains between the visible and the transcendent.

We must keep in mind that the relation between visible and invisible is, for de

⁷⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁷⁶ On the lunar symbolism for the church, see *ibid.*, 16.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 26.

Lubac, the relation between the “visible ecclesial communion” and the “invisible communion with the Trinity”:

Communion is the objective—an objective which, from the first instant, does not cease to be realized in the invisible; the institution is the means for it—a means which even now does not cease to ensure a visible communion. But their reciprocal interiority could not be understood...if we did not believe that the Christian life is received from above, a life to which we are begotten and in which we are nourished by a ministry coming from Jesus himself and which realizes historically a communion victorious over all history.⁷⁸

Here the church generates a visible ecclesial communion while at the same time acting as a means to the invisible. It is a means, but the invisible is already present, already acting within the visible communion. What is critical is that the visible communion is an historical “means” to an invisible, eternal “end.”

This leads us to the third paradoxical pair: the church is of time and of eternity. It is historical and eschatological. In *Motherhood of the Church*, de Lubac describes the church as the “eschatological anticipation, within the temporal order itself, of that Kingdom of God proclaimed by the Gospel.”⁷⁹ In *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, he states:

The reign of God is yet to come: but “without waiting for history to run its course, it has already, in a mysterious anticipation, made its appearance in the inner marrow of history.” After the coming of Christ and his resurrection, “time-after’ is already present in the interior of time.”⁸⁰

The church is a visible and historical communion that anticipates the eschatological communion and is the site for the eschatological acting within the temporal. There

78 Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church Followed by Particular Churches in the Universal Church and an Interview Conducted by Gwendoline Jarczyk* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 35. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Les églises particulières dans l'Église universelle; suivi de La maternité de l'église, et d'une interview recueillie, par G. Jarczyk*, Intelligence de la foi (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1971).

79 *The Motherhood of the Church*, 126.

80 De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 52.

remains an identity between the present and eschatological church, as well as a distinction between them.

De Lubac's criticism of the Vatican II constitution on the church, *Lumen Gentium*, is helpful for understanding this identity with distinction. De Lubac approved of *Lumen Gentium*'s recovery of a virtually lost theological theme, the “people of God journeying towards a common destiny.”⁸¹ This theme recovered the historical dimensions of ecclesial existence as a communal pilgrimage on the way to a goal that transcends history. However, de Lubac criticized the document for reintroducing a modern dualism between the “pilgrim church” and the “heavenly church.” Commenting on the seventh chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, de Lubac explains that the eschatological perspective of the church arising in the last centuries and articulated in *Lumen Gentium* is “novel in the light of the classic teaching (though not always of the theological reflections).”⁸² This dualism—which originated from a focus on individual eschatology against corporate eschatology—sees the two churches as vertically juxtaposed. While *Lumen Gentium* melds together corporate and individual eschatologies, he says, the juxtaposition of the earthly and heavenly tends to occlude the notion that the terrestrial is already making the heavenly present. As a result, *Lumen Gentium* represents a “narrowing of the patristic horizons.”⁸³ For the Fathers, the church is both terrestrial and heavenly, existing as a terrestrial anticipation of the eschatological kingdom constituted by the whole Christ.⁸⁴

Here, as in *Catholicism*, de Lubac argued that an adequate ecclesiology must

81 Ibid., 47.

82 Ibid., 47.

83 Ibid., 51.

84 Ibid., 52.

balance the image of development through time with proleptic anticipation. The church exists in a paradoxical “not-yet” and “already-present;” it is the “church on pilgrimage” and the “church as already filled with Christ and the Spirit.”⁸⁵

C. Communion Ecclesiology in an Eschatological Perspective

The church-as-sacrament is situated in the tension between these two perspectives. Between the visible church and the heavenly church, there is both an identity and a gulf. The church militant is not other than the heavenly church: in de Lubac's perspective, they are different states of the same reality. Yet there is clearly a gulf between the now and the eschaton. De Lubac's understanding of the church as a sacrament helps to harmonize the two affirmations.

There are two temporal trajectories to any ecclesial sacrament: the sacrament is first a making-present of a past reality; secondly, it makes present and anticipates a future reality. De Lubac writes,

The Church which gave them life in the waters of baptism, this Church--visible and terrestrial herself—was therefore for them at the same time “the heavenly Church,” “the heavenly Jerusalem, our mother”.... In this all-embracing view of the mystery the Church is identified with Christ, her spouse, who is himself the kingdom: “autobasileia,” as Origen admirably puts it. Now this view corresponds to the deepest logic of Christian eschatology and to depart from it could lead to many abuses of both thought and action. The reign of God is yet to come; but “without waiting for history to run its course, it has already, in a mysterious anticipation, made its appearance in the inner marrow of history.” Since the fact of Christ and his resurrection, “time-after” is already present in the interior of time.”⁸⁶

To speak of the church as a sacrament means first of all that the church makes Christ present. But this making-present is equally a making the end of time present to us since

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 76; See also, de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 147.

Christ has entered into that fullness in his own person. The eschatological church, the whole Christ, is what the sacrament makes present. He states: “Christ has inaugurated the eschatological era. His work fructifies, but not by appeal to another. The 'last times' have arrived; salvation is accomplished in Him, and for each generation 'the Church makes already present to time the end of history.’”⁸⁷ This end of history is constituted by the unity of all humanity through Christ.

The historical church is a means to its own eschatological realization and a proleptic anticipation of that realization: “The Church is the ark that saves us from death. But we are not mere passengers on this ark: we *are* the ark, we are the Church.”⁸⁸ The church is the sacramental means and the eschatological end. As means, she is a present, visible, organic, and incomplete unity which is the sacrament of her eschatological culmination, the “whole Christ,” the heavenly unity of all humanity.⁸⁹ To put it differently, the visible communion exists in anticipation of a more perfect communion. The eschatological élan of de Lubac's communion ecclesiology moderates a triumphalistic fusion of church and kingdom that would presume an identity between the Roman Catholic Church with the kingdom. It moderates the “already-present” with a “not-yet.”⁹⁰

87 De Lubac, “La Révélation divine,” 93, quoting Jean Mouroux.

88 De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 21.

89 As Susan Wood explains, the notion of the church as sacrament supplements the notion of the church as body of Christ by limiting the identification of church with Christ: “The Church as a sacrament of Christ is Christ, yet it is different, and the difference can, at least in part, be expressed as the difference between sacramental mediation of that which is complete eschatologically and its full eschatological manifestation.” Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 127.

90 Similarly, in his “Le Fondement théologique des missions,” de Lubac describes the catholicity of the church as what the church is called to be. Catholicity is not a description of the geographical extent of the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, it is an essential aspect: “It is an idea and a force. It is an ambition and exigence. Its catholicity is its vocation, which is melded with its being.” Henri de Lubac, “Le

In summary, the church is the present union of humanity awaiting its eschatological completion; but it is also the concrete anticipation of and means to that completion. For de Lubac, the locus for salvation is concrete and visible. This exposition of de Lubac's eschatological understanding of the church may not satisfy some objections. Webster might interpret a sacramental ecclesiology as endangering divine freedom or agency. For de Lubac, it indicates concrete and historical nature of our participation in salvation without thereby reducing salvation to an historical process.

D. Temporal Progress and the Kingdom

At this point it is pertinent to raise the question of the relationship between temporal progress and the kingdom of God. If the Christian church is a visible unity that anticipates and mediates the Kingdom, and if that unity is social, concrete, and historical, it would follow that the actions of the temporal church anticipate and mediate the kingdom. The tradition of Catholic social teaching assumes that the church has a positive role to play in the human social and political arena. If salvation is indeed social, the social doctrine of the church cannot be divorced from other theological doctrines. In sum, the practical action of the church in the social sphere is unified with its liturgical action and its function as a sacrament of salvation. If salvation is being realized in the concrete, then it must take up social and political dimensions, embody particular relationships, and social structures.⁹¹

Fondement théologique des missions,” in *Résistance chrétienne au nazisme*, vol. 34, Œuvres complètes (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2006), 47. This essential mark of the church is its calling.

91 Such a perspective is implied in a range of recent studies. Susan K. Wood's book, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, is based on her dissertation entitled “The Church as the Social Embodiment of Grace in

De Lubac's position remains somewhat ambiguous. Schindler argues that for the liberal tradition of political thought, there is a sharp dualism between citizen and believer, between the political and the supernatural, between ultimate and penultimate ends. For de Lubac, he states, sanctity comprehends citizenship and the eternal comprehends temporal ends. In other words, our ultimate destiny is already being worked out within the particular and historical, and is embodied in political and social forms.

However, in his *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, de Lubac insisted on the non-identity of temporal progress and the kingdom of God.⁹² He argued human liberation is fundamentally ambiguous in its relationship to salvation:

“Liberation of man,” understood as a social emancipation, is a human undertaking which, even when inspired by faith, brings about...by human means certain changes in the organization of temporal society, and which becomes part of human history, with all the hazards...of going from bad to worse, which will always remain possible in this

the Ecclesiology of Henri De Lubac.” While Wood extensively analyzes de Lubac's communion ecclesiology, she does not address the question of social and political progress. David L. Schindler, employing a communion ecclesiology from de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and John Paul II, argues that social and political practices (processes and procedures) are not ideologically neutral. There is a religious form embodied within social and political practice, which either bear a structurally resemblance to the Christian mystery, or which take on another form. John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock take the perspective that socio-political practices can either embrace nihilism or embody salvation, the latter constituting the social-liturgical practice of the Christian church. In a similar perspective, Hans Boersma has indicated that de Lubac's sacramental ecclesiology suggests a pathway between two extremes: an exaggerated anti-Constantinianism which would restrict the action of the church to the “spiritual,” leaving the state in its own realm; and the “perfect society” ecclesiology that imagines the church as a national or political community. Susan K. Wood, “The Church as the Social Embodiment of Grace in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1986); Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*; Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*; Milbank, “Henri de Lubac”; Pickstock, *After Writing*; Hans Boersma, “Sacramental Ontology: Nature and the Supernatural in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac,” *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1015 (2007): 242–273; Jean-Yves Calvez, *Chrétiens, penseurs du social*, Histoire de la morale (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008).

92 The context of *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* can help explain its tone. It was written during the Cold War and at a time when Marxist thought was influencing Christian theological reflection on the coming of God's kingdom and the role of temporal progress and development. It was also written a year after de Lubac's *La Posterité spirituelle*, which traced Hegelian, Marxist, and other future-oriented philosophical eschatologies back to Joachim. When he writes about human progress, he is thinking of Joachim, Hegel, and Marx. See Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 162.

groping and sinful world. "Salvation in Jesus Christ," on the contrary, is essentially a divine undertaking which comes about in the depths of hearts and is inscribed in eternity. This makes clear the proper role of the Church; she is the messenger and bearer of this salvation and hence she cannot be assimilated, either in her structure or in her aims, to any of our human societies.⁹³

De Lubac maintains the absolute transcendence of the grace of salvation with respect to the structures of political society. He distinguishes between liberation as a social program and liberation as the freedom from sin. The first is fundamentally ambiguous in relationship to the latter. Yet one might wonder, given his language, whether human liberation is *ambivalent* with regard to salvation.

Writing about the relationship between the "world process" and salvation, he uses stronger language:

since the world as a whole is going to its death, "it cannot be considered an immanent reflection or an anticipation of the Kingdom of God." Hence it cannot be, as such, the goal of our hopes. We must, then, take care not to confuse the "progress of this world" (itself a very ambivalent term) with the "new creation." We must avoid slipping from conversion of heart, by which the "new man" is born in Christ, to the unfolding of history (dialectic or not) that bears "as in its womb" the societies of the future.⁹⁴

Neither human progress nor world history should be considered an anticipation of the promised kingdom:

In its social meaning liberation of every kind belongs to time; salvation is for eternity, and for that reason anticipates time. We should not even say, strictly speaking, that the more or less perfect accomplishment (it always remains imperfect) of the first of these two goals is at least the indispensable preparation for the second; for this would amount to saying that the Christian hope is necessarily situated in the prolongation of the objective results obtained by human efforts.⁹⁵

Human liberation cannot be confused with the spiritual renewal that occurs in the human heart and which transcends history and progress.

93 Ibid., 159–60.

94 Ibid., 101.

95 Ibid., 107.

De Lubac's response to Edward Schillebeeckx's considerations on the relationship between salvation and human progress illuminates his position. As Wood has argued, de Lubac reacted to Schillebeeckx's characterization of the church as the *sacramentum mundi*, the "sacrament of the world." The question is posed about what the ultimate reference of the church-as-sacrament is: is the church the sacrament of the world or of Christ?⁹⁶ For Schillebeeckx, the church is the visible sacrament of the growth of the historical process toward salvation. God's universal will to save humanity is manifested in the struggle for a better world, even though this manifestation is not explicit or thematic. The salvation of the world through God's grace, coinciding with the unity of humanity, is made explicit within the church.⁹⁷

De Lubac criticized Schillebeeckx on two fronts. First, Schillebeeckx's description of the church as *sacramentum mundi* presented the church as the expression of a salvation already available in the secular world. It ultimately confuses the supernatural and nature and it collapses "creation and divinization."⁹⁸ As a result, the church explicitly thematizes a salvation implicit within socio-political projects. Second, Schillebeeckx fails to articulate the fact that salvation transcends all the features of our historical world. Concerning Schillebeeckx's position, he asks, "Does the 'eschatological kingdom' not appear, in all this, as the culmination of our 'earthly expectations,' as their supreme fulfillment and consummation?... So, in practice, human history and salvation history

96 See Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 109–17.

97 See Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 260.

98 De Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, 226.

would be one and the same.”⁹⁹ The problem, as de Lubac saw it, was that the eschatological kingdom for Schillebeeckx is merely the endpoint of secular progress and not the transfiguration of the world that takes the world beyond itself.

In general, de Lubac's eschatology attempted to avoid two pitfalls. On the one hand, he wished to avoid the identification of temporal and secular progress with a coming eschatological kingdom (reflecting his engagement with Joachim and Joachim's posterity). The infinite difference between creation and salvation is preserved in the difference of orders between human progress and the kingdom. It is clear that he wished to avoid collapsing salvation into an immanent world process to which political progress would contribute. On the other hand, de Lubac attempted to avoid severing all relationship between the visible, temporal order and grace, the supernatural, or the kingdom (reflecting his engagement with early modern theories of pure nature). In different contexts, he places a greater emphasis on avoiding one or the other extreme. In *Brief Catechesis*, he was primarily attempting to avoid the former. His manner of speaking of temporal progress and human liberation is telling, for he defined “human liberation” as the restructuring of temporal society by human means. Human liberation is the rearrangement of the deck chairs on the sinking ship of history. It is a social or political rearrangement considered independently from the revolution of God's grace, the conversion of heart.

In the context of my wider discussion, does de Lubac's insistence that grace is of an entirely different order than temporal progress conflict with his understanding of

⁹⁹ Ibid., 225.

sacramentality, especially of the church's visible and historical presence? Is de Lubac's sacramental ontology, in which we proleptically encounter salvation in concrete, social, and historical forms, at odds with his claim that temporal progress cannot be the preparation or anticipation of salvation? De Lubac did not directly address this apparent conflict within his writings.

For de Lubac, the church itself is the temporal reality—a visible communion and sacramental anticipation—that makes the kingdom present. The church is the sacrament of the eschaton. As in all sacramental reality, the visible sacrament cannot be an end in itself. It achieves its identity as sacrament when it is a means to the final end, a means that we must pass through, and which we never completely pass through. The church embodies a certain way of life that takes on social, liturgical, and political dimensions, which constitute her visibility. Salvation proleptically enters into these dimensions. Yet this social and political space is always an anticipation and, as such, is incomplete.

In de Lubac's view, it would be false to absolutize a certain set of practices as definitively embodying salvation. His communion ecclesiology cautions against it. We enter into communion with God through the ecclesial communion. It would be a mistake, however, to confuse the exterior dimensions of the ecclesial communion, conceived of as exterior practices and structures, with communion with God. The rearrangement of institutions, structures, and practices is no guarantee of salvation; and salvation is not reducible to these institutions, structures, or practices. That is why the exterior of the

sacrament, however we conceive it, cannot be an idol pursued for its own sake. Rather, it must be an icon transparent to the eternal.

Unfortunately, de Lubac did not apply the notion of sacramentality to human liberation or the growth of charity as an ecclesial practice that embodies salvation, at least partially. Unlike Johann Baptist Metz or Gustavo Gutiérrez, de Lubac did not show how social and political practices, the struggle for justice, or the social aspects of ecclesial communion could be anticipatory of the consummation of God's plan. Conceived as only a human effort to reorganize the bureaucracy of social existence, social justice appears enclosed within its own order. Conceivably, de Lubac's understanding of the church as sacrament—of God and of humanity, bearing both the invisible and visible, uniting the eschaton with history—could be reclaimed for interpreting the church's socio-political dimensions. Keeping in mind that these dimensions are always ambiguous—as is temporal progress—they might appear as icons of the divine or as sacraments of the eschaton. In this sense, practices of communion could be considered *within* the sacramental economy of salvation as anticipatory of the eschatological kingdom.

V. Mysticism as Anagogy

After outlining the eschatological features of de Lubac's Christology and ecclesiology, the transition to mysticism may appear abrupt. I concede that it is. Yet, de Lubac's eschatological themes are extended in his writings on mysticism and this mysticism suffuses his writings.¹⁰⁰ Like his eschatology in general, his reflections on

100 As Rudolf Voderholzer states, his interpretation of Christianity is mystical and the mystical appears as a *leitmotif* throughout his works. Rudolf Voderholzer, *Meet Henri De Lubac*, trans. Michael J. Miller

mysticism are fragmentary and incomplete. De Lubac claimed that his unwritten book on mysticism inspired much of his thinking. In 1956, he wrote:

I truly believe that for a rather long time the idea for my book on Mysticism has been my inspiration in everything; I form my judgments on the basis of it, it provides me with the means to classify my ideas in proportion to it. But I will not write this book. It is in all ways beyond my physical, intellectual, spiritual strength. I have a clear vision of how it is linked together, I can distinguish and more or less situate the problems that should be treated in it, in their nature and in their order, I see the precise direction in which the solution of each of them should be sought—but I am incapable of formulating that solution. This all is enough to allow me to rule out one by one the views that are not conformed to it, in the works I read or the theories I hear expressed, but all this does not take its final form, the only one that would allow it to exist. The center always eludes me. What I achieve on paper is only preliminary, banalities, peripheral discussions or scholarly details.¹⁰¹

Beyond his powers to begin, this book is at the center of his theology. While de Lubac failed to articulate the systematic core of his thinking, his failure is congruent with his mysticism itself, in which the very ideas and concepts that we vitally need to reach God, in the end, must be transcended.

De Lubac gave significant attention to mysticism in four sets of writings. Because de Lubac lacked a systematic approach to the diverse arenas in which he spoke of mysticism, most commentators fail to correlate them. First, de Lubac's ecclesiological writings treat the “mystical body,” which we have already touched upon. Second, his writings treating non-Christian religions have “mysticism” as a prominent theme.¹⁰² His

(San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 211.

101 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 113; Voderholzer suggests that de Lubac's unstated book on Christ and never-begun book on mysticism were one and the same. Voderholzer, *Meet Henri De Lubac*, 159; The book on Christ is mentioned in de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 147–8.

102 Henri de Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 35–69; Henri de Lubac, *Aspects du Bouddhisme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1951); Henri de Lubac, *La rencontre du Bouddhisme et de l'occident*, Œuvres complètes 22 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000); Paul Magnin, Jean-Noël Audras, and Association internationale Cardinal Henri de Lubac, *L'intelligence de la rencontre du Bouddhisme: Actes du colloque du 11 octobre 2000 à la Fondation Singer-Polignac*, “La rencontre du bouddhisme et de l'Occident depuis Henri de Lubac,” Études lubaciennes 2 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001); David Grumett, “De Lubac, Dry Land Buddhism, and

article “Mysticism and Mystery,” which relates non-Christian mysticisms with the Christian mystery, is sometimes referred to as an outline of his mystical theology. Third, de Lubac's writings on the history of biblical interpretation speak of “tropology,” the third sense of scripture, as the “interiorization” of the mystery. These writings describe the unity of biblical interpretation, mysticism, and doctrine in pre-Modern times.¹⁰³ Lastly, his *Discovery of God* presents a fragmentary religious epistemology and apologetic. It presents our experience of the finite world as a pathway to God. Interpretation of this work is made difficult by the fact it reads more like Pascal's *Pensees* than a treatise on religious knowledge: it gathers together fragmentary thoughts, quotations, and prayers of praise under a single title. Instead of presenting a demonstration for theistic belief, it leads the reader to move beyond the constructions of our limited intellects and recognize in those constructions the traces of God. *Discovery of God* is certainly mystical, though its themes are not easily harmonized with his other writings.

I will not attempt a systematic correlation among his various writings on mysticism. My intention is more limited. In what follows, I merely sketch how de Lubac's mysticism is situated in his eschatology. First, I interpret de Lubac's *The Discovery of God* in terms of its tension between possession of God in the present and anticipation of God. Anticipating his recovery of *anagoria* in the Fathers, de Lubac describes mysticism as the discovery of the sacramental traces of God in the world. At the same time, these traces of God forever propel the mystic beyond them. Second, de Lubac

Roman Catholicism,” *The Journal of Religion* 92, no. 1 (2012): 58–83.

103 See Voderholzer, *Meet Henri De Lubac*; William Murphy, “Henri de Lubac’s Mystical Tropology,” *Communio* 27, no. 1 (2000): 171–201; Marcellino G. D’Ambrosio, “Henri de Lubac and the Recovery of the Traditional Hermeneutic” (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1991).

interpreted natural or non-Christian mysticisms as anticipations of the mystery to be consummated only at the end of time. His understanding of mysticism assumes the pattern of his Christology and ecclesiology, in which the eschatological enters into the present and the present is a proleptic anticipation of the mystery to come.

A. Religious Epistemology

The question of religious epistemology is integral to de Lubac's understanding of mysticism. However, de Lubac's reflection on religious epistemology treats a distinct set of themes from a different viewpoint. Whereas his writings on mysticism addressed the relationship between the human image and divine likeness, his writings on religious epistemology account for how knowledge of a transcendent God is possible via a knowledge of creation. The latter question was one of the obligatory questions of natural theology in nineteenth- to twentieth-century Catholic theology, which de Lubac took up in *The Discovery of God*.¹⁰⁴ In a sense, mysticism and religious epistemology converge, according to de Lubac's thought, on a single point.

In what follows, I will first contextualize de Lubac's *The Discovery of God* in the debates over natural theology early in the twentieth century. Second, I examine de Lubac's treatment of the “dialectic of affirmation” for its eschatological themes. Third, I argue that sacramentality and kenosis are two themes that emerge from de Lubac's religious epistemology, albeit in an underdeveloped way.

¹⁰⁴ *The Discovery of God* is the English language translation of de Lubac's *Sur les chemins de Dieu* (*On the Roads toward God*) (1956), an updated edition of his *De la connaissance de Dieu* (*On the Knowledge of God*) (1948). While the two versions were substantially the same, the updated title perhaps reflects a shift in metaphor, from scientific knowledge to mystical journey.

1. Transcendental Thomism and the Recovery of Intuition

De Lubac sought to remedy a tendency within modern Catholic natural theology. Often following Thomistic principles, natural theologies attempted to demonstrate God's existence, rising from the knowledge of being of creatures to a knowledge of God's being. Neo-Scholastic natural theologians of the early twentieth century operated under the problematic derived from the Thomistic revival in the nineteenth century. They saw their primary task as establishing a pathway between rationalism and fideism by demonstrating that, on the one hand, reason could prove the existence of God independently of faith and, on the other hand, the act of faith was reasonable.¹⁰⁵

For the neo-Thomist school, the knowledge of the first principles of metaphysics is garnered from sense experience rather than immediate intuition. The “intelligibility grasped in the universal is the intelligibility of the sensible singular.”¹⁰⁶ This position characterizes the Thomism of Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. For this school, the concept is acquired through abstraction from singulars. The

105 The neo-Scholastics reacted to the nineteenth-century Catholic theology influenced by continental idealism, that is “traditionalism” and “ontologism.” They opposed Catholic traditionalism, which grounded knowledge of God exclusively in revelation. As Gerald McCool explains, “The traditionalism of Lamennais, Bautain and the Catholic Tübingen School, which made man's knowledge of the first principles of metaphysics and ethics dependent upon a primitive act of divine revelation communicated to Adam's descendants by tradition, deprived human reason of its legitimate autonomy and, by doing so, undermined the reasonableness of the act of faith.” Gerald McCool, *Nineteenth Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 7. The neo-Scholastics likewise opposed “ontologism,” which grounded human knowledge of concrete particulars in the “intuition” of Infinite Being. The mind's direct intuition of the divine being would undermine the need for historical revelation, fail to respect the relative autonomy of reason, and fail to respect the gratuity of faith. The Holy Office's condemnation of Antonio Rosmini's ontologism in 1887 cast a shadow over the Augustinian tradition of religious epistemology as a whole and became a point of contention between different theological schools.

106 Ibid., 11.

object “Being” is grasped immediately in the concept. Through the process of abstraction, the mind moves from concrete singulars to a concept of Being. Through the concept of Being, one obtains an analogical knowledge of God through creatures.

The transcendental Thomists recognized a deficiency in the neo-Thomist account. It is impossible to move from a concept of creaturely perfection to a concept of divine perfection that adequately represents the transcendent. The process of abstraction, which removes all finitude from our concept of Being, remains suspended in a negative phase. Abstracting the finite elements from our concept of the being of creatures leaves the knower no closer to representing the infinite and transcendent.

The problem, for Joseph Maréchal (1878-1944), was how analogical knowledge of God was possible. The neo-Scholastic epistemological tradition had placed all of the work of religious epistemology, so to say, in objective conceptual knowledge. “Must this objective concept necessarily be the proper, direct, 'quidditive' concept of God?”¹⁰⁷ If so, Maréchal stated, we are forced to accept either ontologism, a direct knowledge of God’s essence, or a univocal concept of being that applies the same way to God and to creatures, a denial of God’s transcendence.

In contrast to the neo-Thomists, Maréchal's religious epistemology moved from creatures to God through the finality of the human mind rather than the concept. For Maréchal, the “object of sense experience...would, as soon as it enters our consciousness, contain a meta-empirical element, which is intimately associated with a strictly empirical

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Maréchal, *A Maréchal Reader*, ed. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 144.

element.”¹⁰⁸ This meta-empirical element derives, not from the concepts themselves, but from the natural finality of the human intelligence toward its infinite end. Gerald McCool explains, “It is the dynamism of the mind into which man’s concepts have been inserted rather than the representative content of the concepts themselves which grounds them in reality.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, concepts are entirely constructed through the experience of sensible realities, but the dynamism of the human mind towards the infinite draws the knower to seek a “beyond” of that experience:

Thus we are induced to postulate in our objective knowledge...a movement of thought which would bring us constantly 'beyond' that which may still be represented by concepts, some kind of metaempirical anticipation which should show us the objective capacity of our intellect expanding infinitely until it exceeds any limitation of being.¹¹⁰

For Maréchal, without concepts derived from the sensible world, the intellect could never know the world as contingent, that is, to make the judgment, “This is not God.” The dynamic finality of the mind for the infinite allows the mind to recognize the world as contingent, pushing beyond toward the transcendent source of being.

The dynamism of the intellect serves to ground an analogical knowledge of God's being. Instead of requiring an adequate “univocal” concept of being applied in the same way to God and creatures, Maréchal argues that the concept of being derived from our sense experience signifies more than it contains. That is because the “internal dynamic finality” of the mind causes us always to seek beyond. For Joseph Maréchal, as for Karl Rahner, this “internal dynamic finality” of the mind grounds the ability to recognize the world as contingent and it constitutes a “pre-thematized” intuition of the divine.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 236.

¹⁰⁹ McCool, *Nineteenth Century Scholasticism*, 88.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 145.

2. The Dialectic of Affirmation: *Affirmatio, Negatio, Eminentia*

De Lubac, borrowing liberally from Maréchal, sought to restore the pre-conceptual intuition of the divine that undergirds the movement from creation to God. His *Sur les chemins* followed Maréchal in defending a pre-conceptual, “intuitive” knowledge of God, which he believed was suppressed in modern Catholicism. De Lubac sought to recover intuition in the resources of a broad Christian spiritual tradition that at once preserved God's transcendence and, in the face of negative theology, affirmed our ability to know God through creation.

In fact, de Lubac's stated intention was to support a religious epistemology expressed in transcendental Thomism, though employing the resources of a more ancient notion of anagogy:

It [*Sur les chemins*] sought...to remedy what seemed to me to be a deficiency of classical Thomism: for the latter, the necessary movement of negative theology creates a danger of agnosticism...; so I wanted to base this same movement on a more fundamental exigency, there at the beginning and constantly recurring, by which I sought to define the human spirit in its relation to God. This intuitive, or more precisely proleptic and dynamic (not thematized, as one would say today), element, well founded in tradition, was diametrically opposed to the extrinsic and restrictive rationalism of one whole modern Thomistic school; it seems more important to me today than ever to stress this, at a time when an undue inflation of “negative theology” risks opening the way not only to agnosticism but to atheism. On the other hand, still dependent upon awkward reflections dating from my beginnings as an apprentice philosopher, I was also moving in an atmosphere of “natural theology,” outside of which, even today, I cannot breathe completely at ease—which does not mean that I admit a natural theology correctly constituted outside revelation, which would in that case come simply to be added onto it.¹¹¹

Like Maréchal, de Lubac's religious epistemology grounds the movement of the mind beyond sense experience in the “dynamic finality of the intelligence.” Furthermore, this

¹¹¹ De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 80–1.

“dynamic finality” must be understood as a proleptic anticipation and an anagogical drive.

De Lubac distinguishes between objective, conceptual knowledge and transcendental, pre-conceptual intuition. On the one hand, we possess an objective, conceptual knowledge deriving from the world of experience and from which we compose our ideas concerning God. This constructive, conceptual knowledge is entirely derived from the human experience of the world. As a result, any concept concerning God must be purified by negating everything in it belonging to the finite world.

Yet, prior to the construction of concepts there exists a primordial “affirmation” of God, which de Lubac sometimes calls “transcendental.” “Every human act,” he writes, “whether it is an act of knowledge or an act of the will, rests secretly upon God, by attributing meaning and solidity to the real upon which it is exercised.”¹¹² It is a “‘basic experience’—the presence of nonconceptual being to consciousness which is common to the philosopher and to all men.”¹¹³ De Lubac appeals to the Thomistic maxim that “all knowers know God implicitly in all they know.” Before any conscious and conceptual affirmation, there is an “affirmation which is still implicit, implied in each of our judgments on existence or judgments of value, and in consequence co-extensive with our whole spiritual activity, an affirmation congenital to the mind.”¹¹⁴ Conceptual processes of discursive reason that prove God's existence by moving from creatures to God are not

112 Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 36.

113 Ibid., 37.

114 Ibid., 53.

worthless. However, according to de Lubac, the success of these processes depends upon a “transcendental” affirmation deeper than the “conceptual” or “objective” affirmation.

The transcendental affirmation is what de Lubac calls “the idea of God.” “The idea of God is not a conceptual construction; it is antecedent to conscious or volitional acts: In its primary and permanent state the idea of God is not, then, a product of the intelligence. It is not a concept. It is a reality: the very soul of the soul; a spiritual image of the Divinity, an 'eikon.'”¹¹⁵ It is significant that de Lubac speaks of the affirmation in terms of an “image” or “eikon” of God. The notion of “image” and “likeness,” so prominent within his eschatology, suggests that the affirmation is an ontological effect of being created as an “image” with a finality toward “likeness.”

De Lubac affirms the historical and cultural constructedness of our concepts about God yet affirms that those concepts can truly signify God:

In reality the authentic affirmation of God—which is something much more than an affirmation—belongs in the first instance to the deepest operation of thought, which is not itself either “mythical” or “logical,” although it is obliged to borrow the procedures of logic in order to express itself, and makes use of imagination to give itself body, in such a way that its spontaneous constructions reveal a structure analogous to the structures of myths. Perhaps, if we are to take all these elements into account, we should do better to describe it with a word of which modern abuse ought not to be allowed to deprive us, namely a “symbolic” affirmation or even, to use another and older term beloved of the Fathers, “anagogical.”¹¹⁶

The mention of “anagogy” is not incidental. The “affirmation” of God is implicit within each objective judgment because the affirmation is co-extensive with the spirit or mind itself. The mind is drawn towards its final end in a movement described as “anagogical.”

While de Lubac does not explicitly link the two, the *anagogia* explicated in

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 40. De Lubac's notion of the “transcendental affirmation” is similar to Karl Rahner's *Vorgriff auf esse* (pre-apprehension of being) that underlies all objective, conceptual judgments.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 19.

History and Spirit and *Exégèse médiévale* is essentially the anagogy in *The Discovery of God*. In *Exégèse médiévale* de Lubac described two senses of anagogy. On the one hand, it is the fulfillment of the “doctrinal formulation,” the fourfold sense of Scripture. This anagogy is objective: it denotes a “higher meaning,” an eschatology in a speculative sense; it is the fulfillment of the person or the cosmos. On the other hand, it is also the fulfillment of the “spiritual formulation,” the threefold sense of scripture. It is subjective in nature: it indicates the manner of apprehending those higher things; it is a higher contemplation, or *theoria*.¹¹⁷ Anagogy in *The Discovery of God* is oriented toward what *Exégèse médiévale* calls “subjective anagogy.” In *The Discovery of God*, anagogy designates the objective “end” insofar as it engenders an ascent through our present reality. The mystical impulse to know God in essence is an “anagogical dialectic” and an “ascending dialectic.”¹¹⁸

De Lubac's “affirmation of God” is a supplement or corrective to an account of theological language. Drawing from Thomas Aquinas's formulation of the dialectic of the affirmation of God, de Lubac reinterprets the way of affirmation, the way of negation, and the way of eminence.¹¹⁹ At the beginning of the dialectic is the affirmation (*via affirmationis*) that some attribute belongs to God (being, goodness, truth). As I have noted, the concept is formulated through knowledge of sensible realities, through processes of abstraction and unification within the mind. The concept used of God here never can be applied univocally to particular objects of our experience and to God, who is

117 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:183.

118 De Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 150–1; de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:184.

119 See D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God: Theology, Language, and Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 152–155.

already known through the fundamental experience of the human mind. Applying such a concept to God is a construction ultimately inadequate to its object.¹²⁰ Through the concept the

absolute, upon which our knowledge rests, now enters into the system of our knowledge. It therefore appears to be caught up in the universal network of relationships. And the Transcendent, which by definition “goes beyond” the notions elaborated by our intelligence, seems to allow itself to be imprisoned within them.

As soon as we formulate a concept of God, a concept that is necessary for knowledge of God, it becomes inadequate. To rest at a conceptual formulation of God would be to form an idol.

The way of negation (*via negationis*) is the second stage of the dialectic. The negation is a purification of the concept: “As the idea of God is particularized and becomes objective, it is submitted to a negative dialectic, which is turned against all the gross elements from which it seems to take its substance.”¹²¹ At the negative stage, the concept does not become vacuous, as if the affirmative stage were simply denied. Instead, the negative phase denies that we affirm God in the manner that we affirm the beings in the world. The way of negation makes room for the final stage of the dialectic, the way of eminence (*via eminentiae*). The final stage predicates something of God, but recognizing God's transcendence, it affirms that the predicate absolutely transcends what we can affirm of the world.

The traditional manner of viewing the dialectic of affirmation raises an objection.

120 De Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 106.

121 Ibid., 106. The radical difference between God and creation is enshrined in the Fourth Lateran Council's statement “*Inter creatorem et creaturam non potest similitudo notari, quin inter eos major sit dissimilitudo notanda*” [Between creator and creature no similitude can be expressed without implying an even greater dissimilitude].

If all concepts are formed by abstraction from the material world, and if, in the negation, we deny those elements in the concept that are formed through experience of the sensible world, are we not left with nothing? If the negative stage denies everything “which, starting from the creature, we have first affirmed of God,” we will end in atheism or agnosticism.¹²²

De Lubac responded that there is “more in the concept than the concept itself.”

Besides the concept, there is the transcendental affirmation that underlies it. This primordial affirmation—co-extensive with the human spirit—is drawn toward the transcendent:

In the dialectic of the three ways, which gives us access to a human knowledge of God (*affirmatio, seu positio; negatio, seu remotio; eminentia, seu transcendentia*), the *via eminentiae* does not, in the last analysis, follow on the *via negationis*; it demands, inspires, and guides it. Although it comes last, the *via eminentiae* is covertly the first, superior and anterior to the *via affirmationis* itself. Although it never assumes a definite form in the eyes of the intelligence, it is always the light and the norm...a hidden power which excites us to pursue objective knowledge and compels us to rectify it. That is why we can enter the *via negationis* and remain in it without fear, once the necessary preliminary affirmations have been left behind. Understood in this way, the *via negationis* is only negative in appearance or negative of appearances. In other words – and more exactly perhaps—although it is negative and remains negative, it is the very opposite of negation.¹²³

The *via eminentiae* is at the beginning of the dialectic insofar as it is presupposed by the *via affirmationis* and the *via negationis* as the end of the journey and the source of its inspiration. In de Lubac's resolution, the likeness exercises a “hidden power” over the historical image, and the *via eminentiae* exercises a “hidden power” over the *via affirmationis*.

The *via negationis*, therefore, takes place within the movement of affirmation,

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 122.

negating only the concept that the mind constructs, a concept that the created intellect must transcend even if remains necessary for knowledge. The conceptual affirmation and negation remain in tension: the idea of God rises spontaneously and is objectified by the mind. The need to check the objective affirmation continues in the negative phase.

Always recurring, the objective affirmation rises again, only to be censured by negative theology. "It may seem, perhaps, as though man were destined to oscillate forever between those two poles without ever finding a haven in which to rest."¹²⁴ The affirmative and negative phase remain together an unbreakable paradox, each correcting the other, neither permanently gaining the upper hand.

In the present state, our knowledge of God exists only in constructed representations. Because of God's transcendence, these representations always exist in tension with negative theology. The mystic must use concepts, affirmations, images derived from the created world, but must be willing to brush them aside forever. One must enter the light through the darkness, abandoning all representations, even if those representations are carrying us, just as the swimmer stays afloat only by pushing the water aside.

In the Lubacian vision, the tension between affirmation and negation is creative insofar as it causes the human being always to push beyond his or her own constructions. Although de Lubac's religious epistemology is neither well-developed philosophically nor systematically connected to his eschatology, there are obvious parallels with his understanding of the sacraments and ecclesiology. Just as the way of eminence is covertly

¹²⁴ Ibid., 108.

the inspiration for the way of affirmation, the eschaton enters into the present. In a text quoted above de Lubac explains:

After all, the eschatological is not something simply absent from the present, any more than what is transcendent is exterior to everyday reality; on the contrary, it is the foundation of the present and the term of its movement—it is the marrow of the present, as it were, and exercises over it a hidden power.¹²⁵

De Lubac's understanding of eschatology expressed here applies as readily to his understanding of the church's temporal movement toward the kingdom as it does to the movement of the mind through creation to God.

3. Emerging Themes: Sacrament and Kenosis

Two complementary themes emerge in de Lubac's account of religious knowledge, themes which reflect his understanding of sacramentality and eschatology but are not overtly developed. First, created realities can truly signify the divine, and are the requisite medium of our minds to reach God. Second, the dialectic of religious knowledge reflects a Christic pattern of life, death, and resurrection, in which transcendence requires a death to self.

The first theme reflects a positive outlook on the ability of created realities to possess a transcendent referent. Hans Boersma, reflecting on nature and grace in the *nouvelle théologie*, states that “de Lubac and [Henri] Bouillard thus left a lasting legacy by rediscovering that the contingencies of human existence were sacramental mysteries meant to draw the created order into deifying union with their origin and end, the triune God.”¹²⁶

¹²⁵ De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 117.

¹²⁶ Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 115.

In de Lubac's religious epistemology, our conceptual formulations can signify God, but only in the acknowledgment of their contingency and insufficiency. He submits that "our concepts really have the power to signify God—and yet, strictly speaking, we cannot grasp God in any one of them; or rather, it is in that very way that they really do signify Him."¹²⁷ From de Lubac's perspective, if mysticism is seeing through signs, it is a seeing of their radical contingency in reference to and in anticipation of the fullness to come: "Every creature reveals him [God] by virtue of the being it borrows from him, crying out that it is not he. Such is the mystery which, in spite of its obscurity, is always a light; the emptiness which it demands of us is the form of his Fullness."¹²⁸ The human knower, recognizing the insufficiency of the sign, moves beyond it in an "anagogical" anticipation. The movement of our mind through created signs to God, however, follows upon the movement of God toward us. The signified acts within the sign, acts through the sign. If de Lubac affirms that human concepts and worldly realities authentically signify God, it is because of God's descent through the world to my mind, in a form of cosmic revelation.¹²⁹

Second, in de Lubac's religious epistemology, negation is presented as *kenosis*.

¹²⁷ De Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 130.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 92.

¹²⁹ "O Thou who appearest through every form and structure without adhering to them or being confounded with them!" From this it follows, in the first place, that the knowledge of God which comes through the external world is itself, in a sense, a revelation: The greatness of God and the beauty of creatures make us, by analogy, contemplate their Author (Wis. 13:5). It is an objective revelation just as natural reason is in itself, as we have seen, a subjective revelation. There is a double and unique natural revelation, a gift of the sign and of the capacity to interpret it, a gift of the book and the capacity to read it. For it is not my mind which first rises from the world to God: it is God who first descends, in some sort, through the world to my mind. The proof [of God] is my construction, but the sign which precedes it and already contains it, which allows it, provokes it, sets it in motion, and always overflows it, is given me by another. In all truth, God *makes me a sign*." Ibid., 89–90.

Characteristic of de Lubac's work is the lack of partitioning between theological topics, as well as a lack of partitioning between topics often treated only under the discipline of “theology” and those only treated by “philosophy.” Within de Lubac's religious epistemology—which until recently would be characterized as philosophy—mystical and Christological themes emerge.

As noted above, de Lubac speaks of construction and negation as a “double dialectic” in the ascent of the mind to God. Two kinds of mysticisms or spiritualities correspond to the dialectic: “The way of signs and the way without signs. Like the two dialectics, these two spiritual ways are, moreover, less separate than united; but is is sometimes one and sometimes the other which dominates.”¹³⁰ The objective affirmation of God, the ascent to God through created signs, requires its own purification in the negative phase. The negative phase does not merely negate the affirmation: it functions as a spiritual way to God, a form of spiritual detachment.

Because man cannot receive anything into his mind without collaborating with his own thought: even the object of revelation must, after all, be *conceived*. In the same way the mystic needs the intellectual because detachment from defined forms—*videntur ut paleae*—presupposes the work which constructs those forms, and the judgment which acknowledges their value. So the conflict cannot end in the victory of either side. It must be transformed into harmony. It must become a rhythm—and mirror the rhythm first sounded by the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Savior.¹³¹

Religious knowledge emerges in *The Discovery of God* as a mirror of the revelation of Christ's kenotic incarnation, death, and resurrection.

In de Lubac's account of mysticism, the willingness to cede before the mystery characterizes the authentic form that non-Christian mysticisms take. Authentic non-

¹³⁰ Ibid., 156 note 29.

¹³¹ Ibid., 98.

Christian mysticisms are characterized by their willingness to cede before the mystery of Christ. Christian mysticism, already in “possession” of the mystery through baptism and the Spirit, is characterized by an attitude of hope for the second coming. On the other hand, an inauthentic expression of mysticism either devolves into myth by worshipping its own constructions (a corruption of the *via affirmationis*) or by refusing any object by making oneself the object (a corruption of the *via negationis*).

For de Lubac, the willingness to cede before the mystery constitutes an essential aspect of religious knowledge and mysticism. In concert with the theme of kenosis, negative theology is characterized by letting go of the very constructions which allow one to raise one's mind to God. By giving oneself up to the mystery, we enter the light through the darkness.

A telling account of de Lubac's own experience was preserved in his personal notes, copied by Edouard Duperray, and included in the appendix of Michel Sales, *L'Etre humain et la connaissance naturelle qu'il a de Dieu*:

Then the only thing that remains is a great emptiness. A single word names it, mystery. But in this gulf an invincible strength, a strange austere softness pushes me. And the deeper it gets, quenching all clarity, in a leap of faith I throw myself into the Mystery, guessing its true name, Love. Mystery! Mystery!...Everything is darkness. But I believe in Love. Outside of this, which is not knowledge [*science*], I know nothing.

Thirst to escape these stifling vanities, of these vanities that are believed so serious. Thirst to break this system of representations; these learned formulas; and these complicated doctrinal scaffoldings, a thirst for fresh air.

In a gesture of refusal, I reject all these concepts—not that I don't know in time, their role and their value—because they constantly abuse, they clutter the mind, they arrogate to themselves the whole place, they mask the Being to whom they should initiate me. One must from time to time empty out one's house.

However, when all the ideas are placed outside, there still remains in the centre of my

spirit as of my heart, a great living image. There is no risk of it disappearing because the hollow that I make in myself opens up a place for it. In it, in the death of everything that appears to be wisdom or knowledge, I have all knowledge and wisdom. I embrace it in my anguish, and the night makes it more luminous. This great living image is the Cross of Jesus.¹³²

In these personal notes, the author dramatically expresses the negation of all human representation in the attempt to transcend them. This movement requires a leap into the darkness of unknowing. At the point of darkness and the abandonment of security, there remains the belief in love and the “great living image,” the “Cross of Jesus.” Through this death, he has “all knowledge and wisdom.”¹³³

The recovery of anagogy is omnipresent in de Lubac's account of religious knowledge and mysticism. However, it never receives a systematic presentation. The affirmation of God that is pre-conceptual and ontological is the anagogical drive of the human spirit, which moves us to transcend the signs in search of their ultimate meaning. This same drive requires the mystic to move beyond those constructions while simultaneously moving through them. For de Lubac, negative theology is not a mere intellectual negation, but a spiritual disposition of emptying oneself to await God's advent. The search for God itself enables a foretaste of what is to come: “To await God is to possess him.”¹³⁴

132 “Une note personnelle” in Michel Sales, *L'Être humain et la connaissance naturelle qu'il a de Dieu: Essai sur la structure anthropo-théologique fondamentale de la Révélation chrétienne dans la pensée du P. Henri de Lubac* (Paris: Parole et silence, 2003), 132–3; I employ the translation of “Une note personnelle” in Noel O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation: Christology as the Key to Interpreting the Theology of Creation in the Works of Henri de Lubac*, Religions and Discourse 40 (Oxford / New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

133 The note echoes de Lubac's religious epistemology: “Beyond all conventions—in the rejection of all untruth—at the cost of security—behind all negations—when everything fails—in the abandonment of everything: The discovery of God.” De Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 169.

134 Ibid., 172.

B. A Mysticism of Likeness: Conformity to the Figure of Christ

Among many Catholic authors in the twentieth century, de Lubac attempted to reconcile an appreciation for the diversity of religions with the exclusive claims of Christian doctrine. He distinguished a “natural mysticism,” a natural openness of humanity to God, from “Christian mysticism,” that is, conformity to the mystery of Christ. De Lubac’s account of mysticism is eschatological in the sense that he envisions mysticism as a proleptic anticipation of the mystery to come or, alternatively, it results from the eschatological “mystery” entering into the present.

1. *La mystique et le mystère*

Two related essays—“Mystique naturelle et mystique chrétienne” and “Mysticism and Mystery”—contain de Lubac’s reflection on the relationship between natural or non-Christian mysticism and Christianity. De Lubac rejected two opposing accounts of mysticism, the first of which posits mysticism as the one truth of all religious systems and the second which rejects mysticism as idolatry.¹³⁵

The “Catholic position,” as he presents it, maintains that mysticism is a universal

135 The first, he calls “universalist”: “there is a universal mysticism, which is the same depth, the same truth, the one truth of all spiritual systems, religious or non religious, which can be found in humanity.” Henri de Lubac, “Mystique naturelle et mystique chrétienne,” *Bulletin du Cercle saint Jean-Baptiste* 32 (1964): 10. The second, finding an expression in the Protestant reformers, regards mysticism as a human product opposed to the true revelation of God and idolatry: “All mysticism leads to pantheism; it is a naturalism. Faith is received from above, and in order to be preserved as pure, it must reject mystical infiltrations as the supreme evil.” Ibid., 11. De Lubac rejects this extreme claim, yet affirms an element of truth in it: outside of Christianity, mysticism tends towards the identification of the mystic with God.

impulse for humanity, while preserving the Christian claim of the centrality of Jesus

Christ:

One can say, in sum, that everything is explained by the relationship that the Christian makes between two ideas, the two words: *mysticism* [*la mystique*] and *mystery* [*le mystère*]. Everywhere human nature is the same in its very depths inasmuch as it comes from the same creator God. We have a precise biblical expression of this truth: man created in the image of God. The idea is often expressed in the Christian tradition, since the patristic era, in this manner: God has created man in his image in view of likeness. The image is...the very depth of the being; the divine likeness is to realize, under the action of the redeeming incarnation, by union with Christ, where one finds divine union. Mysticism is inherent to human nature, since man is made for this union. There is a yearning. In other words, within human nature there is a certain power of intussusception of the mystery given and revealed in Jesus Christ.¹³⁶

In de Lubac's account, mysticism (*la mystique*) describes the same capacity for God common to all human beings that is the result of God's universal calling of humanity.

Mysticism is the “inherent” capacity for grace. The correlate to “mysticism” is “the mystery” (*le mystère*), Jesus Christ, who completes and elevates it.

De Lubac furthermore distinguishes between “natural mysticism” (*mystique naturelle*) and “Christian mysticism” (*mystique chrétienne*), both modalities of *la mystique*. Both mysticisms designate the passive capacity to receive the mystery, a capacity that is “empty and powerless.” De Lubac recognizes a common, “natural” root to Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and even atheistic forms of mysticism (Nietzsche).

Mystique naturelle—this inherent capacity for God—can blossom in different directions. This inherent capacity, which de Lubac calls the “image of God,” “is that by which the Christian reality is assimilated, as well as that by which divine revelation becomes fecund; but alone, it is sterile. And if it wishes to hide its proper object by being

¹³⁶ De Lubac, “Mystique naturelle et mystique chrétienne,” 13.

realized by itself alone, it will become pernicious.”¹³⁷ In “naturalistic” forms, this capacity for God can fold in upon itself: “In its final stage of realization, natural mysticism, having become naturalistic, would be a 'pure mysticism.' No longer recognizing any object, it would almost be the mystical intuition hypostatized in a way; and that, it seems, would be the most profound kind of atheism.”¹³⁸ The innate capacity of human beings for God can turn upon itself as its own object, thereby refusing its true object. “Christian mysticism” is the process of recognizing and “interiorizing” the transcendent object, the “Mystery.”

A couple of clarifications concerning de Lubac's lexicon are essential to understanding his account of mysticism. First, the two poles of the Lubacian exposition—mysticism (*la mystique*) and mystery (*mystère*)—are interpreted in terms of the biblical expression “the image and likeness of God.” The image, for de Lubac, is the ontological openness to God that all people have because God creates them and destines them for himself. “Likeness” is, fundamentally, the destiny or goal of the image. In de Lubac's account of mysticism, “likeness” describes the conformity of the mystic (*le mystique*) to the mystery. As a result, natural mysticism is incomplete unless it attains to the likeness of God, which is the penetration into the divine Mystery. The image is created only to be

¹³⁷ Ibid., 13–14.

¹³⁸ De Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” 53. De Lubac's assessment of atheistic humanism focused on its religious and mystical elements, particularly its refusal to recognize transcendence in the name of immanence (or God in the name of humanity). See Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995); Grumett, “De Lubac, Dry Land Buddhism, and Roman Catholicism”; William L. Brownsberger, “The Confrontations with Modern, Western Atheism of Henri de Lubac, S.J., Martin Buber, and Wolfhart Pannenberg” (S.T.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 2001).

united to God in likeness by taking the mystery into itself in a process of “interiorization” or deepening.

Second, while de Lubac contrasts “natural” mysticism with “Christian” mysticism, he is not contrasting natural with supernatural. In this case, “natural” designates the capacity we have for God because we are created in God's image. It does not thereby indicate that “natural mysticism” embodied in different religions is somehow “un-graced.”

Third, *le mystère* is concrete. All mysticism is oriented toward fulfillment in a transcendent goal specified by divine revelation. Drawing from St. Paul, de Lubac takes *le mystère* to be “the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9-10 NRSV). The mystery is the plan of God that is revealed in Christ and to find its fulfillment at the “fullness of time.”¹³⁹

2. Mysticism as an Expression of “Supernatural Finality”

In his writings on the supernatural, nature, and grace, de Lubac recovered the traditional teaching of a single, supernatural finality of human beings and the “natural desire for the supernatural.” In his writings on mysticism, “natural mysticism” is an expression of the “supernatural finality” of humanity. In other words, the innate mystical impulse of human beings is an epiphenomenon of their intrinsic orientation to their eschatological destiny.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ See above, chapter 4, II, A and B.

¹⁴⁰ These themes are treated in detail in Éric de Moulins-Beaufort, *Anthropologie et mystique selon Henri*

First, de Lubac's characterization of *la mystique* approximates his characterization of “natural desire for the supernatural.” In “Mysticism and Mystery,” de Lubac claims that *la mystique* “is a capacity [for God] that is naturally accompanied by desire, a desire that must be described as ontological.”¹⁴¹ By “ontological” he means that desire for the supernatural belongs essentially to the constitution of humanity. Although *la mystique* is powerless in itself, it is truly a yearning for *le mystère*. As I have mentioned above, just as the “image” is oriented to its “likeness,” *la mystique* is oriented to *le mystère*. His earliest publication, “Apologetics and Theology,” expressed this idea by affirming that the image of God imprinted on all human beings testifies naturally to God's presence and spurs the human being to discover the likeness that can complete it.¹⁴²

In a parallel manner, de Lubac's writings on the supernatural claim that “the natural desire for the supernatural,” though powerless, is an expression of the inner orientation of the human being toward God. De Lubac expressly rejected the neo-Scholastic interpretation of Cajetan's axiom “Natural desire does not exceed the power of nature” (*naturale desiderium non excedit vim naturae*). Exploiting a controversial axiom of Thomas Aquinas—“Every intellect naturally desires the vision of the divine substance”

de Lubac: « *L'esprit de l'homme* » ou la présence de Dieu en l'homme, Études lubaciennes 3 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2003); Jean-Pierre Wagner, *La théologie fondamentale selon Henri de Lubac* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997).

141 De Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” 52.

142 “What is more legitimate than basing understanding on the divine image that every man has within him and that gropingly searches for the only religion capable of uniting it with its model? Do we not have the right to trust in this ‘*testimonium animae naturaliter Christianae*’ [the witness of the naturally Christian soul] that far from testifying in favor of some sort of ‘natural religion’ where the soul can find its rest, instead stimulates it in its quest until it finds the unique way to salvation?” Henri de Lubac, “Apologetics and Theology,” in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 100. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, “Apologétique et théologie,” *Nouvelle Revue théologique* 57 (1930): 361–378.

(*Summa Contra Gentiles* 3.57.4)—de Lubac argued that human beings, powerless to attain supernatural life, nonetheless desire the supernatural as their only end. The knowledge given to us through revelation that we are called to a supernatural end (the beatific vision) enables us to “recognize within ourselves the existence and nature of that desire (for that supernatural end).”¹⁴³ The scriptural knowledge of the supernatural destiny of human beings is evidence of the “natural desire for the supernatural.”

Second, de Lubac makes a much stronger claim: the desire for the supernatural is *constituted* by God's calling or our supernatural finality. This desire for the beatific vision is the ontological consequence of God's intention for humanity:

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. *A fortiori* it does not in any sense depend upon my deliberate will. 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.”¹⁴⁴

The “desire for the supernatural” is a consequence of the inner orientation of humanity as a whole by God to supernatural life. God's call, that is God's ultimate intention, “constitutes” the finality of humanity. In this light, the mystical impulse should be similarly understood as a consequence of the supernatural finality of human beings. It is the consequence of the impact that the final eschatological reality, as the essential goal of our entire being, has upon our present existential condition, characterized by incompleteness and yearning.

143 Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 209.

144 *Ibid.*, 54–5.

De Lubac's work is marked by a number of parallel terms: image and likeness, *la mystique* and *le mystère*, natural desire and supernatural, nature and grace. While they do not always possess a perfectly analogous meaning, these pairs are tied to de Lubac's eschatology. In de Lubac's imagination, the movement to the supernatural life takes place on a historical plane, as a movement through history toward an eschatological consummation. *The Mystery of the Supernatural* states that to pass from the natural to the supernatural is to “pass from the 'dignity of the image' received at the 'first creation' to the 'perfection of the likeness' which is 'reserved for the consummation of all things.’”¹⁴⁵

3. An Origenian Tension: Mysticism as Possession and Anticipation

The mystical impulse—alternatively called the natural desire for the supernatural—belongs to human beings by reason of their supernatural finality. Mysticism exists within the tension between an anticipation of the mystery as a future reality and a present possession by the mystery. De Lubac indicates that this tension exists for forms of non-Christian and Christian mysticism.

Speaking of the salvation of non-Christians, de Lubac affirmed that all of humanity is saved only through conformity to the mystery of Christ, what he calls “likeness.” The desire of the “image of God” is insufficient in itself for salvation; the “image” must be conformed to the likeness of God. However, de Lubac recognizes that the search itself is already an anticipatory possession by the mystery:

The only condition on which his [the non-Christian] salvation is possible is that he should already be a Catholic as it were by anticipation, since the church is the “natural

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 31.

place” to which a soul amenable to the suggestions of grace spontaneously tends. The “less” is then sufficient ...not in itself, of its own worth, but insofar as it aspires to the “more,” insofar as it is ready to be lost in this “more” directly the exterior obstacles which hide the “more” from it are removed.¹⁴⁶

De Lubac thinks of salvation as an incorporation into the body of Christ and a conformity to the person of Christ. For the individual, salvation comes through a receptiveness to the mystery revealed in Christ and completed at the end of time. The non-Christian aspiring to a mystery and open to this mystery has, already, an inchoate possession of the mystery. In effect, the readiness of the “image” to be “lost in the more” is already the intimation of “likeness,” a conformity to the mystery. In sum, the mysticism of non-Christians is characterized by de Lubac as anticipating a future mystery as well as being possessed by the mystery in the present.

A similar tension exists in de Lubac's elaboration on Christian mysticism, for which his sources are the Pauline and Johannine texts. Christian mysticism is, for Paul, a present union of the believer with Christ, which does not have a “purely eschatological significance.”¹⁴⁷ In Paul, the believer is presently united with Christ through baptism and in the Spirit, and this union is oriented to a future fulfillment. Paul himself, de Lubac claims, has been interpreted as a master of mystical understanding in two ways:

146 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 236–7.

147 De Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” 50–1.

A symbol, and a material expression as well, of this opposition [between two forms of Christian mysticism] can be found in the two different ways of referring to St. Paul as a great master of understanding. Some people, who consider the entire process of mysticism, say that St. Paul is the master because—on the road to Damascus, overwhelmed by Christ—he understood completely, in a sudden illumination, the meaning of the Scriptures by seeing that they led to Christ and found their fulfillment in him. Thus, they are the basis for everything. For others, St. Paul is the master because one day he was raised up to the third heaven and there, in a unique intuition, he contemplated the mystery of God—inexpressible, incomprehensible—in which everything is summed up and unified.

Pauline mysticism envisions the entire history of salvation as coming to fulfillment in Christ at the end of time and is also the present contemplation of God's impenetrable mystery.

Similarly, the Johannine teaching combines present mystical union with eschatological hope:

According to John, the Christian has received divine life; he is reborn from water and the Spirit. *Kaí vŭv* [and now]: these two little words, it can be said, explain the complete doctrine of the fourth Gospel. They echo through it like a refrain, attesting that mystical unity is not only something to come but that it has already been mysteriously consummated. The life that John announces is, of course, a gift that will be fully realized only on the last day.¹⁴⁸

In both the Pauline and Johannine forms, the mystical initiation into salvation is balanced by an expectation of its future consummation.

De Lubac expressly appealed to Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Prayer* to elaborate an understanding of Christian mysticism.¹⁴⁹ According to Balthasar, Christian mysticism is the contemplation of the deeds accomplished by Christ in history and, as such, has a “backward gaze.” However, these deeds remain cloaked in mystery. Their ultimate unveiling to us occurs only at the *parousia*, the second coming.¹⁵⁰ Balthasar warned

148 Ibid., 50–1.

149 Ibid., 63, note 94.

150 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 145.

against “subsuming the eschatological element [of Christianity] into mere mysticism.”

This would be to “reduce what is historical in Christianity simply to the general, pre-historical relationship of God and man, of transitory time and the hidden eternity above and within it.”¹⁵¹ Instead, Christian contemplation looks back to the events of salvation awaiting their ultimate *apokalypsis*, their unveiling of the hidden, but present mystery. For de Lubac as for Balthasar, contemplation synthesizes gazing backward at the events of salvation and the future expectation of the ultimate unveiling of the mystery at the *parousia*, a mystery that is proleptically present to present contemplation.

Christian mysticism, in sum, follows a pattern captured by Origen's *anagoria*.¹⁵² Anagogy describes a unity of the mystical ascent to God with that which is the object of the ascent. According to the pattern of the fourfold sense, anagogy follows upon history, allegory, and tropology. In fact, as it is the perfect synthesis of the allegorical meaning and the tropological meaning, anagogy designates the “fusion of the mystery and the mystic.”¹⁵³

Anagogy is a contemplation of the heavenly realities that looks forward to a future consummation; it is a present union with Christ that anticipates a future fulfillment. De

151 Ibid., 145–6. Balthasar states that for Christianity, the “backward gaze on Jesus is one with the prospect of his expected, future *parousia* in glory. The Day of the Lord which began with the arrival of the Messiah will come to its fulfillment. So it is only insofar as the Old and New Covenants meet in Christ, their center, and show their inner unity and penetration in him, that their respective eschatological horizons can also converge on him.” Ibid., 146–7.

152 Christian mysticism is that [mystical understanding of Scripture] pushed to its most fruitful phase by its four traditional dimensions—history, “allegory” or doctrine, ethics or “tropology” and anagogy—each of which is absorbed by the following one...It is by submitting to the historical-doctrinal facts and assimilating them that the necessary foundation for union can be found. The anagogical sense by which the spirit raises itself to God in a unique intuition has the richness of the three preceding dimensions concentrated within itself. de Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” 58.

153 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:184.

Lubac explains: “By the very fact that it is a mysticism of likeness, Christian mysticism is directed toward a goal, toward God who calls to us and beckons us to meet him at the end of the road. It presupposes a process that can never be finished, and it contains an element of eschatological hope.”¹⁵⁴

VI. Conclusion

I have argued that, for de Lubac, Christian eschatology must reintegrate the *invisibilia* with the *futura*, bringing together what was increasingly separated beginning in the twelfth century. The Dionysian and Joachimite traditions were not so much opposed theological traditions as mirror opposites. Both contributed to an increasing separation between the ascent to the transcendent and the hope for the future. De Lubac read this twelfth-century separation in light of what I have described as the separation of “realized” and “future” eschatologies in the twentieth century. The result was diminution of the sacramental dimensions of the historical economy of salvation, that is, the efficacy of historical events for salvation.

De Lubac's formulation of “sacramentality” responded to what he saw as the separation of the future and the transcendent. In effect, the sacramental sign is an anticipation of the eschaton but also a making-present of its reality. The inner “intention” or finality of the sign overflows its bare materiality, allowing it to participate in the higher order of the signified. It points forward to its eschatological end. At the same time, the signified exercises a hidden power over the sign. The sacrament possesses the quality of

¹⁵⁴ De Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” 57.

signifying and bringing about because the eschatological enters into it, exercising a power over it. In de Lubac's account of the particular sacraments, he emphasizes that the sacraments are loci of the eschatological entering into history and propelling us on to eternity.

De Lubac's general account of sacramentality underlies his narration of Christ as the sacrament of salvation and his ecclesiology. His Christology places Christ at the center of history, much as Oscar Cullmann did. Christ inaugurates the eschatological era and initiates the beginning of the end. It might be better to state that the historical actions of Christ are the manifestation of and means to the eschaton. The result is an account of revelation that weaves a passage between exaggerated realized eschatologies like that of Rudolf Bultmann and future eschatologies like that of Jürgen Moltmann. His account of Christ as sacrament of salvation attempts to retain the orientation toward the future in Moltmann by presenting Christ as the means to a future realization. De Lubac avoids the pitfalls of the Joachimite posterity by situating that future realization *in Christ*.

Similarly, de Lubac's ecclesiology reflects the insight, present in *Catholicism*, that Christianity unites transcendence with historical development. The church militant is the historical communion that anticipates the eschatological communion. Even though it is terrestrial and sinful, as the “sacrament of Christ,” the church makes the eschaton present within time. The Christian has access to salvation now and patiently awaits its consummation in the *totus Christus*, the union of all humanity in Christ. Although he supported the recovery of the ecclesial image of the “people of God” in Vatican II's

Lumen Gentium, he felt that it inadequately expressed the unity of the terrestrial and the heavenly dimensions of the church. His sacramental ecclesiology allowed him to affirm both the terrestrial and the heavenly without thereby conflating the two. As a result, his ecclesiology sharply contrasts with the institutional ecclesiologies of a previous era.

In dialogue with post-Vatican II theologies of history, de Lubac opposed what he believed was an identification between temporal progress and the kingdom of God. His opposition to Joachimite thought influenced his position in *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* that just as the natural is not a seed of the eternal, temporal progress cannot in any sense “anticipate” the coming kingdom. His position is consistent with his refusal to collaborate with political regimes or to allow theology to underwrite political ideologies. However, I have argued that de Lubac's position on this point is not entirely consistent with his understanding of the sacramentality of the temporal order, especially when we are speaking of ecclesial practices of charity in the world. If the temporal ecclesial communion is indeed an anticipation of the eschatological body of Christ, the actions of the church in the world might be considered in a sacramental perspective.

De Lubac's *The Discovery of God* elaborates the implications of his mystical theology for a religious epistemology. As the image of God, the human spirit constitutes a primordial affirmation of God coextensive with that spirit. This affirmation is the substratum to all objective acts of volition and intellection. Drawing from Joseph Maréchal, de Lubac conceived this affirmation as a consequence of the finality of the intellect for an infinite object. The finality of the intellect drives its search for what will

fulfill it, not letting it rest until it reaches the true transcendent. De Lubac freely associated this natural desire for the supernatural with the *anagoria* of the Fathers, which is the unending movement through present historical signs to their transcendent eschatological signified. In *The Discovery of God*, he described *anagoria* as an “anticipatory” and “proleptic” knowledge. In effect, his religious epistemology reflects the notion that we are situated in the time between the first and second comings. This is the time of the ending, the time of waiting, the Interim. In the present state, our knowledge of God is obscure and attained only through signs.

It is clear that while mysticism is an omnipresent theme in de Lubac's writings, it is not systematically integrated with his other theological topics. It does, however, consistently play on eschatological themes. Whereas his Christology and ecclesiology focus on the objective dimension of eschatology, his mysticism maintains a subjective focus, that is, on the experience of the mystic. In “Mystique naturelle et mystique chrétienne” and “Mysticism and Mystery,” de Lubac characterizes mysticism as the passive power to receive the Mystery. The relationship between the mystic and the Mystery is analogous to the relationship between the image and its likeness. There are traces of an emerging subjective eschatology insofar as he draws upon the idea of finality to characterize the “likeness.” Likeness to God is the eschatological term of the image. Thus, likeness exercises a proleptic influence upon our humanity, causing it to search for that which could complete it. The mystic—in reality, any human being—possesses an

orientation to his or her transcendent goal, which is his or her completion within the body of Christ, which is the Mystery.

Arguably, the pivotal but underdeveloped aspect of de Lubac's mystical theology is on the kenotic dimensions of the passage of the soul to God. These dimensions appear in his “La Révélation divine,” where he construes the historical and visible revelation of the Word as itself kenotic. The Word's kenotic revelation and presence in the church inspires the kenotic return of humanity to God. Again, in his account of mysticism, the attitude of openness to the mystery and of willingness to give up oneself is requisite for Christian and non-Christian mysticisms. Because “negative theology” is inscribed within kenosis, knowledge of God requires the mystical abandonment of knowledge. De Lubac does not expressly bring together his writings on kenosis in revelation, in mysticism, or in religious epistemology. Kenosis does, however, resonate with de Lubac's understanding of mysticism in general. The anagogical ascent of the mind to God is not merely the contemplation of an ahistorical transcendence, but an entrance into the mystery of salvation enacted in Christ. It is a personal participation in the mystery of salvation through the personal and ecclesial interiorization of the historical mystery, which itself is a kenosis unto eschatological life. This anagogical ascent is never complete. In the present state, our contemplative ascent remains suspended in the hope for the *parousia*.

CONCLUSION

This study has intended to elaborate the theology of history and eschatology underlying Henri de Lubac's contributions in a range of theological topics, including sacramental theology, the theology of revelation, Christology, the history of biblical exegesis, and mysticism. While de Lubac's work does not admit a metaphysical or epistemological foundation in a strict sense, there is an “organic unity” amidst the diversity of themes. I have argued that de Lubac's understanding of history and its end comprises a significant component of this unity.

I. De Lubac's Eschatological Vision

In the first chapter, I argued that the prominence of eschatological themes within de Lubac's writings issued from a cultural and religious context in which the relationship between time and eternity was increasingly a problem. A defining characteristic of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century “Modernist” culture was the preoccupation with temporality and eternity. The consciousness of European moderns registered a rupture between the past and the future, envisioning the present as the beginning of the end. This rupture featured prominently in the Futurist and Decadent Movements around the turn of the century.

The struggles with temporality in European modernity acutely affected Roman Catholicism. Many Catholics saw the problematic relationship between time and eternity as the consequence of the faithlessness of modern culture and life. Beginning in the

nineteenth century, Roman Catholic culture defined itself against a modern European culture, philosophy, and politics, and the Catholic Church saw itself as the bulwark against the loss of eternity altogether in modern life. The neo-Scholastic movement erupted as an intellectual response to modernity and as an attempt at recovering a medieval era in which faith and reason, church and state, and time and eternity were united. The deepest concern of the neo-Scholastics was the same as that of the cultural modernists: to secure the eternal in the midst of flux. The various attacks on church authority and property were conducive to an apocalyptic view of modernity within Catholicism. While apocalypticism was a prominent Catholic interpretation of the present day, this apocalypticism was at odds with a traditional Scholasticism.

In the World War II-era debate over the theology of history, the understanding of history was subjected to theological critique. Henri-Marie Féret launched this debate by seeking a theological understanding of history in the Book of Revelation. He originally concluded that the Book of Revelation forecasts a coming era in which the structures and institutions of human existence conform to the Gospel. Joseph Huby and Gaston Fessard both saw Féret as the advocate of a new millenarianism. Féret responded, stating that Christians must take seriously the temporal character of biblical prophesy even if the precise object of prophecy is unclear. Fessard argued that biblical prophesy signifies, not the specific event, but a dialectic of history significant to every generation. Jean Daniélou turned to a developmental view of the historical actions of God in history for the source

of an interpretation of the historical present. I argued that de Lubac sought a synthesis for these divergent understandings of history within the *nouvelle théologie*.

My second chapter argues that de Lubac sought his synthesis under the inspiration of Origen of Alexandria. While many scholars dismissed Origen as an ahistorical Platonist, de Lubac argued that Origen was the source for a Christian theology of history influential for a millennium. The spiritual sense of scripture—the supposed proof of Origen's Hellenism—was more indebted to the Bible than to Philo. The fourfold and threefold senses of scripture sought to uncover the depth-dimension of history within a progressive and unified history of salvation. For Origen, historical revelation symbolizes and prepares for that which will fulfill it. The Old Testament takes its fuller meaning from the New Testament; the New Testament will only be fulfilled at the eschaton.

Origen offered a critique and response to his Hellenistic milieu. In Hellenistic allegory, the mythic account was merely the occasion for a moral or philosophical meaning. In Christian allegory, an Old Testament event is interiorly related to a later event in history. The Old Testament event is significant in itself as God's salvific intervention into history. However, this intervention is related to the fulfillment of God's entire plan of salvation. The Old Testament prepares for and symbolizes its realization in Jesus Christ.

De Lubac brings out a paradox in Origen's exegesis of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, between figure and truth. On the one hand, the figures of the Old symbolize the truth of the New and are oriented toward their own realization in

the truth. On the other hand, Christ brings total “newness” and transcendence in relation to the Old. How is it possible that the Old Testament prefigures the New without already possessing the knowledge or reality of what is to come? How is the Old Testament figure oriented to something that utterly transcends it? De Lubac explains that Christ objectively reorients the prefigurations of him. His entrance into history transforms the entire “spiritual horizon,” so that he makes those figures signs of himself.

De Lubac's interpretation of the relationship between the figures of the Old Testament and the truth of the New echoes his understanding of human finality. While not already in possession of supernatural life, humanity nevertheless desires it as its only end. This desire is possible because God's intention for humanity objectively orients human existence. Furthermore, the paradox of Christ and his historical prefigurations is the model for the relationships between sacrament and mystery, type (*tupos*) and truth (*aletheia*), sign and signified, and mysticism and mystery.

My third chapter treated de Lubac's recovery of Origen's *anagoria*. De Lubac clearly drew from Origen in order to offer an alternative to the eschatological legacy of the twelfth century, the dissociation of the *futura* and the *invisibilia*. De Lubac saw in the twelfth century the beginnings of the gradual dissociation of mysticism and dogmatic eschatology, on the one hand, and eschatology and apocalypticism on the other. The influence of Pseudo-Dionysius during the Middle Ages led to an understanding of anagogy as the individual contemplation of the invisible through the visible. For de Lubac, this was a stage in a separation of individual and subjective mysticism from the

Christian teachings about the consummation of human history. In the twelfth century, the radical teaching of Joachim of Fiore transformed anagogy into an apocalyptic expectation of a radical upheaval within history. These two traditions—the Dionysian and Joachimite—constituted the source of two opposed eschatological trajectories in modernity.

Origen provided de Lubac with an understanding of anagogy that synthesized and united the Dionysian and Joachimite eschatology. First, Origen's *anagogia* unites objective and subjective elements that could be called dogmatic eschatology and mysticism. The object of the “spiritual understanding” is the Christian mystery. In order to know the Christian mystery, one must be united to it and transformed into it. The objective content of this mystery is the same as the subjective union with it. The *apocatastasis* is, according to de Lubac, the conversion of the whole church to Christ in charity, both a transformative conversion and an ecclesial-cosmic consummation. Second, *anagogia* unites the *futura* and the *invisibilia*. The Origenian tripartite division “shadow / image / truth” is fundamentally the same as the division “Old Testament / New Testament / Eternal Gospel.” The New Testament is definitively oriented toward the “Eternal Gospel” as its symbolic prefiguration. It is oriented to a fulfillment that is yet to come. However, the Eternal Gospel shares the identity of the New Testament Gospel; it is simply the future state of the present Gospel. Origen retains an eschatology in which salvation is available in the present yet simultaneously something to be awaited. He retains a tension inherent in Christian thinking that we live in the “interim,” a time of

signs, during which we must await the final unveiling of the truth already present to us through signs pointing to it as a transcendent eschatological future.

My fourth chapter provides a synthetic examination of de Lubac's eschatology in his understanding of sacramentality, his theology of revelation and Christology, his ecclesiology, and his understanding of mysticism. I have examined these diverse theological fields under the lens of de Lubac's reintegration of the *invisibilia* with the *futura*. In de Lubac's account of sacramentality, the sacramental sign points toward and makes present the eschaton. The inner "intention" of the sign overflows its bare materiality, making it point forward in anticipation of its eschatological end. The sacrament possesses the quality of signifying and bringing about because the eschatological enters into it, exercising a hidden power over it. In *Corpus Mysticum*, de Lubac recovers a Eucharistic ecclesiology in which the sacrament symbolizes and brings about the true Body of Christ, made complete only at the end of time.

De Lubac's account of Christ as the sacrament of salvation represents the historical actions of Jesus as the manifestation of, and the means to, the eschatological kingdom. The kenotic actions of Christ in the incarnation and passion both make God's salvation visible and conduce humanity to that salvation. In a sense, the lines are blurry between his Christology and his ecclesiology. This is not because, as John Webster supposes, the lines are blurry between nature and grace. Instead, it is because the church is the "sacrament of Christ." Even though the church is terrestrial and sinful, it makes the eschaton present in and through time, and the church points forward to its fulfillment in

the *totus Christus*. De Lubac's sacramental ecclesiology allows him to affirm that the church is terrestrial and heavenly without conflating the two.

Lastly, de Lubac's theology of mysticism and his religious epistemology draw on eschatological themes. He associates both intellect's tendency toward the transcendent and the natural desire for the supernatural with the *anagoria* of the Fathers. While not yet possession, this tendency constitutes a “proleptic” knowledge of the end. Similarly, the relationship between mysticism—the passive power to receive the mystery—and the mystery parallels the relationship between “image” and “likeness.” The likeness is, for de Lubac, the final goal of humanity, completion within the Body of Christ. By reason of being made as “image,” we have a mystical yearning that is an anticipation of the eschatological communion and an inchoate possession.

Although de Lubac never developed a systematic eschatology, an eschatological vision permeating his work is disclosed throughout his various theological interventions. This eschatological vision takes shape in analogous binary structures: sacrament and mystery, type (*tipos*) and truth (*aletheia*), sign and signified, and mysticism and mystery. The former is the immanent historical reality that constitutes the manifestation of, and means to, the latter transcendent and eschatological. The latter is the term or final goal of the former. The binary structures support a sacramental pattern of thinking, or, as Hans Boersma describes it, a “sacramental ontology.” These binaries are not univocal in de Lubac's writings. Instead, they find various applications in various fields of inquiry.

As I have argued, the dual structures in de Lubac's work must be read in terms of

the duality between history and its eschatological fulfillment. In *Catholicism*, his first book, de Lubac was concerned to chart a path between two extremes: first, a Hellenistic worldview in which history was an eternally recurring nightmare from which the soul must escape; and, second, an historical immanentist worldview in which there is nothing more than history. The Christian view of the world preserved both the need for transcendence and the belief that events really matter. De Lubac elaborated *Catholicism's* proposal for a recovery of a patristic understanding of history in subsequent writings, including *History and Spirit* and *Exégèse médiévale*. The relationship between history and its eschatological fulfillment constitutes a significant theme in these works. Moreover, the relationship between history and eschatology is the framework through which de Lubac understands sacramentality, revelation, Christ, ecclesiology, and mysticism.

II. Significance and Implications

There are several ways in which this study contributes to understanding Henri de Lubac's theology. First, I have shown the significance of de Lubac's reflection on history and eschatology for many of his significant theological writings. Although my study is far from exhaustive, it examines a theological theme little explored within de Lubac studies.

Second, extending the work of Susan K. Wood and Rudolf Volderholzer, I make the case that history and its consummation are at the center of de Lubac's theological vision. Particularly, by examining de Lubac's *Exégèse médiévale* in conjunction with *History and Spirit* and his other writings on spiritual interpretation, I was able to indicate

how Origen is, for de Lubac, the inspiration for his theology of history. By examining parts of his *Posterité spirituelle*, I could trace a common eschatological theme from the time immediately following World War II until the early 1980s.

Third, many accounts of the *nouvelle théologie* focus on the commonalities among the thinkers generally grouped within this movement, contrasting them with the neo-Scholastics. On the other hand, in my account, unresolved tensions within the Catholic Church as a whole in the mid twentieth century took shape as a division within the *nouvelle théologie* itself concerning eschatology and the theology of history. My examination of the historical context of the *nouvelle théologie* debate suggests that a re-imagination of the eschatological was occurring in social, literary, and cultural spheres long before it hit the theological journals.

III. Limitations of this Study

This study, focused on the particularities of de Lubac's theology, has several limitations. First, the debate over nature and grace triggered by de Lubac's *Surnaturel* concerned the meaning of human finality. Recently, de Lubac's writings on nature, grace, the supernatural, and human finality have been the source of significant controversy. In some cases, the relationship between natural and supernatural is interpreted as de Lubac's most foundational interest and insight. Without denying the significance of this theme in his work, one must simultaneously interpret de Lubac through the lens of history and eschatology. This study has treated de Lubac's understanding of human “finality,” which is an eschatological issue for de Lubac. I suggested that the binary terms “nature” and

“supernatural” are not strictly parallel to “history” and the “eschaton” because God’s intervention in history makes history neither distinctly natural nor supernatural. History is the place of encounter of the natural with the supernatural. Similarly, the historical-eschatological structure of de Lubac’s various theological interventions cannot be easily reduced to the relationship between nature and the supernatural or between nature and grace. There is a need to respond more directly to recent challenges to de Lubac’s understanding of nature and grace, nature and the supernatural, and human finality. My account needs to be supplemented by a thorough exploration of the eschatological themes in de Lubac’s *Surnaturel*, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, and *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*.

Second, I sought to reconstruct the pertinent historical background for de Lubac’s theology of history. Focusing on the debate over the theology of history during the 1940s, I did not examine the subsequent work of the contributors to that debate. Gaston Fessard and Jean Daniélou produced a significant body of work pertaining to the theological meaning of history to which I merely alluded. A broader theological account would require a greater attention to Catholic eschatological contributions leading up to the Second World War, as well as to the various trajectories of the *nouvelle théologie*. Furthermore, the current study did not compare de Lubac’s contribution to that of other significant contemporary theologians before or after the Second Vatican Council, such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner, and Johann Baptist Metz.

Third, Chapter One examined a broad eschatological revival within European

culture and within Catholicism in the nineteenth to twentieth century. A lacuna in its examination of the theology of history debate is that it focuses exclusively on texts. While I provided a snapshot of the situations that occasioned these texts, this study could benefit from an examination of the relationship of these theologies to practice. Lyon, Paris, and Amiens during and following the Second World War were laboratories for putting theologies into creative practice. *L'Action catholique* movements, including *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* (Christian Working-Class Youth) sought a new social Catholicism during the post-War period. Maurice Montuclard and his *Jeunesse de l'Église* movement sought a rapprochement between Christianity and communism following the Second World War. *Les Semaines sociales de France* sought to direct the light of faith onto the concrete social conditions of laypeople in France and around the world. In the post-War situation, the *prêtres ouvriers* sought a new form of ministry among the working classes in France. A more complete picture of the theology of history debate would examine not only the texts, but the movements, practices, and communities as living theories of history, society, and eschatology.

IV. Directions for Future Research

Aware of this study's limitations and its lacunae, I believe that further research could go in several fruitful directions. First, focused research on the “theologies of history” and theologies of society blossoming in the lyonnaise context during and following the Second World War would be a significant contribution to understanding the *nouvelle théologie*. A significant number of authors associated with the *nouvelle*

théologie or in its lineage had roots in Lyon, including de Lubac, Huby, Chaillet, Fessard, von Balthasar, Jean Mouroux, Henri Bourgeois, and others. The book series *Théologie* and the translation series *Sources chrétiennes* had their roots in Lyon. Furthermore, many who were in dialogue with, connected to, or who had inspired, the authors of the *nouvelle théologie* had lyonnaise connections, including Stanislaus Fumet, Pierre Frenay, Emmanuel Mounier, Gabriel Marcel, and Maurice Montuclard. While Lyon was not the whole of the *nouvelle théologie*, it constituted an important site of confluence of Catholic theologians, historians, activists, poets, and philosophers.

Second, in a related way, de Lubac and the *nouvelle théologie* drew from essayists, novelists, and poets whose work was adjunct to the theology of history debate. Charles Péguy, François Mauriac, Paul Claudel, Emmanuel Mounier, and Georges Bernanos each contributed to moving history, eschatology, and apocalypticism to the center of French Catholic consciousness. French Catholic literary production had a more immediate impact on French Catholics than did theological production. It has been said that the theology leading to the Second Vatican Council drew from twentieth-century renewals in biblical studies, liturgical studies, and patristic studies. Perhaps the Catholic literary scene should also have its place.¹ At the very least, de Lubac's theological vision was inspired by the eschatological mysticism of Péguy and Claudel.

Third, Chapter Three indicated that de Lubac sought to understand the origins of modern eschatology. He traced a divergence between the *futura* and the *invisibilia* within

1 Stephen Schloesser's research into French Catholicism following World War I is a significant starting point. See, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

anagogy to the twelfth century. His work on Joachim of Fiore was essentially an account of the genesis of a modern eschatological consciousness. While this work came late in his life, it echoed some of his early work. De Lubac was not alone in his attempt to discern the role of eschatology in the genesis of modernity. Hans Urs von Balthasar completed his dissertation, “The History of the Eschatological Problem in Modern German Literature” in 1928. After completing the dissertation, he joined the Jesuits, then studied in Lyon from 1932 to 1936. In 1937, Balthasar published *Apocalypse of the German Soul*, the book form of his dissertation. Jacob Taubes, the Jewish political philosopher, completed his *Occidental Eschatology* in 1947. Taubes is known as the opponent of Carl Schmitt, a Catholic jurist, political philosopher, and Nazi. Taubes was provoked into writing through attending the lectures of Balthasar. *Occidental Eschatology* was, in part, a Jewish response to Balthasar. The work of Balthasar, Taubes, and de Lubac reacts to the “messianic apocalyptic” arising during their lifetimes in the concrete form of a “messianic politics.” An examination of their respective genealogies of modern eschatology would be a significant interdisciplinary extension of this present study.

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