



Nature, Grace and Catholic Engagement in Contemporary Cultural Dialogue

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Nothing is due to anyone, except on account of something already given to him gratuitously by God.¹

Within contemporary Western secular society the notion of a natural human desire for supernatural fulfilment is not something considered in public discussion, and any attempt to bring it into consideration is often viewed as an attempt to proselytise. According to Louis Dupré, it was only around the fourteenth century that this became the case. Prior to this time, ‘most Christian, Jewish and Muslim philosophers, as well as several ancient ones accepted the existence of such a desire.’² For Dupré, thinkers up to the early and high middle ages would have found it difficult to conceive of human nature, and nature in general without a ‘transcendent orientation.’ The rediscovery of the works of Aristotle by scholastic thinkers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries began a loosening of the link between philosophy and theology which found its way into philosophical and theological conceptions of the human person as such. Dupré makes the assertion that the subordination of ‘the finite end of Aristotle’s *Ethics* to the Christian’s ultimate end,’ originally a subordination reverently intended to protect the gratuitousness of the supernatural order, was to be worked out over the ensuing centuries such that the result was the exact kind of irreverent worldview that such distinction and separation was thought to have protected against.³

In analysing the work of Aquinas on nature and the supernatural, and the subsequent Thomistic tradition which followed through thinkers such as Cajetan (1469-1534) and Suárez (1548-1617), one can see the solidification of a dualistic mode of thinking concerning nature and the supernatural, the result of which could perhaps be

¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [henceforth *ST*], 1a q. 25 a. 3 ad 3.

² Louis Dupré, “On the Natural Desire of Seeing God,” *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics* 1, no. 1 & 2 (2012).

³ *Ibid.*

called an ‘unwitting fostering of the secularization of the west’.⁴ Despite being somewhat ambiguous on this topic, that the conception of nature and grace presented by Aquinas is perhaps best articulated through the work of Jesuit Fr Henri de Lubac rather than that proposed by thinkers such as Cajetan, Suárez and later neo-Thomists such as Dominican Fr Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. It will be the burden of this argument to show that the Lubacian approach provides a much more faithful reading of Aquinas and that this reading is not only authentically Catholic, but provides a far more fruitful and evangelically potent framework for the Church’s engagement with the world, particularly as it pertains to some of the more neuralgic issues of our day.

AQUINAS ON NATURE AND SUPERNATURE

In his work on the life and thought of the twelfth century Dominican Friar Preacher, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ*, Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt provides a masterful treatment of the Angelic Doctor’s work regarding *desiderium naturale*, the natural desire for God and the beatific vision, an issue much disputed in Catholic theological circles, particularly since the publication of Henri de Lubac’s *Surnaturel* in 1946. Bauerschmidt boils the essential questions down to the following: ‘In what sense do human beings have by nature a desire for God?’, and, ‘Is it the case that human beings are so constituted by their creation that their nature remains unfulfilled unless they attain the vision of God?’⁵

The significance of these questions are not simply felt in the realm of highly nuanced academic squabbling, but are of considerable importance for the Christian faith as such, particularly when the consequences of one’s answers are entertained. ‘[I]s the vision of God something that is within the capacity of [human] nature?’, and, ‘if it is something supernatural that can only be attained through God’s gracious assistance – does this imply an obligation on God’s part to give us assistance, lest the nature he has created be frustrated?’⁶ Theologians should rightly be concerned with this somewhat paradoxical conundrum. It seems that Thomas’ most influential interpreters and

⁴ Tracey Rowland, “Theology and Culture,” in *Being Holy in the World: Theology and Culture in the Thought of David L. Schindler*, ed. Jr. Nicholas J. Healy and D.C. Schindler (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B Eerdmans 2011), 56.

⁵ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ*, ed. Timothy Gorringer, Serene Jones, and Graham Ward, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 129.

⁶ *Ibid.*

commentators (i.e. Cajetan and Suárez) may have erred on the side of caution, not wanting to have concocted a theological anthropology which would leave God indebted to his creature. According to Bauerschmidt however, despite the barrels of ink which have been spilt arguing about Aquinas' own position on this topic, the work of Aquinas is itself somewhat ambiguous on these important questions.⁷ What is required is a deeper analysis of both St Thomas himself and the conflicting interpretations, as even Bauerschmidt's assertion of Thomas' ambiguity is contentious in an academic climate where the whole question has been the source of renewed interest and intensified debate. St Thomas, it is well known, carries a considerable weight which both sides of the debate would no doubt be keen to claim for their own.

The surge in publications concerning these questions in recent years has seen the development of thoughtful responses being articulated on both sides of the debate. Bauerschmidt characterises the two opposing camps on this debate as the 'Pure Nature' camp, what de Lubac would have termed the 'extrinsicist' position, and the 'Natural Desire' camp. The most vehement proponent of the Pure Nature faction in the twentieth century was Dominican Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. More recently this argument has been taken up and furthered by scholars such as Lawrence Feingold and Steven A. Long. The 'Natural Desire' camp on the other hand, building on the work of twentieth-century Jesuit Father, and later Cardinal, Henri de Lubac is defended and developed in contemporary scholarship in the *Communio* and *Radical Orthodoxy* circles of scholars through authors such as David L. Schindler, Tracey Rowland, and Nicholas J. Healy together with John Milbank and Aaron Riches.

PURE NATURE AND THE *DUPLEX BEATITUDO*

The 'Pure Nature' reading of Aquinas on these questions 'underscores the distinction between our created nature and God's grace, to the degree of positing for human beings a theoretically-possible, though never historically actual, "pure nature" that is complete in itself apart from any supernatural calling by God to the beatific vision.'⁸ There is much in Aquinas' work which would seem to support the Pure Nature view which posits two distinct ends of human happiness or beatitude: one natural – accessible to man without the grace of God; and, the other supernatural – reliant on the supernatural grace of God. Such a reading of Aquinas, which developed through the commentary of Cajetan and was solidified in seminary theological manuals through

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

the influence of Suárez, seems to have held sway in the Church as ‘orthodoxy’ for centuries and, therefore, one must be careful to not dismiss such a claim too quickly.

Upon examination, the definite distinction made by Cajetan, Suárez and their followers between nature and the supernatural, seems to be made with great piety and respect for the absolute otherness of the creator God. Aaron Riches points out that, ‘[t]he distinction serves, among other things, to safeguard the gratuity of the beatific end achieved in Christ: becoming a ‘partaker of the divine nature’ surpasses every capacity of human nature and therefore entails ‘being receptive’ to the divine gift upon gift of union in Jesus Christ.’⁹ In order to lay adequate emphasis on the gratuitousness of God’s grace, proponents of this approach posit the existence of a ‘pure’ nature within which ‘we would still have found the goal of our existence in loving God above all things, but we would have loved him as the “author of nature,” not the “author of grace.”’¹⁰

The advocates of this ‘pure nature’ approach claim that there is nothing at all incongruous about the notion of a human nature that has no supernatural destiny – a claim which is certainly at odds with the tradition. As such, citing Aquinas himself, they claim a two-fold end, or *telos*, of human nature.

Now man’s happiness is twofold (*duplex hominis beatitudo*) . . . One is proportionate to human nature, a happiness, to wit, which man can obtain by means of his natural principles. The other is a happiness surpassing man’s nature, and which man can obtain by the power of God alone, by a kind of participation of the Godhead.¹¹

De Lubac takes issue with this reading of Aquinas pointing out that, for Thomas, a supposedly pure nature is merely a theological hypothesis, not at all to be applied practically. For de Lubac, a pure nature would leave open the question of the potency of the natural desire for God, which Augustine characterises so vividly and poetically as restlessness of the heart.¹² Bauerschmidt states that, ‘[i]n this view, the “natural desire” for God is, seemingly, the sort of desire we would have had in a state of pure nature, as well as the sort of desire the pagan philosophers had, and which does not need divine revelation in order to be satisfied.’¹³ He characterises this understanding of

⁹ Aaron Riches, “Christology and Duplex Hominis Beatitudo: Re-Sketching the Supernatural Again,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14, no. 1 (2012), 46.

¹⁰ Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ*, 129.

¹¹ *ST I-II*, q. 62, a. 1, *corpus*. Cited in Henri De Lubac, “Duplex Hominis Beatitudo,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35, no. 4 (2008), trans. Aaron Riches and Peter M. Candler Jr.

¹² Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.1.

¹³ Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ*, 130.

human desire as not quite matching Augustine's description of a heart that is truly restless, but as 'mere "velleity",' volition in its weakest form.¹⁴

HENRI DE LUBAC, NATURAL DESIRE AND THE RESTLESS HEART

As has been already noted, the French Jesuit Henri de Lubac read the writings of Aquinas on this matter in a manner somewhat contrary to the received so-called orthodoxy of the time. At the publication of his 1946 thesis *Surnaturel: Etudes historiques* de Lubac became the centre of a long-standing controversy which has resurfaced in more recent times.

Like many of the brighter sparks of mid-twentieth century Catholic theology, de Lubac was somewhat restless with the manual style of theological training which he had be subject to as a seminarian. As both an historian and theologian, de Lubac was uniquely positioned to offer a critique of the theological landscape which he inhabited. His efforts in tracing the development of theology particularly in the West, along with his own positive theological developments, many of which are masterfully concealed 'behind erudite discussion of past and present works,' stretch far beyond simple historical critique, offer much to the discussion as it continues some 25 years after his passing.¹⁵

According to de Lubac's reading, Aquinas held that 'there is no destiny for human beings apart from Christ – and, if there are texts in which he seems to suggest the contrary, then Aquinas would only be playing with the thought experiment of a world, a human nature and fulfilment, as if the history of God's intervention in Christ could be bracketed out.'¹⁶ Any assertion to the contrary would amount to allowing for the existence of a pure nature within which God's action was not felt, a proposition which he felt negated what he saw as the gratuitousness of God's continuing act of creation – something he regarded as neglected in the pure nature approach.¹⁷

In his day de Lubac's work was heavily criticised for the challenge it mounted against the current perceived orthodoxy. The encyclical *Humani Generis* was issued in part to refute a theological thesis which was gaining popularity in modernist circles, a thesis which

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jean-Yves Lacoste, quoted on the dust jacket of John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri De Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (London: SCM Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 76.

¹⁷ See Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ*, 133.

many wrongly attributed to de Lubac himself. The encyclical itself points out that there are many who seek to ‘destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order, since God, they say, cannot create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision.’¹⁸ At this De Lubac’s Jesuit superiors ordered him to cease his academic work of teaching and his books were removed from Jesuit libraries despite never being called in to defend or recant his position before the Holy Office.¹⁹ Concerning the encyclical itself, de Lubac wrote the following:

It seems to me to be, like many other ecclesiastical documents, unilateral: that is almost the law of the genre; but I have read nothing in it, doctrinally, that affects me. The only passage where I recognize an implicit reference to me is a phrase bearing on the question of the supernatural; now it is rather curious to note that this phrase, intending to recall the true doctrine on this subject, reproduces exactly what I said about it two years earlier in a [sic] article in *Recherches de science religieuse*.²⁰

Despite the controversies surrounding the initial publication of his *Surnaturel* thesis, de Lubac’s work has had a tremendous impact on twentieth century Catholic theology, particularly as it found its way into the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the particular hermeneutic favoured by the post-conciliar papacies of St Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. Finding favour in recent papal teaching, de Lubac’s ‘natural desire’ thesis deserves examination.

Bauerschmidt, clearly stating a strong preference for the Lubacian Natural Desire position, summarises Thomas’ argument as follows: ‘human beings are characterised by their desire to know the essence of things, and this knowledge involves not just the thing, but also knowledge of its cause . . . it is not sufficient to know *that* a cause is (which can be known by its effect) but we want to know *what* a cause is.’²¹ It is not enough for a person to know that God, the ultimate cause, exists; but the person will seek to know God Himself as cause. For Bauerschmidt, as for de Lubac and Aquinas before

¹⁸ Pius XII, *Humani Generis: Concerning Some False Opinions Threatening to Undermine the Foundations of Catholic Doctrine*. http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html (accessed 22 March, 2015), 26.

¹⁹ Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism*, 76.

²⁰ 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), 71.

²¹ Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ*, 131.

him, there is a significant emphasis on the fact that it is only through God's gratuitous grace that man can obtain any knowledge of God as he is.

[T]he "natural desire" for God cannot rest in the knowledge of God as the author of nature, the knowledge that human beings would have had in a state of "pure nature" and which philosophers attain based on God's created effects. Rather, our natural desire remains restlessly unfulfilled until it attains to knowledge of God's essence.²²

As with the 'pure nature' position, 'natural desire' arguments also rely on citations of Thomas himself, such as these words taken from his *Summa Contra Gentiles*: 'no matter how fully we know that God exists . . . we do not cease our desire, but still desire to know him through his essence.'²³ The resulting position however is somewhat paradoxical – 'it would seem that human beings have a natural desire for an end that exceeds their nature.'²⁴ Bauerschmidt concludes that 'Thomas' claim that "grace does not destroy nature but perfects it" would mean that grace not only takes human nature to a perfection beyond its natural capacity, but that in some sense grace is needed for human nature even to be itself.'²⁵

In an article written to refute the account of sixteenth century Spanish Jesuit Francesco Suárez, who's thought had solidified the *duplex ordo* thesis as a purported Thomistic orthodoxy, de Lubac's citations of Thomas support his position to the contrary.

Imperfect happiness that can be had in this life, can be acquired by man by his natural powers, in the same way as virtue, in whose operation it consists: on this point we shall speak further on (cf. q. 63). But man's perfect happiness, as stated above (q. 3, a. 8), consists in the vision of the divine essence . . . Consequently neither man, nor any creature, can attain final happiness by his natural powers.²⁶

De Lubac saw clearly that this separation of nature from the supernatural was something of a novelty to the Christian worldview which understood creation itself as a merciful act of a loving creator God, and human nature as inherently made for eternity. For him, it is clear that grace is not part of man's natural equipment; yet without grace, man is not really in his natural state. As Chesterton wrote, 'Take away the supernatural, and what remains is the unnatural.'²⁷

²² Ibid, 131.

²³ *Contra Gentiles* lib. 3 cap. 50 n. 7, cited in *ibid*, 131.

²⁴ Ibid, 131.

²⁵ Ibid. Citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a q. 1 a. 8 ad 2.

²⁶ *ST I-II*, q. 5, a. 5, *co.* cited in De Lubac, "Duplex Hominis Beatitudo."

²⁷ G. K. Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 88.

BEYOND PARADOX: RESOLUTION IN A CHRISTOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

In an article building on the thought of de Lubac and taking into consideration contemporary criticisms of his work, Aaron Riches suggests that the relationship between nature and grace be read through a Chalcedonian Christological hermeneutic, by which he refers to the ‘traditional Christological grammar of unified distinction: *inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter*.’²⁸ For Riches, this Christological formulation is the hermeneutical key to navigating the contentious waters of the nature/grace debate, avoiding ‘both a quasi-Eutychian’ eliding of difference (*inconfuse, immutabiliter*), while at the same time avoiding a ‘quasi-Nestorian tendency to undermine the objective unity of the *finis ultimus* of human nature (*indivise, inseparabiliter*).’²⁹

Turning to the person of Christ for answers to these conundrums in theological anthropology has a venerable tradition in the Fathers of the Church, but more recently affirmed at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which stated in a particularly de Lubac-esque formation that

The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown.³⁰

This bears striking resemblance to de Lubac’s own statement from his 1947 work, *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme*:

By revealing the Father and by being revealed by him, Christ completes the revelation of man to himself. By taking possession of man, by seizing hold of him and penetrating to the very depths of his being Christ makes man go deep within himself, there to discover in a flash regions hitherto unsuspected. It is through Christ that the person reaches maturity, that man emerges definitively from the universe and becomes conscious of his own being.³¹

²⁸ Riches, “Christology and Duplex Hominis Beatitudo: Re-Sketching the Supernatural Again”, 66.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html 7 Dec. 1965, (accessed 14 Nov. 2014), n. 22.

³¹ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1950), 339.

He continued,

[f]or through the Christian revelation not only is the scrutiny that man makes of himself made more searching, but his examination of all about him is at the same time made more comprehensive. Henceforth the idea of human unity is born. That image of God, the image of the Word, which the incarnate Word resumes and gives back to its glory is “I myself”; it is also the other, every other. It is that aspect of *me* in which I coincide with every other man, it is the hallmark of our common origin and the summons to our common destiny. It is our very unity with God.³²

The resemblance which the *Gaudium et Spes* text bears to de Lubac’s earlier work of these has been pointed out on numerous occasions and it is doubtful that this resemblance is merely coincidental. As such, Riches is on solid ground in proposing this Christological hermeneutic as at once authentically Lubacian and more importantly, authentically Catholic. Thus in a discussion concerning the relationship between the natural sphere and the supernatural, Riches claims that “[t]he first accent of Christology is thus neither atonement nor reconciliation, but the communication of incommensurate spheres of existence, the realization of “the fruit of divine desire for self-communication and union with humanity”.³³ It is in and through the person of Christ that the otherwise separate realms of nature and the supernatural come together as a unified whole in what we could term a kind of hypostatic union. The supernatural does not obliterate nature, it does not sit as a separate entity somehow on top of, superadded to nature, nor do the natural and supernatural orders become conflated. Instead the relationship between nature and the supernatural is in fact integral, a perfectly distinguished yet unified phenomenon.

NATURAL DESIRE AND THE CHURCH’S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORLD

The above discussion concerning the character of the relationship between nature and the supernatural seems to be of little consequence for plain persons. However, as asserted above, this is not simply a matter of internal academic bickering, but pertains to the very essence of the faith, and has consequences for how Christians engage in the culture at large. In a contemporary context the outcome of the

³² Ibid, 340.

³³ Riches, “Christology and Duplex Hominis Beatitudo: Re-Sketching the Supernatural Again”, p. 67; citing Williams, A. N. *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 90.

extrinsicist or ‘pure nature’ view is perhaps nowhere more evident in current Catholic engagement with the broader culture on the issue of marriage. The following section will demonstrate the effect of the pure nature view as it is witnessed in one particular articulation of a ‘natural’ or ‘traditional’ view of marriage over and above contemporary fashionable attempts to redefine the institution. It will then attempt to indicate an alternative direction for Catholics seeking to engage in the wider culture on this and other neuralgic issues.

The 2012 publication of the work *What is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* by the trio of authors, Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson and Robert P. George, presents what many consider the most eloquent argument in defence of ‘traditional’ marriage in our age. The tremendous variety of societal challenges which have been unfolding at an ever increasing pace since the sexual revolution of the 1960s and earlier have placed the common conception of marriage under significant scrutiny and even outright denial in our times. A publication such as *What is Marriage?*, originating as it does from the collective pen of faithful Catholic legal philosophers, holds the hopes of many who would seek to proclaim and defend a true conception of marriage in a ‘secular society’ against the introduction of laws which would redefine this foundational element of the social order, especially as such redefinitions include a particular focus which would see the extension of the legal concept of marriage to include unions of two people of the same sex.

In a statement of praise for the work produced by these three authors, Professor Mary Ann Glendon says that ‘[t]he authors make a compelling *secular* case for marriage as a partnership between man and woman, whose special status is based on society’s interest in the nurture and education of children.’³⁴ From the outset of the book, the authors of the work *What is Marriage?* set out to define the institution of marriage without any recourse to religious tradition or any purported special revelation, with the express intent to conduct the debate about marriage within a completely secular and therefore supposedly neutral context.

In their introduction to the book, the authors are quick to point out that their ‘argument makes no appeal to divine revelation or religious authority.’³⁵ While they do go on to point out that they are not opposed to the use of religious arguments to help one define marriage, it is clear that from their perspective that any such recourse to religious authority is unnecessary at best, and at worst would seriously damage the supposed neutrality of the purely reasoned case which they hope

³⁴ Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George, *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012) (back jacket) - emphasis mine

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

to present. In a review of this work Hans Boersma points out that this method ‘easily moves from a bracketing of religion for the sake of argument to a faulty view of religion as private by definition.’³⁶ The relegation of religion to a strictly private sphere is but one fallout from this separation of the natural order from the supernatural and the work of Girgis et al. does little more than lend legitimacy to this faulty view.

The attempt by Girgis, et al. to demarcate some ‘common ground’, outside of the influence of religious is however not entirely misguided, but the assumption that any such common ground could be neutral is problematic. According to David L. Schindler,

‘de Lubac would [not] permit us to deny that some notion of “common ground” is necessary for communication in a pluralistic society; that some methodological abstraction is necessary for intelligent inquiry; or that some significant sense of appeal to reason and indeed to nature is appropriate and often necessary “prior” to an (explicit) appeal to Revelation. Nonetheless, the subtle and absolutely crucial point required by de Lubac’s theology is none of these tendencies can any longer be rightly understood as implying neutrality within respect to the *truth* revealed by God in Jesus Christ. Neither any “common ground,” nor any “methodological abstraction,” nor, finally, any appeal to reason or nature alone is ever, from its first actualisation, innocent of implications (positive or negative) relative to this truth.’³⁷

What is being attempted in the *What is Marriage* book is little more than a futile effort to engage in debate located within Aquinas’ hypothetical state of pure nature. This is akin to what Tracey Rowland wrote of the well intentioned, yet unwittingly self-secularising ‘revisionist Baroque Thomism [of Cajetan and Suárez, which was] developed to defend the intrinsic goodness of a post-lapsarian humanity against Reformist tendencies to emphasise its depravity.’³⁸ Rowland goes on to point out that,

Similar dualist trajectories were followed by trying to defend the Catholic faith in the late nineteenth century with reference to various so-called Enlightenment standards of rationality, and in the twentieth century by those trying to defend the Catholic faith within the tradition of political liberalism.³⁹

³⁶ Hans Boersma, “Defending Marriage: A Review of ‘What Is Marriage: Man and Woman: A Defense,’ by Sherif Girgis, Robert P. George, and Ryan T. Anderson,” *First Things*, no. March (2013), 52.

³⁷ David L. Schindler, from the introduction to the 1998 edition of, Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), xxx.

³⁸ Rowland, “Theology and Culture”, 58.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

The issue, as de Lubac would see it and as his later followers have pointed out, is that,

the division of all that exists into a two-tiered natural and supernatural order had the effect of marginalising the supernatural as “an artificial and arbitrary superstructure”; and “while theologians were striving to protect the supernatural from all contamination, it became isolated from the life of the mind and from social life, and the field was left open for the invasion of secularism.”⁴⁰

This separation between nature and the supernatural unwittingly results in a kind of self-secularising force felt in and through the well intentioned attempts to defend Christian ethics absent from any invitation to an encounter with the person of Jesus and the life of a faith nourished by sacramental participation in the life of the Church. De Lubac’s colleague Hans Urs von Balthasar would point out similarly that,

The Christian [does not] need to leave his centre in Christ in order to mediate him to the world, to understand his relation to the world, to build a bridge between revelation and nature, philosophy and theology. . . . This is what the saints are fully aware of. They never at any moment leave their centre in Christ. . . . When they philosophize, they do so as Christians, which means as believers, as theologians.⁴¹

In attempting to engage with a supposedly ‘pure’ rationality in a neutral and autonomous secular sphere, the authors of *What is Marriage* do little more than unconsciously affirm the falsity that there is some sort of neutral realm in which Christ is not Lord. The reaction to the publication *What is Marriage* and the subsequent work of its authors and other thinkers who have taken up this line of reasoning in engaging on this issue in the culture has been strong. These authors have found little sympathy from those they had hoped to have been able to engage with on the level of ‘pure reason.’ Instead what is witnessed is an unwillingness to engage in discussion and a labelling of their arguments as little more than hate speech, while their persons are labelled as bigots and fear mongers.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid, 58; citing Henri de Lubac, “Nature and Grace,” in *The World in History: The St Xavier Symposium*, ed. T. Patrick Burke (London: Collins, 1968), 32-33.

⁴¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Theology and Sanctity,” in *Explorations in Theology*, Vol. 1, *Word Made Flesh*, trans. A.V. Littledale and Alexandre Dru (San Francisco, 1989), 195.

⁴² A simple glance at the kind of attention received by the twitter feed of Ryan T. Anderson, one of the authors of *What is Marriage* is enough to note the severity of the criticisms made against his argument. This includes unfair *ad hominem* attacks as well the kind of “Trolling” common to online disagreements of this kind.

For authors such as Girgis, Anderson, and George, the precise, articulate, common sense argument finds little resonance in the hearts and minds of their interlocutors. Perhaps this is because the ‘comprehensive’ view of marriage that they present, over and above the ‘revisionist’, ‘emotivist’ view of marriage, does not account for the final end of man, the beatitude of seeing God ‘face-to-face.’

CONCLUSION

The vexing issue of how a human person can have an end that lies outside of his ability to attain it is one which has been the source of much consternation for theologians and philosophers at least since the time of Aquinas. For de Lubac, and for his followers, the only answer to this conundrum lies in the purely gratuitousness not only of creation itself, but of the Incarnation of Christ the Lord, the second person of the Blessed Trinity. The resulting Trinitarian and Christocentric theological anthropology holds in tension the two inextricably unified, yet distinct orders of nature and the supernatural.

Divorcing the supernatural from the natural in an attempt either to protect God’s absolute transcendence and otherness or to engage with non-believers in a dialogue about ethical issues does little but push God away from us into what Benedict XVI called a ‘sheer impenetrable voluntarism.’⁴³ Rather than furthering the Church’s evangelical efforts, arguments which attempt to operate in a supposed neutral secular realm absent from God do little more than add a shrill overtone to the already noisy public arena.

We conclude with the words of David L. Schindler who provides us with what is perhaps the most articulate summary of de Lubac’s Trinitarian and Christological anthropology, an anthropological vision which presents a view of man far more elevated, dignified and inviting than can otherwise be conjured.

De Lubac... argues that human nature exists (*de facto*, not *de jure*) only as already *related* to the God of Jesus Christ... this relation is not, as it were, merely a movement but (also) already a form. Relation to the God of Jesus Christ already orders nature and thereby gives nature a new form – a shape, a pattern of intelligibility, a logic, a “face.” To be sure, one can never emphasise enough that this form is pure gift, in no way required by our nature or able to be claimed by our nature. And this form of God, already given in creation through

⁴³ Benedict XVI, Lecture by the Holy Father Benedict XVI at the University of Rome ‘La Sapienza’, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080117_la-sapienza.html, (accessed 14 November, 2014).

Christ, is fully actualised only by means of participation in the Church which is the body of Christ and indeed finally, in the unrestricted communion with God which can occur only in the next life.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ David L. Schindler, 'Grace and the Form of Nature and Culture', in *Catholicism and Secularization in America: Essays on Nature, Grace, and Culture*, ed. David L. Schindler (Notre Dame; Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1990), 14-15.