

Introduction

It is rightly said that the topic of nature and grace touches almost any and every theological and even human question, for one's appraisal of this issue transforms the way in which one understands the very encounter between man and God. For this reason, twentieth-century French theologian Henri de Lubac (1896–1991)—regarded as one of the primary inspirations of Vatican II—contends that this issue: “is at the heart of all great Christian thought . . . at the bottom of discussions with modern unbelief, and form[s] the crux of . . . Christian humanism.”¹ Hence, the formulation of the nature-grace relation has far-reaching consequences, affecting no less than the meta-narrative—not just of Christianity—but of humanity itself.

In what follows, we will see that there are two basic aspects of the Christian mystery of nature and grace: (1) Christocentrism, which is to say that Christ is the center and end of *all* things; and (2) the necessity of distinguishing between nature and grace for the purpose of preserving the supernatural transcendence and gratuity of grace.

The Christocentric aspect of nature and grace appears in the opening of the very first encyclical of the late Bl. Pope John Paul II when he writes: “Jesus Christ is the *center* of the universe and of history.”² This theme in fact goes all the way back to Sacred Scripture, as can be seen here in the Letter to the Colossians: “For in him all things were created

1. De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 35; “au cœur de toute grande pensée chrétienne . . . au fond des discussions avec l’incroyance moderne, qu’il formait le nœud du problème de l’humanisme chrétien” (De Lubac, *Mémoire sur l’occasion de mes écrits*, 33).

2. John Paul II, *Redeemer of Man*, no. 1.

... all things were created *through him* and *for him* ... [and] *in him* all things hold together” (Col 1:16–17). And similarly, the Letter to the Ephesians states:

For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan [οἰκονομίαν] for the fullness of time [πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν] to *unite* [ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι] *all things in him*, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:9–10).³

In the second century, St. Irenaeus likewise echoes this Christocentric Pauline theme:

So the Lord now manifestly came to his own, and, born by his own created order which he himself bears, he by his obedience on the tree *renewed* [ἀνακεφαλαιόω] [and reversed] what was done by disobedience in [connection with] a tree; and [the power of] that seduction by which the virgin Eve, *already betrothed* to a man, had been wickedly seduced was *broken* when the angel in truth brought good tidings to the Virgin Mary, who already [by her betrothal] belonged to a man. ... Therefore he *renews* [ἀνακεφαλαιόω] these things in himself, uniting man to the Spirit. ... He therefore *completely renewed* [ἀνακεφαλαιόω] *all things*.⁴

Contemporary patristic scholar Robert Louis Wilken comments on St. Irenaeus’ use of Ephesians 1:10 here, observing that Christ brings to “completion” what was originally begun in creation, suggesting that Christ is not just the beginning, but also the *end* of all creation—the one in whom creation reaches its final goal:

[St. Irenaeus] favors terms like *renew* and *restore*. ... Drawing on the language of Saint Paul in Ephesians, he says that Christ “summed up” or “united” all things in himself (Eph 1:10). ...

3. See also the prologue in the Gospel of John: “all things were made *through him*, and without him was not anything made that was made” (1:2–3), and also the Letter to the Hebrews: “in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, *through whom* also he created the ages” (Heb 1:2).

4. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, bk. V, ch. 19–20, emphasis added, cited from Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 389–90; brackets with Greek text are added, other brackets with English are original in translation. Note: the “recapitulation” motif is here translated as “renew” (see *ibid.*, 389 n. 93).

Christ does not simply reverse what had been lost in the fall: he brings to *completion* what had been partial and imperfect.⁵

Similarly, in the medieval period, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)—though perhaps better known for his emphasis upon the *distinction* between nature and grace—also shares this same Christocentric perspective which is apparent in his correlation of the eternal Law with the Person of the Word (i.e., the Son). This association is significant since for Aquinas the very notion of nature and the natural order finds its ontological root in the eternal law—here correlated with the Person of the Word—in which case the “natural” order is *itself* Christocentric in its very foundation. In this light, St. Thomas writes: “Among other things expressed by this Word, the eternal law itself is expressed thereby.”⁶

St. Thomas is here stating implicitly—not *only* that the natural order does not exist apart from Christ—but that the very notion of the natural order is itself *Christological*. Such a view is incompatible with the very notion of secularism, if by this term one means a certain domain of reality somehow independent of Christ. This point is emphasized by twentieth-century Eastern theologian Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958) in the following:

The Eastern tradition knows nothing of “pure nature” to which grace is added as a supernatural gift. For [Eastern theology], there is no natural or “normal” state, since grace is implied in

5. Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 66–67, first italics original, emphasis added on the word “completion.” See also Jaroslav Pelikan who comments on these themes in the pre-Nicene period: “The reason the incarnation was necessary was that man had not merely done wrong—for this, repentance would have sufficed—but had fallen into a corruption, a transiency that threatened him with annihilation. As the agent of creation who called man out of nothing, the Logos was also the one to rescue him from annihilation. This the Logos did by taking flesh. For this theology, it was the universality of death, not the inevitability of sin, which was fundamental. . . . It was death and corruption that stood in the way of man’s participation in the divine nature, and these had to be overcome in the incarnation by the Logos” (Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 1:285).

6. *ST I-IIae*, .q. 93, a. 1, ad 2. We will return to this issue later on, but for now let us note that the “eternal law” is simply God’s overarching providence governing all things. The importance here, then, is that the eternal law includes both what might be called the “order of nature” and the “order of grace.” Accordingly, correlating Christ with the former softens the force of the radical distinction between nature and grace. In this light, St. Thomas becomes something of a model for holding both aspects of the mystery of nature and grace together in proper balance, the Christocentric aspect of unity and the need to distinguish nature and grace from one another.

the act of creation itself. . . . “Pure nature” . . . would thus be a philosophical fiction. . . . The world [has been] created in order that it might be deified . . . [and] its center [is] in the Word, the hypostatic Wisdom of the Father. . . . For there is no “natural beatitude” for creation [and it] has no other end than deification. All the distinctions which we may try to make between the state which was proper to the first creatures, according to their natures, and that which was conferred upon them by their ever-increasing participation in the divine energies [i.e., grace] can never be more than fictions.⁷

While Lossky clearly accentuates the Christocentric aspect of nature and grace, let us now turn to establish the importance of the second aspect of nature and grace, namely, the necessity of *distinguishing* between nature and grace, for the purpose of preserving the supernatural character of divine grace. This distinction can likewise be traced back to Sacred Scripture, as for example when St. Paul portrays the grace of salvation as vastly surpassing the created natural order: “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9; cf. Isa 64:4). Let us note that in order for grace to “surpass” the natural order, or be considered “supernatural,” we must presuppose some notion of the “natural.”⁸

Though man is gratuitously created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26), this original creation is surpassed by man’s new creation in Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). Hence, the sublime grandeur of man’s supernatural participation through divine grace surpasses man’s original creation in *imago Dei*, since by the grace of Christ man now shares in the very filiation of the Eternal Son. For this reason, St. John the Evangelist can write the following: “See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, *and so we are*” (1 John 3:1).⁹ While

7. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 101.

8. Let us also observe that the very word “supernatural” presupposes an understanding of the word “natural,” since the former is strictly speaking intelligible only in relation to the latter.

9. This theme of “sonship” is scattered throughout the New Testament: “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:14–17). Similarly, the Letter to the Galatians states: “But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to

the original *imago Dei* is restored in Christ, the New Testament goes beyond this primordial restoration: in Christ man is now “conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29)—man has become “a son in the Son,” as the traditional language of the Church has it.¹⁰ This salvation in Christ is quintessentially a supernatural work of divine grace, since it is a gift above and beyond the parameters of human nature, as classically stated here in the Letter to the Ephesians: “by *grace* [we] have been saved” (Eph 2:8).¹¹

The point we wish to emphasize at this juncture is that this distinction between the first creation and the new creation (or between nature and grace) is necessary for the purpose of preserving the supernatural transcendence of grace; this distinction between nature and grace further presupposes the independent coherence of the natural order—or else it could not be distinguished from grace.

Twentieth-century literary scholar and apologist C. S. Lewis presupposes this line of reasoning when he describes Christianity as a religion in which God encounters man from the “outside,” that is, in terms of God’s pursuit of man and not the other way around. In other words, supernatural grace comes to man from without, as something over and above his nature, and so Lewis writes:

To be frank, we do not at all like the idea of a “chosen people.” Democrats by birth and education, we should prefer to think that all nations and individuals start level in the search for God, or even that all religions are equally true. It must be admitted at once that Christianity makes no concessions to this point of view. It does not tell of a human search for God at all, but of something done by God for, to, and about, Man [i.e., God’s search for man].¹²

redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’ So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir” (Gal 4:4–7). Likewise, we read in the Book of Revelation: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life. He who conquers shall have this *heritage*, and I will be his God and he shall be my *son*” (Rev 21:6b–7).

10. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 17.

11. Similarly, emphasizing the gratuity of the grace of salvation, St. Paul writes: “While we were yet helpless . . . Christ died for the ungodly. . . . God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:6–8).

12. Lewis, *Miracles*, 187.

Here Lewis' point is that Christianity presents itself as a supernatural religion precisely because it is founded upon a divine entrance into the created order, from the top down, as it were, as a matter of divine *descent*, rather than man's progressive *ascent*. But in order to understand grace as something "over and above" human nature, we must first have some prior conception of human nature—in relation to which grace then stands as "over and above." For without a sense of the coherence of nature, *as* nature, grace necessarily loses its specificity: that is, without a coherent view of nature and the "natural," the unique signification of the term "*super-natural*" becomes unclear.

Now *how* this independent coherence and integrity of the natural order can be reconciled with the Christocentrism mentioned above is itself an interesting question, and one which we will take up in due course. For now, let us simply note that both aspects of the nature-grace relation are essential for preserving the integrity of the Christian mystery of nature and grace.

And so with this preliminary assessment in mind, let us now turn to introduce the nature-grace debate more specifically, noting especially the implications which follow from various positions.

Parameters of the Nature-Grace Debate

Corresponding to the two dimensions of the nature-grace mystery—Christocentrism and the necessary distinction between nature and grace—are two poles comprising the nature-grace debate more generally: *extrinsicism* and *intrinsicism*. They are so named on account of the closeness (or lack of closeness) with which they correlate the orders of nature and grace—or more specifically, the closeness or lack of closeness with which they correlate human nature with the gift of grace.

Extrinsicism emphasizes the distinction of nature and grace for the purpose of preserving the supernatural and transcendent gratuity of grace, over against human nature. Intrinsicism, on the other hand, holds that human nature is inherently open-ended and oriented to the supernatural order of grace, in which case man's fulfillment lies only in and through Christ—with the result that a purely "natural beatitude" is simply out of the question—much as Lossky stressed above. For this reason, intrinsicism is more incompatible with secularism than is the case with extrinsicism; and in fact, the latter has been alleged to have subtly rein-

forced secularism in the modern era, on account of its emphasis upon the self-contained and independent coherence of the natural order.¹³

Accordingly, as we mentioned at the outset, this debate has clear implications for secularism, and even for religious pluralism. As for the latter, in its extreme form, intrinsicism can serve as a catalyst for relativizing the uniqueness of Christ, as well as that of the sacraments—relativizing their status as privileged channels of grace. The reason is due to the fact that in its extreme form, intrinsicism correlates nature and grace so closely that it *identifies* nature and grace as one and the same—with the result that the order of grace ultimately becomes something that “bubbles” up from *within* human nature, quite contrary to C. S. Lewis’ comments above. If we were to follow this intrinsicist train of thought, it would ultimately imply that the grace of Christ is not substantially different from that of non-Christian religions, in which case the newness or uniqueness of Christ is thereby diminished.¹⁴

While we should note that this more extreme form of intrinsicism is certainly not that of the Christian tradition rooted in St. Paul, it is still the case that the problems resulting here illustrate the importance of extrinsicist aspects of the nature-grace relation. For as we have said, if the term “grace” is applied so broadly that it covers all that might otherwise have been considered “natural,” the exceptional character of grace inevitably fades away. For this reason, a more specific awareness as to what constitutes the natural and supernatural orders—by way of their

13. Cf. De Lubac, *Surnaturel*, 153–54.

14. Edward T. Oakes summarizes well the anomaly that the extreme forms of extrinsicism and intrinsicism ultimately yield similar results regarding the issue of secularism: “Intrinsicism so *fuses* nature and grace that anything natural becomes, by the very fact that it *is* natural, a form of grace . . . Again we are faced with the irony of history . . . Admittedly, intrinsicism comes to the opposite conclusion from that drawn by extrinsicism—that grace more or less automatically wells up from within nature rather than confronting it extrinsically from the outside—but, in one of those ironies that have marked the life of the Church after Vatican II, this ‘naturalized grace’ ends up justifying secular independence from religion, too” (Oakes, “The Paradox of Nature and Grace,” 667–96, here 693, emphasis original). On the other hand, we should also note that extrinsicism in its extreme form so separates nature and grace that the natural order appears as an autonomous and independent order of existence so completely set apart from the order of grace that the natural order seems to be self-sufficient in its own right; in this view, while the order of grace may “add” to the perfection of the order of nature, grace seems to be, strictly speaking, unnecessary. In this light, too, the order of grace diminishes in its importance, making secularism once again the ironic but logical result.

intelligible distinction—actually serves to preserve the singular uniqueness of supernatural grace.

For now, with this general outline of the two main schools of thought before us, let us turn to set the stage for what will follow in greater detail. Here we will define key principles and terms to be used throughout, most of which refer to the extrinsicist tradition, but which also serve as the backdrop for the intrinsicist critique against the extrinsicist tradition in the twentieth century—led first and foremost by Henri de Lubac.

Preliminary Definitions

Nature

In what follows, “nature” will be understood in its Aristotelian sense as follows: “nature is a principle [ἀρχῆς] or cause [αἰτίας] of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily, in virtue of itself and not accidentally.”¹⁵ The collection of things which have such a principle (i.e., a “nature”) constitutes the order of nature.¹⁶

Importantly, let us observe here that “nature” is a principle *in* things—it is not a thing itself. As we will see, this point is of the utmost importance because it illustrates the fact that the notion of the natural order—as intelligibly distinct from the supernatural—need not be taken to imply that this natural order actually *exists* independent of the order of grace. On the contrary, the notion of the natural order’s coherence entails nothing more than the conceptual distinction between its intelligibility, *as* natural—as distinct from the supernatural order of grace, which is something over and above human nature.

Aristotle’s definition of nature only implies that there are different kinds of things, with different principles of activity (that is, different “natures”)—in virtue of which each is intelligible in its own right.¹⁷ Again,

15. Aristotle, *Physics*, bk. II, ch. 1 (192b 21–23), cited in Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 329: “ὥς οὗσης τῆς φύσεως ἀρχῆς τινὸς καὶ αἰτίας τοῦ κινεῖσθαι καὶ ἡρεμεῖν ἐν ᾧ ὑπάρχει πρῶτως καθ’ αὐτὸ καὶ μὴ κατὰ συμβεβηκός.”

16. The medieval maxim *agere sequitur esse* (“act follows being”) draws from this definition. In other words, a thing’s characteristic behavior or activity reveals its essence or nature—its nature being simply the ultimate source or principle underlying a thing’s characteristic powers.

17. A good analogy to illustrate this point is to take the notion of substance and

the independent *intelligibility* of the natural order in no way entails the independent *existence* of the natural order; recognizing this fact is the first step toward reconciling the above-mentioned Christocentrism with the extrinsicist emphasis upon the nature-grace distinction.

The Divine Economy and the End(s) of Man

The divine “economy” refers to God’s providential ordering and governance over all things. When we refer to the “actual” or “concrete” divine economy, we are referring to the present order of God’s providence, over against a “hypothetical” ordering of things which might have been possible, but which does not actually exist. This discussion plays directly into the question regarding man’s ultimate end, since in the actual divine economy (the actual ordering of God’s providence), man’s last end is the beatific vision. Since this vision of God is a *supernatural* end, it raises the question as to whether or not the beatific vision is man’s *only* possible end—or whether man could have been ordained to a purely *natural* end in a hypothetical divine economy. If a purely natural end would have been possible in a hypothetical economy, then there is a further question as to whether man’s purely natural end is still possible in the present economy, despite the fact that man is actually and concretely ordered to God in the beatific vision.

If one holds that the beatific vision is man’s *only* possible end, there are further questions regarding both God’s justice, as well as the gratuity of grace and the beatific vision. In other words, one is left with the following question: could God have *refused* the offer of the beatific vision—if this were man’s *only* possible end? If we say that God could

accident: this distinction is intelligible and is rooted in reality, yet a particular substance and its accidents are never physically separable from one another, in the sense that I could never hold the bare substance of a thing with no accidents whatever; in other words, a substance cannot physically exist without *some* accidents, though many of these can be gained or lost throughout the course of a thing’s existence. In other words, I could not ask someone to hand me the “weight” of a rock (an accident) without also handing me the rock itself (the substance), nor could they hand me the bare “substance” of the rock, without also handing me its accompanying accidents along with it. In this light, there is nothing incompatible in adhering to the notion of an independently *intelligible* order of nature, on the one hand, juxtaposed alongside the above-mentioned Christocentrism, on the other. We can acknowledge two separate intelligible orders of reality, while simultaneously acknowledging the inseparable *existential* interplay between the two orders; though intelligibly distinct, they exist inseparably from one another in the concrete order of things.

not have refused man the beatific vision—since it is man’s only possible end—then it would appear that the beatific vision is no longer a *free* gift, since it would seem to be necessary on account of man’s nature.

On the other hand, if we hold that God could have refused the beatific vision, we retain the essential gratuity of man’s supernatural end, but we likely would have to accept the possibility of a purely natural end; otherwise, we are committed to the possibility that God could have created man with only the possibility of the beatific vision as a final end—an end which He could refuse man—in which case man could have been created with only the final prospect of suffering and frustration as his final end. The question, then, of course, is whether this view squares with God’s justice, or if it tends toward some form of Voluntarism which is perhaps incompatible with the Christian tradition.

For these reasons, thinkers in the extrinsicist tradition insist that man has *two* final ends: one natural, accessible by way of his natural powers; and the other supernatural, accessible *only* by way of supernatural grace. Strictly speaking, only the latter is gratuitous (and is therefore not necessary)—which is to say that God could have refused the beatific vision (since this supernatural end requires the gift of grace) without any injustice on His part; all that is necessary on God’s part as a matter of justice is that He supply for man’s *natural* end, which is the end flowing from his nature.

This leads us directly to our next topic, namely, the *debitum naturae*, or the “debt of nature,” which in the extrinsicist tradition signifies what God owes to the creature as a matter of justice, in virtue of what flows from the natural order.

The Debitum Naturae

As implied above, the *debitum naturae* stipulates that some things are in fact *due* to the creature on account of the creature’s nature or essence. God’s justice to the creature entails that He provides whatever is necessary for a given creature to reach its *natural* end—which is the end given to it on account of its nature, and which is accessible by way of its own natural principles. In this light, God is *not* free in His offer of man’s natural end; that is, He could not have withheld this end from man without injustice on His part.

A frequent objection to this notion of the *debitum naturae* is that creation itself is gratuitous, a point which underlies Lossky’s state-

ment above—in which case, God cannot be said to *owe* anything to any creature whatsoever. Extrinsicist thinkers respond by conceding that creation is of course gratuitous in that it is a free act on God's part; but once God chooses to create, there is a natural order which He has brought into existence—and which is intelligible in its own right—and which therefore should be taken as an expression of divine wisdom and providence. For this reason, according to extrinsicist proponents, God is not so much “indebted” to the creature, as He is to Himself, and to the manifestation of His own divine wisdom in the natural order—an order which He freely willed into existence. In other words, it is God—not the creature—who is the source of the *debitum naturae*. Thus, the *debitum naturae* is nothing more than the recognition of the natural order as (1) independently intelligible and as (2) a manifestation of divine wisdom and divine providence.

Further, since man's elevation in Christ *surpasses* the order of nature, we can speak of at least *two* levels of *gratuity*, one of creation, and another surpassing the natural order of creation. It is in fact the *debitum naturae* which preserves this twofold *gratuity*: for “*gratuity*” can refer to (1) that which is not owed, simply speaking, in which case creation itself is gratuitous; (2) “*gratuity*” can also refer to a divine gift which is *over and above* the natural order. In this second sense, supernatural grace is “doubly” gratuitous, as it were, because it elevates man over and above the endowment implied by his specific nature.

But if “*gratuity*” is reduced simply to *what is not owed*, this twofold distinction of *gratuity* collapses. For this reason, while extrinsicist thinkers readily concede that the natural order is gratuitous in the first sense above, it is not gratuitous in the second sense; hence, only the gifts of grace and glory are gratuitous in *both* senses.

Hence, the notions of *dependence* and *gratuity* are not exactly the same thing, and it is generally the blurring of these two issues which lies behind objections against the *debitum naturae*. While it is the case that all of creation is *dependent* upon God and His providence, as we just pointed out, the *gratuity* of creation and the *gratuity* of supernatural grace are not on the same level. Accordingly, this “dependence” of creation upon God can be registered in two ways, which correlates with the two aforementioned levels of *gratuity*: namely, (1) creaturely dependence upon God, in accordance with His *natural* providence in the natural order; and (2) creaturely dependence upon God, in accor-

dance with His supernatural providence and supernatural elevation by way of divine grace.

In the following, St. Thomas witnesses to the importance of the *debitum naturae* when he answers the following objection in the *Summa Theologiae*: “The act of justice is to pay what is due. But God is no man’s debtor.”¹⁸ To which Aquinas responds this way:

In the divine operations debt may be regarded in two ways, as due either to God, or to creatures, and in either way God pays what is due. It is due to God that there should be fulfilled in creatures what His will and wisdom require, and what manifests His goodness. In this respect God’s justice regards what befits Him, inasmuch as He renders to Himself what is due to Himself. It is also due to a created thing that it should possess what is ordered to it. . . . Thus also God exercises justice when He gives to each thing what is *due* to it by its *nature* and *condition*.¹⁹

The point implied here is that what is due to a creature in accordance with its “nature and condition” refers to the natural order, and stands in contrast to the transcendent gift of supernatural grace. Similarly, this line of thinking lies behind the following from St. Thomas when he addresses the need for predestination, which arises precisely because God’s providence has *supernaturally* ordered man to an end beyond the powers and parameters of his nature:

The end towards which created things are directed by God is *twofold*, one which *exceeds all proportion* and faculty of created nature; and this end is life eternal, that consists in seeing God which is above every creature. . . . The other end, however, is *proportionate* to created nature, to which end created being can attain according to the power of its nature. . . . Hence the type of the aforesaid direction of a rational creature towards the end of life eternal is called predestination.²⁰

Natural Desire

In the extrinsicist tradition, man’s natural desire is contained within the natural order, the possible fulfillment of which is included in the

18. *ST I*, q. 21, a. 1, obj. 3.

19. *ST I*, q. 21, a. 1, ad 3, emphasis added.

20. *ST I*, q. 23, a. 1, emphasis added.

debitum naturae. For this reason, the fulfillment of man's natural desire (or at least the possibility thereof) is necessarily *due* to the creature—as a matter of justice—as something included in the *debitum naturae*. Accordingly, for the extrinsicist tradition, man cannot be said to have a *natural* desire for the beatific vision, since that would thereby nullify the *gratuity* of this supernatural end.

The reasoning behind the extrinsicist tradition at this point draws largely from a principle found in Aristotle (384–322 BC), namely, that *nature does nothing in vain*, illustrated here in the following examples: “A shoe is pointless [μάτην] when it is not worn. But God and nature create nothing that is pointless [μάτην].”²¹ Similarly: “Whenever the sexes are separate the female cannot generate perfectly by herself alone, for then the male would exist in vain [μάτην], and *nature makes nothing in vain* [μάτην].”²² And finally: “Animals must be endowed with sensation, since *Nature does nothing in vain* [μάτην].”²³

The appropriation of this principle by the extrinsicist tradition and its application to man's natural desire solidified what would become the principal opposition against de Lubac in the twentieth century. As we will see in the next two chapters, de Lubac argued that man has a *natural* desire for the beatific vision; but still, he insisted that this supernatural end retained its *gratuity*. For the extrinsicist tradition, however, these two positions are incompatible: since a *natural* desire cannot be in vain, the fulfillment of a natural desire—on account of the *debitum naturae*—is therefore *not gratuitous*.²⁴

21. Aristotle, *On the Heavens* bk. I, ch. 4 (271a 32–33), cited in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 452: “μάτην γὰρ ὑπόδημα τοῦτο λέγομεν, οὐ μὴ ἔστιν ὑπόδεσις. ὁ δὲ Θεὸς καὶ ἡ φύσις οὐδὲν μάτην ποιοῦσιν.”

22. Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, bk. II, ch. 5 (741b 2–3), cited in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1150, emphasis added: “ἐν ὅσοις δὲ κεχώρισται τὸ θῆλυ καὶ τὸ ἄρρεν, ἀδύνατον αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ τὸ θῆλυ γεννᾶν εἰς τέλος· τὸ γὰρ ἄρρεν μάτην ἂν ἦν, δὲ φύσις οὐδὲν ποιεῖ μάτην.”

23. Aristotle, *De anima*, bk. III, ch. 12 (434a 30–31), cited in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 690, emphasis added: “τὸ δὲ ζῶον ἀναγκαῖον αἰσθῆσιν ἔχειν ... εἰ μὴθὲν μάτην ποιεῖ ἡ φύσις.”

24. See Louis Dupr s “Introduction” to de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, xiv where he writes: “To a theology that had accepted the existence of two relatively independent orders of reality the idea of a natural desire for a supernatural end was *a priori* excluded. The principal objection against it the new theologians strangely derived from Aristotle's static cosmology. In *De Caeol II* the philosopher had written that heavenly bodies stay their course, because no being desires what its nature has no means to attain. If the stars had the power to move beyond their course, nature

For de Lubac on the other hand, the beatific vision is man's *only* final end; any other final end results only in man's permanent frustration and suffering, as he writes here: "In me . . . in my concrete nature—that nature I have in common with all real men . . . the 'desire to see God' cannot be permanently frustrated without an essential suffering. To deny this is to undermine my entire Credo."²⁵

To complicate matters further, Pope Pius XII's 1950 encyclical *Humani generis* seems to teach along the very lines of the extrinsicist tradition above—or so at least it would appear at first glance—since he seemed to condemn de Lubac's teaching on the matter. Pope Pius XII writes: "Others destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order, since God, they say, cannot create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the Beatific Vision."²⁶ Here the pope seems to condemn the position which would deny the possibility of a purely natural end, as de Lubac seems to do so in the above when he states that there can be only *one* end for man. For this reason, it is alleged that *Humani generis* targeted de Lubac specifically, an issue which we will take up in the following chapter.

For now, let us simply observe the apparent tension between de Lubac and *Humani generis* on this point. Consider, for example, the pope's remarks in comparison to the following from de Lubac, which represents his cardinal thesis in his 1946 *Surnaturel*: "L'esprit est donc désir de Dieu."²⁷ Clearly, de Lubac is here precluding the very possibility of a purely natural end—since the created spirit, of which man is no doubt a prime example—inherently and inexorably desires the beatific vision, on account of its very nature.

would have given them the means to do so. In the same way, Cajetan and Suárez [key thinkers in the extrinsicist tradition], and their followers argued a human being can feel no desire for what its nature [cannot] attain."

25. De Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 54. "En moi . . . en ma nature concrète, dans cette nature que j'ai en commun avec tous les hommes réels . . . le 'désir de voir Dieu' ne saurait être éternellement frustré sans une souffrance essentielle. Je ne saurais nier cela sans faire une brèche à mon Credo" (De Lubac, *Le Mystère du Surnaturel*, 80, italics original).

26. DH 3875–99. Pius XII, *Humani generis* (1950), no. 26.

27. De Lubac, *Surnaturel*, 483: "The spirit is desire for God." I would like to thank my colleague, Dr. Edward Macierowski, for help in translating passages from de Lubac's *Surnaturel*. He is currently translating volume four of de Lubac's *Medieval Exegesis*, and has already completed volumes 2 and 3 for publication.

For further complexity and even irony here, however, let us note that the Second Vatican Council appears to have weighed in on this issue as well, and this time undoubtedly in favor of de Lubac. The Council states: “Christ died for everyone, and . . . all are in fact called to *one* and the same destiny, which is divine . . .”²⁸ Thus, while at mid-twentieth century de Lubac looked to be a man condemned, by the close of the Second Vatican Council he was recognized as one of its leading influences—and this especially pertains to the Council’s general framework on nature and grace.

Obediential Potency

For the extrinsicist tradition, man’s capacity for the beatific vision cannot be described as a natural potency or natural inclination (both of which are closely related to natural desire), since a natural potency inclines a thing to its *natural* end—the fulfillment of which is contained within the *debitum naturae*, which would therefore be due to the creature according to divine justice. In this light, the extrinsicist tradition employs the concept of obediential potency for the purpose of accounting for the precise relationship between human nature and the beatific vision.

At a basic level, the meaning of “obediential potency” refers to the capacity of a creature to “obey” the Creator, since the finite creature is always susceptible to being elevated or transformed by divine omnipotence. Accordingly, at one level obediential potency is used to explain God’s working of miracles, the transforming of finite creatures in such a manner that would have been impossible on the part of the creatures taken by themselves, in virtue of their natural powers alone.

However, in contrast to the case of a miracle, obediential potency as applied to man’s capacity for the beatific vision is slightly different because man remains *man* throughout this divine elevation. In other words, while the case of a miracle appears to have no specific relation to the nature of the creature as such—since God could transform anything into any other thing whatever—the capacity for the beatific vision *does* have some relation to human nature, since not every creature can be elevated in such a manner (that is, not *as* that particular creature). In this light, though it is impossible for man to actualize the beatific vision by

28. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, emphasis added.

virtue of his natural powers alone, this capacity is nonetheless rooted in the very dynamism of human nature itself.

For this reason, “obediential potency” has two distinct meanings: (1) “generic” obediential potency which corresponds to the case of a miracle, and which indicates no real relation between the specific nature of the creature and its miraculous transformation; and (2) “specific” obediential potency which corresponds to man’s specific capacity for the beatific vision, and which stipulates that the capacity for a certain elevation *is* in fact rooted in the very nature of the creature in question; this elevation is therefore perfective of that particular nature, albeit in a way that transcends the powers of its nature, strictly speaking.

As for an illustration of generic obediential potency, let us consider the following from the Gospel of Matthew: “God is able from these stones to raise up children of Abraham” (Matt 3:9); this is an example of a generic obediential potency because the stones are no longer *stones* by the end of the change; and supposing that these hypothetical stones, now-turned-human, were to receive the beatific vision, they certainly would not do so *as* stones. Hence, these stones have no *specific* obediential potency for the beatific vision (though they could be said to have a generic one).

On the other hand, as we have said, the capacity of human nature to be elevated to the beatific vision is a specific obediential potency precisely because this capacity is rooted in man’s *specific* nature: not every nature can be elevated to any end whatsoever, for only spiritual and intellectual nature possesses the capacity for the beatific vision; any other creature would have to be first transformed into an intellectual and spiritual creature, and only then elevated to the beatific vision.

Accordingly, the reason that the extrinsicist tradition insists upon the designation of man’s potency for the beatific vision as *obediential* (as opposed to *natural*) stems only from the fact that human nature cannot actualize this potency by itself. Moreover, since obediential potency refers to a capacity to be elevated beyond what is possible in virtue of the natural order, its actualization is not contained within the *debitum naturae*—in which case its fulfillment is always gratuitous (in contrast to *natural* potency, or natural desire which is contained within the *debitum naturae* and therefore would not be gratuitous). In this light, the extrinsicist tradition contends that the notion of specific obediential potency masterfully captures the balance of on the one hand, rooting the capacity

for the beatific vision in human nature, while simultaneously preserving on the other hand the sublime gratuity of this elevation, as supernaturally transcending the powers of human nature.

The Supernatural Order of Grace

In what follows supernatural “grace” will be understood with reference to man’s participation in the divine nature (cf. 2 Pet 1:4) in such a way that transcends what is signified in the notion of creation.²⁹ Accordingly, we will seek to point out the distinctively Trinitarian aspect of supernatural grace which elevates man to share in God’s Triune life, over against that participation in which all creatures partake by way of creation. This point will come to light most fully in chapter 6.

At this point, let us now turn to outline the procedure to be undertaken as follows, introducing in summary fashion the task of each successive chapter.

Chapter Précis

In what follows, we will proceed in three parts: (1) Part One (chapters 2 and 3) will introduce Henri de Lubac and the overarching historical and theological context for the nature-grace debate, particularly as it took place in the twentieth century. The remote but relevant historical context goes back at least to the French Revolution of 1789 and the Church’s ongoing struggle with the rising tide of secularism. As we will see, ecclesial thinkers throughout France in the nineteenth century tended to align with conservative political theorists—those most opposed to the heirs of the Revolution—harboring hopes of forestalling the triumph of secularism. In the end, this alignment turned out to discredit the Church’s engagement with modernity and actually bolstered the growth of secularism. For as the European monarchies of old lost credibility—to which the Church seemed so intimately intertwined—it seemed almost inevitable that the Church’s fate would share in the ebb and flow of Europe’s political fortunes, for better or worse.

In the twentieth-century, the Church in France found itself in a similar position when Nazi Germany defeated France in 1940, which

29. Through the grace of Christ, we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4).

resulted in four subsequent years of German occupation. Hitler installed Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain (1856–1951) who governed France from Vichy, and he would do so under the auspices of National Socialism.

Despite the ominous fact that he governed under Hitler's watchful eye, Pétain's rule appeared to give some semblance of a return to a more traditional form of government, one which ostensibly looked to reverse some of the French Revolution's heritage of strident secularism and anti-clericalism. For this reason—failing to recognize the full situation at hand—many Catholics were actually friendly to the conservative political arrangement with Pétain, hoping that his rule would undo the secularist trajectory of French society. However, de Lubac took strong exception here, as he perspicaciously saw the true colors of Pétain's regime. In fact, his friend and fellow Jesuit, Yves de Montcheuil (1899–1944), professor of theology at the Institute Catholique in Paris, paid the ultimate price for his intellectual resistance against the Nazi regime: de Montcheuil was shot and killed in 1944.³⁰ And de Lubac, too, had to flee from the Gestapo on occasion, and it was precisely in this context that his epochal work, *Surnaturel*, took final form, as he recounts here:

In June 1940, leaving in haste with a group of companions for La Louvesc, after having evaded the Germans who were approaching Lyons, I carried along a bag with a parcel of notes in it, among which was the notebook for *Surnaturel*. I spent several days up there putting a little order into it. Soon there was the return from our exodus (when Lyons was south of the famous “line of demarcation”), and I gave no more thought to it. But when, in 1943, being hunted by the Gestapo, I had to flee once more, I again carried along my notebook.³¹

His thinking on nature and grace is certainly not unrelated to this dark period of European history, for de Lubac's aim is no other than to articulate the foundations of a genuinely Christian humanism. In his mind, the horror of the Nazi regime represented nothing short of the disastrous implications which follow when the nature and mystery of man

30. See de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 47–49.

31. *Ibid.*, 35. Many Jesuits heroically held their ground against the Nazi agenda in France at this time. See Lapomarda, *Jesuits and the Third Reich*, 315–16. In the epilogue, he summarizes the results of his research: “The Jesuits as an organization and as individuals in service to others, Christians as well as Jews, did not remain silent but resisted the evil policies of the Third Reich and, as a consequence, suffered very much for such opposition to the Nazis in Europe” (*ibid.*, 359).

is misapprehended—when we fail to see the innate dignity of every human person, as created in the image and likeness of God, and ultimately ordered to a supernatural union with God in Christ Jesus.

The Catholic intellectual backdrop for de Lubac at this time is the theology of pure nature (also known as the extrinsicist tradition) which stretched back to the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation. It developed rapidly against the backdrop of the condemnation of Michael Baius (1513–1589) in 1567 in Pope Pius V's papal bull *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*.³² As we will see, Baius had a very low view of post-lapsarian human nature, not unlike that of Martin Luther (1483–1546).³³ Accordingly, Baius emphasized man's depravity to the point that man's nature seemed to take on an utter exigency for grace—an utter *need* for grace—in which case grace would seem to be no longer *gratuitous*.

The pure-nature tradition emerged forthrightly in this context, appearing to have on hand the ideal solution: namely, the need to ground theology upon the prior conception of “pure nature,” that is, a conception of “human nature” considered abstractly, apart from the order of grace. This notion of pure nature allowed Catholic theologians to explain the coherent integrity of human nature—apart from the gift of grace—giving them the conceptual tools necessary to preserve the gratuity of grace, over against Baius' teaching on man's post-lapsarian condition. Consequently, when St. Pius V condemned several of Baius' propositions regarding nature and grace, the pure-nature tradition appeared to receive something of a papal endorsement. Largely for this reason, it quickly rose to hegemonic status, going virtually unchallenged for centuries—that is, until de Lubac called it into question at mid-twentieth century.

After setting up this historical context of de Lubac's work, chapter 3 will take up the foundational and methodological principles which govern de Lubac's teaching on nature and grace; here we will seek to

32. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, DH 1901–1980.

33. In *Bondage of the Will*, Luther writes: “Our will principally because of its corruption can do no good of itself.” And similarly: “Free-will without God's grace is not free at all, but is the permanent prisoner and bondsman of evil, since it cannot turn itself to good” (Luther, *Selections from His Writings*, 182, 187, respectively). Similar to Luther's position on free will here, the following is a proposition attributed to Baius which was condemned by Pope Pius V in his Bull *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*: “It is a Pelagian error to say that free will is capable of avoiding sin” (Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, DH 1901–1980).

show the contrast between him and the pure-nature tradition, as it manifests itself at a basic hermeneutical level. For example, de Lubac places a great deal of emphasis upon the theological category of paradox and he sees his efforts here as diverging sharply from his counterparts in the pure-nature tradition. With this methodological hermeneutic in hand, de Lubac simply refuses to restrict himself to mutually exclusive categories—such as *either* “natural desire” (for the beatific vision), *or* its “gratuitous” fulfillment. The category of paradox, in other words, enables de Lubac to transcend such conventional dichotomies, in which case one can affirm both man’s *natural* desire for the beatific vision and its *gratuitous* fulfillment—no doubt, much to the chagrin of his pure-nature interlocutors. As we will see, this *modus operandi* of de Lubac is central to the logic of de Lubac’s overall position on nature and grace.

This is but one example of the basic difference in theological posture and *prolegomena* of de Lubac over against the pure-nature tradition; their differences here initiate the fundamental trajectory of their disagreements more generally, which largely accounts for their apparent stalemate at mid-twentieth century. Thus, the treatment of de Lubac here will help to inform our treatment of both his overall position, as well as more precisely delineate where and how he differs from the pure-nature tradition.

Next, we will begin Part Two (chapters 4 and 5), where we will take up the recent resurgence of the pure-nature tradition, which has taken place largely over the last decade. Chapters 4 and 5 will treat two of its leading representatives, Lawrence Feingold and Steven A. Long, respectively.³⁴

As we will see, it appears that the Church’s shift from extrinsicism before the Council to intrinsicism after the Council may have gone too far—at least so it may seem by way of perception; and it is just this perception that explains this resurgence of the pure-nature tradition. Accordingly, these chapters will take up the pure-nature tradition’s contemporary articulation, as well as their assessment of de Lubac.

At this point, let us state our thesis clearly: it is our contention that the resolution of these issues, as they have emerged in the contemporary form of the debate over nature and grace, can best be found in the theology of Matthias J. Scheeben (1835–1888). Accordingly, Part Three (chapter 6) will treat Scheeben’s masterful combination of extrinsicism and

34. Feingold, *Natural Desire to See God*; and Long, *Natura Pura*.

intrinsicism, a synthesis which captures both dimensions of the mystery of nature and grace. Scheeben's thought, we contend, can reconcile the most important contributions of both the pure-nature tradition, as well as those of de Lubac; and for this reason, the recovery of his thought can move the present debate beyond its current stalemate, which has not yet moved substantially from its mid-century form, despite the increase in activity on this issue.

As an indication of Scheeben's potential to accomplish this mediating task, let us take note of the fact that quite diverse thinkers—on both sides of the nature-grace issue—praise his work and find in him something of an ally. This diversity points to a common convergence in Scheeben, one which we will explore throughout and which Aidan Nichols captures here:

The sympathetic citation of his [Scheeben's] work by twentieth-century theologians as different as Hans Urs von Balthasar [1905–1988], a child of the so-called “new theology” [of which de Lubac is perhaps *the* representative] of the 1940s and 50s, and Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange [1877–1964], champion, in the years immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council, of “strict observance” Thomism [perhaps *the* intellectual opponent of de Lubac in the 1940s on nature and grace], attests to his mediating role.³⁵

It will be the task of chapter 6 to bear out Scheeben's achievement here, which we will undertake in four phases: (1) we will introduce Scheeben and his credentials for successfully bringing about this reconciliation; (2) we will demonstrate his basic congruity with the pure-nature tradition; (3) we will survey his teaching on the grace of divine sonship (which will eminently distill the sublime and supernatural character of divine grace); finally, (4) we will demonstrate Scheeben's

35. Nichols, *Romance and System*, 19. Balthasar describes Scheeben's thought as: “truly and in the highest sense and degree a theology of the ‘glories of divine grace’” (Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 116). Scheeben's Jesuit translator, Cyril Vollert, praises him in a similar vein: “His most notable contribution to Neo-Scholasticism is his service in bringing the supernatural, in its full purity and beauty, back to the center of theological thought. By his doctrine as well as by his method he sought to destroy the lingering influence that rationalism and the Enlightenment had exerted on Catholic theology. He was neither philosopher nor apologist but a theologian . . . He tried to attract men to the faith, not by proofs built on historical or apologetic foundations, but by opening and displaying its inner treasures” (Vollert, “Introduction,” in Scheeben, *Nature and Grace*, xiii).

ability to accommodate the intrinsicist contribution of de Lubac by way of his teaching on the Incarnation, where Scheeben captures the very Christocentrism mentioned at the outset of this chapter.

Let us conclude here by observing that Scheeben's thought on nature and grace is yet to be considered a critical part of this debate. For this reason, it is our modest hope and conviction that the present argument will rectify this lacuna; for Scheeben, it seems, has a tremendous contribution to make to this discussion—and perhaps unlike any other, he can reconcile both sides together and move the debate beyond its current impasse. With this overarching and timely task before us, let us begin our journey with Henri de Lubac.

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