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The Mystery of the Human Spirit: De Lubac and Bouillard on Nature and the Supernatural

Those who think themselves capable of grasping the nature of God would do well to consider whether they have looked into themselves.

St Gregory of Nyssa¹

INTRODUCTION: *NOUVELLE THÉOLOGIE* AND THE REFORMATION

The conflicts surrounding *nouvelle théologie* centred on its attempts to come to a renewed integration of nature and the supernatural. Each of the issues involved in the controversies of the 1940s and 50s involved the key issue: to what extent are nature and the supernatural distinct from one another? Several other problems, immediately connected, also came to the fore: the relationships between reason and faith, philosophy and theology, history and eternity, experience and revelation, human ability and divine grace, historical and spiritual interpretation were the most evident concerns. Whereas the Leonine Thomist revival of the late nineteenth century had in each case reinforced a more or less strict separation between nature and the supernatural, the *nouvelle* theologians regarded such a separation as the most serious pitfall of the Baroque scholasticism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with disastrous consequences both in terms of a radicalized autonomy of the realm of nature and in terms of divine grace being isolated from everyday human existence. They were concerned with the rationalism and secularism implied in the immanentism of a purely natural order and with the fideism, spiritualism, and authoritarianism of a strictly other-worldly supernatural order.

When the *nouvelle* theologians tried to reintegrate nature and the supernatural, they took up concerns that had long lain at the heart of the Reformation. The *nouvelle* theologians were like the Reformers in a number of ways. They wanted

¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, c. 11 (quot. Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad/Herder, 1998), 210).

to go back beyond scholastic theology to the Church Fathers and place the Scriptures at the centre of the theological enterprise (de Lubac, Daniélou). They were apprehensive of an authoritarian hierarchy and wanted to reintegrate doctrinal authority with the Eucharistic life of the Church and with the active communal participation of the laity (Congar). They insisted that Christ was not just of significance for matters of faith, but that the Incarnation was foundational to every human endeavour (Balthasar). They were interested in recapturing the significance of the ordinary lives of working class people as genuine vocations, worthy of reflection in a theology of work (Chenu). They had questions about the clearly defined sacramental system of Catholicism.² Moreover, the focal point of *nouvelle théologie's* criticism was usually either the scholasticism of the post-Reformation period or the more recent neo-scholasticism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Both scholastic periods had reacted against a perceived forswearing of human reason, whether that of the Reformation, with its emphasis on *sola fide* and its protest against Aristotelianism, or that of the nineteenth-century Catholic fideism and traditionalism of Félicité de Lamennais, Louis Bautain, as well as Johann Adam Möhler and others of the Tübingen school.³ In other words, the approach of *nouvelle théologie* might well be viewed as an olive branch extended to the Reformation, with which it shared an apprehension of rational philosophy setting the theological agenda. Understandably, then, the direction of *nouvelle théologie*, along with its endorsement at the Second Vatican Council, made for a significant ecumenical opportunity.

Although it is true that the *nouvelle* theologians did take up some of the concerns of the Reformation, and while people like Yves Congar and Hans Urs von Balthasar were genuine and passionate in their ecumenical interests, it would be erroneous to view *nouvelle théologie's* reintegration of nature and the supernatural as a twentieth-century replay of the Reformation. We should keep in mind that the *nouvelle* theologians generally looked beyond nineteenth-century or even sixteenth-century scholasticism to the earlier pre-Reformation period as the source of the problems that would ultimately lead to the rise of neo-Thomism. On this understanding, the Reformation, while correct in some of its observations, was simply one major contributor to a larger shift that had begun in the Middle Ages and would involve both the Catholic Church and the Reformation churches in a gradual drifting apart of nature and the supernatural. In other words, with regard to the central issue of the nature-supernatural relationship, *nouvelle théologie* did not see itself as taking up the Reformation concerns. Rather, *nouvelle théologie* offered a challenge to both neo-Thomism and the Protestant Reformation. Indeed, *nouvelle théologie's*

² Cf. Marie-Dominique Chenu's comment that the twelfth-century 'operation of delimiting the seven major sacraments sufficed by itself' to manifest a tendency of 'desacralization' (*Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, trans. and ed. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Born (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 127).

³ Cf. Chap. 2, sect.: Nineteenth-century 'Footnotes' to Kant.

sacramental readjustment of the nature–supernatural relationship implied the *ressourcement* of a period preceding the deplorable break of the Reformation. *Nouvelle théologie* does offer a genuine possibility of true ecumenical dialogue. But the ecumenical landscape is a complex one, with Catholicism and Protestantism both implicated, although perhaps in different ways, in the loss of a sacramental ontology. Both Catholic and Protestant traditions need the courage to reappraise the problematic history of the split between nature and the supernatural, resulting in the descramentalized universe of modernity.

In this chapter and the next, I will trace in some detail the views of Henri de Lubac, Henri Bouillard, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Marie-Dominique Chenu on this particular contentious issue. It will become clear that the four theologians shared an opposition to what Chenu called the ‘Baroque scholasticism’ of neo-Thomism and its nature–supernatural divide. We can note in each of the four authors a concern for a sacramental mindset that regarded the created order as symbolic in character, so that it made the supernatural reality present to the realities of time and space. At the same time, however, the various *nouvelle* theologians pursued this sacramental ontology each with their own distinct emphasis. De Lubac and Bouillard tended to draw on the Greek Church Fathers and the Neoplatonic tradition; as a result, they emphasized the sacramental link in its upward direction: nature pointed upward to the supernatural and made it present. Balthasar and Chenu tended to be a great deal more critical of the Platonic tradition and were fearful of an idealism that might undermine the goodness of creation; as a result, they accentuated the sacramental connection in its downward direction: the Incarnation valued the created order and thereby gave it its sacramental character. To be sure, the contrast was in no way absolute. On the one hand, de Lubac was not naive to the real problems inherent in the Platonic tradition, and the Incarnation remained central to his theology, while Bouillard’s Thomism gave him a true appreciation for the relative autonomy of the natural order. On the other hand, both Balthasar and Chenu had a high regard for the Greek Fathers, including the Neoplatonism of Denys. The commonalities far outweighed the differences among the *nouvelle* theologians. Most importantly, a sacramental ontology, informed by a *ressourcement* of the Church Fathers, informed all of them.

HENRI DE LUBAC: *DESIDERIUM NATURALE* AS SACRAMENTAL PRESENCE

Neoplatonism and the Gratiuity of Grace

On 10 May 1940, Nazi Germany invaded France and quickly set up a puppet regime, under the leadership of France’s First World War hero, Marshal Pétain. Exactly two months later, Pétain was appointed Chief of State of the Vichy

regime in central France, beginning five long years of oppressive fascism, anti-Semitic legislation, and other forms of collaboration with Nazi Germany. One of the painful memories of this time period is the massive support many in the Catholic Church gave, first to the Fascist party, Action française, in the 1930s, and then to Pétain's Vichy regime during the Second World War itself. Seventy-six thousand Jews were deported from France to Germany between 1941 and 1945; only about 2,500 survived. In 1997, the Catholic Church of France issued an official apology, pronounced by Bishop Olivier de Berranger. Speaking of the silence of the French Church in the face of the Nazis' extermination of the Jews, he acknowledged: 'Today we confess that this silence was a mistake... We beg God's forgiveness and ask the Jewish people to hear this word of repentance.'⁴

The rise of fascism in Europe, particularly in France, and the question of how the Church should respond, was the context in which Henri de Lubac developed his theology.⁵ De Lubac realized the temptation that the Vichy regime presented to traditionalist Catholics, attracted as they were to structures of authority. But he also realized that at its heart fascism constituted a different religion: a return to anti-Catholic and anti-Christian neo-paganism.⁶ As de Lubac came to see it, the French cultural and political situation was intimately tied up with the theological question of the relationship between nature and the supernatural. The reason, he believed, why so many accommodated uncritically the fascist neo-paganism of the Vichy regime was the long-standing separation between nature and the supernatural, as if the two formed two hermetically sealed compartments. Such separation, de Lubac believed, granted the realm of nature a nearly autonomous status in relation to the supernatural. In no way related to the supernatural, the realm of nature could move in its own, self-chosen direction, unencumbered by a higher call that the gospel, Jesus Christ, or the Church might issue.

De Lubac's opposition to a strictly autonomous natural realm did not mean, however, that he uncritically adopted a Neoplatonic perspective in which the created order emanated in a hierarchically graduated fashion from an eternal Plotinian One. In the concluding chapter of his book, *Le Mystère du surnaturel* (1965), in a chapter entitled 'The Call of Love', de Lubac issued the following words of caution against Neoplatonism:

One must... be careful to correct—if not wholly to avoid—the neo-Platonist metaphors of flux, of gushing, of 'effluence', of emanation, of soaking into things. God is not, as one might think from some Platonist expressions also taken up by Denys, a generosity pouring himself out, it is at best inadequate to see him simply as that 'fundamental

⁴ (Quot. *Le Monde* (1 Oct. 1997), B11.) Cf. Patrick Henry, 'The French Catholic Church's Apology', *FrR* 72 (1999), 1099–105.

⁵ Cf. de Lubac, *Résistance chrétienne à l'antisémitisme: Souvenirs 1940–1944* (Paris: Fayard, 1988); English trans.: *Christian Resistance to Anti-Semitism: Memories from 1940–1944*, trans. Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius, 1990).

⁶ Joseph A. Komonchak, 'Theology and Culture at Mid-century: The Example of Henri de Lubac', *TS* 51 (1990), 599.

generosity' which must mean, for the Absolute, simply the fact of being essentially communicable; or that kind of generosity which is no more than a de-sacralized charity. Those who, in order to avoid 'contingentist theories' which might tend to anthropomorphism, accept rather too readily Platonist or Plotinian theories as if despairing in advance of purifying any personalist theory by the laws of analogy, are in danger of steering from Charybdis on to Scylla. No theory will dispense with the need for correction by analogy.⁷

These strongly worded 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. And this lengthy quotation was not an isolated instance of anti-Platonic rhetoric. The entire chapter contrasted the call of God's love in Christ with the Platonic absolute, supreme intelligence, 'eternally unaware of us imperfect beings'.⁸ We need to take seriously these anti-Platonic comments, found here and elsewhere in de Lubac's writings. His desire to safeguard both the concrete character of the love of the triune God and his freedom in creating and redeeming was unambiguous. And, of course, in this way, de Lubac simply placed himself in the Christian Tradition, which had generally tried to uphold both the Trinitarian love and the freedom of the Creator and Redeemer God in the face of the emanationism and pantheism of the Platonic tradition.

There was more, however, to de Lubac's quotation than met the eye. He accompanied his expressions of reservation regarding the Platonic tradition with several comments indicating that he wished to safeguard the gratuity of divine grace: 'Let us say it once more in conclusion: God could have refused to give himself to his creatures, just as he could have, and has, given himself. The gratuitousness of the supernatural order is true individually and totally. It is gratuitous in regard to what we see as preceding it, whether in time or in logic.'⁹ While by no means disingenuous, either in his cautionary comments against Neoplatonism or in his insistence on the gratuity of the gift of sanctifying grace, we none the less do need to notice the defensive posture that de Lubac adopted with these comments. His anti-Platonic discourse served to maintain the gratuity of grace. And his insistence on the freedom of grace served to protect him against the key accusation that he anticipated from the commentatorial Thomist tradition. Or, to put it somewhat differently, precisely because he was aware of being perceived as a closet Neoplatonist, he pulled out all the stops in trying to pre-empt his opponents' attacks.

Pure Nature and Natural Desire

This raises the question why the neo-Thomists were convinced that de Lubac's position, first advanced in 1946 in *Surnaturel*, and then in somewhat modified

⁷ De Lubac, *Mystery*, 234–5; English trans. of *Le Mystère du surnaturel* (Paris: Aubier, 1965).

⁸ De Lubac, *Mystery*, 228. ⁹ Ibid. 236.

form again in 1965 in *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* and in *Le Mystère du surnaturel*, would endanger the gratuity of grace.¹⁰ The reason for this lies, partially at least, in the influence that Maurice Blondel exerted on de Lubac.¹¹ The neo-Thomists saw in de Lubac Blondel's 'method of immanence', along with all of its perceived connections to Modernism. From their perspective, they were right to worry. De Lubac's *Surnaturel* uncompromisingly rejected commentatorial Thomism and sounded a clarion call for a reintegration of theology and philosophy. De Lubac was convinced that the neo-Thomist tradition had caused a loss of the proper place of theology:

Theology had reigned as queen of the sciences, and on occasion it had possibly taken unfair advantage of its title. Now it was beginning to lose its position; after dominating the whole of knowledge it was tending to become merely a separate branch. The supernatural end which is, so to say, the keystone of the arch, was no longer that of philosophy. The study of man was cut into two parts.¹²

De Lubac wanted to restore the unity of a Christian anthropology. He objected to two specific developments in the neo-Thomist tradition, in each of which he observed a radical departure from St Thomas himself.¹³ First, he lamented the rise of the idea of 'pure nature' (*pura natura*)—that is to say, nature apart from any consideration of grace or of a supernatural end. Initially, the question of *pura natura* had been raised hypothetically in connection with the eternal destiny of unbaptized children. What would be their final end? By way of analogy, the issue was then raised: imagine that Adam would have died in a state of pure nature, before receiving sanctifying grace.¹⁴ Thus, the theologoumenon of *pura natura* was, in the neo-Thomist tradition, a state in which God hypothetically could have created Adam. That is to say, according to his absolute power (*potentia absoluta*) God could have created Adam without original justice and sanctifying grace. Such a first creature surely would not have ended up with the same supernatural beatitude that Adam, and all of the saints, did in fact obtain. The later Thomists turned this hypothesis into an elaborate scheme in which two parallel orders ran alongside one another, each perfectly following its own course: the natural and the supernatural orders each leading to its own appropriate connatural end.

¹⁰ Cf. de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946); id., *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* (Paris: Aubier, 1965); English trans.: *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: Crossroad/Herder, 2000); id., *Mystery*.

¹¹ Cf. Chap. 2, sect.: The Dynamism of Human Action.

¹² De Lubac, *Augustinianism*, 214–15.

¹³ Interestingly, Henri Bouillard presented a nearly identical analysis of Thomas's position on the nature–supernatural relationship (*Conversion et grâce chez s. Thomas d'Aquin: Étude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), 77–84). The two theological developments, along with their cultural impact, receive careful treatment in Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 167–81.

¹⁴ De Lubac, *Augustinianism*, 110.

Second, inevitably accompanying the notion of *pura natura* was the insistence that human beings were not naturally oriented towards a supernatural end; there was no natural desire (*desiderium naturale*) for the beatific vision. The Aristotelian principle of connaturality meant that every being had an end proportionate to its nature, so that it could attain this end by means of its inherent powers. As Aristotle had argued in Book 2 of *De caelo*, if the stars had had the capacity to move, nature would have given them the appropriate organs to do so.¹⁵ Accordingly, the neo-Thomists argued, it was impossible for human beings to have the innate desire for the supernatural beatific vision without also having the connatural means to attain it. The only conclusion could be that there was no *desiderium naturale* for a supernatural end. The desire for our supernatural end must itself already be a separate supernatural gift of grace. The neo-Thomists thus concluded that human beings had a twofold final end, the one natural and the other supernatural, the latter extrinsically superimposed on the former. De Lubac, however, was not convinced that the Aristotelian principle of connaturality was applicable to faith. The fact that God had given human beings natural desire for the beatific vision did not entail that they could attain their supernatural end by means of their inherent, natural powers.

As a meticulous historian of doctrine, de Lubac carefully traced the rise of the neo-Thomist extrinsicist thought patterns. He concluded that St Thomas had already relied too much on Aristotelian philosophy. This was clear from Thomas's use of the term 'nature'. 'For Aristotle', explained de Lubac, 'nature was a center of properties and a source of activity that was strictly delimited and enclosed within its own order.'¹⁶ According to de Lubac, Thomas Aquinas had borrowed this understanding of 'nature' from Aristotle. Therefore, when fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Thomist thought appealed to the Angelic Doctor for their separation between nature and the supernatural, there was unfortunately some justification for these appeals. De Lubac argued that Thomas's understanding of 'nature' as a distinct domain, unrelated to any supernatural end, had been too Aristotelian and had constituted a deviation from the theology of the Church Fathers. When they had employed the distinction made in Genesis 1: 26 between the image [εἰκών] and the likeness [ὁμοίωσις] of God, this had not been the same as the distinction between the Aristotelian notion of nature and the Christian understanding of grace. Rather, the Church Fathers had distinguished between the mere capacity to see God (the image [εἰκών] of God) and the actual gift of the Holy Spirit communicating life to believers (the likeness [ὁμοίωσις] of God).¹⁷ Aquinas, argued de Lubac, had attempted to integrate two ultimately incompatible notions: the Aristotelian idea of a self-contained 'nature' and the

¹⁵ 'Si natura dedisset caelis inclinationem ad motum progressivum, dedisset etiam instrumenta ad talem motum' (quot. de Lubac, *Augustinianism*, 169).

¹⁶ Id., *Surnaturel: Études historiques*, ed. Michel Sales (rev. edn, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), 435. Cf. Komonchak, 'Theology and Culture', 587–8.

¹⁷ De Lubac, *Mystery*, 98.

patristic understanding of 'image'.¹⁸ The former had restricted human beings to a natural realm whose ends they could attain by their natural powers. The latter had opened human beings from the outset to the supernatural horizon that they could obtain by the grace of God.

The notion of 'pure nature' itself, however, did not come to the fore until much later. De Lubac traced its origins to the sixteenth century. The first step had been taken by the Louvain theologians John Driedo (1480–1533) and Ruard Tapper (1487–1599), who had insisted that God had not owed human beings the supernatural gift of eternal life and that God could have created Adam without sanctifying grace.¹⁹ The notion of *pura natura* itself had first been used as a polemical tool against the radical Augustinian followers of Michael Baius (1513–89). For Baius, the creation of human nature had necessarily and immediately implied the gift of the Spirit. Thus, Baius had obviated the gratuitous character of the immediate gift of the Spirit in the Garden. God had been obliged to provide Adam in Paradise with eternal life. Prior to the Fall, there had only been merit, no grace.²⁰ Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) had defended Catholic doctrine by insisting that God had been under no obligation to give Adam sanctifying grace. Thus, in order to protect the gratuity of grace, Bellarmine had used the term *pura natura*. 'Bellarmine was its creator', insisted de Lubac.²¹ The sixteenth-century theologians, however, had remained relatively subdued in their assertions surrounding God's hypothetical use of his absolute power to create a human being in a state of *pura natura*. The notion had served in a purely hypothetical fashion, merely safeguarding the conviction that God had not been obliged to give supernatural grace.

More importantly, none of these theologians had denied that every human being did have a natural desire for the supernatural end of the beatific vision. The Aristotelian principle of connaturality seemed to exclude such an apparent confusion between nature and the supernatural, but de Lubac showed that on this score none of these sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theologians had been impressed with the philosopher. Aristotle had not been a Christian and could not have been expected to speak with authority on the relationship between nature and the supernatural. The Dominican theologian, Dominic Soto (1499–1560), had expressed himself unambiguously: 'Aristotle knew nothing about the supernatural, and he would not have conceded that any matter has a natural inclination towards anything, unless it had the power and natural strengths to obtain it; we, however, do concede that our nature is so sublime that it is inclined towards that end which we cannot obtain except through God's help.'²² And de Lubac

¹⁸ Komonchak, 'Theology and Culture', 588.

¹⁹ De Lubac, *Augustinianism*, 147–9.

²⁰ Ibid. 1–30.

²¹ Ibid. 152, quoting Fr Smulders.

²² Soto, *In IV Sent.*, dist. 41, q2, a1 (quot. ibid. 130).

repeatedly pointed out that the belief in an innate *desiderium naturale* had been shared by the various medieval schools of thought. It had been accepted not just by Dominicans like Soto, but also by Scotists, including Duns Scotus (1265/6–1308) himself.²³

Notwithstanding this common acceptance of a *desiderium naturale*, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had witnessed a development that would ultimately undermine the notion. Appeals to the Aristotelian principle of connaturality had become increasingly frequent. The application of this principle, along with the implication of the denial of a *desiderium naturale*, had first come to the surface, de Lubac explained, with Denys the Cartusian (1402–71) and then with Thomas Cardinal Cajetan (1469–1534). For both of these theologians, natural power could not have been in vain, so they logically had come to deny that a desire for the vision of God was natural to human beings.²⁴ Other theologians had supported their denial: Conrad Kroellin (1476–1536), Francis Silvester (Ferrariensis) (1474–1526), and Chrysostom Javelli (1470–1538).²⁵ Later on in the sixteenth century, other Thomist scholars from Salamanca—Bartholomew of Medina (1527–81) and Dominic Bañez (1528–1604)—had also started to follow the more recent trends.²⁶ Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), who had introduced the principle of connaturality in his book *De fine ultimo* (1592), had been particularly influential on later theology. De Lubac commented that ‘it may well be thought that no one did more to spread it than Suarez’.²⁷ De Lubac did not hesitate to trace the development of a self-enclosed natural realm through to neo-Thomist luminaries of his own day, scholars such as Ambroise Gardeil, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Joseph de Tonquédec, Blaise Romeyer, Charles Boyer, and Pedro Descocqs.²⁸

De Lubac explained that Cajetan and Suárez had been the most influential scholars in promoting the denial of natural desire, both of them insisting that they had been in line with the Angelic Doctor himself. At the same time, however, the Fourvière Jesuit made clear that Suárez, a fellow Jesuit, had not been the first to devise the idea of human nature as a closed, self-sufficient entity: the Dominican theologian ‘Cajetan is, if not quite the first initiator of it, at least its patron and leading authority. It was chiefly he who introduced it into Thomism and, more precisely, actually into the exegesis of St Thomas himself, thus conferring upon it a kind of usurped authority’.²⁹ It was Cajetan, then, whom de Lubac blamed more than anyone else for having introduced an innovation under the guise of merely being a faithful commentator of St Thomas.³⁰

²³ De Lubac, *Augustinianism*, 138, 211, 230; id., *Mystery*, 154–5.

²⁴ De Lubac, *Augustinianism*, 163–5.

²⁵ Ibid. 125–6, 165–6.

²⁶ Ibid. 168.

²⁷ Ibid. 168.

²⁸ Ibid. 161–2; id., *Mystery*, 149–50.

²⁹ Id., *Mystery*, 145–6.

³⁰ Cf. id., *Augustinianism*, 138.

De Lubac was keen to demonstrate that both the notion of pure nature and the denial of natural desire were relatively recent developments, and that they could not possibly boast the support of St Thomas.³¹ This is not to say that de Lubac felt equally strongly about both issues. He was willing to recognize that in some sense the notion of *pura natura* might serve a positive purpose, that it might indeed safeguard the gratuity of grace by making clear that divine grace came to us from the outside, and was, in that sense, supernatural or extrinsic. He acknowledged that the idea could serve to keep at bay the Baianist view that God had been obliged to give Adam eternal life.³² Eager to make clear his differences with Baianism, de Lubac was willing to admit that the hypothetical idea of pure nature could perhaps assist to uphold the priority of grace also in the prelapsarian situation.

But even this admission was mostly a matter of expediency. De Lubac's reservations with regard to *pura natura* remained profound, particularly when this notion was accompanied by the denial of an innate *desiderium naturale*. First, as long as the idea of pure nature functioned at the level of a mere hypothesis, it seemed to him ultimately useless in protecting the gratuity of grace. The question of grace, after all, did not concern a hypothetical human nature, but it concerned *me*, a human being created with a supernatural end:

What can possibly be learnt from the situation of the first, the hypothetical man, in regard to the gratuitousness of the gift given to the second, the man that I am in reality? I can only repeat that ultimately it is solely in relation to me, in relation to our nature as it is, this actual mankind to which we belong, that this question of gratuitousness can be asked and answered.³³

In other words, even if grace had indeed been gratuitous for a hypothetical person created in a state of pure nature, this in no way provided a guarantee that grace was also gratuitous in our *actual* state.

³¹ De Lubac's interpretation of St Thomas continues to be a matter of disagreement. In accord with de Lubac's general position are: Denis J. M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good: Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas's Moral Science* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997); Éric de Moulins-Beaufort, *Anthropologie et mystique selon Henri de Lubac: 'L'Esprit de l'homme' ou la présence de Dieu en l'homme* (Paris: Cerf, 2003); Stephen Wang, 'Aquinas on Human Happiness and the Natural Desire for God', *NBI* 88 (2007), 322–34. Others express disagreement: Georges P. Cottier, 'Désir naturel de voir Dieu', *Greg* 78 (1997), 679–98; id., *Le Désir de Dieu: Sur les traces de saint Thomas* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2002); Stephen A. Long, 'On the Possibility of a Purely Natural End for Man', *Thomist* 64 (2000), 211–37; Guy Mansini, 'Henri de Lubac, the Natural Desire to See God, and Pure Nature', *Greg* 83 (2002), 89–109; Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God according to St Thomas Aquinas and his Interpreters* (Rome: Apollinaris, 2001); Reinhard Hütter, 'Desiderium Naturale Visionis Dei—Est autem duplex hominis beatitudo sive felicitas: Some Observations about Lawrence Feingold's and John Milbank's Recent Interventions in the Debate over the Natural Desire to See God', *NV Eng* 5 (2007), 81–132.

³² While de Lubac agreed that the notion of pure nature was 'perhaps useful, but recent' (*Augustinianism*, 106), he also made clear that the notion actually did not function a great deal in the Baianist controversy (ibid. 107–9). Elsewhere, de Lubac questioned whether the hypothesis of pure nature was 'really useful' (*Mystery*, 52).

³³ De Lubac, *Mystery*, 60.

Second, over time, the hypothetical character of pure nature had turned out to be not quite so hypothetical. While St Thomas had been content to acknowledge with Aristotle that there were subordinate natural ends of earthly happiness, the new Thomism had gone much further, speaking of a twofold end, the one natural and the other supernatural, even in the hereafter. Soon a twofold beatitude, even a twofold vision of God, had been the result. De Lubac illustrated how the commentatorial Thomists had ended up with the natural realm annexing all the characteristics of grace for itself, including faith, prayer, virtues, disinterested love, etc. 'What remains peculiar to the supernatural order', exclaimed de Lubac, 'except the word?'³⁴ Once Cajetan and others had denied that from the beginning God had constituted human nature with a supernatural end, the notion of pure nature allowed them to posit two unconnected parallel outcomes to human life.³⁵ In order to minimize any inherent link between nature and the supernatural, the Thomist tradition had turned *pura natura* from hypothesis into reality.

Third, by a twist of irony, de Lubac believed that the neo-Thomists were the ones endangering the gratuity of grace, while at the same time they were courting secularism. One of de Lubac's deepest motivations came to the surface at this point. Always maintaining that natural desire did not, in fact, undermine the gratuity of grace—the Baianist and Jansenist spectre, which always hovered over his theology—de Lubac pointed to the implication of his opponents' views: the idea of two parallel tracks, the one superimposed on the other, implied strict autonomy for the realm of nature. The neo-scholastic appeal to the gratuity of grace was, de Lubac believed, a mere smokescreen: 'I believe that the profound, and unnoticed, reason is rather the reverse. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, in the first period of the Renaissance, a feverish enthusiasm for philosophy infected certain minds. A large number of Christian thinkers were won over at that time by the renescent naturalism.'³⁶ Thus, de Lubac repeatedly insisted that the threat to gratuitous grace lay not in the notion of a *desiderium naturale* but in the secularism implicit in the separation of the two realms.³⁷ As Tracey Rowland comments:

For de Lubac, the idea of a pure nature contained dangerous Pelagian tendencies, since it meant that it would be possible to sever grace from nature and marginalize it under the

³⁴ De Lubac, *Mystery*, 40.

³⁵ Cf. id., *Augustinianism*, 191–9. Cf. de Lubac's comment that the new model assumed 'that every man, in our world as it is, before having received the grace of baptism or any other enabling grace, was in that state of "pure nature" (at least if one excludes original sin and its consequences). Finality was therefore considered as something fairly extrinsic: not a destiny inscribed in a man's very nature, directing him from within, and which he could not ontologically escape, but a mere destination given him outside when he was already in existence' (id., *Mystery*, 68–9).

³⁶ Id., *Augustinianism*, 212.

³⁷ Cf. de Lubac's warnings against secularism in *Augustinianism*, pp. xxxv, 240. Through the events of the Second Vatican Council and beyond, de Lubac became more and more convinced that the threat came less from neo-Thomist extrinsicism than from secular immanentism, though of course he viewed both as based on the same premises. Cf. Chap. 7, sect.: The Church in the World.

category of the 'supernatural'. The supernatural could subsequently be privatized and social life would then proceed on the basis of the common pursuit of goods associated solely with the 'natural' order.³⁸

The Mystery of the Human Spirit

The question that remains, of course, is: what was de Lubac positively searching for? Part of the answer lies in Blondel's influence on de Lubac's theology. Blondel's vision of a reintegration of history and faith and of nature and the supernatural coincided with a sacramental ontology that regarded nature as innately or inherently oriented to the supernatural. This natural desire was something on which de Lubac insisted by using terms such as 'appetite', 'imprinted movement', 'innate openness', 'interior aptitude', 'inclination', or 'capacity' for supernatural grace.³⁹ It was Blondel, along with Joseph Maréchal and Pierre Rousselot, who, in Balthasar's words, gave de Lubac 'the courage to read out of the texts of Thomas Aquinas what he saw in them with evidence: the paradox of the spiritual creature that is ordained beyond itself by the innermost reality of its nature to a goal that is unreachable for it and that can only be given as a gift of grace'.⁴⁰ To be sure, it is possible to over-interpret the Neoplatonist tendencies intimated by these comments. We have already seen that de Lubac did not simply want to be a Neoplatonist.⁴¹ And at times he could make concessions to a separation between the two realms that made him sound distinctly modern.⁴² De Lubac's tendency towards Neoplatonism always remained tempered, and probably with good reason.⁴³ It is none the less clear that his arduous insistence on a *desiderium naturale* stemmed from his wish to return to a

³⁸ Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition after Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003), 94.

³⁹ De Lubac, *Mystery*, 130–2, 136–7.

⁴⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview*, trans. Joseph Fessio and Susan Clements (San Francisco, Calif.: Communio/Ignatius, 1991), 13.

⁴¹ Cf. also de Lubac, *Mystery*, 119.

⁴² Throughout Chap. 5 of *Le Mystère du surnaturel*, de Lubac made some remarkably strong statements limiting the positive character of natural desire, insisting it was no more than a 'passive aptitude' (*Mystery*, 85), which did not even 'initially or distantly' have a participation in our supernatural being (ibid. 84). At one point, he sounded positively neo-scholastic: 'It is as though there were two levels, two floors with no connection between them. For the two orders are incommensurable' (ibid. 81–2). This is exactly the sort of construct de Lubac had been opposing and would continue to oppose throughout his life.

⁴³ The title of John Milbank's book on de Lubac (*The Suspended Middle*) takes its cue from Balthasar's use of the same phrase (Balthasar, *Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 14–15). See Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005). Milbank is incorrect, however, in assuming that in some sense de Lubac regarded natural desire as already supernatural in character (ibid. 38–40). Balthasar himself pointed out that de Lubac never made this move. For de Lubac there was 'no trace yet of supernatural grace' in the created spiritual nature, which was exactly why he could not agree with Karl Rahner's 'supernatural existential' (Balthasar, *Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 71). Not unfairly, David Lyle Jeffrey points out that 'in *The Suspended Middle*, de Lubac sounds more like Milbank than like himself' (review of *The Suspended Middle*, in *JAAR* 75 (2007), 715).

spirituality that placed mystery and paradox in the centre of its theology.⁴⁴ John Milbank rightly points to the fact that the *desiderium naturale* functioned as a 'suspended middle' between nature and the supernatural, something that was reserved for human beings alone. They had a natural desire for God because they were created as spirit,⁴⁵ made in the image of God,⁴⁶ for the sake of the eternal vision of God.

De Lubac was unyielding on the issue of *desiderium naturale* because it provided an essential theological link with a patristic, more or less Neoplatonic mindset, which had been sacramental in character. De Lubac believed it was necessary to hold together two paradoxical notions: on the one hand, human beings had an innate natural desire for God; on the other hand, this natural desire was unable of itself to attain the beatific vision, so that the human interior aptitude in no way obliged God to give sanctifying grace. The Aristotelian principle of connaturality was, in de Lubac's mind, an unfortunate rejection of paradox and mystery in favour of common sense.⁴⁷ Few emphases were as important to him as this acceptance of paradox and mystery, something he had appropriated from his sustained reading of the Church Fathers and the medieval tradition. A purely positivist theology that refused to acknowledge mystery and wished to remove the scandal of apparent contradictions would always end up isolating and rationalizing one side of the equation and would thus become 'heresy properly so called'.⁴⁸ The most serious problem with neo-scholastic theology, from de Lubac's perspective, was, therefore, that it seemed like 'a buildup of concepts by which the believer tries to make the divine mystery less mysterious, and in some cases to eliminate it altogether'.⁴⁹

From the outset of his career, de Lubac moved away from what he called the rational 'dialectical' theology that had dominated Catholic thought since the Middle Ages, and turned to what he termed the 'symbolic' theology of the Church Fathers.⁵⁰ The Church Fathers had displayed an eye for the mystery of

⁴⁴ Just a glance at some of the titles of de Lubac's books illustrates the importance of paradox in his thought. See de Lubac, *Paradoxes* (Paris: Éditions du livre français, 1946); English trans.: *Paradoxes of Faith*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius, 1987); id., *Paradoxe et mystère de l'Église* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1967); English trans.: *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, trans. James R. Dunne (New York: Ecclesia, 1969); id., *Autres paradoxes* (Namur: Culture et vérité, 1994); English trans.: *More Paradoxes*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius, 2002).

⁴⁵ Cf. de Lubac's historical theological investigations regarding human nature as tripartite, i.e., consisting of body, soul, and spirit, the latter being the locale of the *imago dei*. See de Lubac, 'Tripartite Anthropology', in *Theology in History*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius, 1996), 117–200. Cf. id., *Brief Catechesis*, 26–7 and the reflections on de Lubac's anthropology in Lewis Ayres, 'The Soul and the Reading of Scripture: A Note on Henri de Lubac', *SJT* 61 (2008), 173–90.

⁴⁶ Cf. de Lubac, *Mystery*, 98–100, 108.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 140–66.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 175.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 178.

⁵⁰ Id., *Corpus Mysticum; The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages: Historical Survey*, trans. Gemma Simmonds, Richard Price, and Christopher Stephens and ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and

God. For them, theology had been much less a rational explanation of matters divine than something that began with faith in Christ and was willing to rest in the unexplained mysteries that this faith relationship with a personal and transcendent God entailed. De Lubac argued that the move from symbolism to dialectic had begun with Anselm (1033–1109) and Aquinas. Theology had become more a form of ‘Christian rationalism’ than a type of spiritual understanding.⁵¹

De Lubac’s approach took a different starting-point, one that insisted on a return to mystery. Discussing the image of God, de Lubac commented: “‘Who has known the mind of the Lord?’ asks St Paul. ‘For my part’, adds St Gregory of Nyssa, ‘I also ask: Who has known his own mind? Those who think themselves capable of grasping the nature of God would do well to consider whether they have looked into themselves’.”⁵² God had designated the *desiderium naturale* as an essential aspect of human nature and as the place where he would graciously work an inner transformation. To remove the *desiderium* would be to remove the *mysterium*, which is to say, the sacrament of God’s presence in the world.⁵³ For de Lubac, the historical contingency of the image of God gave it the potential to function as the sacramental means of entering into deifying union with the triune God.

HENRI BOUILLARD: ANALOGY AND SACRAMENTAL ONTOLOGY

Fear of Relativism

Soon after Henri Bouillard joined the faculty at Lyons-Fourvière in 1941, it became evident that his doctoral studies under Charles Boyer had done little to make him fit the neo-scholastic mould. Controversy broke out as soon as he published his *Conversion et grâce chez s. Thomas d’Aquin* (1944). Much of the controversy that ensued resulted from the fear that Modernist relativism was taking root again. Repeatedly, the Dominicans from the St Maximin studium accused Bouillard of falling into this Modernist trap.⁵⁴ After all, Bouillard

Susan Frank Parsons (London: SCM, 2006), 221–47; English trans. of *Corpus mysticum: L’Eucharistie et l’Église au moyen âge: Étude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944). Cf. Komonchak, ‘Theology and Culture’, 587–90.

⁵¹ Komonchak, ‘Theology and Culture,’ 589.

⁵² Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, c. 11 (quot. de Lubac, *Mystery*, 210).

⁵³ De Lubac often highlighted the near interchangeability in the great Tradition of the terms *mysterium* and *sacramentum*. See Chap. 5, sect.: A Sacramental Hermeneutic; Chap. 7, sect.: The Eucharist Makes the Church.

⁵⁴ e.g., Marie-Michel Labourdette, ‘La Théologie et ses sources’, *RT* 46 (1946), 364–7. Cf. Thomas Guarino, ‘Henri Bouillard and the Truth-status of Dogmatic Statements’, *ScEs* 39 (1987), 335.

presented a daring interpretation of St Thomas's views on conversion and grace, in which he placed the Angelic Doctor's theology squarely within the history of the development of doctrine.⁵⁵ Such contextualizing of Thomas's theology seemed clearly problematic. First, Bouillard's opponents claimed that an emphasis on the historical context of Thomas's thought could not but relativize his theology. At the very least, Bouillard's book was not just about the conversion of the human person, but also about the conversion of theology.⁵⁶ When, in his discussion of St Thomas, Bouillard wrote that a 'theology that is not up to date [*actuelle*] is a false theology', he could hardly expect neo-scholastic theologians to accept his comment without demurral.⁵⁷ Understandably, this comment became the most hotly debated line in the entire book. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange challenged what he saw as Bouillard's dismissal of St Thomas and of the Council of Trent as 'false doctrine'.⁵⁸ Bouillard's book was, in the eyes of Garrigou, a disconcerting debut for the new *Théologie* series that the faculty of Lyons-Fourvière had initiated.

Second, it appeared evident that Bouillard preferred the theology of the earlier tradition—and in particular that of St Augustine—over the Aristotelian scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas. When, for example, Bouillard insisted that Thomas's acceptance of an infused habit (*habitus*) was a novelty (with 'an existence of no more than a century'⁵⁹), or when he highlighted St Augustine's emphasis on spiritual presence over and above the later Aristotelian notion of transubstantiation, it was hard to avoid the impression that Bouillard believed that the achievements of the thirteenth century were up for discussion. And so, when Bouillard's strategy changed from questioning Thomas's hegemony to appealing to his authority in opposition to later neo-Thomist developments, his opponents were not impressed.⁶⁰ When, for instance, Bouillard maintained that Thomas Aquinas had never taught the theological notion of 'elevating grace', his

⁵⁵ Cf. John Auricchio, *The Future of Theology* (Staten Island, NY: Alba, 1970), 277–80.

⁵⁶ Cf. Karl-Heinz Neufeld's astute remark: 'At this point, the method and theme of Bouillard's work find themselves combined in a peculiar fashion. Is there not a demand here for a surrender, a repentance, a conversion of theology, through which it might conform to its meaning in today's age?' ('Fundamentaltheologie in gewandelter Welt: H. Bouillards theologischer Beitrag', *ZKT* 100 (1978), 428–9).

⁵⁷ Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce*, 219.

⁵⁸ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, 'La Nouvelle Théologie, où va-t-elle?' *Ang* 23 (1946), 126, 129. Cf. also id., 'Les Notions consacrées par les Conciles', *Ang* 24 (1947), 217–30. Cf. Bouillard's reaction on this point in 'Notions conciliaires et analogie de la vérité', *RSR* 35 (1948), 255–6.

⁵⁹ Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce*, 137–8. Cf. *ibid.* 224. Gillon showed himself particularly outraged by this assertion. See his 'Théologie de la grâce', 46 (1946), 605.

⁶⁰ Of course, all the way through, Bouillard insisted that he was merely interested in historical recovery and denied his antagonists' accusations of having a theological agenda, saying he did not mean to take positions on the theology of St Thomas (*Conversion et grâce*, 16; *id.*, 'A propos de la grâce actuelle', 112). Similarly, Bouillard insisted that he had never given his opinion as to whether sanctifying grace was a 'form' and had never denied the existence of habitual grace ('Notions conciliaires', 270, 257 n. 1). Considering the explosive historical context of the controversy, as well as Bouillard's engaged style, this disclaimer seemed somewhat disingenuous.

antagonists were outraged that the Jesuit from Fourvière had dared to oppose the standard interpretation of Thomas Aquinas.⁶¹ One could hardly build on a theology that appeared to deal with the development of doctrine in such a cavalier fashion.

Third, a Kantian epistemology seemed to lie behind Bouillard's emphasis on historical context and his hesitations regarding traditional Thomist theology. In the conclusion of his dissertation, he insisted that it was 'the law of the Incarnation' that permanent divine truth was accessible only by way of contingent human notions.⁶² Well aware that this might cause the neo-Thomists to accuse him of relativism, Bouillard clarified by making a distinction between the absolute character of affirmations, on the one hand, and the contingent or relative character of human notions or representations, on the other hand:

History does not, however, lead to relativism. It allows us to know, in the midst of theological evolution, an absolute—not an absolute of representation, but an absolute of affirmation. Whereas notions, methods, and systems change over time, the affirmations that they contain remain, even though they are expressed by means of other categories. Moreover, it is the affirmations themselves that, in order to keep their meaning in a new intellectual universe, determine new notions, methods, and systems in correspondence with that universe . . . History thus manifests at the same time the relativity of notions, of schemes in which theology takes shape, and the permanent affirmation that governs them. It is necessary to know the temporal condition of theology and, at the same time, to offer with regard to the faith the absolute affirmation, the divine Word that has become incarnate.⁶³

Thus, by insisting *both* on the relativity of theological representations and systems with regard to historical contingency *and* on the absolute character of the eternal underlying affirmations, Bouillard wanted to safeguard the validity and significance of both.

Both Garrigou-Lagrange and his student Marie-Michel Labourdette identified in the distinction between affirmation and representation a return to the Kantian subjectivism advocated by the Modernists Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell.⁶⁴ Garrigou-Lagrange was convinced that by insisting that theological notions changed over time Bouillard was giving up on absolute truth and had made it relative to the human subject. Truth, for Bouillard, was no longer a matter of correspondence between reality and intellect (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*). Instead, insisted Garrigou, he had lapsed into a definition that held to a conformity

⁶¹ See on this point particularly the criticism of Michel-Louis Guérard des Lauriers, 'La Théologie de s. Thomas et la grâce actuelle', *ATH* 6 (1945), 276–332; and also of Gillon, 'Théologie de la grâce', 609–12.

⁶² Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce*, 220.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 220–1.

⁶⁴ Labourdette was none the less much more nuanced in his criticism than Garrigou. Cf. Agnès Desmazières, 'La "Nouvelle Théologie", prémisse d'une théologie herméneutique? La Controverse sur l'analogie de la vérité (1946–1949)', *RT* 104 (2004), 262–9.

between mind and life (*conformitas mentis et vitae*), a definition borrowed from Maurice Blondel which, to Garrigou's mind, treated truth as the mere expression of human spirituality: 'It is very dangerous to say, "Notions change, affirmations remain." If the notion of truth itself is going to change, the affirmations no longer remain true in the same manner, nor with the same meaning.'⁶⁵ Garrigou-Lagrange seemed to have nailed the issue.⁶⁶ After all, Bouillard's belief that theological representations could—and at times should—change, allowed him to question the particularities of Thomas's theological system. The apparent doctrinal relativism on display in Bouillard's description of the historical developments leading up to Thomas's doctrine of justification was the result, so Garrigou-Lagrange believed, of a relativist notion of truth itself, one that took its starting-point in the human subject rather than in divine revelation.⁶⁷

Fourth, Bouillard's rejection of 'elevating grace' was perceived as one of the serious doctrinal consequences of this relativism. From the neo-scholastic perspective, the loss of 'elevating grace' turned the preparation for justification (sanctifying grace) into a natural, human affair. Bouillard maintained that 'elevating grace' had not come into the theological mainstream until the rise of nominalism in the fourteenth century. Thomas himself, Bouillard insisted, had

⁶⁵ Garrigou-Lagrange, 'La Nouvelle Théologie', 130. Maurice Blondel's comment, which Garrigou resurrected in 1946, was the following: 'The abstract and fanciful *adaequatio rei et intellectus* gets replaced by the legitimate methodical investigation, the *adaequatio realis mentis et vitae*' ('Le Point de départ de la recherche philosophique', *APC* 152 (1906), 235; cf. also id., *Action* (1893): *Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. Olivia Blanchette (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 283). For further discussion on this issue, see Garrigou-Lagrange, 'Nécessité de revenir à la définition traditionnelle de la vérité', *Ang* 25 (1948), 185–8; id., *De gratia: Commentarius in Summam Theologicam S. Thomae I^{ae} II^{ae} q. 109–114* (Turin: Berruti, 1947), 328–9 n. 2; id., *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought*, trans. Patrick Cummins (St Louis, Mo.: Herder, 1950), 381. Cf. also Etienne Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté: La pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II (1914–1962)* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998), 31.

⁶⁶ For a recent similar approach to truth and Christian doctrine, highly critical of *nouvelle théologie*, see Ralph McNerny, *Praeambula fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

⁶⁷ Bouillard added that he did not believe that theological dogmas were mere representations or that contingent truths were simply adrift in the waves of human experience: 'To avoid all ambiguity let me comment that the absolute affirmations that we oppose to the contingent representations, contain not just defined dogma, that is to say, propositions canonized by the Church, but also everything that is contained explicitly or implicitly in Scripture and the Tradition. [These affirmations] contain also the invariant or the absolute of the human spirit, first principles and acquired truths necessary to imagine dogma. We contrast this ensemble of invariants with that which is contingent in theological concepts. It is essential to understand that these invariants do not subsist *beside* and independent of contingent concepts. They necessarily come about and express themselves *within them*. But when they change, the new constructs contain the same absolute relations, the same eternal affirmations' (*Conversion et grâce*, 221). This comment indicated that Bouillard was no Modernist: (1) he maintained that defined dogmas and canonized propositions—in fact everything contained in one way or another in Scripture or Tradition—were all included in the absolute affirmations; (2) by using the term 'affirmation' rather than 'experience', he made clear that he looked upward rather than inward for the contents of divine revelation; and (3) he refused to separate contingent expressions of truth from the absolute affirmations to which they referred.

still looked to the infused habit (*habitus*) of grace as the object of divine assistance (*secours divin*), so that, for Thomas, God had prepared human beings for conversion by means of this habit of grace. In other words, Thomas had never posited a separate divine act that elevated the human person from the realm of nature into that of grace. The neo-Thomists were convinced that this interpretation of Thomas's view of conversion reduced God's assistance to a bare minimum. Bouillard did not seem to believe in a special divine act of grace in the habit's motion towards conversion, and he appealed to St Thomas for his belief that God did not assist believers beyond the general or natural guidance that he provided to all human beings. The neo-Thomists concluded that Bouillard's rejection of direct divine intervention by means of an 'elevating motion' naturalized or immanentized the process of conversion.

Bouillard's antagonists expressed their concern about this loss of supernatural elevating grace. In self-defence, Bouillard insisted that he did not view this general divine assistance as 'natural', and that he was not at all averse to calling it 'grace', considering it had justification as its supernatural aim.⁶⁸ This concession, however, met with scepticism. As far as Bouillard's detractors could see, the question was not about the supernatural finality of this general divine assistance. The real question was who ultimately effected conversion: God or the human person. For Bouillard, while God indeed provided universal assistance, it was the human *habitus* itself that achieved the supernatural act: 'If it [i.e., actual grace] elevates, it is not through itself, but through the form [of the habit] that it acts.'⁶⁹ Bouillard insisted that he faithfully followed St Thomas on this score: 'For St Thomas the divine motion, considered in itself as motion, is simply motion to the act; [this motion] merely gives the impetus [*donner le branle*]; it is the infused habits that elevate to the ability to accomplish supernatural acts.'⁷⁰ Bouillard concluded that God's movement of the soul was limited to general assistance. The human *habitus* itself had to respond to this general divine impetus.

To neo-Thomists like Louis-Bertrand Gillon this appeared to endanger the gratuitous character of grace. The rejection of a special divine act of elevating grace in favour of a general guidance of the human habit seemed to put into question the distinct character of supernatural conversion: 'With conversion', Gillon countered Bouillard, 'we are in the presence of an absolute beginning, of a first willing that requires a special divine instigation [*instinctus*]'.⁷¹ It was this absolute beginning of supernatural life that Bouillard was accused of endangering. In conclusion, Bouillard's historical contextualization of theology, his return to the Fathers and the earlier medieval tradition, his emphasis on the knowing human subject, and his insistence on the role that the human being played in

⁶⁸ Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce*, 84; id., 'À propos de la grâce actuelle', 93–4.

⁶⁹ Id., 'À propos de la grâce actuelle', 94.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Gillon, 'Théologie de la grâce', 611.

conversion were all indications to the neo-Thomists that Bouillard was reintroducing the relativism of Modernism.

Bouillard, Barth, and the Doctrine of Analogy

Bouillard turned to Karl Barth after being removed from his teaching post in 1950. This gave him the time to reflect more deeply on the significance of the analogy of being (*analogia entis*). After a seven-year period of silence, Bouillard published his monumental analysis of Barth's theology.⁷² Bouillard's *Karl Barth* (1957), written as his second dissertation at the Sorbonne and defended in the presence of the Swiss theologian himself, was, as one Reformed reviewer put it, 'a turning point in the relations between Catholics and Protestants'.⁷³ His study of Barth forced Bouillard to confront issues such as the validity of the traditional proofs for the existence of God, the value of natural theology, and, underlying both of these issues, the legitimacy of the traditional doctrine of *analogia entis*. Barth radically opposed all three by accusing Catholicism of a 'both...and' theology (nature *and* grace, faith *and* works, Scripture *and* Tradition; revelation *and* reason; revelation *and* history).⁷⁴

Bouillard's mature work on Barth gives clear evidence that in the intervening years he had thought a great deal more about the problem of the analogy of being, as well as its connection to the status of human truth claims.⁷⁵ Bouillard was not afraid to voice some serious criticisms in the direction of Barth, and each time they came from his reading of St Thomas—although his interpretation of the Angelic Doctor was far from neo-scholastic. Bouillard expressed his reservations regarding Barth's understanding of *analogia entis* as articulated in the *Church Dogmatics*. Here Barth grounded the analogy entirely in the revelation of God's grace. He did so for understandable reasons, since he reacted

⁷² Bouillard, *Karl Barth*, i, *Genèse et évolution de la théologie dialectique*; ii, *Parole de Dieu et existence humaine* (Paris: Aubier/Montaigne, 1957). Bouillard published a number of shorter essays in which he summarized particularly his disagreement with Barth's rejection of natural theology. See id., 'La Refus de la théologie naturelle dans la théologie protestante contemporaine', in Henri Birault, et al., *L'Existence de Dieu* (Tournai: Casterman, 1961), 95–108, 353–8; id., 'La Preuve de Dieu dans le "Proslogion" et son interprétation par Karl Barth', in *Congrès international du IX^e centenaire de l'arrivée d'Anselme au Bec* (Le Bec-Hellouin: Abbaye Notre-Dame du Bec and Paris: Vrin, 1959), 190–207; id., *The Logic of the Faith*, trans. M. H. Gill and Son (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 59–137; id., 'Karl Barth et le catholicisme', in Karl H. Neufeld (ed.), *Vérité du christianisme* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1989), 101–16; id., *The Knowledge of God*, trans. Samuel D. Femiano (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 11–62.

⁷³ Gabriel Widmer, 'Karl Barth vu par le P. Bouillard', *RTP* 3rd ser., 9 (1959), 166.

⁷⁴ Cf. J. Eileen Scully, *Grace and Human Freedom in the Theology of Henri Bouillard* (Bethesda, Md.: Academia, 2006), 93–4. For helpful analyses of Bouillard's nearly 900-page dissertation, see Guarino, 'Fundamental Theology', 52–212; Scully, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 87–123.

⁷⁵ Since Bouillard's second volume of *Karl Barth* consists of two parts, I will refer to these two parts as *Karl Barth* ii and iii, respectively. Bouillard republished much of *Karl Barth* iii in *La Connaissance de Dieu: Foi chrétienne et théologie naturelle* (1967), subsequently translated into English as *The Knowledge of God*. Here see *Karl Barth*, iii. 190–217.

against a view of analogy that he had encountered in the writings of the Lutheran scholastic theologian from Wittenberg, Johannes Andreas Quenstedt (1617–88).⁷⁶ Bouillard believed that Barth was correct to reject this view, but erroneous in thinking that St Thomas had held to it, as well. Bouillard explained that one could find Quenstedt's view in the later theology of the Dominican theologian Thomas Cardinal Cajetan, as well as in the Jesuit theologian Francisco Suárez. Their approach was essentially a conceptualist view, according to which human concepts (Bouillard's 'representations') could truly grasp what God was like. To be sure, Cajetan and Suárez still applied human concepts only in an analogous manner, but they none the less believed that to say of God that he was good was to apply to him the ordinary conceptual contents of the term 'good'.⁷⁷ Bouillard insisted that Barth was correct in reacting against such a position, because it veered far too much in the direction of univocity—claiming there was no conceptual difference between discourse applied to God and to human beings. Such a view, Bouillard agreed with Barth, tended to undermine the infinite dissimilarity between God and humans, while claiming an untenably close link between God's eternal truth and human theological statements and systems.

In his dissertation on Barth, then, Bouillard engaged in a fascinating dialogue between Thomas Aquinas, on the one hand, and Cajetan and Suárez, on the other.⁷⁸ This was anything but a purely academic matter, considering the sharp controversy that had driven Bouillard out of Fourvière seven years earlier. Bouillard insisted that Thomas's view of analogy had been much more restrained than that of Cajetan and especially that of Suárez. For Cajetan and Suárez, Bouillard explained, concepts themselves were analogous, so that they had the ability to give us actual knowledge of the essence of God. An imperfect but none the less direct resemblance existed between human concepts and the essence of God.⁷⁹ Suárez even went so far as to speak of a 'division of being between infinite and finite', thereby subjecting both God and humans to 'being' as an overarching category.⁸⁰ Such conceptualism, Bouillard explained, was something from which St Thomas had always shied away. When Thomas had discussed the topic, he had never even used the expression *analogia entis*. Bouillard suggested that St Thomas had not seen the concept of being—or any other predication we might make of God—as directly representing the divine essence. It was not the concepts themselves that he had viewed as analogous; instead, it was the mode of signification (*modus significandi*) that had been analogous. That which our concepts signified (*res significata*) had remained beyond our ability to grasp.

⁷⁶ See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ii, pt 1, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, et al. and ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (1957; repr. London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 237–43. Cf. the analysis of Guarino, 'Fundamental Theology', 170–4.

⁷⁷ Cf. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology*, ii *The Concept of Truth and Theological Renewal*, trans. N. D. Smith (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968), 9–10.

⁷⁸ Bouillard, *Karl Barth*, iii. 198–204.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 200.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Based on this reading, Bouillard posited that Thomas's position on analogy was closely connected to Denys's apophatic Neoplatonism. Appealing to the sixth-century Syrian monk, Bouillard commented:

The attributes that we borrow from [creatures] to affirm them with regard to God must also be denied being, in order to signify that they do not befit him except in an eminent sense. One will thus say, with pseudo-Denys, 'God is wise', 'God is not wise', 'God is super-wise'. Since wisdom has its source in God, it must be that he possesses it. But it is not in him in the way we conceive it, and in that sense we must deny that attribute of him. This negation does not signify, however, that God lacks in wisdom, but that he possesses it eminently. So, the analogy is the synthesis of a thesis and of an antithesis.⁸¹

Bouillard's linking of Thomas with Denys sent the not so subtle message that neo-scholasticism, building on the conceptualism of Cajetan and Suárez, had failed to grasp the true meaning of St Thomas and had thereby abandoned the Neoplatonic tradition and had lapsed into a modern form of rationalism. Bouillard explained that Barth had worked with the neo-scholastic misreading of Thomas since he had encountered a similar reading in the Lutheran theologian Quenstedt. As a result, Barth had reacted less to St Thomas himself than to his later scholastic commentators.⁸²

Bouillard, Le Blond, and the 'Analogy of Truth'

Bouillard was no doubt pleased to encounter the link between the doctrine of analogy and the nature of the truth claims of Christian doctrine in Jean-Marie Le Blond's 1947 defence on his behalf, in an essay entitled 'L'Analogie de la vérité' ('The Analogy of Truth').⁸³ This essay provides an interesting entry into the issues at stake in the debate surrounding *nouvelle théologie*. While Le Blond judiciously did not name any of the antagonists by name, he made obvious reference to the difficulties in which Bouillard found himself through the publication of his dissertation on Thomas Aquinas. Le Blond drew a link between the doctrine of analogy of *being* and the notion of analogy of *truth*, a link he believed ought to 'make people guard against hasty judgments and summary condemnations'.⁸⁴ Le Blond made the case that if one accepted an

⁸¹ Bouillard, *Karl Barth*, iii. 203.

⁸² This is not to say that there were no differences between the positions of Bouillard and Barth. Guarino comments, rightly I believe, that Barth's analogy of revelation simply failed to deal with the question that the doctrine of analogy addresses—namely, how it is possible for human beings to speak about God or to receive his revelation ('Fundamental Theology', 200).

⁸³ Jean-Marie Le Blond, 'L'Analogie de la vérité: Réflexion d'un philosophe sur une controverse théologique', *RSR* 34 (1947), 129–41. For a neo-Thomist response, see Labourdette and Marie-Joseph Nicolas, 'L'Analogie de la vérité et l'unité de la science théologique', *RT* 47 (1947), 417–66. For discussions of Le Blond's essay, see Auricchio, *Future of Theology*, 311–14; Guarino, 'Fundamental Theology', 32–7. For a critical assessment of Le Blond's position, see John F. X. Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-century Thomists* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 166–72.

⁸⁴ Le Blond, 'L'Analogie de la vérité', 129.

analogy of proportionality between names applied to God and to human beings, then such an analogy had to apply not just to the concept of being, but also to the transcendentals of truth, goodness, and unity, since these transcendentals were 'basically being itself in its relationship to intelligence, appetite, and self-possession'.⁸⁵ The result of this identification of truth, goodness, and unity with being itself was that the doctrine of analogy applied to all of them: 'The thesis of the analogy of truth is, in effect, no less compelling than that of the analogy of being. The truth is not univocal; there is, shall we say, a subsistent truth that is absolute, which is God himself in his simplicity, God as he knows himself and knows in himself all things.'⁸⁶ All other truths, the Rector of the House of Philosophy at Mongré concluded, had to be 'complex and deficient', just as all human beings were complex and deficient.

By insisting on an 'analogy of truth', Le Blond posited a similarity between ontology and revelation. In both cases, simplicity and fullness could be found only in God. Human being and human truth were always only analogous being and analogous truth. This allowed human theological statements to share in the truth, since they manifested 'a tendency to the absolute'.⁸⁷ Le Blond's distinction between absolute, simple truth and contingent, complex truths echoed Bouillard's differentiation between affirmations and representations:

This position of the absolute, which precisely gives our true affirmations their own character, accounts for the *form* of our knowledge, in an affirmation that reaches the infinite and for which the various representations supply the limiting *matter*; the latter unveils the ideal and the domain of the spirit in this fundamental, implicit affirmation of the absolute, which supports all its acts.⁸⁸

Le Blond's essay placed Bouillard's terminology of 'affirmation' and 'representation' within the context of a Thomist doctrine of analogy, which included not just analogy of being but also analogy of truth.⁸⁹ And Le Blond did not shy away from the consequences: even the Thomist synthesis itself could not 'be equal to the subsistent Truth, and cash in all [its] riches'.⁹⁰ The implication of Le Blond's analysis was, of course, that if one were to make the mistake of identifying the truth with a particular historical theological synthesis, he would fall into the trap of univocity, mistaking limited, historical representations for eternal, absolute affirmations.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Ibid. 130.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 131.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Bouillard himself appeared to pick up on Le Blond's suggestion, entitling his own article against Garrigou-Lagrange, 'Notions conciliaires et analogie de la vérité', and insisting there that different theological systems (Augustinian, Thomist, Suarezian, etc.) each used analogous notions, expressing in different ways the same reality (Bouillard, 'Notions conciliaires', *RSR* 35 (1948), 254).

⁹⁰ Le Blond, 'L'Analogie de la vérité', 133.

⁹¹ Le Blond repeatedly presented the charges of univocity ('L'Analogie de la vérité', 130, 138, 140) and of Cartesian rationalism (ibid. 138, 141). There is little doubt that he had in mind Garrigou-Lagrange and the Dominicans from Toulouse.

This theory of an 'analogy of truth' is intriguing. It allowed Bouillard to overcome both the Scylla of Modernism and the Charybdis of neo-Thomism. On the one hand, Modernism regarded historical or contingent statements as merely the relative expressions of one's ultimately ineffable subjective experience. This implied that for Modernism there were no eternal or absolute truths in which our statements might participate in some fashion.⁹² On the other hand, neo-Thomism tended to identify one's particular, contingent theological system of thought with eternal truth in a rather univocal or straightforward fashion. In other words, while Modernism flirted with equivocity, neo-Thomism tended to err on the side of univocity. The doctrine of analogy allowed Bouillard to state that human representations of truth could participate, in some limited fashion, in the eternal and absolute truth of God.⁹³

Karl Barth and Relative Autonomy in Bouillard

In his dissertation on Barth, Bouillard, as a Catholic theologian, took position against Barth's apparent fideism. According to Barth, the doctrine of *analogia entis* was the key issue at stake between Protestantism and Catholicism and so formed the basic reason for his rejection of Catholicism.⁹⁴ In contrast, Bouillard followed Blondel in acknowledging the significance of human action and agreed with Le Blond that truth claims were analogous in character. Since this implied an ontology that was sacramental in character, Bouillard refused to follow Barth's apparent belittling or disparaging of a relatively autonomous natural realm. According to Bouillard, people came to the knowledge of God in and through the contingencies of historical and material particularity. This led to the repeated refrain in Bouillard, usually against Barth, that *we*, as created human beings, were the ones who knew God, and that we knew him in a creaturely fashion.⁹⁵ For Bouillard, this human element prevented faith from turning into something

⁹² Cf. Chap. 1, sect.: Modernism's Non-sacramental Mindset.

⁹³ This is not to say that Bouillard managed to iron out all difficulties. He argued that when Trent affirmed that sanctifying grace was the 'formal cause' (*causa formalis*) of justification, it did not mean to insist on this particular Aristotelian category as the object of its affirmation; its real teaching was that justification was an interior renewal and not just an imputation of Christ's merits. Guarino rightly observes, 'It is precisely this "abstraction" which gave rise to Labourdette's bewilderment and the concomitant charge that the invariant affirmation was itself no more than *another* theological notion' ('Fundamental Theology', 36).

⁹⁴ Cf. Barth's oft-quoted comment, 'I regard the *analogia entis* as the invention of Antichrist, and I believe that because of it it is impossible ever to become a Roman Catholic, all other reasons for not doing so being to my mind short-sighted and trivial' (*Church Dogmatics*, i, pt 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G. W. Bromiley and ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (2nd edn, 1975; repr. London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), p. xiii).

⁹⁵ See e.g. Bouillard, *Karl Barth*, iii. 17–19, 103; id., *Knowledge of God*, 27–8, 39, 60, 95. Illustrative is Bouillard's comment: "One knows God by God and only by God". Sure; but it is *we* who know him. The grandeur of Barth is to have recalled energetically an essential truth, too often neglected. Far from invalidating or restricting his affirmation, it will become clear that what we add

purely 'arbitrary'.⁹⁶ Appealing to Rudolf Bultmann's (1884–1976) notion of pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*), Bouillard argued that human beings had an original grasp (*saisie originaire*) or natural knowledge of God. This transcendental condition allowed, with regard to the human side at least, for the act of conversion.⁹⁷ All of this implied, for Bouillard, that there was some latitude to develop 'proofs' for the existence of God.⁹⁸ Bouillard argued that Barth clearly misunderstood the purpose of Anselm's ontological proof: 'The meaning is obvious: Anselm wants to prove *that* God exists, and not just *how* it is true that he exists.'⁹⁹

Despite his disagreements with Barth on the doctrine of analogy, Bouillard's study of the Swiss theologian did affect his own theology. Bouillard found in Barth a congenial discussion partner and perhaps even an ally in his struggles with the neo-Thomist manualist theologians. Their position was that the natural intellect allowed anyone, believer and non-believer alike, to appreciate and be convinced of the classical proofs for the existence of God and to be persuaded, by means of a judgement of credibility, that the Christian gospel could rightly lay claim to the status of divine revelation. This approach assumed a strict separation between nature and the supernatural, according to which human reason—along with proofs and miracles—had its rightful place in the former. The actual dogmatic contents of revelation belonged to the realm of the supernatural. The acceptance in faith of the truth of the gospel was predicated on the authority of the Church. Bouillard came with a fairly drastic reworking of this standard approach, largely due to his reading of Blondel, but also encouraged by the theology of Barth. His reading of Barth allowed him to put forth a sacramental understanding of reality, one in which nature and the supernatural were much more closely connected than was the case among the neo-Thomists.

A look at three areas where Bouillard wanted to appropriate Barth's questioning of a purely autonomous natural realm may serve to illustrate this point. First, when it came to proving God's existence, Bouillard clearly displayed a certain

expresses the condition by which it is true *for us* (*Karl Barth*, iii. 77). Cf. Guarino, 'Fundamental Theology', 55–7, 68; Scully, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 108. Brian Foley criticizes Bouillard on this point, rejecting the notion that the subjective 'I' must already be presupposed in the act of faith ('The Catholic Critics of Karl Barth: In Outline and Analysis', *SJT* 14 (1961), 147).

⁹⁶ Bouillard, *Knowledge of God*, 31, 39, 95. Cf. Scully, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 12.

⁹⁷ For an excellent exposition of Bouillard's position on natural knowledge as the transcendental condition for faith, see Guarino, 'Fundamental Theology', 74–92.

⁹⁸ Cf. Bouillard's comment: 'The movement by which the original grasp of God, involved in all Christian faith, becomes conscious of itself and explicates its own rational structure, in other words, the process by which the natural knowledge of God becomes "natural theology", constitutes at first the proof of the existence of God' (*Karl Barth*, iii. 141). See also *ibid.* 177. I am none the less placing the term 'proof' between quotation marks, because, as we will see, Bouillard's emphasis on the *relative* character of human autonomy places the genuine character of this 'proof' in doubt.

⁹⁹ Bouillard, *Karl Barth*, iii. 156. Cf. *id.*, *Knowledge of God*, 70, 80. Bouillard outlined his understanding of St Anselm's *Proslogion* in *Karl Barth*, iii. 141–70, and summarized his thought in 'La Preuve de Dieu', 190–207. See also *id.*, *Knowledge of God*, 63–95.

hesitance. Influenced by Blondel, Bouillard was wary of isolating such rational arguments—as if these proofs could be separated from the dynamic action of the people's everyday lives. While approving the well-known affirmation of the First Vatican Council that God could be 'known with certitude by the natural light of human reason from created things',¹⁰⁰ Bouillard none the less also wanted to affirm that this human reason lay embedded within the overall orientation of the desiring subject: 'In reality there is no objective revelation beyond that which is apprehended by human souls, and the divine light in the soul is nothing other than that of the revelation received.'¹⁰¹ Thus, while not denying the rationality of the proofs as such, Bouillard believed that fundamental theology needed more emphasis on the experience of people's daily existence, within which they could become aware of their still indeterminate or unthematized original grasp of God.¹⁰² Only within such a context could the traditional proofs become convincing. Signs did not offer rational proof in and of themselves, therefore, but only within a subjective attitude of openness to the supernatural.¹⁰³ The implication was that for Bouillard the will and the intellect were much more closely connected than the neo-scholastic tradition had recognized. Bouillard, taking his lead from Blondel, looked to the will as the main human factor leading us in our search for understanding.

Second, Bouillard remained unconvinced that believers and unbelievers could grasp the proofs for the existence of God with equal depth. In a careful analysis of St Anselm's *Proslogion*, Bouillard insisted that Anselm had not accepted that the unbelieving fool of Psalm 14 was able fully to understand the conclusion of the ontological argument. To be sure, it was a rational proof, and proof that was accessible to all through a commonly shared language that allowed for reciprocity between believer and unbeliever.¹⁰⁴ Still, Anselm had been fully cognizant of the fact that many would not have grasped his argument and been convinced that it entailed the existence of God. While, at some level, unbelievers could grasp the expression 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' (*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest*), the fool would not have been persuaded that this in itself implied the real existence of God. Bouillard explained that for Anselm faith had been required to come to this final step and so to understand the full meaning of 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'. Only faith would acknowledge that *the very expression itself* implied the existence of God. Without the

¹⁰⁰ *Dei Filius*, chap. 2.1 (DS 3004).

¹⁰¹ Bouillard, *Logic of the Faith*, 15–16.

¹⁰² Bouillard preferred the term 'fundamental theology' to apologetics, as this discipline 'would supply the fundamentals to which dogmatic and moral theology must always return' (*Logic of Faith*, 35).

¹⁰³ See id., 'L'Idée chrétienne du miracle', *Cahiers Laennec* 8/4 (Oct. 1948), 25–37; id., *Logic of the Faith*, 16–21. Cf. Guarino, 'Fundamental Theology', 216–19, 231–3, 256–60; Scully, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 26–8.

¹⁰⁴ Bouillard, *Karl Barth*, iii. 155–6.

actual experience of faith, the unbeliever could not grasp the true implication of what he understood merely at a superficial level. Bouillard explained:

This sheds light on the paradox that we pick up in the *Proslogion*. On our reading, the unbeliever, when he *hears* the believer articulate this designation of God—‘that than which nothing greater can be conceived’—understands the meaning; yet he does not understand it well, since he does not grasp that the existence of God is necessarily implied here.¹⁰⁵

This approach committed Bouillard—and, he believed, it had also committed Anselm—to a close connection between faith and reason. Since it was only the believer who could grasp the full implication of the meaning of *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest*, it was only through the experience of faith that reason truly came to its own.

Third, Bouillard believed that St Anselm had rejected a strict separation between philosophy and theology and that this lay behind his conviction that reason flourished more fully within the context of faith. Bouillard agreed with Barth that Anselm had developed his argument as a believer, within the context of prayer, and in the presence of other Benedictine monks. All of this indicated, Bouillard insisted, that the rightful place of the *praeambula fidei* and natural theology was only within the ambit of faith. The proofs for the existence of God and the judgements of credibility could not stand on their own as purely philosophical attempts to arrive at the existence of God and at the reality of divine revelation. Only within a theological context did such attempts truly make sense.¹⁰⁶ Bouillard therefore repeatedly made the case that not only had St Anselm viewed his proof for God’s existence as a theological enterprise, but that also Thomas Aquinas, by including his proofs in the *Summa theologiae*, had rejected a strict separation between philosophy and theology.¹⁰⁷ Bouillard concluded that natural theology constituted the inside skeleton rather than the outside scaffolding of revealed truth. Natural theology was, in his words, ‘the rational *intrastructure*, and not, strictly speaking, the *infrastructure*, of Christian theology’.¹⁰⁸ The preambles and natural theology had their place only within the context of faith.

These three points, for which he was indebted to Barth’s theology, allowed Bouillard to oppose the rationalism of his neo-Thomist adversaries. Divine revelation was no longer completely separate from the existential longings of people in the contemporary world. Instead, fundamental theology’s main duty was now to try and show people how divine revelation corresponded to the open questions and experiences of their unfulfilled longings, and thereby to show the ‘logic of the faith’. The natural world and its supernatural implications were no

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 166. See on this point the helpful analysis of Guarino, ‘Fundamental Theology’, 116–22.

¹⁰⁶ Id., *Karl Barth*, iii. 146–52, 166–7; id., *Knowledge of God*, 71–3.

¹⁰⁷ Id., *Knowledge of God*, 77–9; id., *Logic of the Faith*, 114.

¹⁰⁸ Id., *Logic of the Faith*, 114.

longer considered equally intelligible to all. Instead, the divine illumination of faith, through the shaping of both the will and the intellect, would come to take centre stage, not just in the understanding of Christian doctrine, but also in the realm of philosophy and reason. No longer, therefore, would fundamental and speculative theology constitute two hermetically sealed compartments. Bouillard clearly curtailed the neo-Thomist autonomy of nature and assigned it a position of *relative* autonomy only.

Bouillard and the Gratuity of Grace

Bouillard advocated a change from theology as a strictly intellectual endeavour founded on extrinsically construed *praeambula fidei* to a rather more Neoplatonic, sacramental approach in which philosophy served to provide the rational 'intrastructure' within the overall theological discipline. Of course, neo-scholastics were nervous about this reintegration of nature and the supernatural. Particularly, they were concerned that Bouillard would be unable to uphold the distinct character of divine transcendence and the gratuity of divine grace. Bouillard's insistence that there was a correspondence between divine revelation and the inner structure of human experience seemed to them a lapse into semi-Pelagianism. Likewise, Bouillard's emphasis on the human will seemed to imply that human desire *necessitated* supernatural revelation, thus curtailing divine freedom. In short, the neo-Thomist concern was with the implications of Bouillard's sacramental position for the doctrine of grace.

It is true that Bouillard was intent on maintaining the integrity of human freedom.¹⁰⁹ From the outset, one of the concerns about Bouillard's *Conversion et grâce chez s. Thomas d'Aquin* was his rejection of 'elevating grace', since it appeared to imply a naturalizing of grace. In agreement with Blondel, Bouillard insisted that all human beings were faced with the choice 'either to ignore the presence of the Absolute Being within us or to open our hearts to him'.¹¹⁰ This emphasis on the freedom of human consent stemmed from Bouillard's desire to uphold a correlation between divine revelation and the experience of the natural human question of the supernatural. Bouillard insisted that by freely consenting to the initial option of a still indeterminate supernatural—simply acknowledging in oneself the presence of the Absolute Being—one was already within 'the ambit of the Christian faith'.¹¹¹ He so accentuated the inner dynamic of human existence as oriented towards the supernatural that he may inadvertently have excluded some of the mystery involved in the divine-human encounter.

This is not to say, however, that the neo-scholastic objections to Bouillard's theology were largely correct. Clearly, Bouillard passionately insisted both on

¹⁰⁹ Scully highlights this point in *Grace and Human Freedom*.

¹¹⁰ Bouillard, *Logic of the Faith*, 24.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 20. Cf. *ibid.* 25.

divine transcendence and on the gratuitous character of grace, and he refused to regard revelation as the result of human experience or subjective introspection. Bouillard defended Blondel by insisting that the philosopher from Aix had safeguarded the 'transcendence and gratuity' of the supernatural in at least three ways. First, Blondel had highlighted precisely the failure or frustration of the dynamic longing of the human will. This failure would become evident if and when people would recognize that the supernatural was beyond their grasp. Second, Blondel had never introduced the actual contents of Christian theology into his philosophy.¹¹² He had never gone beyond talking about Christian beliefs as hypotheses, which non-believers should test in order to see whether they could function as answers to the frustrations of the human will. Third, and perhaps most importantly, Blondel had realized that only the experience of faith could discern that the Christian message was the gift of God 'in its ineffable gratuity'.¹¹³

Bouillard may at times have moved too uncritically on the path of human experience, confident that it would inexorably lead to an affirmation of metaphysics and divine transcendence. He sometimes did come close to confusing divine revelation with human experience. And the human will appeared to receive a great deal of autonomy in Bouillard's theology of conversion. But Bouillard was a theologian willing to take risks. As a result, his theological position neither slid into a rationalist apologetic of signs and miracles, nor into an immanentism that explained the supernatural in terms of human experience. Bouillard's theology was the outcome of a deep desire for a truly sacramental ontology, one that maintained the validity of metaphysical claims, while also recognizing the hermeneutic character of human existence, the dynamism of human experience, and the significance of historical developments. By reading Maurice Blondel and Karl Barth, both through the prism of Thomas's doctrine of analogy, Bouillard became an advocate of a sacramental ontology.

CONCLUSION: *NÉOPLATONISME BELGO-FRANÇAIS*

Nouvelle théologie is sometimes regarded as a movement that was especially intent on adapting Catholicism to modern culture, by paying attention to 'signs of the times'. The term *néoplatonisme belgo-français* may, therefore, not spring readily to mind in relation to the theological movement more commonly known as *nouvelle théologie*. When Fr Louis-Bertrand Gillon, theologian at the Angelicum

¹¹² Thus, Bouillard explained that 'the philosophy of action leads one to take seriously the Christian message. But at the same time it recognizes—and Blondel insists on this—that it cannot affirm their truth. The affirmation can only be attained and posed in the experience of faith' ('The Thought of Maurice Blondel: A Synoptic Vision', *IPQ* 3 (1963), 395).

¹¹³ Bouillard, *Blondel and Christianity*, trans. James M. Somerville (Washington, DC: Corpus, 1969), 83.

in Rome, used the expression *néoplatonisme belgo-français* in 1946, he meant it as a term of derision, as an attempt to undermine the work of de Lubac and Bouillard.¹¹⁴ The dominant Thomist school of thought sought to dismiss *nouvelle théologie* as a group of anti-intellectual radicals who had infested Lyons-Fourvière in France and Le Saulchoir in Belgium, creating a Belgian–French Neoplatonism.¹¹⁵ Ironically, Gillon's caustic comment about *néoplatonisme belgo-français* highlighted one of *nouvelle théologie's* most significant emphases: de Lubac and Bouillard were convinced that the great Tradition, and especially the Greek Fathers, had held a unified view of reality. This view had not suffered from the modern extrinsicism characterizing later Thomist thought, as it came to regard the supernatural as a separate order, superimposed onto the realm of nature. While Gillon's accusation was an overstatement, his intuition was none the less correct that *nouvelle théologie* was reacting against the loss of mystery in theology. *Nouvelle théologie* evaluated as positive the Neoplatonic realization that the ultimate end of human beings could not possibly lie within the realm of nature itself.

The neo-Thomist detractors of de Lubac and Bouillard were rightly concerned to uphold divine transcendence and the freedom of grace. They believed that the only means at their disposal was to keep the eternal truth of God as far removed as possible from any human hermeneutic vicissitudes and to hold at bay any sense of an innate human longing for supernatural beatitude. For them, any link between divine truth and human existence had to remain strictly extrinsic. This meant that theological truth systems could be logically deduced from the deposit of divine revelation and were consequently impervious to historical development. It also meant that conversion was best described as an unequivocally miraculous intervention, unconnected to innate human desire.

The theologians of Lyons-Fourvière took a vastly different approach. The struggles of de Lubac and Bouillard gave evidence of a deep underlying commonality between the two Jesuits. De Lubac refused to live in a modern, non-sacramental world, and he maintained that God drew human beings to himself by connecting with what was most truly human in them—namely, their natural desire for the beatific vision. The human spirit could become a sacrament of the presence of God. Bouillard insisted that human language, embedded within historical realities and their developments, was able to speak of supernatural, unchanging truth in an analogical fashion. Human signs could make signified

¹¹⁴ Gillon, 'Théologie de la grâce', 604, 611. Thomas G. Guarino first alerted me to this reference of Gillon ('Fundamental Theology', 37 n. 58). For Bouillard's response to Gillon, see Bouillard, 'Précisions', *RT* 47 (1947), 177–83, which is followed by a 'Post-scriptum' by Gillon (pp. 183–9).

¹¹⁵ Through circumstances of the anti-Catholic French legislation at the beginning of the early twentieth century, the scholasticate moved from Flavigny (east of Paris) to Le Saulchoir, Belgium, where it was located from 1903 to 1937. So, by the time Gillon made his accusation in 1946, all the main figures connected to *nouvelle théologie* were located in France.

realities present. The human spirit and human discourse could both function as sacraments, drawing human realities into the presence of God. De Lubac and 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.