

THE REVIVAL OF THE NOTION OF PURE NATURE IN RECENT DEBATES IN ENGLISH SPEAKING THEOLOGY

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I. INTRODUCTION

The announcement of the good news of salvation in the New Testament implies a need to reflect on the newness of the Christian's life (cfr. Jn 3:3-5). By birth, man is a son of Adam, but by a new birth in Christ (the second Adam) man becomes an adopted son of God (cfr. Jn 1:12-13; Rom 5:12; Gal 6:15; 2Cor 5:17), "partaker of the divine nature" (1Pet 1:4). The binomial natural-supernatural has historically been used to express the two orders found in man, whose elevation to the supernatural life presupposes the existence of a metaphysical principle called nature, as the classic axiom says: *gratia supponit naturam*.¹ Man's capacity for grace (*capax gratiae*) is not something radically extraneous to his nature, yet at the same time is completely out of proportion to his nature. Thus, man is in a certain sense paradoxical, for he is only satisfied in the vision of God, for which he has a natural desire, but cannot attain this (ultimate) end through his own forces.

It has been constantly necessary to search for equilibrium between these two affirmations. From the 16th to the beginning of the 20th centuries theology ap-

¹ Cfr. J.B. BEUMER, *Gratia supponit naturam. Zur Geschichte eines theologischen Prinzips*, «Gregorianum» 20 (1939) 381-406; 535-552; B. STOECKLE, *Gratia supponit naturam: Geschichte und Analyse eines theologischen Axioms*, Herder, Roma 1962.

peared to obtain a certain consensus in this question.² Man's capacity for grace was described as a specific obediencial potency. Simultaneously, the notion of pure nature was used to defend the gratuity of man's supernatural elevation. Pure nature refers to the hypothetical possibility that God could have created man without ordering him to a supernatural end. It was argued that this notion ensures that man's elevation to the supernatural order was absolutely gratuitous, not owing or corresponding to man's nature. As such God could have chosen not to elevate man to the supernatural life.

In 1946, Henri de Lubac published his book *Surnaturel: Études historiques*,³ and his thesis turned the general consensus of the preceding centuries on its head. De Lubac's first claim was historical. He argued that the notion of pure nature was an invention of St. Thomas Aquinas's commentators, and not found in his teachings or the Christian tradition. However, de Lubac's thesis was not purely exegetical. He also believed that this concept of pure nature had contributed to the rise of secularism. For him, the notion of pure nature had developed into a system that conceived human nature as autonomous, and with no reference to faith, thereby making grace an 'additional extra'. It led to the consideration of man closed off from the supernatural, with no real reference to the supernatural life and completely self-sufficient.

De Lubac strongly emphasized that man has only one ultimate end, which is supernatural. Man has been made to be with God, and has an innate desire for this ultimate end—the beatific vision. According to de Lubac, there is a supernatural finality inscribed in human nature in its concrete, historical existence in human persons. Thus, he explained that grace is not something extraneous to man, but really does perfect his nature. It is absurd to speak of human nature isolated from its supernatural end, for this end is precisely what constitutes man. Secularism, on the other hand, is absolutely insufficient to explain man's significance and identity. According to de Lubac, the separation of the natural order from the supernatural, by means of the notion of pure nature, had led to the exile of Christianity from the world. This was because, gradually, the world or the 'natural' had become sufficient in itself, and isolated from faith.

² When the topic is studied closer, one realizes that a perfect consensus on the interpretation of Aquinas in this point has never existed. Cfr. for example the already classic study of W.R. O'CONNOR, *The Eternal Quest. The Teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Natural Desire for God*, Longmans, New York 1947 (written without knowing the contents of de Lubac's book).

³ H. DE LUBAC, *Surnaturel. Études historiques*, Aubier, Paris 1946. Two articles published in the following years tried to clarify some points of his thesis: *Duplex hominis beatitudo*, «Recherches de science religieuse» 35 (1948) 290-299; *Le mystère du surnaturel*, «Recherches de science religieuse» 36 (1949) 80-121 (English translation in *Theology in History*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1996, 281-316). An excellent exposition of the circumstances around the author and the book, especially the influence of Blondel on him, can be found in C. IZQUIERDO, *El teólogo y su teología: Henri de Lubac y Surnaturel* (1946), «Revista Española de Teología» 64 (2004) 483-510. For other influences on de Lubac, like those of Rousselot, Maréchal, etc., see also M. FIGURA, *Der Anruf der Gnade. Über die Beziehung des Menschen zu Gott nach Henri de Lubac*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1979.

Henri de Lubac's thesis initially encountered strong opposition, especially among Thomist theologians, some of whom thought that a dangerous new theology was developing.⁴ Many believed that Pius XII's Encyclical *Humani generis* (1950) condemned his thesis by saying that "others destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order, since God, they say, cannot create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision".⁵ De Lubac would, in fact, refine his thought (without fundamentally changing it) in his later works *The Mystery of the Supernatural* and *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, both published in 1965.⁶ Despite this initial opposition, de Lubac was seemingly vindicated in the Second Vatican Council⁷ and, as a result, the consensus following the Council has been on the side of de Lubac, while criticisms and precisions have come from distinguished theologians such as Rahner and Balthasar.⁸

However, just when there seemed to be a new general consensus over the supernatural, in recent years the debate has been revived, particularly follow-

⁴ We cannot enter here into the details of the theological atmosphere of those years. For an overview, among many others, see A. NICHOLS, *Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie*, «The Thomist» 64 (2000) 1–19; J. METTEPENNINGEN, *Nouvelle Théologie - New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II*, T & T Clark International, New York 2010; W.F. MURPHY, *Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie: A Dialogue Renewed?*, «Josephinum Journal of Theology» 18 (2011/1) 4–36.

⁵ «Alii veram 'gratuitatem' ordinis supernaturalis corrumpunt, cum autem Deum entia intellectu praedita condere non posse, quin eadem ad beatificam visionem ordinet et vocet" (PIUS XII, Encyclical *Humani generis*, 2 September 1950: DH 3891).

⁶ H. DE LUBAC, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, Herder & Herder, New York 1967, originally published as *Le mystère du surnaturel*, Aubier, Paris 1965; IDEM, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, Crossroad, New York 2000, originally published as *Augustinisme et théologie moderne*, Aubier, Paris 1965.

⁷ See especially *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22: "only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come (cfr. 1Cor 13,8; 3,14), namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear". Cfr. S. WOOD, *The Nature-Grace Problematic within Henri de Lubac's Christological Paradox*, «Communio» (English edition) 19 (1992) 389–403; R.F. GOTCHER, *Henri de Lubac and Communio: The Significance of His Theology of the Supernatural for an Interpretation of Gaudium et Spes*, Marquette University, Milwaukee 2002; N. O'SULLIVAN, *Christ and Creation: Christology as the Key to Interpreting the Theology of Creation in the Works of Henri de Lubac*, P. Lang, Oxford 2009 [see a synthesis in IDEM, *Henri de Lubac's Surnaturel: An Emerging Christology*, «Irish Theological Quarterly» 72 (2007) 3–31]; M.-G. LEMAIRE, *Henri de Lubac dans la théologie contemporaine (1991–2016). Fécondité et actualité d'une pensée*, «Gregorianum» 97 (2016/1) 7–28, here 13–17. See also T. ROWLAND, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II*, Routledge, London 2003.

⁸ Cfr. S.J. DUFFY, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville (MN) 1992; A. VANNESTE, *Nature et grâce dans la Théologie occidentale. Dialogue avec H. de Lubac*, Peeters, Leuven 1996; D. BERGER, *Natur und Gnade in Systematischer Theologie und Religionspädagogik von der Mitte Des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart*, Roderer, Regensburg 1998; C. RUINI, *La questione del soprannaturale*, «Nuovo Areopago» 2–3 (2000) 5–24; F. GIANFREDA, *Il dibattito sulla natura pura tra H. de Lubac e K. Rahner*, Pazzini, Verucchio 2007. For a comparative study on Garrigou-Lagrange, de Lubac and Rahner, cfr. A.G. COOPER, *Naturally Human, Supernaturally God: Deification in pre-conciliar Catholicism*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2014. It is easy to note that in recent years most of the manuals on Theological Anthropology refer to this point, adding to these names in some cases that of Juan Alfaro; see for example P. O'CALLAGHAN, *Children of God in the World. An Introduction to Theological Anthropology*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 2016, 387–405.

ing the publishing of Lawrence Feingold's doctoral thesis entitled *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters*⁹ and a Symposium convoked by the *Revue Thomiste* and the *Institut Saint Thomas d'Aquin* in Toulouse in 2000.¹⁰ In his historical and theological study, Feingold argues that de Lubac's interpretation of St. Thomas regarding man's natural desire to see God is mistaken.¹¹ While de Lubac had argued that in St. Thomas man has an innate desire to see God (i.e. for his supernatural end), Feingold believed that St. Thomas conceives of man's desire to see God as elicited by the natural knowledge of God's existence. It is a desire provoked by the indirect knowledge of God through creation. The Symposium held in Toulouse aimed to provide a balanced critique of de Lubac's theses on the supernatural, identifying positive aspects while aiming to correct others.

The re-ignition of the debate on the supernatural has been very pronounced in the English-speaking world,¹² as is testified by some monographic issues and an increasing number of papers in several theological journals.¹³ Among other topics that have resurfaced, the notion of pure nature has been the object of studies that try to recover its place in theology.¹⁴ Vanneste wrote in 2005 that "the

⁹ This thesis was initially published as the third volume of the «Series Theologica» of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Apollinare Studi, Roma 2001). The Second Edition (which we will use here) was later published with the same title and a number of alterations: L. FEINGOLD, *The Natural Desire to see God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and his Interpreters*, Sapientia Press, Naples (FL) 2010. See Santiago Sanz's review in «Annales theologici» 25 (2011) 205-208.

¹⁰ The proceedings of this symposium were later translated into English and published in 2009: S.-T. BONINO (ed.), *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-century Thomistic Thought*, Sapientia Press, Naples (FL) 2009.

¹¹ Two other important (and unfortunately often neglected) historical studies are: J. ALFARO, *Lo natural y lo sobrenatural: estudio histórico desde Santo Tomás hasta Cayetano (1274-1534)*, Csic, Madrid 1952, which studies the relation between the natural and the supernatural from St. Thomas up until Cajetan; and G. COLOMBO, *Del Soprannaturale*, Glossa, Milano 1996, which focuses on the 16th-20th centuries; the latter puts together a number of his previous articles along with some new material.

¹² There are obviously recent contributions to the debate in other languages, for example B. CHOLVY, *Une controverse majeure: Henri de Lubac et le surnaturel*, «Gregorianum» 92 (2011/4) 797-827. Although this study makes an interesting point, that is, the confusion between 'supernatural' and 'grace' at the origin of the controversy, it ignores almost completely the bibliography in English of the last decades on this topic. The same applies to her recent valuable work *Le Surnaturel incarné dans la création: une lecture de la théologie du Surnaturel d'Henri de Lubac*, Cerf, Paris 2015.

¹³ Cfr. *Book Symposium*, «Nova et Vetera» 5 (2007/1) 95-200; *Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie*, «Josephinum Journal of Theology» 18 (2011/1). Cfr. also, *pars pro toto*: G. MANSINI, *Henri de Lubac, the Natural Desire to See God, and Pure Nature*, «Gregorianum» 83 (2002/1) 89-109; N.J. HEALY, *Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace: A Note on Some Recent Contributions to the Debate*, «Communio» 35 (2008) 535-564; C. CUNNINGHAM, *Natura Pura: The Invention of the Anti-Christ: A Week With No Sabbath*, «Communio» 37 (2010) 243-254; T.J. WHITE, *The Pure Nature of Christology: Human Nature and Gaudium et spes* 22, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 8 (2010/2) 283-322; C.M. CULLEN, *The Natural Desire for God and Pure Nature: A Debate Renewed*, «American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly» 86 (2012/4) 705-730; C. SEILER, *Natura Pura: A Concept for the New Evangelization*, «Theological Research» 2 (2014) 53-65; D. GRUMETT, *De Lubac, Grace, and the Pure Nature Debate*, «Modern Theology» 31 (2015) 123-146.

¹⁴ Cfr. S. LONG, *Natura Pura: on the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace*, Fordham University Press, New York 2010; B. MULCAHY, *Aquinas's Notion of Pure Nature and the Christian Integralism of Henri de Lubac: Not Everything is Grace*, P. Lang, New York 2011. For a review of both, cfr. T.M.

same notion of *natura pura* seems to us, theologically speaking, useless, badly chosen and in the end incoherent [...], a false and harmful idea, that should be definitively banished from Catholic theology".¹⁵ It seems that, at least in the English speaking area, his suggestion has not been received.

We are aware of the fact that others have recently provided comprehensive studies of the contemporary debate on the supernatural in general, including some of the publications just mentioned.¹⁶ Our intention here is to provide an overview of the various positions about the concept of pure nature, so as to evaluate its significance in the contemporary discussion on the supernatural.

We will proceed in the following way. After a brief synthesis of de Lubac's ideas on pure nature and the first reactions (II), we will focus on the contributions of the Symposium of Toulouse (III)¹⁷ and Lawrence Feingold (IV), and then on the reactions to these criticisms (V). After this we will consider the specific studies on the notion of pure nature by Steven Long, Bernard Mulcahy and Andrew Swofford (VI). In the concluding remarks we will summarize the results of our investigation.

II. DE LUBAC'S CRITICISM OF THE SYSTEM OF PURE NATURE

De Lubac defines 'pure nature' as "a state in which man would be given to his own wisdom and reduced to his own strength, where he would have to grow and be completed alone".¹⁸ In *Surnaturel* and *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* de Lubac discusses the origin of this notion. In *Surnaturel*, he attributes it firstly to Cajetan and Suárez's (mis-)interpretations of St. Thomas and then also to the reaction to Baius and Jansen.

De Lubac sees Cajetan as the theologian who systematically developed a vision of the natural end of man. Others would later take this on, such as Domingo Báñez, Luis de Molina, Robert Bellarmine and Francisco Suárez. De Lubac ar-

OSBORNE Jr., *Natura Pura: Two Recent Books*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 11 (2013/1) 265–279. More recently, we should add A. SWAFFORD, *Nature and Grace: A New Approach to Thomistic Resourcement*, Pickwick, Eugene (OR) 2014; published also in James Clarke & Co, Cambridge (UK) 2015.

¹⁵ A. VANNESTE, *La question de la natura pura. Note complémentaire*, «Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses» 81 (2005/1) 1–28, here 3: "la notion même de *natura pura* nous paraît, théologiquement parlant, inutile, mal choisie et en fin de compte incohérente [...]; nous tenons la *natura pura* tout simplement comme une idée fausse, nocive même, à bannir définitivement du vocabulaire de la théologie catholique".

¹⁶ To these should be added C. SMITH, *Surnaturel Revisited: Henri de Lubac's Theology of the Supernatural in Contemporary Theology*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 2012 (partially published in «Cuadernos Doctorales de la Facultad de Teología» 61, Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 2014, 153–237). We will deal here with a number of publications that Smith could not take into account, as they have been produced in the meantime.

¹⁷ We will include in this section other publications from the years surrounding 2000, especially those published by moral theologians on the ultimate end of human being.

¹⁸ DE LUBAC, *Surnaturel*, 15: "un état où l'homme serait remis à sa propre sagesse et réduit à ses propres forces, où il aurait à se développer et à s'achever seul".

gues that it is Suárez who strictly applies Aristotle's principle of proportion between means and end, whereas in St. Thomas it had been used only relatively for the case of man. As such, the state of pure nature is no longer seen simply as a possibility, but as a metaphysical demand.¹⁹

During the debates with Baius and Jansen, the notion of 'pure nature' took on more importance, for it was considered to be necessary for the defence of the gratuity of grace and the beatific vision.²⁰ In attempting to emphasise man's need for grace in his condition of original sin, Baius and Jansen had argued that the state of original justice was demanded by man's nature. Grace was not seen from the point of view of donation and liberality, but in terms of necessity and demand. The notion of 'pure nature' was used to counter this argument and support the gratuity of grace. From this moment, says de Lubac, 'pure nature' became one of the fundamental points of theology – rather than simply a hypothetical question of possibility of pure nature, there arose a 'system of pure nature'.

As can be deduced, de Lubac's principal problem lies in the affirmation that spiritual creatures have both a natural and supernatural end. The notion of pure nature developed into the system of pure nature, in which man's natural end was so emphasised that it seemed to be able to fulfil him. Grace, on the other hand, seemed to lose importance, and be considered ornamental. Pure nature gradually came to be considered as complete in itself; the natural and the supernatural were divided and isolated. As a result, "in the means in which one [nature] was converted into a complete system, the other [supernatural] came to be, in the eyes of thinkers, something superfluous".²¹ De Lubac argues that this approach leads to a dimming of man's divine vocation and a rupture in the unity of the divine design. The supernatural end of man was no longer a key-stone in theology, man was split in two and philosophy seemed able to provide a valid explanation of man. De Lubac sees this as the abdication of theology.

1. *The central thesis of Surnaturel (1946)*

In this work, de Lubac's message is that the notion of pure nature, used principally to defend the gratuity of the supernatural, has obscured the ordering of man's spirit to God. In fact, according to de Lubac, the gratuity of the supernatural can be easily maintained without recourse to this concept. In his argument, de Lubac makes two fundamental affirmations. Firstly, the human spirit, created in the image of God, tends toward God: man desires God. But this desire must

¹⁹ Cfr. *ibidem*, 158.

²⁰ For a detailed study of the supernatural in the debates with Baius and Jansen, see COLOMBO, *Del soprannaturale*, 3-141.

²¹ DE LUBAC, *Surnaturel*, 175: "A mesure que l'une devenait un système complet, corrélativement, l'autre devenait aux yeux du senseur une superfétation".

be understood in terms of donation; as the desire for the self-giving of God,²² not from Baius and Jansen's perspective of necessity. While this is the absolute of human desires, it is inefficacious. It is rather the hope of a gift. Secondly, God, when creating man, is not obliged to order him to the beatific vision. Rather it is the result of his divine will, which encompasses everything (creation and elevation). "If there is in our nature a desire for God, this cannot be but due to God wanting for us that supernatural end that consists in seeing Him".²³ The desire to see God is, in fact, his calling man to himself.

In this way, the divine gift of man's calling to the beatific vision participates in the gratuity that marks creation itself. De Lubac's thesis is that man has written on his nature a desire for his ultimate end. For this reason, he argues that it is impossible to speak of a human nature apart from grace. Man is by his very essence called to be with God, it is what defines him. In this way, de Lubac appears to give precedence to finality over nature.²⁴

The vision of human nature isolated from the supernatural, and to which the supernatural was something entirely extrinsic, led to the loss of the sense of the unity of God's design present in the Church Fathers. De Lubac wanted to recuperate this unity of creation and the divine plan for man. Rather than the concept of pure nature, the salvific plan of God should be the starting point for a true understanding of man and his ultimate end.

According to de Lubac, St. Thomas teaches that man has a natural desire for the beatific vision. This desire has been implanted into human nature, it is *innate*; it is not merely an abstract possibility. At the same time, the actual attainment of the supernatural order is always gratuitous. Thus de Lubac is making two affirmations: firstly with respect to the teaching of St. Thomas, and secondly refuting the possibility of a purely natural order.

2. *The gratuity of the supernatural in The Mystery of the Supernatural (1965)*

Despite de Lubac's insistence, the gratuity of the supernatural in his vision did not appear to be entirely well founded. Firstly, does not this argument exclude all that Christian tradition states regarding the gratuity of our elevation to be chil-

²² Cfr. *ibidem*, 483.

²³ *Ibidem*, 486: "S'il y a dans notre nature un désir de voir Dieu, ce ne peut être que parce que Dieu veut pour nous cette fin surnaturelle qui consiste à le voir".

²⁴ Cfr. J.M. GALVÁN, *Henri de Lubac: El misterio del hombre en el misterio de Dios*, «Anuario Filosófico» 39 (2006/1) 163-177, here 167 and 169. Thus, even hypothetically, the notion of 'pure nature' would seem illogical, as can be seen in the following citation: "This desire [for God] is not some 'accident' in me [...]. It is in me as a result of my belonging to humanity as it is, that humanity which is, as we say, 'called'. For God's call is constitutive. My finality, which is expressed by this desire, is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God. And by God's will, I now have no other genuine end, no end really assigned to my nature or presented for my free acceptance under any guise, except that of 'seeing God'" (DE LUBAC, *The Mystery*, 70).

dren of God? And secondly, do not Scripture, the Fathers and the Magisterium speak of a new, added gratuity to creation?

These questions led de Lubac to return to the topic of the gratuity of the supernatural in his later book *Le mystère du surnaturel* (1965). Here he reaffirms his argument that pure nature is not needed to defend the gratuity of the supernatural but is, in fact, insufficient to this purpose. De Lubac argues that what is really needed is to show that the beatific vision is a gratuitous gift for man situated *in his present situation*.²⁵ Thus, the reflection on whether man could have been created without being ordered to the beatific vision is, according to de Lubac, irrelevant.

What is then, de Lubac's proposal so as to defend the gratuity of the supernatural? Firstly, he distinguishes between the gift of man's being and the imprint of a supernatural finality on this being. However, de Lubac says that, in reality, the subject which the gift presupposes does not precede the gift, but is constituted by it: "Considered in itself, statistically one might say, my nature or my essence is no more than what it is. There is, let me repeat, no slightest element of the supernatural in it, nor the slightest power to raise itself up to it, nor the smallest principle for laying claim to it. But no more than we can envisage, except in order to represent the thing humanly to ourselves, any real subject existing before being brought into being by the creative act, can we now envisage that nature in its concrete reality as existing before having its finality imprinted upon it; and that finality, by God's free will, is supernatural. Thus, it is never nature which of itself has any call on the supernatural: it is the supernatural which, so to say, must summon up nature before nature can be in a position to receive it".²⁶ Thus, being and finality occur at the same time. While there is a distinction between the two, neither precedes the other.

In his vision, de Lubac argues on a fundamental point concerning spiritual beings: there is no necessary proportion between nature and end, for they are open to the infinite, to the universal, and they are endowed with a certain capacity for the transcendent. It is only non-spiritual natures that are ordered to a connatural or proportionate end: "For there is nature and nature. If, in contrast with the supernatural order, the being of angels and men as resulting simply from their being created must be called natural, we must allow that their situation, in relation to other natures, is 'singular and paradoxical'; for it is the situation 'of a spirit which is to become subject and agent of an act of knowledge for which it has no natural equipment, and which is thus to be fulfilled by getting beyond itself' (*Bulletin thomiste*, vol. 4, 1934-1936, 590). If, then, there is a human nature and an angelic nature, we cannot use the terms *wholly* in the sense in which we speak of animal nature, for instance, or cosmic nature [...]. Spiritual beings cannot be confounded with beings known simply as 'natural beings': *naturalia, entia*

²⁵ Cfr. *ibidem*, 71, 78-79, 94.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 124.

naturalia, res naturales, causae naturales, creaturae naturales, corpora naturalia, formae naturales".²⁷

In this way, perhaps de Lubac's central problem with the system of pure nature is the presence of a natural finality in man; a finality that would logically precede the supernatural and would be still present, though subordinate, in elevation. In fact, de Lubac argues that God does not create and then determine the end of the creature. Rather, God wants a particular end and then creates a nature for this end: "it is not the supernatural which is explained by nature, at least as something postulated by it: it is, on the contrary, nature which is explained in the eyes of faith by the supernatural".²⁸

This is what de Lubac affirms as the paradox of the Christian: that he desires something more than he can achieve by his own powers. This is the aspiration placed by God in man; it is the impulse towards what transcends him.

3. *The existence of a proportional natural end*

De Lubac explains that while St. Thomas took on the Aristotelian concept of nature, at the same time he inherited the patristic vision of man as spiritual and therefore open to the infinite. For this reason, he argues that the proportionality described by Aristotle between the forces of creatures' nature and the good to which they are directed, is not strictly applicable to man.²⁹ De Lubac argues that this understanding is present in Aquinas: "[St. Thomas] knows that while other natural beings bear within them a distant reflection of God, 'by way of a trace', only man resembles God 'by way of an image' (*Sic igitur in homine invenitur Dei similitudo per modum imaginis secundum mentem, sed secundum alias partes eius per modum vesitigii*", I, q. 93, a. 6), and that this image, which is 'intellectual nature itself' (*Cum homo secundum intellectualem naturam ad imaginem Dei esse dicatur*', I, q. 93, a. 4) within him, is drawn towards its Model".³⁰ Thus, for de Lubac, the notion of human nature present in St. Thomas is not the same as that in Aristotle.

De Lubac accepted that the use of the Aristotelian notion of nature in Aquinas implied the affirmation of a happiness proportional to man's nature. However, this happiness was spoken of as an imperfect happiness and only possible in this life: "[In St. Thomas] the first of these two 'beatitudes,' which is 'proportionate to our nature,' is not a transcendent beatitude, a final or definitive end of the created spirit in a hypothetical world of 'pure nature.' Rather, it is an imperfect 'beati-

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 133.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 123.

²⁹ Cfr. *ibidem*, 154.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 140.

tude,' terrestrial and temporal, immanent to the world itself'.³¹ However, only eternal beatitude is the true beatitude, or beatitude itself.³² This, says de Lubac, is the difference between natural and supernatural beatitude. For St. Thomas, man's only true happiness is found in the vision of God. It is only this true happiness that can be considered with regard to man in his actual, concrete existence.³³

This point is vital for de Lubac's understanding of nature. Man, since he is a spiritual being, is not closed in on himself, but open to the infinite. There is a radical difference between those beings whose nature is directed to an end proportionate to their forces, and spiritual beings, which are open to the infinite. Man cannot be defined by a nature that excludes his calling to a perfection that transcends him. The proportionality of nature and end is not applicable to man for he is a spiritual being. As de Lubac says, "there is something in man, a certain capacity for the infinite, which makes it impossible to consider him one of those beings whose whole nature and destiny are inscribed within the cosmos".³⁴

4. *De Lubac's understanding of human nature and the natural desire to see God*

Up until now, we have spoken of de Lubac's criticism of 'pure nature'. This criticism is not necessarily of the *concept* of pure nature, but more specifically of the *system* of pure nature. "It is not the ancient concept of *natura pura*, but the system which has grown up around it in modern theology and profoundly changed its meaning, which it seems to me could be set aside without any loss".³⁵

This clarification is of great importance. De Lubac is not opposed to the concept of nature itself and its use in theology, including for spiritual beings. The idea of a spiritual nature, or even of a merely pure nature understood as the "structure proper to the created spirit" or as "essence well defined, endowed with proper laws and natural means", does not offer him any difficulty; on the contrary, he considers that it ought to be fully accepted and defended.³⁶ According to him, the consistency of nature as the substrate of grace does not imply the affirmation of a double ultimate end.

De Lubac, at least in 1965, does not object to the recognition that man could have been created by God without being elevated to the beatific vision and destined to another end, but he rejects that, supposing man to be called to that vi-

³¹ IDEM, *Duplex Hominis Beatitudo*, «Communio» 35 (2008) 599-612, here 603; first published in «Recherches de science religieuse» 35 (1948) 290-299.

³² Cfr. *ibidem*, 609.

³³ Cfr. DE LUBAC, *Surnaturel*, 129-132.

³⁴ DE LUBAC, *The Mystery*, 142.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 42.

³⁶ The quotations come from *ibidem*, 77 and 81. Cfr. J.L. ILLANES, *La teología como saber de totalidad. En torno al proyecto teológico de Henri de Lubac*, «Revista española de teología» 48 (1988) 149-192, here 167.

sion—as is in fact the case—, there subsists in man a second ultimate end, even though it be subordinated to that exalted end. He is only really concerned with man in his concrete and historical state. His ultimate end affects man's nature, as it is found concretely.

The supernatural finality for which man is created and to which he aspires, leads de Lubac to affirm that man has a natural desire to see God. This is something that constitutes man as man. "God's call is constitutive. My finality, which is expressed by this desire, is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God".³⁷ No other finality, apart from that supernatural, "now seems possible for me than that which is now really inscribed in the depths of my nature; there is only one end, and therefore I bear within me, consciously or otherwise, a 'natural desire' for it".³⁸ This natural desire could thus be described as an ontological desire, which is a consequence of the orientation that God imprints on man when he gives him a supernatural finality.

De Lubac also clarifies that this desire does not render Revelation irrelevant; it does not imply a natural knowledge of the supernatural. He argues that this desire cannot be fully known without Revelation. In fact, his reasoning works in a way inversely: it is Revelation that shows to us our calling, and in revealing to us our supernatural end, makes us recognise in us the existence and nature of that desire.³⁹ This desire for the vision of God, while existing naturally in us, is not something that we discover naturally. It is God's revelation that shows to man what are his deepest desires.

5. *The change of emphasis in the Petite Catechèse (1980)*

De Lubac didn't stop his treatment on the supernatural with his 1965's 'twins'. As some authors have pointed out, there is a later, often overlooked, fundamental work: his *Petite catéchèse sur nature et grâce*.⁴⁰ There de Lubac re-addresses the question on the supernatural, attempting to distinguish without separating the two orders; for the circumstances in theology, especially after the Second Vatican Council, had changed in a radical way. De Lubac insists in several occasions on the fact that "to deny this fundamental distinction (nature and the supernatural), if one truly understands what it means, to deny it regardless of the words in which it is expressed, would be to deny as well and in its very principle every

³⁷ DE LUBAC, *The Mystery*, 70.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 71-72.

³⁹ Cfr. *ibidem*, 274.

⁴⁰ IDEM, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1984 (originally published as *Petite catéchèse sur Nature et Grâce*, Arthème Fayard, Paris 1980). Cfr. SMITH, *Surnaturel Revisited*, 55-60. He refers there, among others, to G. COLOMBO, *Henri de Lubac 1896-1991 in Italia*, «Teologia» 16 (1993) 72-98; and B. SESBOÛÉ, *Le surnaturel chez Henri de Lubac: Un conflit autour d'une théologie*, «Recherches de science religieuse» 80 (1992) 373-408.

notion of revelation, mystery, divine Incarnation, redemption or salvation. That would be to deny the Christian faith itself".⁴¹

On the other hand, de Lubac came to the conclusion that the presentation of the debate would be more adequate from the point of view of the binomial nature-grace, rather than natural-supernatural. This is partly due to the fact that the term 'nature' does not fully account for man's freedom, and 'supernatural' does not adequately express the self-communication of God in Jesus Christ.⁴² Nature and the supernatural have been united through the Incarnation; thus they are united, with the supernatural transforming nature. Grace is communicated to man, and in this way, de Lubac presents the distinction between nature and grace. For man, seen historically in his sinful nature, has received the gift of grace, which he either rejects or accepts. "Be this as it may, the fundamental distinction between 'human nature' and the 'supernatural', a distinction which underlies their union brought about by grace as we have tried to explain it here, remains a fundamental element in Catholic doctrine".⁴³

De Lubac presents his explanation on the gratuity of grace along the lines of the teachings of *Gaudium et spes*, where he notices the absence of any reference to the hypothesis of pure nature. "The Council [...] does not seem to feel the need, in order to maintain this gratuity, of calling upon the hypothesis of a 'purely natural order', complete in itself. It never 'speaks of man as God's creature without reminding us that his Creator' destines him 'to be united with himself in Christ'; 'the two notions of creation and of vocation to divine communion are always associated'. By thus avoiding (it was certainly done on purpose) the language of the 'two different orders', as it was used in one whole theological school (and without pretending to exclude it either), the Council 'assumed a very important position'. Indeed, as Jean Mouroux wrote, 'if there are in the universe varying levels of analysis (creation, sin, redemption), there are not two different orders of reality, but only one, that of the Covenant which had creation for its first act; and Christ is its Alpha and Omega, its beginning and end; and this order is supernatural'".⁴⁴

We can conclude that, due to the new situation after the Council, de Lubac highlighted the importance of the supernatural and its distinction from nature, without changing his basic vision about the un-necessity of pure nature to explain the gratuity of grace.

⁴¹ DE LUBAC, *A Brief Catechesis*, 20-21.

⁴² Cfr. *ibidem*, 39-41, where de Lubac quotes H. BOUILLARD, *L'idée du surnaturel et le mystère chrétien*, in *L'homme devant Dieu. III. Perspectives d'aujourd'hui*, Aubier, Paris 1964, 153-166.

⁴³ DE LUBAC, *A Brief Catechesis*, 186.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 189-190. The first two internal quotations come from J. MOUROUX, *Le concile et le sens de l'homme*, in C. PICARD et al., *L'ère des ordinateurs. Dialogue de l'homme et de la machine*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1966, 144 and 149. The last one is taken from J. MOUROUX, *Sur la dignité de la personne humaine*, in Y. CONGAR, M. PEUCHMAURD (dirs.), *L'Église dans le monde de ce temps: Constitution pastorale Gaudium et spes. II: Commentaires*, Cerf, Paris 1967, 232.

6. *The immediate reaction to Surnaturel*

a) From within traditional Thomism

Charles Boyer

In his contribution to the Symposium convoked by the *Revue Thomiste* and the *Institut Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Henry Donneaud examines the reaction to de Lubac's *Surnaturel* on the part of three traditional Thomists. The first is Charles Boyer, a professor at the *Gregoriana* and one of the pillars of the Neo-Scholasticism that defended Catholic theology from modernist thought.⁴⁵ In 1947 he published an article responding to de Lubac's thesis.⁴⁶ Boyer does not address the validity of de Lubac's interpretation of St. Thomas. He does not enter into a historical discussion on the origin of 'pure nature'; rather, his defense is purely theological and speculative. He aims to show the logical impossibility of de Lubac's thesis.

Boyer identifies two principal points in de Lubac's work. Firstly, the negation of pure nature and the denial of a natural ultimate end proportionate to man's nature. Man, therefore, is directed to God purely by a supernatural love. Secondly, a natural desire in man to see God, which is proof of man's supernatural end. Boyer then asks: if man only has a supernatural end, and if he has a natural desire for this end, then is it possible to say that this end goes beyond the demands of human nature? Is this end still supernatural? According to Boyer, de Lubac's answer is that, while the desire is natural, our nature is not entitled to the supernatural. The supernatural is entirely gratuitous – it is a demand written gratuitously on our nature.

Boyer's criticism is that the concept of nature necessarily "implies an essence with its own faculties and an end that is proportionate to it. It would therefore be a contradiction to posit a nature without positing at the same time an end that it could attain".⁴⁷ Therefore, Boyer is concerned with de Lubac's concept of nature itself. To say that there is only one end of man would signify: this end is in fact natural (in which case, the supernatural is lost), or it is supernatural (which destroys the very concept of nature).

Rosaire Gagnebet

The second author considered by Donneaud is Rosaire Gagnebet, a disciple of Garrigou-Lagrange and a professor at the *Angelicum*. In 1948 and 1949 he pub-

⁴⁵ Cfr. H. DONNEAUD, *Surnaturel through the Fine-Tooth Comb of Traditional Thomism*, in BONINO, *Surnaturel. A Controversy*, 41-57, here 42.

⁴⁶ Cfr. C. BOYER, *Nature pure et surnaturel dans le Surnaturel du Père de Lubac*, «Gregorianum» 28 (1947) 379-395.

⁴⁷ DONNEAUD, *Surnaturel through*, 44.

lished, in two parts, a long article in which he addresses one concrete issue: de Lubac's interpretation of the notion of natural love of God.⁴⁸ Unlike Boyer, Gagnebet aims to prove that de Lubac's interpretation of St. Thomas is mistaken; thus, his discussion is more historical. Donneaud argues that Gagnebet's article is rigorous in its analysis of the texts of St. Thomas and "provides objective material for some serious corrections that de Lubac's interpretation of St. Thomas deserves".⁴⁹

Gagnebet sees in de Lubac's thesis a denial of a true natural love of God. For de Lubac considers natural love of God as something necessary or instinctive, and not due to free will. It is only supernatural love of God that truly "can put us in a voluntary and moral relationship with God as our end".⁵⁰ Gagnebet therefore sets out to prove that St. Thomas's true teaching is that natural love of God (while not supernatural) is voluntary and free, and proportionate to man's nature and faculties. In St. Thomas, this natural love is not limited to the *voluntas ut natura*, an impulse where the creature is pushed towards its end, but extends to the *voluntas ut ratio*, a free act, grounded in the natural knowledge of God.

Thus, Gagnebet defends the natural end proportionate to man's nature. This end is not the beatific vision, but the natural contemplation of God through his creatures. This argument is also used by St. Thomas when discussing limbo. Those babies who died without baptism do not attain the beatific vision, but do attain a natural happiness proportionate to the natural capacities to know and love.

However, Donneaud notes that Gagnebet does not address the texts where St. Thomas refers to a natural desire for the beatific vision, an end disproportionate to man's nature. Donneaud accepts that Gagnebet's argument on the natural love of God is convincing and well-founded, but he does not explain de Lubac's argument on the natural desire of which St. Thomas speaks. Thus, both Gagnebet and de Lubac commit the same error: they appeal to only some of St. Thomas's texts, but not others, to support their argument.

Marie-Joseph Le Guillou

A third reaction came from Marie-Joseph Le Guillou, who published an article in 1950, shortly before the encyclical *Humani generis*, in which he, like Gagnebet, aims to faithfully interpret St. Thomas.⁵¹ However, he was much more receptive to de Lubac than Gagnebet. He accepted much of what de Lubac says, while intending to correct some defects in de Lubac's argument.

⁴⁸ R. GAGNEBET, *L'amour naturel de Dieu chez saint Thomas et ses contemporains*, «Revue Thomiste» 48 (1948) 394-446; 49 (1949) 31-102.

⁴⁹ DONNEAUD, *Surnaturel through*, 46.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 47.

⁵¹ M.-J. LE GUILLOU, *Surnaturel*, «Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques» 34 (1950) 226-243.

Le Guillou tries to balance between the two points on which the debate hinges. Firstly, he accepts a natural desire to see God. Man's relation to the supernatural is not simply that of pure passivity, but is truly open and ordered to the beatific vision. At the same time, he defends the gratuity of grace and the distinction between "two orders of finality".⁵² Le Guillou recognises a connatural end, attainable by man's faculties. The natural desire for God is directed not to the beatific vision itself, but to the vision of God as First Cause.

Le Guillou thus defends the necessity of the notion of 'pure nature' for the gratuity of grace. Through this notion, creation does not necessarily imply elevation. Le Guillou rejects de Lubac's argument on this point and believes that de Lubac necessarily connects human nature with the beatific vision. Le Guillou believes that the natural desire to see God does not signify the necessity of the supernatural, but its possibility.

Donneaud says that Le Guillou's explanation of the natural desire is insufficient, for how then can St. Thomas speak of the *lumen gloriae* as the object of the *desiderium naturale*? Donneaud himself suggests that the answer is that there are two possible meanings of natural desire: as either a metaphysical/ontological appetite or as an elicited/conscious act.⁵³ Donneaud himself proposes that in St. Thomas the natural desire for God is not a concrete act, but an "unconscious finality, ontologically inscribed in our nature".⁵⁴

b) From outside traditional Thomism

Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar

Although this study deals mainly with the debate generated by de Lubac inside the Thomist school, we cannot avoid referring here, at least briefly, to the reactions of two of the most important contemporary theologians, who do not strictly belong to the Thomist school: Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar.⁵⁵

As is well known, before the publication of *Humani generis*, in August 1950, an anonymous article appeared in the German theological journal *Orientierung*, where the ideas of de Lubac, in the context of *Nouvelle Théologie*, were syntheti-

⁵² DONNEAUD, *Surnaturel through*, 52.

⁵³ Donneaud here makes reference to the article by J. LAPORTA, *Pour trouver le sens exact des termes: appetitus naturalis, desiderium naturale, amor naturalis, etc. chez Thomas d'Aquin*, «Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge» 40 (1973) 37-95. This line of reasoning will be of great importance in the years following this Symposium, particularly in the work of Lawrence Feingold, as we will see later.

⁵⁴ DONNEAUD, *Surnaturel through*, 55. The importance of this contribution of Le-Guillou for the future debate should not be underestimated, as can be seen, for example in G. COTTIER, *Le désir de Dieu. Sur les traces de Saint Thomas*, Parole et Silence, Paris 2002, especially 228-232, where the importance of the notion of pure nature is highly defended. We will see how other authors in recent English speaking debates refer to Le Guillou.

⁵⁵ Cfr. L. MALEVEZ, *La gratuité du surnaturel*, «Nouvelle Revue Théologique» 75 (1953) 561-586, 673-689; GIANFREDA, *Il dibattito*, 55-115.

cally expounded: the supernatural end is inscribed in the very structure of man, so that his desire of the supernatural is absolute; at the same time, a hypothetical pure nature would be a very abstract and unreal concept.⁵⁶

Karl Rahner published an answer to these theses in the same issue of *Orientierung*. Basically, Rahner agreed with the denial of the Neo-Scholastic notion of *duplex ordo* and its extrinsicist view of the supernatural.⁵⁷ But Rahner criticized de Lubac because his idea of a natural desire for the supernatural would imply that the supernatural is constitutive of human nature, and this would not respect the gratuity of grace. For this reason the notion of pure nature should not be denied, but considered as a residual concept (*Restbegriff*), necessary to affirm the gratuity of the supernatural, to which man is inclined in virtue of a capacity given to him by God, the 'supernatural existential'.⁵⁸

A year later, Balthasar published his study on the theology of Karl Barth, whose third part is dedicated to the concept of nature in Catholic theology.⁵⁹ There he affirmed that de Lubac's focus on the *desiderium naturale videndi Deum* implied a real theological progress, avoiding the extrinsic view of grace in theology. At the same time, Balthasar weighed up Rahner's defense of the notion of pure nature against de Lubac's criticism. There is here a sort of unavoidable oscillation in theological thought. For we cannot develop a purely divine theology (where the hypothesis of pure nature would simply have no relation to reality) but always need a human expression for the reality of grace, and there 'pure nature' (although inexistent) offers the necessary foundation for the freedom of real grace. Balthasar expresses this oscillation by saying that nature in itself has no access to the world of grace, and at the same time, it has been created and can be completely understood only in reference to grace. In the end, as Malevez points out, Rahner and Balthasar agree to the formal character of the notion of nature in theology, as its content cannot be determined with certainty outside the context of grace and salvation in which it has been created.⁶⁰

Juan Alfaro

As we have mentioned, in 1952 Juan Alfaro published his historical study on the supernatural. He found that the vast majority of theologians in the period be-

⁵⁶ D., *Ein Weg zur Bestimmung des Verhältnisses von Natur und Gnade*, «Orientierung» 14 (1950) 138-141. The anonymous author (D.) of this article is commonly identified as E. Delhaye.

⁵⁷ K. RAHNER, *Über das Verhältnis von Natur und Gnade*, «Orientierung» 14 (1950) 141-145, published later in his *Schriften zur Theologie*, I, Benziger, Einsiedeln 1960, 323-345.

⁵⁸ See also IDEM, *Existential II. Theologische Anwendung*, in *Sacramentum mundi*, Herder, Freiburg i.B. 1967, 1298-1300; *Grundkurs des Glaubens. Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*, Herder, Freiburg i.B. 2008 (orig. 1976), 116-136.

⁵⁹ H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Karl Barth. Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, Hegner, Köln 1951. See E. GUTWENGER, *Natur und Übernatur. Gedanken zu Balthasars Werk über die Barthsche Theologie*, «Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie» 75 (1953) 82-97, 461-464.

⁶⁰ Cfr. MALEVEZ, *La gratuité*, 685; GIANFREDA, *Il Dibattito*, 114.

tween Aquinas and Cajetan affirmed the existence of an innate appetite in man to see God. In their discussions of this natural tendency, they often compared it to the natural inclination of beings to their natural perfections.

However, Alfaro also found that these same theologians affirm that the vision of God is absolutely un-owed to human nature; that is, they do not see this vision of God as demanded by human nature, for its communication to man depends entirely on the divine will.⁶¹ Yet are not these two affirmations contradictory? Is it possible to harmonise the gratuity of man's supernatural end with the existence of an innate appetite for this end?

Without attempting to arrive at a definitive speculative solution to this problem, Alfaro tried to establish the fundamental points made by these theologians, and ascertain what was left unsaid by them.⁶² Firstly, when they affirm the existence in man of an innate appetite for the vision of God, they do not conclude that this end is ontologically necessary, but only that it is *possible*; and they do not affirm that this possibility is knowable through reason.

Secondly, they do not affirm that the vision of God is the only possible end of man, the lack of which would imply suffering. In fact, almost all argue that unbaptized infants do not suffer after death even though they lack the beatific vision. They refer to a state of perfection of natural knowledge of God and some even refer to this state as one of natural happiness. Obviously, this natural happiness is far from being the fullness of the beatific vision.

Thirdly, while they affirm the existence of an innate appetite for the vision of God, they do not accept that it is an ontological necessity, but that it is totally un-owed to man. Most, in fact, expressly reject that it is a necessity, and almost all "present positive symptoms in favour of the possibility of the state of pure nature",⁶³ without explicitly formulating it. If this is the case, then how can these theologians not have realised that an innate appetite would imply a requirement for the desired perfection, thus making that perfection not gratuitous but necessary? Alfaro says that they simply do not see the difficulty in affirming both the innate appetite for the vision of God and the gratuity of this vision.⁶⁴

Alfaro argues that the thesis of the possibility of the non-elevation of the entire human race to the supernatural order had not been entirely formulated during this period. While the logical principles were established, the explicit possibility of a state of pure nature for the human race was not yet formulated, whereby God could have not destined man to the beatific vision. This hypothesis of the state of pure nature does present difficulties for the innate appetite to see God, for in the state of pure nature the innate appetite would be completely frustrated. But with-

⁶¹ Cfr. ALFARO, *Lo natural*, 400-401.

⁶² Cfr. *ibidem*, 402-403.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 403.

⁶⁴ Cfr. *ibidem*, 404.

out this hypothesis, these theologians did not perceive the problem and therefore did not attempt a solution.

Alfaro then explains the thesis of Cajetan, who denies the existence in man of an innate appetite for the vision of God and concludes that a purely natural happiness is possible. He says that this particular aspect of his teaching broke with most theological schools in the 14th and 15th centuries, but was not entirely original.⁶⁵ However, according to Alfaro, in the other fundamental aspect of his thesis – the possibility of the non-elevation of man to the beatific vision –, Cajetan was very much in line with theologians preceding him. As already mentioned, most theologians in this period recognise the existence of a state of natural happiness – specifically in relation to the souls of unbaptized infants. While they do not affirm in a universal way the possibility of this non-elevation, “St. Thomas, Durando, Palude, Savonarola, Scotus, Bassolis and Argentina develop and present in such a way the concept of the supernatural and gratuity of the beatific vision that their conception logically leads to the universal conclusion of this possibility”.⁶⁶

Thus, Alfaro concludes that Cajetan did not invent the notion of the state of pure nature and possibility of a natural happiness, even if he was the one to systematically develop it. Rather, it was the conclusion of the general theological opinion in the preceding centuries.⁶⁷ Moreover, he was not the first to deny of the existence of an innate appetite to see God.

For this reason, Alfaro rejects the historical thesis of de Lubac regarding the notion of pure nature. For de Lubac believed that Cajetan erroneously introduced this notion into Thomism, due to the influence of nominalist conceptions on the power of God. Alfaro argues that “Cajetan’s theory has clearer and more precise origins than that which Father de Lubac imagines”.⁶⁸ Alfaro accepts that Cajetan’s denial of the innate appetite for the vision of God and the affirmation of a perfect natural happiness outside the vision of God differed to the traditional Thomist doctrine in the 14th and 15th centuries, even though this was not entirely original in Cajetan. However, Alfaro argues that it was within Thomist thought that Cajetan came to the conclusion of the possibility of a state of pure nature. Therefore, it was “a legitimate prolongation of the thought, not only of St. Thomas and the Thomist school of the 14th and 15th centuries, but of all the theological thought during these two centuries, that conceived the beatific vision as a perfection whose collation to created nature depends only on the divine will”.⁶⁹ In an

⁶⁵ Cfr. *ibidem*, 407-408.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 409.

⁶⁷ Cfr. *ibidem*.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 412. Vanneste has also shown some insufficiencies in de Lubac’s explanation on the origins of the notion of pure nature: cfr. A. VANNESTE, *Saint Thomas et le problème du surnaturel*, «Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses» 64 (1988) 348–370. See also ILLANES, *La teología*, 156.

⁶⁹ ALFARO, *Lo natural*, 412. We can recall here the doctoral thesis, directed by Alfaro some years later, of C. RUINI, *La trascendenza della grazia nella teologia di San Tommaso d’Aquino*, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma 1971.

article published in 1957,⁷⁰ Alfaro argues that the question on the supernatural must balance the transcendence and immanence of the vision of God, and presents a solution that aims to protect both dimensions.

III. THE RESPONSE TO DE LUBAC ON THE SUPERNATURAL. RECEPTION AND CRITIQUE OF DE LUBAC'S THESIS UP UNTIL 2000

De Lubac's thesis, despite the initial opposition, was widely accepted, especially from the time of the Second Vatican Council onwards. This *status quo* lasted until the year 2000, when the *Revue Thomiste* and the *Institut Saint Thomas d'Acquin* organised a Symposium at the *Institut Catholique* of Toulouse on Henri de Lubac and the debate on the supernatural. As we have said, the English translation of the proceedings of this symposium was published in 2009.⁷¹ This volume principally aimed to challenge the widely accepted consensus on the theses of Henri de Lubac regarding the supernatural. Yet it is a balanced challenge, identifying many of the positive aspects of de Lubac's thought, while aiming to correct others.

In the foreword, Serge-Thomas Bonino states that one of the aims of this Symposium was to emphasise the equilibrium required in interpreting St. Thomas's doctrine on the natural and the supernatural. "On the one hand, the insistence on the gratuity of the supernatural does not entail the idea of a natural order absolutely closed in on itself. On the other hand, exhibiting the stepping stones of the supernatural in a human nature capable of God does not lead to the destabilizing of the coherence of this nature or to its absorption without further ado into the unity of the unique divine project".⁷² Grace requires "a nature subsisting in itself".⁷³ Yet this does not mean that nature exists, concretely, outside the order of grace, "but, in the concreteness of human life called to divinization, it represents a group of structures that possesses its coherence, its ends, and its own meaning".⁷⁴

⁷⁰ ALFARO, *Trascendencia e inmanencia de lo sobrenatural*, «Gregorianum» 38 (1957) 5-50. See also IDEM, *El problema teológico de la trascendencia y de la inmanencia de la gracia*, in *Cristología y Antropología: Temas Teológicos Actuales*, Cristiandad, Madrid 1973, 227-336. Alfaro sustains that the "intellectual creature is intelligible and realisable without in fact being destined to the vision of God"; and secondly, that the immediate knowledge of Infinite Being is the supreme perfection of man, and therefore, his existence would be absurd without an intrinsic ordination to this ultimate end (IDEM, *Trascendencia*, 5). Man could have been created without in fact being destined to the vision of God; that is, man is something in himself intelligible and realisable (*ibidem*, 7). Alfaro argues that man only attains his perfect immobility in the vision of God, and this is due to his 'intellectuality', his capacity for the truth and the good (cfr. *ibidem*, 46). Because of his 'intellectuality', man is only definitively perfectible in the supernatural. The supernatural is the only ultimate response to the created intellect, yet this response is not necessary so as to affirm the intelligibility and existence of the intellectual creature (cfr. *ibidem*, 50).

⁷¹In this volume are found 15 essays that address the debate on the supernatural. We will focus here only on those particularly relevant for our examination of the notion of 'pure nature', along with other contributions in the same period, not necessarily linked to this Symposium.

⁷²S.-T. BONINO, *The Conception of Thomism after Henri de Lubac*, in IDEM (ed.), *Surnaturel: A Controversy*, vii-xii, here xi.

⁷³*Ibidem*.

⁷⁴*Ibidem*.

1. *Positive reception of de Lubac's thesis*

a) Georges Chantraine and de Lubac's *Surnaturel*

Georges Chantraine, in his essay,⁷⁵ outlines the basic ideas in *Surnaturel* and some effects that this work has had on the present day. He argues that “the goal of *Surnaturel* was to engage in a dialogue with contemporary thought by restoring the doctrine of nature and the supernatural in accord with the Tradition of the Church”, which “unites the gift of God the Creator and the supernatural gift of God the Saviour”⁷⁶ – thus rendering the notion of ‘pure nature’ irrelevant.

The Fathers of the Church, describing the relation between God and man, say that man is created by God in His image. Man thus bears in him the divine image and is open to the divine likeness. Man's spirit is therefore capable of the supernatural, and has a longing for it. In the medieval age, the reception of Aristotle altered this patristic vision, for Aristotle does not consider man in relation to his call to participate in the Trinitarian life. According to de Lubac, while St. Thomas is Aristotelian, he does not follow Aristotle's argument that “the end of every being is proportionate to its nature”, for “man is created with a view to participation in the divine life, and this end is internal to the created nature and moves it. Man naturally tends toward God himself; he also naturally desires to see him with a beatific vision”.⁷⁷

De Lubac believed that later interpreters, such as Denis the Carthusian, Cajetan and Suárez distorted this view, applying to human nature Aristotle's principle that all natural beings require an end proportionate to their nature, and thus cementing the notion of ‘pure nature’. As a result, man's supernatural end would be an addition, and only the natural end would be naturally knowable. According to de Lubac, St. Thomas aimed to connect the philosophical and theological visions of man through the use of ‘natural desire’, but his commentators separated the philosophical and theological points of view – simply connected by a miracle.

Chantraine also briefly addresses the relation between *Surnaturel* and *Humani generis*. De Lubac did not consider that this magisterial teaching, in particular the phrase concerning the gratuity of grace, was directed to him. He mentions that the encyclical never endorses the notion of ‘pure nature’, and instead uses similar language to de Lubac's own in *Le mystère du surnaturel* (1949). Chantraine also recalls that de Lubac recognised the usefulness of the notion of ‘pure nature’, but argued that it had wrongly replaced the authentic view of the tradition of the Church.

⁷⁵ G. CHANTRAINE, *The Supernatural: Discernment of Catholic Thought according to Henri de Lubac*, in BONINO (ed.), *Surnaturel: A Controversy*, 21-40.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 22.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 25.

b) Joseph Komonchak and the recovery of the Catholic vision

In an article on Henri de Lubac in the context of mid-century theology, Joseph Komonchak argues that the *Nouvelle Théologie* achieved what it intended: to bring back theology from the cultural exile in which it found itself. It would be vindicated in the Second Vatican Council, which ended the opposition between theology and modernity. According to Komonchak, de Lubac's *Surnaturel* is the work that typified this new theology.⁷⁸ De Lubac aimed to overcome the narrow boundaries into which modern theology had been restricted.

Komonchak believes that de Lubac's diagnosis of theology was correct, and that his thesis outlined in *Surnaturel* was at the heart of his intention to "recover the breadth and the depth of Catholic tradition".⁷⁹ De Lubac aimed to show from Tradition that "one of the central meanings of the Church's catholicity is precisely that it addresses all aspects of human life".⁸⁰ Religion and man's relation to God are not merely extrinsic elements to his life, but that "nature is made for the supernatural, and without having any rights over it, it cannot be explained without it".⁸¹ Komonchak says that *Surnaturel*'s central argument is to recover the notion of the image of God, so as "to defend the sacred or religious character of all human life".⁸² It was to recover the "inclusive, world-embracing, history-defining, and redemptive role of theology".⁸³

c) Laurence Renault and the influence of William of Ockham

Coming back to the volume of the Toulouse Symposium, Laurence Renault argues that William of Ockham introduced into theology the principle of equivalence between the natural desire of an end and the natural access to this end. This vision was not present in the writings of other important medieval doctors, including both St. Thomas and Scotus.⁸⁴

Renault argues that Ockham was the first to deny that man's desire for the beatific vision was natural. He claims that this denial is a result of Ockham's equivalence between the "naturalness of the *desire* for the end and the naturalness of the *access* to the end".⁸⁵ For Ockham, if the desire is natural, then it neces-

⁷⁸ Cfr. J. KOMONCHAK, *Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac*, «Josephinum Journal of Theology» 18 (2011/1) 79-100, here 81; originally published in «Theological Studies» 51 (1990) 579-602.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 90.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, 91.

⁸¹ H. DE LUBAC, *Internal Causes of the Weakening and Disappearance of the Sense of the Sacred*, «Josephinum Journal of Theology» 18 (2011/1) 37-50, here 43; originally published in «Bulletin des aumôniers catholiques. Chantiers de la jeunesse» 31 (August 1942).

⁸² KOMONCHAK, *Theology*, 93.

⁸³ Cfr. *ibidem*, 100.

⁸⁴ Cfr. L. RENAULT, *William of Ockham and the Distinction between Nature and Supernature*, in BONINO (ed.), *Surnaturel. A Controversy*, 191-202, here 201-202.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 192.

sarily implies an understanding of how this desire is to be satisfied, which would render Revelation irrelevant. There is an “asserted proportion between the desire and the means to satisfy it”.⁸⁶ In this way, Renault argues that Ockham takes this notion of proportion and makes it one of the keys of theology – and it becomes one of the principal characteristics of the system of pure nature. Thus, he isolates the natural and supernatural orders and distorts the traditional vision of their relation.

d) Marie-Bruno Borde and the interpretation of the *Salmanticenses*

Marie-Bruno Borde then presents one of the most classical interpretations of the natural desire for God in St. Thomas – that found in the *Salmanticenses* (Thomistic Carmelites of the 17th century). In his essay, Borde argues that the natural desire to see God was understood by the majority of Thomists in the 16th and 17th centuries as an “elicited, inefficacious, and conditioned desire”, and not as an innate desire.⁸⁷ Borde believes that this is not the true teaching of St. Thomas, but a distortion due to the influence of Cajetan.

In theology, two affirmations must be simultaneously maintained: the vision of God fulfils man’s nature and he desires it, yet the divine communion to which man is called transcends him. Borde explains that interpreters of St. Thomas have taken two differing paths in attempting to resolve this question. Some, such as Ambroise Gardeil,⁸⁸ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrangé⁸⁹ and Jean-Hervé Nicolas,⁹⁰ have understood man’s natural desire for the vision of God as a ‘natural *elicited* appetite’. This refers to the desire of one who knows; it is a desire that arises precisely because of knowledge. This desire is natural not in the sense that it necessarily arises, but because “it expresses the *nature of the mind* in its quest for cause and essence”.⁹¹ These theologians believe that an innate natural desire implies that the vision of God is something demanded by nature itself. This would endanger the gratuity of man’s supernatural calling and blur the distinction between the natural and supernatural orders.

Borde refers to others, such as Henri de Lubac, Jorge Laporta⁹² and Yves Floucat,⁹³ who understand man’s natural desire to see God as an “*innate* natural appetite”, that is an ontological inclination characteristic of the human spirit. This “innate appetite is an inclination, or a propensity, inscribed by the Author of

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁷ M.-B. BORDE, *The Natural Desire to See God According to the Salmanticenses*, in BONINO (ed.), *Surnaturel. A Controversy*, 251-268, here 267.

⁸⁸ Cfr. A. GARDEIL, *Le désir naturel de voir Dieu*, «Revue Thomiste» 31 (1926) 381-410.

⁸⁹ Cfr. R. GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, *L'appétit naturel et la puissance obéissante*, «Revue Thomiste» 33 (1928) 474-478.

⁹⁰ Cfr. J.-H. NICOLAS, *Les rapports entre la nature et le surnaturel dans les débats contemporains*, «Revue Thomiste» 95 (1995) 399-416.

⁹¹ BORDE, *The Natural Desire*, 254.

⁹² Cfr. J. LAPORTA, *La Destinée de la nature humaine selon Thomas d'Aquin*, Vrin, Paris 1965.

⁹³ Cfr. Y. FLOUCAT, *Métaphysique et religion*, Pierre Téqui, Paris 1989, 14-25.

nature, whereby each thing pursues its good and perfection without any knowledge being required".⁹⁴

These argue that if man's ultimate end is the vision of God and man is only satisfied in the attainment of this end, there must be an innate desire for God in human nature. And for the vision of God to be the end of our nature, our nature must be "carried toward it by a natural weight".⁹⁵ The Salmanticenses believed that this innate appetite only referred to the ultimate natural end, which is not the vision of God in himself, but the knowledge of Him as He is in his creatures – "this knowledge constitutes connatural beatitude".⁹⁶ In this way, there are two "hierarchically ordered beatitudes", and in the ultimate end (beatific vision) is found "in an eminent mode all the perfection of the natural end".⁹⁷

e) Denis Bradley and human happiness

Outside the contributions to the Toulouse's Symposium, we should mention that in the late 90's Denis Bradley published a valuable study on Aquinas' conception of human happiness from the point of view of moral theology.⁹⁸ Bradley's essential point in his analysis is St. Thomas's philosophical demonstration that, for man to attain ultimate human happiness, he needs the other-worldly vision of God: "it is the only satisfying end of an intellectual nature".⁹⁹ There is no such thing as an ultimate, natural end, because man is only truly satisfied in the vision of the divine essence. However, at the same time, human nature does not have the capacity to attain this end. Human nature is intrinsically oriented to an end that it cannot attain.

Bradley essentially shares de Lubac's position on the human final end. As a consequence, he maintains that the construction of a systematic philosophical ethics grounded on an ultimate natural end is impossible. The notion of natural beatitude in St. Thomas is neither "the ultimate natural end of man nor a constituent of ultimate beatitude. All that Aquinas allows is that natural beatitude that can never 'satisfy' is a participation or similitude of perfect or supernatural beatitude".¹⁰⁰ As a result, "insofar as no natural end – including a life combining contemplation and action – adequately satisfies man's desire for beatitude, man is naturally endless".¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, Bradley admits the hypothetical concept of a pure nature: "man – considered entirely apart from anything known through revelation and given

⁹⁴ BORDE, *The Natural Desire*, 256.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, 257.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁸ D. BRADLEY, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good: Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas's Moral Science*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 1997.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, 423.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, 513.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, 512.

through grace – could have been created in a state of pure nature, in which state man would have had a solely natural end”.¹⁰² The fact that man was ordered in creation to the supernatural end does not place any necessity on God, because He could have created man without this supernatural destiny: “lacking that destiny, human nature, nevertheless, would be human nature”.¹⁰³

Although Bradley allows for the possibility of pure nature, and agrees that it may be found in St. Thomas, he argues, along the lines of the late de Lubac, that for Aquinas this notion holds no importance. “This conceptual possibility is a corollary of the supernatural character of the beatific vision. Now this corollary is the ‘hypothesis’ that looms so large among the modern theologians reacting negatively to Baius. But the hypothesis enjoys no such importance for Aquinas. Aquinas, assuredly, affirms the gratuity of man’s supernatural elevation. Yet he never puts into abeyance the divine generosity; he never argues that men *de facto* have or ever have had a strictly natural ultimate end”.¹⁰⁴

Thus, Bradley brings de Lubac’s epistemology of paradox to the Christian moral reflection. “This, then, is the deep paradox confronting the Thomistic philosopher. Philosophical reason, beginning with the natural desire for happiness, demonstrates that human nature cannot be satisfied by any end naturally attainable, and concludes that only a supernatural end, the vision of the divine essence, could satisfy man’s natural desire. This conclusion is both a paradox and an *aporia*. It marks an impasse beyond which reason can go no further. Once philosophical reason has reached its paradoxical conclusion, the natural endlessness of human nature, it must also acknowledge that it is impossible to know philosophically whether man, whose intelligence is naturally oriented to the vision of God, is actually given such fulfillment. On the contrary, the philosopher must allow that it is entirely possible that human nature is vain or futile”.¹⁰⁵

2. Criticism of de Lubac’s thesis

a) Serge-Thomas Bonino and limbo

Serge-Thomas Bonino examines St. Thomas’s discussion on limbo, because he argues that this topic demonstrates his conception of man and man’s relation to the supernatural. His conclusion is that St. Thomas does seem to support a relative integrity of human nature.

Bonino defines limbo as a state in which “the human person is deprived of his supernatural last end, which is the beatific vision of the divine essence, but where

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, 471.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, 474.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 475.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, 527-528.

on the other hand he does not suffer from this".¹⁰⁶ It is a state in which man's nature seems in some way fulfilled, but where he is at the same time deprived of the beatific vision. This doctrine of limbo has much to do with the notion of pure nature. In fact, "limbo constitutes the real state that is closest to the hypothetical state of pure nature".¹⁰⁷ Bonino mentions that this topic of limbo is, unfortunately, hardly addressed in the writings of Henri de Lubac.

St. Thomas holds that in the souls of unbaptized infants is found "simultaneously the existence of a perfect knowledge [of the existence of the beatific vision] [...] and the absence of all sorrow".¹⁰⁸ According to St. Thomas, man "is only distressed when he is deprived of that to which he has been in some way made proportionate. Thus no wise man is distressed because he cannot fly like a bird or because he is not a king or an emperor, since that is not his due, but he would be distressed if he were deprived of something which he has had in some way a capacity to possess".¹⁰⁹ Thus, the souls in limbo do not suffer for their lack of the beatific vision, for it is out of their reach.

In *De malo*, St. Thomas refines this vision distinguishing between natural and supernatural knowledge. The souls in limbo possess perfect natural knowledge, and know that "the soul is created for beatitude and that this beatitude consists in obtaining the perfect good".¹¹⁰ They are like "good philosophers".¹¹¹ However, they do not have supernatural knowledge and are ignorant of Revelation, as St. Paul says: "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what things God has prepared for those that love him" (1 Cor 2:9).

St. Thomas argues that while man naturally longs for beatitude,¹¹² the souls of unbaptized infants know of beatitude in general, but not specifically. It is for this reason that they do not suffer.¹¹³ Here, St. Thomas does not speak of two different beatitudes, but of two kinds of knowledge of this one beatitude: "a general knowledge that engenders an explicit desire for happiness in general, and a specific supernatural knowledge that provokes a desire for the glory of heaven".¹¹⁴ Revelation manifests that this beatitude is the vision of the divine essence, possible through grace. "But left to its own resources and deprived of faith's enlightenment, as is the case with the soul in limbo, the intelligence spontaneously identifies this happiness with the goods it can attain naturally and the use of which it effectively enjoys: the natural knowledge and love of God".¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁶ S.-T. BONINO, *The Theory of Limbo and the Mystery of the Supernatural in St. Thomas Aquinas*, in IDEM, *Surnaturel. A Controversy*, 117-154, here 118.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, 119.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, 131.

¹⁰⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In II Sent.*, d. 33, q. 2, a. 2.

¹¹⁰ IDEM, *De malo*, q. 5, a. 3.

¹¹¹ BONINO, *The Theory*, 139.

¹¹² THOMAS AQUINAS, *De malo*, q. 5, a. 3, arg. 1.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, q. 5, a. 3, ad 1.

¹¹⁴ BONINO, *The Theory*, 142.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 143.

For St. Thomas, the absence of true beatitude is a penalty for those souls in limbo, for this loss does in some way go against their natural inclination. Yet while man is ordered to the beatific vision, this ordering is not in an immediate way.¹¹⁶ He has not the means to know or attain this end and “human nature, of itself, does not entail such an end”.¹¹⁷

b) Jacob Schmutz and the doctrine of causality

Jacob Schmutz argues that the development of the theology of pure nature was made possible, apart from the theological controversies such as Baianism, by the metaphysical structure of medieval philosophy – specifically the relation between the first cause and secondary causes. Schmutz believes that it is the “autonomy bestowed on the secondary cause and the efficacy in its order that allows us to think of an appetite of nature as efficacious and self-sufficient in its order”.¹¹⁸

One of many explanations given for the relation between the first cause and secondary causes was that of Luis de Molina, who believed that divine causality could be described as a “general concurrence that flows *with* the secondary cause, immediately and simultaneously, into the latter’s effects”.¹¹⁹

Schmutz says that in St. Thomas, however, the first cause acts *immediately* in the secondary cause. This causality does not remove the secondary causality proper to the creature, for the creature contributes to the action in the world *secundum illud quod est sibi proprium*.¹²⁰ God enables the secondary cause to act of itself, while acting on it “in order to produce its actual operations according to a mode that is proper to the secondary cause”.¹²¹

Schmutz says that traditional Thomism “explained the relationship between first cause and secondary cause in the form of an action fully performed by two *total* but subordinated causes”,¹²² while Molina, along with Suárez, proposes that neither of the two causes is *superfluous*. Molina describes the behaviour of the first cause and secondary cause like two men rowing the same boat. Yet Schmutz says that in this approach the action is not due to two total causes, but the “cooperation of two partial causes”.¹²³

Molina’s argument on the “concurrence of two partial causes thus enables one to establish two distinct orders of causality, a veritable *duplex ordo causalitatis*”.¹²⁴ Molina sees it as the cooperation of two causes, not the “operation of one cause in

¹¹⁶ Cfr. *ibidem*, 145.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁸ J. SCHMUTZ, *The Medieval Doctrine of Causality and the Theology of Pure Nature (13th to 17th Centuries)*, in BONINO (ed.), *Surnaturel. A Controversy*, 203-250, here 205.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 206-207.

¹²⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 45, a. 5, co.

¹²¹ J. SCHMUTZ, *The Medieval*, 209.

¹²² *Ibidem*, 237.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, 238.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, 241-242.

the other".¹²⁵ Schmutz argues that the double order of nature and the supernatural is "founded on a causal *duplex ordo*".¹²⁶

It is precisely these two orders of causality that were separated and led to a separation between the orders of nature and the supernatural. God's action in the world is greatly reduced, and the "world of secondary causality becomes a world with its own proper and self-sufficient nature that must seek in its own power for the definition of its possibilities, the determination of its merits, and the finalization of its acts".¹²⁷

c) André-Mutien Léonard and the necessity of the pure nature concept

André-Mutien Léonard argues that the notion of pure nature is necessary to preserve the consistency of nature and the gratuity of the supernatural. Léonard does not agree that the gratuity of grace is adequately defended "by emphasizing that the expectation, even the requirement, of the supernatural, inscribed as a necessity in our nature, rests first on the gift, itself gratuitous, of the creation of man in the image of God".¹²⁸ Rather, Léonard emphasises the distinction between the gratuity of the act of creation and the gratuity of the introduction into the divine life.

Léonard believes that de Lubac mistakenly attacked 'pure nature' as he believed it to imply a vision of human nature closed in itself, and closed off from the divine. Yet Léonard argues that, while some may have abused the concept of pure nature in this way, pure nature is not necessarily autonomous from the transcendent. "This pure nature of man, being in the image of God, would have been constitutively capable of God through the transcendental openness of the intellect and will to the infinity of being that belongs to the metaphysical nature of the soul".¹²⁹ For man is open to the transcendent, human nature is *capax Dei*, and its fulfilment is only attained beyond itself.

Léonard's central argument is that if grace is to be gratuitous to man, then he requires certain integrity in himself. "Divinizing grace cannot belong to the necessary intelligibility and, in this sense, to the 'nature' of man". Rather, "the gratuity of divinization entails that it not form a part of the necessary nature of man and that this nature has, or at least can have, an authentic meaning even outside grace".¹³⁰ The concept of 'grace' requires that there be a concept of 'nature', so that man can be defined in his essence – without it he would be unintelligible.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, 243.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, 249.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*, 249-250.

¹²⁸ A.-M. LÉONARD, *The Theological Necessity of the Pure Nature Concept*, in BONINO (ed.), *Surnaturel. A Controversy*, 325-330, here 325.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*, 327.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*, 328.

Léonard acknowledges that this approach must strive to avoid the error of extrinsicism, which sees grace as something entirely extrinsic to human nature. Léonard argues that man is, in his nature, not “a divinised being, but a being capable of the infinite, and hence, a being capable of receiving the gift of divinization”.¹³¹ While human nature is not necessarily assumed by grace, it is “intrinsically capable of being assumed by it”.¹³²

In summary, grace fulfils the deepest longing of man’s nature. Yet at the same time, human nature has a real meaning apart from this divinisation – thus safeguarding the gratuity of grace and the integrity of human nature. This vision sees human nature as perpetually in search for the Absolute, a desire that could never be fully satisfied.

Léonard argues that this approach to nature and grace does not imply that God first created, then elevated man. Instead, he says that man has been created in grace. In his concrete existence, man has only one calling, only one final end – he is “positively ordered to personal friendship with God”.¹³³ The significance of pure nature is to specify the “zone, discernible with great difficulty, that must correspond to man’s essential nature and that could have had a real integrity outside of grace”.¹³⁴

d) Peter Pagan-Aguiar and the defense of a natural human finality

Aside from the Toulouse Symposium, a relevant study that criticises de Lubac’s position is that of Peter Pagan-Aguiar, in which he discusses human finality according to Aquinas.¹³⁵ It is relevant for, together with Steven Long’s analysis, it is in a sense the counterpart of Bradley’s opinions.¹³⁶ Pagan-Aguiar cannot deny the affirmation (obvious for a Christian thinker) that a purely natural moral philosophy is insufficient. What he denies is “the claim that a purely natural and complete moral philosophy is intrinsically impossible [...]. If Bradley’s position is correct, then the very notion of a complete philosophy independent from *sacra doctrina* involves not simply a paradox but an internal contradiction”. As a consequence, “the possibility of the state of pure nature – a theory intended to preserve the gratuity of the supernatural order and the integrity of reason within its own proportionate sphere of operation – would be left without any ultimate justification”.¹³⁷

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, 329.

¹³² *Ibidem*.

¹³³ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*, 330.

¹³⁵ P.A. PAGAN-AGUIAR, *St. Thomas Aquinas and Human Finality: Paradox or Mysterium Fidei?*, «The Thomist» 64 (2000) 375-399. Here he presents a synthesis of his unpublished dissertation: IDEM, *A Thomistic Defense of Perfect Natural Beatitude*, Fordham University, New York 1998.

¹³⁶ As we will see later, S. Long’s contribution to this debate started in those years.

¹³⁷ IDEM, *St. Thomas*, 378.

Bradley's position would imply that human nature is endless in itself until it attains by grace its only final and supernatural end. There seem to be only two alternatives: either deny the universality of the principle of finality, or accept that there is a natural final end. However, Pagan-Aguiar identifies a third possibility: sustain that "human nature's obediential potency for the supernatural is sufficient to establish the theoretical possibility of the immediate divine vision as man's last end, so that the possibility of this supernatural good could be positively known without presupposing on our part any knowledge of grace".¹³⁸ Against the objection of Bradley (and de Lubac) about the restriction of the notion of obediential potency to the realm of the miraculous in Aquinas, Pagan-Aguiar notes that "although Aquinas may not explicitly employ the term 'obediential potency' in arguments intended to show that man's last end consists in the immediate vision of God, these Thomistic arguments necessarily presuppose the notion of obediential potency. [...] As Long recognizes, Bradley's interpretation is questionable insofar as it completely reduces the notion of obediential potency to the notion of extrinsic susceptibility to miraculous transmutation. It is true that for Aquinas this susceptibility is an obediential potency. Bradley has not shown, however, that *every* obediential potency must be a susceptibility to miraculous transmutation".¹³⁹

Pagan-Aguiar sustains the possibility of a state of pure nature, but he delineates very clearly the necessary context in which it must be understood. "Aquinas, unlike Duns Scotus and others, held that spiritual creatures were in fact created in the state of grace, not in the state of pure nature. Given this presupposition, the Thomistic arguments at issue cannot properly be viewed as complete without reference to the intrinsically supernatural principles possessed by spiritual creatures in the original state of nature. Contrary to Scotistic interpretations, the Thomistic arguments are meant to show that nature as originally constituted, not pure nature, is ordered to the immediate vision of God".¹⁴⁰

Pagan-Aguiar explains the different approach of Aquinas and Scotus on the natural desire to see God. While from a Scotistic viewpoint the natural desire for the immediate divine vision is understood univocally, from a Thomistic standpoint, however, natural desire is understood analogically. It means that, although not completely unrelated, the natural desire of graced nature and that of pure nature are not of the same order. The former is directed to God as triune Godhead and as knowable through intrinsically supernatural principles, whereas the latter is directed to God as first efficient cause and as knowable through means other than intrinsically supernatural principles. Consequently, "in the state of pure nature the desire to know the divine essence directly would be nothing more than

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, 381. This is Long's view.

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*, 383. After having praised him, Pagan-Aguiar then criticizes what he considers an exaggerated philosophical optimism in Long's approach, due to his dependence on Maritain on this point.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 388.

a pure velleity [...]; in the state of pure nature man would require for his commensurate perfection not a supernatural but a strictly natural final end, namely, an exalted analogical knowledge of God's nature by means of divinely infused species".¹⁴¹

Pagan-Aguiar is aware that defenders of 'theological intrinsicism' might object that his reading of the natural desire to know God stems from an exaggerated conception of the gratuity of the supernatural order, from an 'extrinsicist' theology of grace foreign to the mind of Aquinas. At this point, he answers that in his view "the supernatural is far from irrelevant in the actual historical order. In this order we are not free to dismiss our supernatural vocation without the most tragic of consequences. On the contrary, we are obliged to affirm that without Christ's grace human nature cannot attain its *de facto* final end, the immediate divine vision. From the supra-philosophical perspective of infused faith one can affirm, through an infallible act of intellectual assent, that a purely philosophical ethics is incomplete not *de jure* but *de facto*. But the practical inadequacy of a purely philosophical ethics in the present divine economy is cognitively inaccessible to unaided reason". And so, he concludes, "an extrinsicist theology of grace properly understood is wholly consistent with *Fides et ratio*, and in my judgment this theology is the very one developed so admirably by the Angelic Doctor".¹⁴²

3. Other positions

a) Jean-Pierre Torrell on Nature and Grace in Aquinas

In his intervention in the Symposium at the *Institut Catholique* of Toulouse on the supernatural debate, Jean-Pierre Torrell makes the very relevant point that St. Thomas did not treat nature as a univocal concept. Torrell believes that an examination of these conceptions of nature is vital for the debate on the supernatural, and sheds light on the notion of pure nature.

St. Thomas, in contrast with the general consensus of his time (which saw creation and elevation as two distinct moments)¹⁴³ believed that man was created in grace: "turned toward God in the first instant of his creation, he received

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 390. He later explains: "It is not clear how the desire for the divine vision, insofar as this desire emanates from nature left to itself, can be anything more than a simple velleity, unless one is prepared to sacrifice either the gratuity of the supernatural order (reason without faith) or the natural integrity of reason (voluntarist faith without reason) [...]. An unfulfilled velleity does not by itself entail a frustration of the relevant natural desire" (*ibidem*, 397-398).

¹⁴² *Ibidem*, 397. So, "both the principle of finality (Aristotle) and the radical gratuity of grace (SS. Paul and Augustine) can be preserved without compromise, granted that the notion of natural desire is employed analogically (Aquinas) rather than univocally (Scotus)" (*ibidem*, 398).

¹⁴³ This was the opinion of St. Bonaventure, among others. On this particular point, see the interesting study of C. CULLEN, *Bonaventure on Nature before Grace: A Historical Moment Reconsidered*, «American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly» 85 (2011/1) 161-176.

grace”.¹⁴⁴ Since man was created with an ultimate end that is beyond his capabilities, he was constituted in such a way so as to be able to attain this end. With this end in mind, man was constituted in a state of original justice. St. Thomas does not see creation as separate from elevation, but that “God created man to invite him to share in his own communion”.¹⁴⁵ Man is ordered to the beatific vision from the very moment of his creation and for this reason God grants him the means of attaining this end.

While St. Thomas never uses the term *natura pura*, he often uses terms such as *bona naturalia* (41 times), *data naturalia* (14), and *pura naturalia* (32). In this way, he draws a distinction between the *naturalia* and the *gratuita*.¹⁴⁶ Torrell says that the expression *in statu naturalium* cannot be translated simply as “in the state of pure nature”, but rather as “natural powers alone”.¹⁴⁷ In this way, St. Thomas describes the concept of nature that has an “autonomy in relation to grace”.¹⁴⁸ And inversely, we see that “grace is not included in the definition of nature”.¹⁴⁹ For St. Thomas, “it is as a hypothesis that the consideration of a human nature *in puris naturalibus* is useful: by strictly setting aside what only grace can give, it not only marks out the limits beyond with nature cannot go, but it also shows what the powers of nature can do by themselves”.¹⁵⁰

This understanding of the *bona naturalia* appears in St. Thomas’s use of the term *natura integra* (‘integral nature,’)¹⁵¹ a state that describes Adam before the fall, “in possession of the privileges with which God endowed him at the moment of his creation, *but abstracting from sanctifying grace*”.¹⁵² Integral nature and the state of original justice were part of the same concrete reality of our first parents. While they cannot be separated, they can be considered under different aspects. Torrell argues that this notion of integral nature has two intentions: to clarify the distinction between nature and grace (that grace not be due to nature), and to safeguard nature’s autonomy. For this reason, “nature remains with its own characteristics, even if in concrete reality there are no separated ‘natural’ acts any more than there is an integral nature apart from the state of innocence”.¹⁵³

Due to original sin, man lost this state of original justice, and was deprived of goods that he had received in creation. St. Thomas considers these depriva-

¹⁴⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In II Sent.*, d. 29, q. 1, a. 2.

¹⁴⁵ J.-P. TORRELL, *Nature and Grace In Thomas Aquinas*, in BONINO (ed.), *Surnaturel. A Controversy*, 155-188, here 185.

¹⁴⁶ For example: *In II Sent.*, d. 29, q. 1, a. 2, ad 1; *De veritate*, q. 29, a. 6; *In II Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 4; *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 5, a. 1; *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 1, ad 12; *De veritate*, q. 24, a. 7; *De malo*, q. 4, a. 2, ad 22.

¹⁴⁷ TORRELL, *Nature and Grace*, 169.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 186.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 169-170.

¹⁵¹ *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 114, a. 2

¹⁵² TORRELL, *Nature and Grace*, 171.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*, 172.

tions under two aspects. Firstly, “if we consider human nature according to its natural principles only, there is no doubt that these [consequences of original sin] are not penalties, but merely natural deficiencies (*defectus naturales*) [...]. If [we consider human nature] as it was created (*instituta*), there is no doubt that these are penalties for it, for we can say that someone is punished when he is deprived afterwards even of something that was given him”.¹⁵⁴

For St. Thomas, things that are natural to man were not taken away by sin¹⁵⁵. Yet he also says that man’s nature, apart from losing the gratuitous gifts, has been wounded in its natural gifts. While before original sin man could do all the connatural good (e.g. natural love of God), afterwards he cannot. His nature is in some sense undamaged by sin, but also wounded. This clarification shows the different ways in which Aquinas understood ‘nature’. In one sense, ‘nature’ was not affected by original sin, when ‘nature’ refers to those “constitutive principles of human nature”.¹⁵⁶ This regards those properties that belong to man’s specific nature and without which he would not be a man. However, the inclination to virtue, which is a good of nature, has been lessened by sin, due to the loss of the harmony of the powers of the soul. Finally, the gift of original justice, which St. Thomas says can be termed a good of nature,¹⁵⁷ was lost through original sin.

It may appear unusual for St. Thomas to include the gift of original justice within the goods of man’s nature, but it is a logical conclusion to his affirmation that man was created in grace. This gift of sanctifying grace and original justice was natural in the sense that “in the person of the first man, the divine economy had granted it to the whole of human nature”.¹⁵⁸ These gifts were natural to man, in the sense that his nature was integral – endowed with the natural and gratuitous gifts.

Here, Torrell sees in St. Thomas a distinction between the natural understood in a “metaphysical, essential” sense, considered in the first place, and the natural understood in an “existential and historical sense”.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, the meaning of the phrase *spoliatus gratuitis, vulneratus in naturalibus* signifies that: (1) man lost sanctifying grace and his original justice; (2) he was wounded in his natural gifts, those that were part of his nature “in the historical sense”, that is, due to his creation in grace.

¹⁵⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In II Sent.*, d. 30, q. 1, a. 1.

¹⁵⁵ Cfr. IDEM, *In II Sent.*, d. 39, q. 2, a. 1, arg. 5; *De malo*, q. 2, a. 11, arg. 1; *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 83, a. 2, obj. 3 and q. 98, a. 2.

¹⁵⁶ TORRELL, *Nature and Grace*, 186.

¹⁵⁷ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 85, a. 1.

¹⁵⁸ TORRELL, *Nature and Grace*, 175.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

b) Peter Ryan proposal on the fulfilling
and gratuitous character of the beatific vision

In a dense article published in *Gregorianum*,¹⁶⁰ the Jesuit theologian Peter Ryan discusses the opposed positions of Garrigou-Lagrange and de Lubac, and sees Rahner's thought as the midpoint between the pure nature tradition and *Nouvelle Théologie*. He concludes by giving his own proposal about how the beatific vision can be both gratuitous and fulfilling.

In his view, "Rahner saw something I consider absolutely essential: human nature is unconditionally oriented, not to perfect happiness, but only to ever-greater happiness".¹⁶¹ According to Ryan, Aquinas plainly holds what Rahner denies, namely, that human nature itself is unconditionally oriented to perfect happiness. Aquinas never clarified how his teaching on limbo, that logically presupposes a nature not unconditionally oriented to perfect happiness, "can be reconciled with his more central teaching that we do necessarily desire perfect happiness".¹⁶²

Garrigou-Lagrange holds that the beatific vision, being the proper object of the divine intellect, exceeds the proper object of the human intellect and, thus, is not innately desired. On the other hand, de Lubac and Scotus hold that if the beatific vision is not innately desired, human nature can never be raised up to that vision, because human nature's elevation would so profoundly alter it that it would be essentially changed. Ryan says that he agrees with both points, and concludes: "the beatific vision is not a fulfillment of human nature as such".¹⁶³ He later clarifies this position: "human persons have the capacity to receive the gift of a share in the divine nature, and that capacity pertains to human nature. But the share in the divine nature that they receive does not transform their human nature to make *it* capable of being fulfilled in the beatific vision. This vision is not, as theologians on all sides of the dispute have assumed, a direct fulfillment of human *nature* but of human *persons* insofar as they share in the *divine* nature".¹⁶⁴

According to Ryan this point is crucial, "for it explains how the beatific vision can be both naturally fulfilling and utterly gratuitous. It is naturally fulfilling in the sense that it is entirely fitting to human beings to accept the share in the

¹⁶⁰ P.F. RYAN, *How Can the Beatific Vision Both Fulfill Human Nature and Be Utterly Gratuitous?*, «*Gregorianum*» 83 (2002/4) 717-754. Some years before he had discussed and (partially) published his doctoral thesis: IDEM, *Moral Action and the Ultimate End of Man: The Significance of the Debate between Henri de Lubac and his Critics*, Excerpta ex dissertatione ad Doctoratum in Facultate Theologiae Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana, Roma 1996.

¹⁶¹ IDEM, *How Can the Beatific*, 747. See also *ibidem*, 752, where Ryan criticizes the Rahnerian supernatural existential.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, note 97.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*, 751, note 103.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 751. In note 104 he ascribes this idea to G. Grisez. Cooper has criticised this approach as introducing a Kantian-like division between nature and person, tending to a deistic view of ethics and an extrinsic juxtaposition of the natural and the supernatural: cfr. COOPER, *Naturally Human*, 226-229.

divine nature God offers them [...]. And yet, not being *per se* a fulfillment of human nature that divinization and the beatific vision to which it leads remain gifts over and above the gift of creation and are therefore utterly gratuitous”.¹⁶⁵

Ryan believes that his denial that the beatific vision is *in principle* necessary for human fulfillment does not imply that human beings can *de facto* be fulfilled without it. Nor does it deny that *de facto* human beings have restless hearts. Our *de facto* situation is our fallen condition, in which we cannot achieve the ever-greater fulfillment in human goods that we naturally desire. To escape it and find genuine human fulfillment, we need a divine help that is utterly gratuitous. God offers that help (healing grace) only by also offering us a share in the divine nature (elevating grace). Thus accepting a share in the divine nature is *de facto* the only way we can achieve even our natural human fulfillment. It is in this way that our hearts are restless until they rest in God.

Ryan tries to correct what he considers a mistaken understanding of the restless heart, “the idea that human beings naturally desire perfect happiness and thus implicitly desire the beatific vision as the direct fulfillment of their *human* nature. That idea seems obvious to those who already believe that God is offering two things –the beatific vision and the happiness human hearts naturally desire – but fail to distinguish those two things”.¹⁶⁶ This suggests that “the human goods essential to happiness here and now are not essential to heavenly happiness. The destruction of human death and gaining of bodily life that Jesus accomplished for us by dying and rising inevitably seem only incidental to our heavenly fulfillment”.¹⁶⁷ A right vision of the restless heart, according to Ryan, implies that “our natural desire is directed to human goods, including the good of friendship with God. But we should not expect to find integral fulfillment in those goods in this world, for here we have no lasting city. We can expect to find what our hearts desire only in God’s kingdom, where, as his children, we shall see him as he is”.¹⁶⁸

c) Other moral theologians’ positions on the final human beatitude.
The contribution of Pinckaers

Stephen Wang also refers to the paradox that we naturally desire what we cannot naturally attain, and observes how Aquinas uses Aristotle’s example of the help of a friend: what we do with the aid of our friends, we do ourselves. This helps to explain that “the fact that the *achievement* of happiness can only be a supernatural gift from God does not mean that our *desire* or *request* for it needs some supernatural cause”.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 753.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 753-754.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 754.

¹⁶⁹ S. WANG, *Aquinas on Human Happiness and the Natural Desire for God*, «New Blackfriars» 88 (2007) 322-334, here 333.

His conclusion moves along the lines of Bradley's and Ryan's idea of natural human incompleteness. Wang observes that we are *ecstatic* creatures. This implies that we are restless and *in via*. "We are fragmented persons, internally displaced, perpetually going beyond ourselves to a future fulfillment [...]. It is a constitutive part of our nature to seek a deeper happiness and to be aware that any happiness we do achieve in the future will soon slip through our fingers".¹⁷⁰

Wang refers also to the Dominican moral theologian, Benedict Ashley. In an essay quoted by Wang, Ashley writes against those who deny a proper human natural end. "Such objections seem based on a failure to see that if the natural ultimate end is subordinated to the supernatural end and the two ends are seen as pertaining to different and purely analogical orders, the natural end is not extrinsic to the supernatural end, but is subsumed to and included in it, so that the axiom 'grace perfects nature' is realized. Grace perfects nature not by adding something extrinsic and accidental to it, but by profoundly transforming and elevating it to a higher, even an infinitely higher order of being".¹⁷¹

Ashley agrees with de Lubac on the existence of a natural desire for God. But "de Lubac's conclusion, however, that the fact of this natural desire to know God proves that at least in the present state the human person has no natural ultimate end, leads to what for an Aristotelian, at least, is an absurdity – a human nature that is not a nature".¹⁷² Ashley explains later that "contrary to de Lubac and others, we must retain the notion of a natural ultimate end, but only if it is also understood that in God's actual dispensation this natural end is subsumed *within* the supernatural ultimate end, perfect beatitude in the Trinity. To reject the present existence of a natural end is to render absurd the very concept of human nature, hence of the hypostatic union and of the transformation of human nature by grace".¹⁷³

We should observe that these authors are indebted, in one way or another, to the remarkable figure of Servais Pinckaers. In an article published originally in 1976, and recently translated into English, Pinckaers analyzes the natural desire for God together with the question of the final end and pure nature.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, 334.

¹⁷¹ B.M. ASHLEY, *What is the End of the Human Person?*, in L. GORMALLY (ed.), *Moral Truth and Moral Tradition. Essays in Honour of Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe*, Four Court Press, Dublin 1994, 68-96, especially 76-81; here 79.

¹⁷² *Ibidem*, 80, where he continues: "For Aristotle 'nature' is defined dynamically as 'an intrinsic principle of motion and rest' and 'motion' implies a pre-determined goal (*Physics* 192a23; 198b10-199b32). Thus a nature or essence which has no proper final cause is impossible, since an essence is a formal principle, and finality is simply the form considered as the goal attained, perfect and complete. Only chance entities lack an intrinsic final cause. Hence, as *Humani generis* taught, no impossibility appears why God could not have created human persons in a merely natural state, although in fact we were not so created" (*ibidem*, 80-81).

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*, 94. See also B.M. ASHLEY, *A Biblical Introduction to Moral Theology*, St. Pauls, New York 1996, 96-103.

¹⁷⁴ S. PINCKAERS, *The Natural Desire to See God*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 8 (2010/3) 627-646 (orig. *Le désir naturel de voir Dieu*, «Nova et Vetera» 4 (1976) 255-273).

Pinckaers states clearly the position of Aquinas, who does not appear to be at all concerned about the coordination of the natural desire with the gratuity and transcendence of the vision of God. This problem came later, due to the tension in nominalism between God and human freedom. Along with human nature itself, human freedom would be later considered, especially in the Lutheran crisis, as self-sufficient. The relation of nature with the supernatural becomes in this way critical. If human nature is self-sufficient, how can we conceive of a desire for God that is really natural but yet is directed to the vision of God, which is evidently supernatural?¹⁷⁵

As Pinckaers observes, “it is important to note how St. Thomas’ conception of human nature is not quite the same as the one presented by Père de Lubac. St. Thomas’ use of Aristotle does not entail a self-sufficient human nature, as it does with Suárez and others of his time. Rather human nature for St. Thomas is open to God and his grace”.¹⁷⁶ If Aquinas refers to some paradox, it is the paradox of friendship as true love: to the extent that man discovers God as the source of all truth and goodness, he comes spontaneously to love him as the most desirous object of his love. From this love of friendship toward God proceeds a natural desire to know God in himself and to attain him as the cause of goodness and truth. “The natural desire to see God –which is rooted in the natural love of friendship for God and is fulfilled in the beatific vision of God in supernatural terms– is proper to the nature of spiritual beings. Because this desire proceeds from the intellect (which seeks to know God in himself, in all truth) and from the will (which tends already to love God in himself in all purity) this desire naturally contains within itself a refusal to assert an exigency by which it could itself reach God”.¹⁷⁷

Precisely because this desire and love have a natural dimension, this view allows the possibility of pure nature. In the end, Pinckaers observes that his emphasis of friendship is something forgotten in the modern age, but that belongs to the proper nature of man, to know and love the other for himself.¹⁷⁸ So, he explains, “if we insist on considering man in a hypothetical state in which he is placed in the world by God in a state of pure nature, where he is not accorded the promise of vision, then we must say that whatever happiness man could find would be imperfect yet real. In this state man’s knowledge and love of God would be developed according to his natural powers”.¹⁷⁹ At the same time, it should be clear that we are speaking about a state “which of course never existed”.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ Cfr. *ibidem*, 632.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 638.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 642.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 646: “This new sense of friendship was unfortunately neglected by subsequent modern theologians. Friendship, taken as a superior form of love, reveals the proper nature of man: his capacity to know and love the other as himself and for himself”.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 642.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, 644.

IV. LAWRENCE FEINGOLD AND THE NATURAL DESIRE TO SEE GOD

As we said at the beginning, the study that has greatly contributed to the resurgence of the debate in the English-speaking world is that of Lawrence Feingold, first published in 2001.

Feingold challenges de Lubac's interpretation of St. Thomas's teaching on man's natural desire to see God. As we have seen, de Lubac argued that, in St. Thomas, this natural desire in man is innate. Feingold's rigorous study covers the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Duns Scotus (1266-1308), Capreolus (1380-1444), Denis the Carthusian (1402-1471), Cajetan (1469-1534), Sylvester of Ferrara (1474-1528), Domingo de Soto (1494-1560), Francisco de Toledo (1532-1596), Bartolomé de Medina (1527-1580), Domingo Báñez (1528-1604), Gabriel Vázquez (1549-1604), Francisco Suárez (1548-1617), Cornelius Jansenius (1585-1638) and Henri de Lubac on this issue, and he concludes that St. Thomas teaches that man's desire for God is natural, but elicited.¹⁸¹ This means that man's desire to see God is provoked by the prior knowledge of God's existence as First Cause. Therefore, according to Feingold, man does not have an innate appetite implanted on his will and intellect directly for the beatific vision.¹⁸² Feingold's analysis is substantially historical in that he intends to show that this understanding is found in St. Thomas himself, and is not the result of misinterpretations by later commentators, particularly Cajetan.¹⁸³

Those who affirm an innate desire to see God argue that all beings have an innate appetite for their ultimate end. Therefore, if the beatific vision is man's ultimate end, it is naturally desired. If man had no innate appetite for the vision of God, then its attainment would be extrinsic to the inclination of man's nature.¹⁸⁴

On the other hand, those who present the natural desire to see God as elicited argue that an innate appetite is always with respect to something proportionate to nature and nature's potencies. Therefore, an innate appetite cannot tend towards what exceeds the natural order. Feingold argues that in numerous texts, St. Thomas refers to natural and supernatural beatitude. For man's will is not naturally inclined to the supernatural end, but to the connatural end – i.e. that end which is proportional to his nature. He says that man cannot have a natural

¹⁸¹ Feingold states that this has been the traditional Thomistic position, held by theologians such as: Sylvester of Ferrara, Francisco de Vitoria, Báñez, Suárez, Vázquez, the Salmanticenses, John of St. Thomas, J. M. Ripalda, J. B. Gonet, G.-L. Gotti, C. R. Billuart, A. Gardeil, R. Garrigou-Lagrange, W. O'Connor, A. Finili, M.-R. Gagnebet, J.-H. Nicolas, A. Piolanti.

¹⁸² According to Feingold, principal proponents include: Durandus of Saint Pourçain, Domingo de Soto, Francisco de Toledo, St. Robert Bellarmine, C. Jansenius, A. Arnould, Henry Noris, Fulgentius Bellelli, J. L. Berti, J. Maréchal, J. Laporta, E. Brisbois, H. de Lubac, S. Dockx, and Q. Turiel.

¹⁸³ Among other recent attempts to regain the figure of Cajetan in contrast with de Lubac's criticisms, it should be mentioned at least R. McINERNEY, *Praeambula fidei. Thomism and the God of the Philosophers*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 2005, especially 69-90, where he quotes F. GABORIAU, *Thomas d'Aquin en dialogue*, Fac, Paris 1993. Cfr. also R. CESSARIO, *Cardinal Cajetan and His Critics*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 2 (2004/2) 109-118.

¹⁸⁴ Cfr. FEINGOLD, *The Natural Desire*, xxviii-xxix.

inclination for what goes beyond his nature.¹⁸⁵ Rather, it is grace that enables man to be ordered to the vision of God.¹⁸⁶ Feingold says that de Lubac does not reflect the thinking of St. Thomas on this point, because in de Lubac “our nature is intrinsically finalized and inclined exclusively to our supernatural end in virtue of the imprinting of a supernatural finality on the soul in the moment of its creation”.¹⁸⁷ An innate appetite for the beatific vision would appear to deny the existence of a natural beatitude for man, and endanger the distinction between the natural and supernatural orders and the gratuity of grace. Finally, there are many places in which St. Thomas says, in line with 1Cor 2:9, that the vision of God goes beyond man’s natural desire.¹⁸⁸

Feingold says that the principal difficulty with de Lubac’s position is to explain how grace is not due to human nature, given that it has an innate desire for the beatific vision. He believes that de Lubac’s thesis does not show how the gratuity of grace differs or exceeds the gratuity of creation. The gratuity of grace supposes that some things are due to nature, such as the “ordination to a proportionate end, and the availability of means to achieve it”.¹⁸⁹ Feingold believes that this is perhaps the strongest argument to demonstrate that man has an elicited natural desire to see God, but not an innate appetite.¹⁹⁰

Despite his disagreement with de Lubac’s interpretation of the natural desire to see God, Feingold believes that de Lubac’s aim to recover “the sense of the supernatural character of the Christian promise and vocation” was correct.¹⁹¹ He agrees, therefore, with de Lubac’s emphasis on the relation between man’s “natural aspirations and his supernatural vocation”.¹⁹²

1. *Elicited natural desire*

Feingold takes on Suárez’s definition of innate appetite as “a natural weight or inclination (*pondus naturae*), held in common with other living and inanimate creatures”.¹⁹³ It “flows from the very essence of a thing in a constant, immutable, and unconscious way”.¹⁹⁴ On the other hand, an elicited desire “is a particular conscious movement of the will or sense appetite attracted by some object

¹⁸⁵ Cfr. *ibidem*, 406-409.

¹⁸⁶ Cfr. *ibidem*, xxix, 409-411.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 323.

¹⁸⁸ Cfr. *ibidem*, 411-412.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 424.

¹⁹⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*.

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*, xxxv.

¹⁹² *Ibidem*.

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*, 15.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, xxiv. Feingold assumes that an innate natural desire implies that this desire be unconditional or absolute.

known either by the senses or the intellect”.¹⁹⁵ It is an inclination that is “‘drawn out’, as it were, by the desirability of the known object”.¹⁹⁶

Feingold explains that this elicited natural desire flows spontaneously from the will when confronted with its object.¹⁹⁷ He argues that in St. Thomas man’s natural desire to know the essence of God is an elicited natural desire: “a desire spontaneously aroused on the basis of prior knowledge of God’s effects in the world”.¹⁹⁸

However, Feingold concedes that this is not sufficient. For this elicited natural desire could correspond to an underlying innate appetite for the vision of God. For example, “the natural elicited desire for happiness in general corresponds to an innate appetite of or natural inclination of the will itself, which by its nature is ordered to happiness”.¹⁹⁹ Feingold asks whether this natural elicited desire to see God means that man’s will and intellect are in themselves ordered to the beatific vision. For this reason, he examines whether in St. Thomas an innate desire to see God founds the elicited desire.

Feingold follows the position taken by Suárez, who argues that the elicited desire to see God is founded in the innate inclination to know in general, not on an innate appetite to see God. In this way, an innate appetite for a universal object can be applied to a particular object (the universal object being proportional to human nature, but the particular not necessarily).²⁰⁰

This approach depends on the principle that an innate appetite refers only to an object that is proportionate to the nature of the subject. An elicited desire is based on knowledge and can therefore be extended to what exceeds the subject, for example the vision of God.²⁰¹ In fact, a natural inclination to the vision of God is only possible for God, or those to whom God has given grace. Feingold argues that the ‘divineness’ in man because he has been made in God’s image only orders man to God “insofar as He can be naturally known and loved”,²⁰² it does not in itself give man a natural inclination for the beatific vision.²⁰³

While St. Thomas never explicitly distinguishes between an innate and an elicited desire to see God, Feingold argues that an innate desire to see God is foreign to St. Thomas’s thinking.²⁰⁴ Man has no natural inclination for a supernatural end because it surpasses his natural forces. On the other hand, an elicited natural desire can be directed to an object that exceeds man’s natural forces. In

¹⁹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, xxiv-xxv.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, xxv.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁰⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*, 265-267, 401.

²⁰¹ Cfr. *ibidem*, 397-401.

²⁰² *Ibidem*, 406.

²⁰³ Cfr. *ibidem*, 404-406.

²⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 397-401.

some places, St. Thomas does affirm the existence of a natural desire, but Feingold argues that in these cases he is referring to an elicited natural desire. Feingold also considers it to be absolutely certain that, in the teachings of St. Thomas, man has an innate appetite for connatural beatitude, i.e. that which is proportionate to his nature.²⁰⁵

2. *Natural and supernatural love*

Furthermore, Feingold also argues that an innate appetite for the vision of God would imply that man had a natural love for God “insofar as He is the *object of supernatural beatitude*”.²⁰⁶ Yet man’s love for God as object of supernatural beatitude is charity, a theological virtue and caused by sanctifying grace.²⁰⁷ Feingold proposes, based on a large number of texts of St. Thomas, that man can love God naturally or supernaturally, and these correspond to two types of natural inclination towards God.²⁰⁸ These are determined by God’s natural and supernatural activity in creation. “A love for God directed to union with Him in the beatific vision must itself be the product of a *supernatural* intervention of God, infusing the theological virtues and creating a supernatural friendship with Him. An innate love for God can only be directed to God as the author of nature and of natural perfections, and insofar as He can naturally be participated in”.²⁰⁹ This argument is of particular importance for our topic as the two types of love reflect two ways in which God can be considered the final end of man.

3. *Twofold Beatitude*

Feingold presents various citations in which St. Thomas says that man is ordered to the vision of God by grace, but not by nature.²¹⁰ This would also support his argument that man has no innate appetite to the vision of God. Man’s will and intellect are instead ordered to his connatural end (the contemplation of God through his effects); for them to be ordered to God, grace is necessary.²¹¹

Feingold argues that there is abundant evidence to suggest that St. Thomas considers man’s beatitude to be twofold. Yet an innate appetite can only be directed to one final end. Were it directed to the supernatural end, then the connatural end would not satisfy and therefore would not be a final end. Feingold states that St. Thomas does speak of the natural contemplation of God as a connatural ‘final

²⁰⁵ Cfr. *ibidem*, 414-415.

²⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, 415.

²⁰⁷ Cfr. *ibidem*, 415-416.

²⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, 416-421.

²⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, 420.

²¹⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*, 318.

²¹¹ Cfr. *ibidem*, 409-411.

end' and also affirms the existence of a natural inclination in the will and intellect for this connatural end. Feingold concludes that St. Thomas affirms the existence of this innate appetite for man's connatural end, but not for his supernatural end.²¹² The connatural end is, according to Feingold, a true final end, for while "it does not mark the limit of our natural aspirations, it marks the limit of our unconditional, proportionate and innate natural aspirations".²¹³

4. *Obediential potency*

Feingold argues that in man there is no natural passive potency for the vision of God, but a *specific obediential potency*.²¹⁴ As we have seen, Feingold argues that man has no innate appetite for the vision of God, and that there is only an innate appetite for what can be attained by the natural powers. Neither can there be a passive natural potency for the supernatural, because this would correspond to an active natural potency. This implies that man has no natural passive potency for grace, for a natural passive potency only refers to what is proportionate to nature and can be perfected by a natural agent. However, an obediential potency is different, for "it is open to an undetermined range of *disproportionate* realizations above its nature".²¹⁵ This obediential potency in man is not generic, but "proper to the spiritual creature".²¹⁶ Due to his intellectual nature, because he has been created in the image of God, he is capable of receiving grace.

5. *Pure nature*

The affirmation of the innate appetite for the vision of God, according to Feingold, necessarily excludes the possibility of a state of pure nature.²¹⁷ Apart from resorting to magisterial defences of this notion, Feingold also believes that this notion is necessary for it philosophically ensures the "coherence of the natural order" and theologically preserves "the full gratuitousness of grace".²¹⁸ Feingold clarifies that the possibility of a state of pure nature does not mean that the elevation of man is not fitting. This elevation is fitting for man's nature and this is demonstrated in his (elicited) natural desire to see God. Despite this fittingness,

²¹² Cfr. *ibidem*, 422-423.

²¹³ *Ibidem*, 423.

²¹⁴ Cfr. *ibidem*, 101-165.

²¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 413.

²¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 165.

²¹⁷ Cfr. *ibidem*, 424-426. Feingold mentions that Scotus, St. Robert Bellarmine, Toledo and Soto affirm the existence of an innate appetite for the vision of God without rejecting the possibility of a state of pure nature.

²¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 425.

Feingold believes that it would not be absurd or impossible for human nature to be created without this supernatural end.²¹⁹

Feingold also refers to de Lubac's attempt, in *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, to allow for the possibility of a state of pure nature for a 'generic' human nature (and not for our 'concrete' nature). However, Feingold believes that this solution is inadequate, and does not preserve the gratuity of grace "with respect to the condition of the nature as we have actually received it".²²⁰

V. REACTIONS TO THE THESIS OF FEINGOLD

1. Support for de Lubac's thesis

a) Nicholas Healy

Some authors in the journal «Communio» have reacted against Feingold's criticism of the French Jesuit theologian. Healy defends de Lubac's argument that the "logic of gift that informs both creation and redemption" respects the integrity of nature and the originality of grace.²²¹ Healy proposes that when de Lubac speaks of the beatific vision as the final end of man, he does not imply that it draws from the principles of nature. Instead, he argues that this finality has been inscribed on nature, prior to grace.²²² This natural desire is not grace, but is "the natural infrastructure placed by God in intellectual nature for the sake of realizing his plan to bestow the call to supernatural happiness in a second 'moment' that is logically and ontologically distinct with respect to the act of creating intellectual nature in the first place".²²³

He argues that what de Lubac really denies is that the natural end is man's *final* end. De Lubac accepts that St. Thomas speaks of a twofold happiness; his real argument is that this natural happiness is imperfect and only to be attained in this world. Therefore, Healy argues that regarding "the accusation that de Lubac 'rejects the natural end' —if this is taken to mean that de Lubac rejects the idea of a 'natural beatitude' proportionate to our nature, it is a demonstrably false accusation".²²⁴ De Lubac wants to emphasise that the ultimate end of human nature is supernatural, even if there may exist an imperfect, proportional end attainable in this life. Thus, Healy believes that in "the present providential economy, God places in created intellectual nature a natural basis for his call to that end, the issuing of which constitutes a second, ontologically/logically distinct 'moment.'"²²⁵

²¹⁹ Cfr. *ibidem*, 425-426.

²²⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*, 426.

²²¹ N.J. HEALY, *Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace: A note on some recent contributions to the debate*, «Communio» 35 (2008) 535-564, here 547.

²²² Cfr. *ibidem*, 551.

²²³ *Ibidem*, 553.

²²⁴ *Ibidem*, 555.

²²⁵ *Ibidem*, 562.

A weak point in Healy's argument is that he does not refer to St. Thomas's argument on limbo. If Healy were correct in his interpretation, then St. Thomas would not speak of a natural beatitude for unbaptized infants after death. Thus, it would seem that St. Thomas allows for the attainment of this imperfect beatitude not just in this life.

b) Support from Non-Catholic theologians. John Milbank and others

A strong supporter of de Lubac's thesis is the Anglican theologian John Milbank, the leading representative of the movement known as *Radical Orthodoxy*.²²⁶ He has also reacted critically to Lawrence Feingold's work, and has defined his own theological movement as the legitimate heir to the teachings of Henri de Lubac. Like de Lubac, Milbank argues that the notion of pure nature encouraged the consideration of scientific disciplines and aspects of life independent from faith or the supernatural, and has resulted in the exclusion of Christianity from society. The Radical Orthodoxy movement is a battle against secularism, and it aims "to reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework".²²⁷

Milbank sees de Lubac as the forerunner of an integralist revolution of a new theology of grace, where "in concrete, historical humanity there is no such thing as a state of 'pure nature'. [Instead] every person has always already been worked upon by divine grace, with the consequence that one cannot analytically separate 'natural' and 'supernatural' contributions to this integral unity".²²⁸

Milbank focuses particularly on de Lubac's argument that man's (spiritual) nature cannot be spoken of in the same way as other natures. Instead it requires a different kind of ontology than Aristotle's more biologically determined ontology can provide. It is for this reason that Milbank says that de Lubac's "account of grace and the supernatural is *ontologically revisionary*. The natural desire cannot be frustrated, yet it cannot be of itself fulfilled. Human nature in its self-exceeding seems in justice to require a gift – yet the gift of grace remains beyond all justice and all requirement".²²⁹ Therefore, Milbank explains "for de Lubac [...] the logic of spirit as gift governs both the realm of nature and the realm of grace and the hinge between them that is the mystery of the supernatural".²³⁰

Milbank is highly critical of Cajetan's interpretation of the teachings of St. Thomas concerning the end of man. According to Milbank, Cajetan's vision en-

²²⁶ Cfr. J. MILBANK, C. PICKSTOCK, G. WARD (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy. A New Theology*, Routledge, London 1999. For a Catholic perspective of this movement, see L.P. HEMMING (ed.), *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry*, Routledge, London 2000.

²²⁷ MILBANK, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 1.

²²⁸ IDEM, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Blackwell, Oxford 1991, 206.

²²⁹ IDEM, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (MI) 2005, 30.

²³⁰ *Ibidem*, 44-45.

closed man within himself; it secularised the concept of nature and led to the conclusion “that human nature *in actuality* is fully definable in natural terms. This means that there can be an entirely natural and adequate ethics, politics, and philosophy and so forth”.²³¹ The cause of this was the separation of the single (but twofold) end in St. Thomas into two separate ends, parallel and not subordinated. Grace was therefore seen as something extrinsic to nature. Milbank believes that this error of Cajetan has led to the creation of a purely philosophical ethics (in fact a complete philosophical system) that is distinct from faith. As can be deduced, Milbank does not consider philosophy to be the handmaid, but rather an organ of theology.

More recently, Connor Cunningham, a disciple of Milbank, has published a ‘provocative’ article where, through a sort of ‘intellectual experiment’, he reluctantly allows a certain use of the notion of pure nature while describing it as counterfactual, in favor of the affirmation that man and his nature can be understood only in the light of Christ.²³²

Cunningham criticizes the allergy to paradox of some theologians who defend the pure nature tradition, and the fact that they prefer abstractions to the reality of paradox. He therefore follows on from de Lubac and Milbank, especially in asserting that there are not two orders, there is only one life, and this is God’s life.²³³ “The term *supernatural* does not refer to a new order of being added to nature but to the means for attaining the one final end for which the power of nature alone does not suffice’. The fact that it does not suffice signals a natural call or desire for that which lies beyond, and for that very reason such a call is in some way indigenous: ‘*The ultimate purpose of a rational creature exceeds the capacity of its own nature*’ (*Comp. Theol.* I.143, n. 82). Indeed, man is in this world a sort of microcosm, uniting in himself all that which is below him and offering it to that which is above him. Nature and grace form a union analogous to a seamless robe, which was not to be ripped asunder and sold off”.²³⁴

Cunningham then observes: “it is man that is made in or to the image of God, and not the other way around. Moreover, as Irenaeus (to name but one) argues, we don’t even know what man being made in the image of God means until the Incarnation—for Christ is the perfect image of God, and thus we are made in Christ’s image, and Christ is the God-Man: the paradox of the Incarnation reveals the paradox of humans”.²³⁵ The conclusion is very clear: “the only nature

²³¹ *Ibidem*, 17.

²³² C. CUNNINGHAM, *Natura Pura, the Invention of the Anti-Christ: A Week With No Sabbath*, «Comunio» (English edition) 37 (2010) 243–254.

²³³ “There can only be one life, and life is God” (*ibidem*, 253).

²³⁴ *Ibidem*, 250. The internal quotation corresponds to L. DUPRÉ, *Passage to Modernity*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1993, 171.

²³⁵ CUNNINGHAM, *Natura pura*, 252. “Only through the Incarnation and Passion are ‘good’ and ‘evil’ truly known, for as we know already, there God suffered in the Incarnate Son and therefore, Christ alone is Adam” (*ibidem*, 253).

that is pure is that of Christ, but as he is our beginning and end, this purity is offered to us, being so as our natural end".²³⁶

Outside the area of *Radical Orthodoxy*, we now turn to the reformed theologian Hans Boersma, who agrees with de Lubac's criticism of the system of pure nature and his thesis on the rise of secularism as the result of the radical separation between the supernatural and natural orders, caused by theologians such as Cajetan and Suárez. Boersma, like de Lubac, is principally concerned with the radical autonomy given to the natural order, "in which human beings could attain their own natural ends quite apart from divine intervention".²³⁷ He argues that the result was that "the realm of nature became a realm in which human beings had no need for God".²³⁸ While Boersma accepts a certain affirmation of the created order, he argues that these areas of human endeavour do not have their own natural *telos* and cannot "be viewed apart from the supernatural redemptive purposes of the eternal vision of God".²³⁹

Besides sixteenth century Thomism, Boersma sees the roots of the modern independence of natural order in Scotus' affirmation of the univocity of being, which replaced the Thomist analogy and the participatory ontology that was characteristic of the Christian alliance with Platonism. Boersma shares Radical Orthodoxy's criticism of the *Doctor subtilis*, according to which, "what Scotus does is to make the created order independent from God".²⁴⁰ He prefers what he calls the Christologically based analogical approach of Irenaeus, where "the imperfection of creation highlights the incarnation as the model of Adamic growth towards perfection. The Word of God is not just the climax but also the template for the creation of humanity".²⁴¹

In this way he tries to avoid a temptation that he calls, borrowing the term from K. Barth, 'accommodation'. "As evangelicals we may be particularly tempted to confuse an affirmation of the created order with accommodation to an immanent culture. We may not talk about 'pure nature', but whenever we neglect

²³⁶ *Ibidem*, 254. In the same line of thought, from a Catholic scholar, cfr. C. SMITH GILSON, *The Political Dialogue of Nature and Grace. Toward a Phenomenology of Chaste Anarchism*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York - London 2015. In this very peculiar book, the author manifests her rejection of the notion of pure nature, that "can only be considered a faithful expression of St. Thomas when a narrow view of his work is defended" (*ibidem*, xvii). Although interesting critical remarks can be found in her exposition, nevertheless, her discussion on the arguments of Feingold and Long is very limited and seems to have misunderstood some important points (see, for example, *ibidem*, 26-29).

²³⁷ H. BOERSMA, *Accommodation to What? Univocity of Being, Pure Nature, and the Anthropology of St Irenaeus*, «International Journal of Systematic Theology» 8 (2006) 266-293, here 285. Cfr. also, from the same author, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009.

²³⁸ *Idem*, *Accommodation*, 285.

²³⁹ *Ibidem*, 286.

²⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 275.

²⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 279.

to ask the culturally relevant question, ‘Accommodation to what?’ we fall into the same trap of allowing the immanent ends of our culture to set the agenda”.²⁴²

c) David Grumett

We conclude this section with the noteworthy study of David Grumett, who argues (in line with some other authors, as we will see later) that de Lubac is an Augustinian theologian.²⁴³ This would be the proper perspective with which to accurately approach his thought. Grumett documents how de Lubac was interested in Augustine from the beginning of his academic career. This would explain, among other things, why the principal focus of de Lubac’s works on the supernatural concerned the wrong interpretations of Augustinian thought in Baius and Janse-
nius. “The primary theological inspiration for de Lubac’s theology of grace and nature was neither Thomism nor secularism, but Augustinianism”.²⁴⁴

It is precisely this Augustinian framework the only real context within which de Lubac admits the notion of pure nature. Grumett claims that in his later works, de Lubac, while recognizing a certain usefulness of such a concept, denounces what he considers the error of developing “pure nature as a theory”, for this implies “to separate the discussion of pure nature from its primary scriptural context of the prelapsarian state of Adam. This had the effect of removing the idea of pure nature from the Christian narrative of creation, fall, and redemption, in which the person of Adam was central, and relocating it into a realm of purportedly objective metaphysical theory”.²⁴⁵ Grumett states in a simple and brief way the real Augustinian approach to the theory of pure nature. “For a creature to believe that it is self-sufficient is for it to turn away from God, from whom it receives its perfections, and to descend into the nothingness of evil. To assert such self-sufficiency is effectively to deny that the world was created by God out of nothing”.²⁴⁶

According to Grumett it is evident that de Lubac perceived “an essential difference but not a contradiction” between Thomas and Augustine on topics related to pure nature. “In general terms, de Lubac recognizes that Thomas and Augustine adopt distinct theological methodologies. The ‘most usual difference’ between them is that, whereas Thomas ‘frequently begins by considering human nature as such in the abstract, independent of sin and its consequences,’ Augustine ‘takes as his starting point the experience of sinful man’ ”.²⁴⁷ Grumett then

²⁴² *Ibidem*, 286.

²⁴³ D. GRUMETT, *De Lubac, Grace, and the Pure Nature Debate*, «Modern Theology» 31 (2015/1) 123-146. He had also published some years earlier his introductory study *De Lubac: A Guide for the Perplexed*, T&T Clark, London 2007. See especially, in relation to this question, chapter 1, entitled “God and nature” (7-24).

²⁴⁴ *Idem*, *De Lubac, Grace*, 138.

²⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 131.

²⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 144.

²⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 133. The internal quotations come from DE LUBAC, *A Brief Catechesis*, 122.

identifies in de Lubac's approach the verification of "clear divergences between Augustine and Thomas on topics of central relevance to the doctrines of grace and nature", showing how "the systematic exposition that Thomas adopted in many works discouraged him from considering pure nature in the narrative Adamic context that was fundamental for both Augustine and de Lubac".²⁴⁸

Grumett also makes some observations regarding Feingold's criticism of de Lubac. "His dispute with de Lubac is not primarily about the greatness or otherwise of the end for which humanity is destined. Rather, their contestation concerns the relative power of reason and grace, and of human initiative and divine action. For Feingold, the human desire for the vision of God must be founded on knowledge, and self-transcendence by nature is possible through elicited desire. De Lubac's contrary Augustinian exaltation of grace calls into serious question his critics' confidence in reason".²⁴⁹ We could read in this a simple confirmation of the fact that Feingold is a Thomist, while de Lubac is an Augustinian. In fact, Grumett recognizes that both "embrace a high theological anthropology, although they disagree on whether this is best promoted by establishing grace and nature in distinct orders or by encompassing the two within a single order", although he criticizes as not acceptable "Feingold's provocative suggestion that de Lubac retained, unwittingly or otherwise, a Jansenist doctrine of original grace".²⁵⁰

However, in our view, the most interesting point comes later, when Grumett addresses some criticisms made by de Lubac's admirers, who suggest that the French Jesuit in the end accepted the inadequacy of the categories of grace and nature (O'Sullivan), or at least that he preferred an increasing Christological perspective (Vanneste). "The categories of grace and nature cannot, however, be effaced [...]; to dissolve these categories into a Christology that itself failed to address Christ's divine and human natures, and their interrelation, would constitute a retrogressive step rather than one of progress".²⁵¹ These categories are necessary so as to articulate theologically the fundamental parallelism between Adam and Christ. "In de Lubac's sophisticated theological anthropology Adam is the mediator between humankind, which was born from him, and Christ, who as the second Adam overcame the effects of the sin of the first Adam. The importance that de Lubac attaches to Adam as the mediator between humans and Christ provides a welcome corrective to a current tendency to instrumentalize

²⁴⁸ GRUMETT, *De Lubac, Grace*, 137. One wonders whether Grumett, trying to focus on the Augustinian roots of de Lubac's theology, has correctly described the broad context of Aquinas' thought on nature and grace, as expounded, for example, in the study of Torrell, that he himself refers to in a footnote. As Torrell shows, Aquinas' notion of human nature is always situated from the point of view of the history of salvation, and this does not impede him (perhaps we could say, precisely for this reason) to think about human nature in itself.

²⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 140.

²⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

²⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 145.

Christ as the mediator between humankind and God. For de Lubac, in contrast, Adam is, for humans, a graced exemplum, an origin, and a nature, who, being such, surpasses both purely natural anthropology and purely transcendent metaphysics”.²⁵²

2. Support for Feingold's thesis

a) Guy Mansini

Guy Mansini agrees with Feingold's analysis of de Lubac's thesis, especially with regard to the gratuity of grace. He poses the question: “If the desire for the vision of God is natural, in the sense of innate, and absolute, how is grace not compromised in its character precisely as what is not owed to us?”²⁵³ Mansini does not believe that de Lubac's solution adequately defends the gratuity of grace, for if man cannot be what he is without this innate desire, if he “cannot be placed in being without this, then it becomes unthinkable that God will frustrate it [...] [and] in that case, how can I experience grace as a gift?”²⁵⁴ Mansini also believes that Feingold successfully rebuts de Lubac's interpretation of St. Thomas on man's natural desire for God.²⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Mansini draws attention to the presence of this double gratuity in the Scriptures, particularly in the theology of election, as experienced by Israel in the Old Testament and reflected on by St. Paul.²⁵⁶

Despite this, Mansini is greatly appreciative of de Lubac's contribution to theology. He believes that de Lubac has assisted the Church to come “to a better —because more traditional— mind on the unity of nature and grace in the single plan of God”, yet he also underlines that “the path to this good destination included historical error, as in the interpretation of St. Thomas, and theological confusion, as in the relation of such things as innate desire and gratuity”.²⁵⁷

Mansini himself provides an interesting proposal, in distinguishing between person and nature: “I think it true to say that we are not who we are without the ordination to God, without the grace he has offered, without the promise of vision. Who we are is something dramatically constituted; it is something we become according as we are related to other persons, make moral decisions, and especially, according as we are engaged with the God revealed to us by Christ, whose Spirit dwells in our hearts. But what we are – that is another question.

²⁵² *Ibidem*, 146.

²⁵³ G. MANSINI, *The Abiding Significance of Henri de Lubac's Surnaturel*, «The Thomist» 73 (2009) 593-619, here 603.

²⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 606.

²⁵⁵ Cfr. *ibidem*, 607.

²⁵⁶ Cfr. IDEM, *Henri de Lubac, the Natural Desire to See God, and Pure Nature*, «Gregorianum» 83 (2002) 89-109, here 107-109. For his criticisms on Lonergan and Rahner cfr. IDEM, *Lonergan on the Natural Desire in the Light of Feingold*, «Nova et Vetera» 5 (2007) 185-198; IDEM, *Experiential Expressivism and Two Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians*, «Nova et Vetera» 8 (2010) 125-141.

²⁵⁷ IDEM, *The Abiding Significance*, 618.

What we are can be the same, indeed, is the same, whether we are called to grace and glory or not. Sharing in the divine nature does not give us another nature. Deification does not make us no longer men”.²⁵⁸ His distinction between ‘who’ (person) and ‘what’ (nature) we are is a suggestive proposal that may be of more use than Henri de Lubac’s recourse to ‘concrete nature’.

b) Reinhard Hütter

Reinhard Hütter, like Feingold, also performs an exegetical study of the (seemingly contradictory) texts of St. Thomas and attempts to come to a unifying vision regarding the natural desire for the vision of God.²⁵⁹ In his study, he makes great use of the view of Marie-Joseph Le Guillou, and believes that Le Guillou’s response to de Lubac accurately reflects St. Thomas’s thinking.²⁶⁰ Hütter concludes that St. Thomas does not teach that there is an innate, unconditional natural desire in man for the supernatural.²⁶¹ Instead, in the economy of salvation, man’s natural desire is transformed into this “unconditional desire of the infused virtue of hope” to see God.²⁶²

As we have seen, de Lubac argues that human nature is “*capax Dei*, is ontologically oriented towards the beatific vision”.²⁶³ Le Guillou, and Hütter, agree that man has an opening in the heart of the nature of his intellect, which has been created in the image of God.²⁶⁴ However, Le Guillou differs to de Lubac because he believes that “the gratuitous transcendence of the ultimate end requires the relative but proper integrity of a nature, including its proportionate finality, that is intrinsically open and waiting for such an elevation”.²⁶⁵ Thus, the fact that man has only one created ultimate end does not exclude a distinction “between two orders of finality”.²⁶⁶

This distinction is necessary so as “to develop a coherent account of the relative and limited integrity of the principle of nature, which preserves the proper

²⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 606-607.

²⁵⁹ R. HÜTTER, *Aquinas on the natural desire for the vision of God: A relecture of Summa Contra Gentiles III, c. 25 après Henri de Lubac*, «The Thomist» 73 (2009) 523-591.

²⁶⁰ LE GUILLOU, *Surnaturel*, 226-243.

²⁶¹ Hütter also outlines this conclusion in another article, in which he says de Lubac is mistaken when he argues that later commentators distorted St. Thomas’s true teaching. Cfr. R. 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*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 5 (2007/1) 81-132. Both articles have been later collected as chapters 5 and 6 in IDEM, *Dust bound for Heaven. Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (MI) 2012, 129-246.

²⁶² Cfr. IDEM, *Aquinas*, 591.

²⁶³ *Ibidem*, 588.

²⁶⁴ Cfr. *ibidem*.

²⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 588.

²⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 588.

gratuity of the first gift, the *donum primum*, and hence does justice to the ineluctable double gratuity entailed in the economy of salvation”.²⁶⁷

c) Harm Goris

In the Book Symposium published by «Nova et Vetera» on Feingold’s work, Harm Goris outlines a number of reasons why he supports Feingold’s analysis.²⁶⁸ According to him, “the concept of a pure nature remains very useful and maybe even indispensable for articulating the gratuity of the gift of grace we have received, but it remains a concept that is abstracted from the ontologically prior concrete human being in the state of grace or of sin”.²⁶⁹ Goris continues arguing that, if God wants to elevate free creatures to participate in the uncreated life of the Three Persons, He ‘has to’ endow them with their own nature. “It is logically impossible for God to create intelligent beings that by nature would share the divine life”.²⁷⁰ If it is possible to describe human nature without grace, we have to admit that grace can be described only in reference to nature. There is a metaphysical reason why a definition of grace implies a relation to nature: “Sanctification is not a creation *de novo*; it is a transformation of an existing subject”.²⁷¹

Goris also makes an important observation about Aquinas’s theological language on ‘happiness’ – ‘perfect happiness,’ ‘truth’ – ‘First Truth,’ ‘good’ – ‘Highest Good’, observing that they are not cases of univocal or equivocal use of identical terms, but have to be interpreted in accordance with Aquinas’s general theological framework of analogy. So, “interpreting the relation between nature and grace with the help of the doctrine of the analogy of divine names offers a way to allow for a certain similarity, continuation, or intrinsic relation between nature and supernatural grace, while at the same time maintaining a radical dissimilarity and discontinuity between the two. Grace perfects our nature, our natural desire for truth and goodness, but in a way we could never have imagined. Grace transforms our natural life into a participation in the divine life, our desire for truth into a desire for the First Truth, our desire for the good into desire for the Highest Good, our desire for happiness into the desire for perfect happiness. That is a radical transformation, a regeneration, a recreation into ‘what no eye has seen and no ear has heard’ ”.²⁷²

²⁶⁷ IDEM, *Desiderium Naturale*, 131.

²⁶⁸ H. GORIS, *Steering Clear of Charybdis: Some Directions for Avoiding Grace Extrinsicism in Aquinas*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, (2007/1) 67-80.

²⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 74.

²⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, 75.

²⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁷² *Ibidem*, 79.

d) Christopher Malloy

In an extensive article Malloy has severely criticized de Lubac in the light of Feingold and Long, with references to some other authors involved in the debate.²⁷³ His conclusion is clear: “whereas the hypothesis of pure nature presents difficulties, de Lubac’s thesis presents absurdities”.²⁷⁴

Malloy argues from the beginning that de Lubac’s insistence that no created spirit can be adequately satisfied with a proportionate end is in tension with his explicit admission, several times stated, of the legitimacy of the *hypothesis* of a purely natural state. So “there is ‘a fundamental ambiguity’ in de Lubac’s corpus with respect to the relation between the natural desire and human nature. The relation is characterized in more than one way. At times, as indicated above, the desire is identified with the finality of *this* human nature or even with human nature itself. At other times, *this* human nature is distinguished from the desire that God impresses upon it”.²⁷⁵

This leads to the criticism according to which de Lubac and his followers (Malloy quotes here Braine and Healy) fail to identify the specific gratuity of grace, and at the same time, lose the intelligibility of the natural order. In the first place, Malloy considers de Lubac’s attempt to defend the gratuity of grace, namely, his appeal to our desire to receive the gift *as* something gratuitous and unexpected. Here he quotes Mansini’s objection “that to desire something with a ‘precise *qua*, [a] specifying *as*’ is to have a consciously molded desire. Such a desire could not be innate; it would have to be elicited; thus, it need not be unconditional. If Mansini’s argument holds, it cuts off the effectiveness of this final appeal”.²⁷⁶

Secondly, Malloy denounces the weakness of de Lubac’s notion of human nature. “*To say, then, that there is an innate natural inclination to an end surpassing both the resources within the natural order and the divine providential solicitude formally pertinent thereto is to say that God, as author of nature, creates to no end, that he instills a motion that has no aim*”.²⁷⁷ In other words, following the lines of

²⁷³ C.J. MALLOY, *De Lubac on Natural Desire: Difficulties and Antitheses*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 9 (2011/3) 567–624.

²⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 623.

²⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 580–581. Malloy refers to Braine’s invitation (whose own contribution will be later analysed) to read de Lubac not as speaking with philosophical precision, but as presenting us with human *persons* in this concrete order of divine wisdom. This is especially obvious when considering the opposition which de Lubac creates between a concrete human nature as opposed to an abstract one. “De Lubac’s contention that we would be dealing with two essentially different men, and thus two persons, is not consonant with Thomas’s thought. More importantly, ‘nature’ of its nature is a universal, applicable to many; thus, its very character is ‘abstract’ although the essential principle in a man is concrete. So, to disparage as ‘abstract’ someone’s notion of nature is to disparage the very category ‘nature’. On this, see FEINGOLD, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 335f. Of course, if a man in the state of pure nature is of a different essence than I, then Pius XII’s teaching is as pointless a defence of gratuity as de Lubac claims the hypothesis of pure nature to be” (MALLOY, *De Lubac*, 598, note 134).

²⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 604.

²⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 603. Italics in the original.

Long's contribution to the debate, here the theonomic dimension of nature itself is lost. "De Lubac considers that were man not to have an absolute and inefficacious desire for the supernatural, he would not be radically dependent upon God. But on the contrary, neither Thomas nor reliable defenders of the theory of 'pure nature' leave space for autonomous self-actuation [...]. Man can do nothing 'without the divine help.' This divine help is not the *auxilium* of entitatively supernatural grace; it is the natural providential help, requisite in the natural order, just as the *auxilium* of grace is uniquely requisite in the supernatural order".²⁷⁸

In conclusion, Malloy notes that "de Lubac bade his readers abandon the then-regnant hypothesis of pure nature since, as he perceived, no purely natural order could be 'theonomic' [...]. Did he *presuppose* as non-theonomous and autonomous what 'pure human nature' with a natural finality would be?"²⁷⁹

e) Christopher Seiler

In clear contrast with Cunningham, Seiler has published a brief paper in which he holds the importance of the notion of pure nature for the new evangelization.²⁸⁰ Along the lines of Feingold and Long, and quoting the contribution of Le Guillou to this debate, Seiler states from the beginning his thesis: "Human nature – I argue – can be, and by Aquinas is, understood in abstraction from the call to supernatural beatitude, and in fact such a 'pure' concept of nature is actually necessary for theological knowledge of the first Adam, the second Adam, and all those who come in between".²⁸¹

While Saint Thomas believes that man was created in grace, he does not exclude the possibility that it could have been otherwise. He states explicitly, following a common tradition, that man (and angels) could have been created *in pura naturalia*. "We could even say that this *natura humana* is in a certain sense *natura pura* – nature without reference to grace or sin – just nature, pure and simple. These principles and powers remain the same throughout the various states of historical realization in which man has existed. What changed was the manner in which these powers were able to operate".²⁸² The reasons for sustaining this notion are summarised by Seiler: "Such a concept is necessary for a coherent explanation of how it is that Adam, Christ, and you are related. Unless there is a concept of nature with a density of its own there is simply no way to

²⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 611. Malloy then asks: "does not de Lubac presuppose the irrelevance of grace to a man in a purely natural state when he describes such a one as not being dynamically open to God?" (*ibidem*, 612). And notes how "de Lubac at times describes the natural end, as conceived in this hypothesis, as though it were thought to be equally alternative to the supernatural (see *Surnaturel*, 453). At other times, he admits the legitimacy of holding two ends, one subordinated to the other (see *ibid*, 452), yet he describes the subordinated one as not theo-centric" (MALLOY, *De Lubac*, 612, note 189).

²⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 619.

²⁸⁰ C. SEILER, *Natura Pura: A Concept for the New Evangelization*, «Theological Research» 2 (2014) 53–65.

²⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 54.

²⁸² *Ibidem*, 62.

explain how it is that the fall, or the incarnation, or the infusion of sanctifying grace does not cause a substantial change. If it were true that we could not consider human nature in the abstract, then when Adam sinned he would have no longer remained a man, and when one is baptized he would change into something of a different species from what he was before. Denying such a concept of 'pure' nature leads one into the fallacy of 'concrete nature' [...]. Without a robust *philosophical* concept of human nature the Christian faith falls into incoherence. How can one explain the Nicene Creed, which claims that the second person of the Holy Trinity took on human nature in Jesus Christ, if such a thing as 'human nature' does not really exist?"²⁸³

f) Thomas Joseph White

In a similar vein, we now present three contributions to the debate by Thomas Joseph White.²⁸⁴ The first, in clear contrast with Cunningham's approach, develops what he calls the 'pure nature of Christology'. The point is well expressed at the beginning of the article: "To conceive of Christ as truly and perfectly human by contrast and comparison with ourselves requires a mediating concept of pure nature. Without such a concept we cannot rightly articulate why Christ is the fulfillment of what it means to be human".²⁸⁵ White tries to re-present Aquinas' conception of the different states in which human nature has existed, to show how the true Thomistic tradition never argued that pure nature in fact existed. In this sense, White points to the *status naturae integrae*, which was not subject to the deficits of the later notion of pure nature "*precisely because grace was not unrelated to but intimately present and active within its original constitution*. As Jean-Pierre Torrell has recently noted (and as Garrigou-Lagrange accurately comments on *Summa theologiae* I, q. 97, aa. 1 and 3) the notion of a nature that is 'integral' is understood by Aquinas as *ontologically distinct and intellectually distinguishable* from the graces of that same nature, even as the aforementioned integrity is possible only in a state of original justice, and therefore as a reality *ontologically inseparable* from the participation in divine life. Therefore Aquinas insists that one can analyze 'what' human nature could do by its own natural powers (*per pura naturalia* or *in puris naturalibus*) in the state of original inno-

²⁸³ *Ibidem*, 63. Seiler refers to Le Guillou: "As Le Guillou says so well: 'Pure nature is not a nature that would be totally strange to us, as it seems P. de Lubac thinks: it designates in our world the proper structure of the created spirit'" (*ibidem*).

²⁸⁴ T.J. WHITE, *The Pure Nature of Christology: Human Nature and Gaudium et spes* 22, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 8 (2010/2) 283-322; *Good Extrinsicism: Matthias Scheeben and the Ideal Paradigm of Nature-Grace Orthodoxy*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 11 (2013/2) 537-563; *Imperfect Happiness and the Final End of Man: Thomas Aquinas and the Paradigm of Nature-Grace Orthodoxy*, «The Thomist» 78 (2014/2) 247-289. The first article mentioned has been adapted and published as chapter 2 of IDEM, *The Incarnate Lord. A Thomistic Study in Christology*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 2015, 126-170; this monograph is conceived as a 'Biblical Ontology of Christ', that is, an attempt to reconcile Christology and metaphysics.

²⁸⁵ WHITE, *The Pure Nature*, 287.

cence as distinguishable from what could be done only under the inspiration and agency of grace. This is not an artificial ‘abstraction’ but rather a profound form of insight into the natural structure of the graced human being”.²⁸⁶

If we deny the idea of the different states of human nature in history, “we would be obliged to abolish all distinction of nature and grace, thus seeing our human historical condition as *necessarily bound up with Christ* such that human salvation in Christ simply would be co-extensive with our ‘natural’ existence (a not-so-subtle version of *apokatastasis panton*). Nature in separation from Christ would be literally inconceivable”.²⁸⁷ We would come to the curious consequence that, “if there is not metaphysically perennial, essential knowledge of the human person and its nature, then the message of Christ as the historical fulfillment of human existence is a message *purely extrinsic* to human culture”.²⁸⁸ Then, “a notion of ‘pure nature’ (of nature possibly existing as neither originally graced nor as fallen) is the logical corollary of any claim that human nature was originally graced, is indeed in a fallen state, and has been redeemed by Christ, in whom human nature has attained (by grace) an acutely particular perfection, even while Christ is truly human like us”.²⁸⁹ Concluding his study in the light of the famous paragraph 22 of *Gaudium et spes*, White states that “a Christological accomplishment of all human history presupposes not only the use of a universal concept of the human and its applicability to both Christ and to all other men. It also requires in turn the implicit acceptance of the real ontological possibility of a state of pure nature, even if this state has never concretely existed”.²⁹⁰

In a second piece published by White we find an analysis of contemporary authors intervening in the nature-grace debate. He identifies in the theologies of Barth and de Lubac, respectively, two legitimate exigencies, and at the same time, two extreme paradigms of thought about nature and grace: Barth, a sustainer of extrinsicism, worries about the reduction of Christian Revelation to human categories, and attempts to highlight the transcendence of Christ’s message. De Lubac, on the other hand, defends intrinsicism, because he worries about anthropological pessimism. He therefore highlights the continuity of grace with respect to human nature, grace being its perfect completion.²⁹¹ Faced with these alternative positions, White proposes a ‘MacIntyrean’ kind of thesis with regard to Scheeben,²⁹² as he is convinced of the fact that the nineteenth century German theologian offers a more comprehensive thesis on the grace-nature paradigm than either Barth or de Lubac, taking into account many of the critical concerns of each, without the respective deficits of the other. After examining some texts, White offers a synthesis: “Schee-

²⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, 294-295.

²⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 298.

²⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 307.

²⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 309.

²⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 320.

²⁹¹ IDEM, *Good Extrinsicism*, 537-546.

²⁹² *Ibidem*, 547-555.

ben attempts to articulate (1) what we might call a ‘good intrinsicism’ that shows the ontological harmony or compatibility between human nature’s innate spiritual ends and the proposed work of revelation and grace in us, and simultaneously, (2) a ‘good extrinsicism’ that emphasizes the radical gratuity and transcendence of the order of grace to that of nature. In *both* these respects, Scheeben differs (profitably in my opinion) from *both* Barth and de Lubac”.²⁹³

White is interested in the question of the purely natural end of man, which, in contrast to de Lubac, Scheeben considers necessary to maintain. This is because in his view, “the natural and supernatural ends of man are not on a par”, but “are hierarchically subordinated such that grace can elevate the inclinations of nature without doing any violence to it. [...] Rather, human nature, because of its spiritual life, is intrinsically open *potentially* to being *elevated* freely by God into the life of grace, in view of the beatific vision”.²⁹⁴

In the third article mentioned, White addresses his attention to Aquinas’ texts on the final end of human nature, together with the question of the natural desire for God. Here his general agreement with Feingold’s and Long’s analysis is evident. The main point White wants to make clear is that Aquinas’ affirmation of a natural desire to see God is not an assertion of an innate inclination to grace, for it transcends any proportion to human nature. “Two affirmations are being underscored by Aquinas that are in no way incompatible: (1) The human soul has a natural desire to see God immediately, one that is even philosophically demonstrable; and (2) the human soul is in no way naturally inclined to the supernatural object of faith as such”.²⁹⁵

White makes here an interesting distinction between inclinations and desires in Aquinas’ language. While inclinations remain proportionate to nature, our desires “can attain to those realities that we cannot procure by our own power. It is in this sense that we can understand Aquinas’s clear affirmation that there is inscribed in the human intellect an innate desire to see God. The desire to see God is an expression of our deepest human inclination to know the truth about the first cause, and at the same time, this desire clearly reaches out beyond that which it is in our proportionate power to accomplish or achieve”.²⁹⁶

White recognises that the terminology of ‘elicited desire’, strongly defended by Feingold, “is not present in Aquinas’s texts and it does evolve within the con-

²⁹³ *Ibidem*, 555. White later explains that “one could say that the early Barth maintains a radical equivocity (alien otherness) of grace to nature while de Lubac’s *Surnaturel* risks tending toward a univocal identification of the two (in the realm of final if not formal causality). Scheeben, meanwhile, maintains an analogy” (*ibidem*, 560).

²⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, 559.

²⁹⁵ *IDEM*, *Imperfect Happiness*, 282. In a note on the previous page, White denies the idea of a ‘natural desire for the supernatural’ in Aquinas: “it is simply natural for the human intellect to desire to see God immediately. This natural desire is not identical to a proportionate inclination to the formally supernatural as such. It is this last point that de Lubac’s defenders typically fail to see” (*ibidem*, 281, note 69).

²⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 282.

text of subsequent disputes between Thomists and Scotists” and accepts that this terminology may be disputed. “Nevertheless, what is noteworthy is that Aquinas does think that there is a rational basis for arguing philosophically that the human intellect desires naturally to see God immediately”.²⁹⁷

In this way, White shows how Aquinas held the existence of a human natural end together with a natural desire to see God. What is inscribed in our nature is “a natural openness to the possibility of the supernatural”, and for this reason “our natural end is not indicative of any natural inclination toward the supernatural as such. Grace remains entirely transcendent of our natural powers, innate inclinations and proportionate ends”.²⁹⁸

White comes back then to the opposite paradigms of Barth and de Lubac, and summarizes what a Thomistic point of view suggests to each of them. “Against Barth and with de Lubac, there exists a natural point of contact in us such that grace is not alien to human nature and can lead human nature without violence through the ascent upward into the supernatural life of God. [...] Against de Lubac and with Barth, grace is something wholly transcendent of our human nature to which ordinary human reasoning and willing are not innately and naturally inclined or proportioned. One might say, instead, that there is an analogy between the natural end (which implies the desire to see God immediately) and the formal object of revelation (which elicits theological hope in the vision of the Holy Trinity) without an identification of the two”.²⁹⁹ Instead of collapsing the natural and supernatural orders into one another, or not distinguishing them adequately, “an Aristotelian philosophical realism regarding the imperfection of human natural capacities for happiness redounds to a deepened Augustinian sense of the sheer gratuity of grace and supernatural beatitude, a life beyond what any human eye has seen, ear has heard, or heart imagined”.³⁰⁰

3. *Alternative positions*

a) David Braine

David Braine is receptive to the exegetical work done by Feingold, but he adds that “the principal regret I would have about Feingold’s distinguished work is he did not look beyond the logical defects of de Lubac’s presentation, including his evidently irregular use of the term ‘nature,’ to what he intended to convey”.³⁰¹

²⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, 284.

²⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, 286.

²⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, 288-289.

³⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, 289.

³⁰¹ D. BRAINE, *The Debate Between Henri de Lubac and His Critics*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 6 (2008) 543-590, here 544.

Braine argues that de Lubac's fundamental thesis regarding man's supernatural finality was correct. He believes that, with his thesis, de Lubac was able to fight against extrinsicism, where grace is conceived as something needed only so as to attain an end higher than man's natural beatitude.³⁰² Braine does not see the underlying thesis as problematic; the issue is rather de Lubac's use of the term 'nature'.

As we have seen, de Lubac is primarily concerned with man as he is found concretely, "according to the order of providence in which the whole of creation is actually set, the plan actually chosen by God and operative in religion as it actually is". For this reason, man's supernatural finality, says Braine, "is something to be ascribed to each human *person* as such, and not to his *nature* as a human being, because it is a real attribute of the person but existing in the person only in virtue of a relation".³⁰³ According to Braine, de Lubac erred by using the term 'nature', whereas his reasoning in fact refers to the person. The supernatural finality does not change 'nature' understood in an Aristotelian sense; instead, it is given to persons in virtue of a relation.³⁰⁴

Braine says that 'nature' can therefore be understood in two senses. The first "refers to what is natural according to the whole order of the universe in the actual order of providence, that is, the order according to which God created it", while the second "refers to what is natural in the sense of what belongs to particular species of individuals within such order, which is how philosophers mainly use the word".³⁰⁵

Thus, Braine believes the confusion to stem from this misuse of the term 'nature' by de Lubac³⁰⁶. And he therefore argues that de Lubac's underlying thesis does not imply that grace is demanded by nature ('nature' understood in the sense in which Feingold uses it³⁰⁷).

Interestingly, while Braine argues that de Lubac's interpretation of the natural desire in St. Thomas is mistaken,³⁰⁸ he does believe that de Lubac is more in line with St. Thomas's general view of man. For he says that St. Thomas's real concern, like de Lubac, was with man "as he exists in the actual order of providence instituted by God, and not with generalizations about other conceivable but non-existent orders of providence".³⁰⁹

³⁰² Cfr. *ibidem*, 571.

³⁰³ *Ibidem*, 570.

³⁰⁴ Cfr. *ibidem*, 552.

³⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, 564.

³⁰⁶ Cfr. *ibidem*, 567.

³⁰⁷ Cfr. *ibidem*, 584.

³⁰⁸ Cfr. *ibidem*, 568.

³⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, 580-581.

b) Sean Larsen

Larsen makes a contribution to the debate in a vein similar to that of Braine.³¹⁰ He identifies the two most extended readings of de Lubac in Hütter's and Milbank's works. While the first one is representative of the 'static metaphysics of the pure nature', the second is the attempt of replacing it with a static metaphysics of 'the suspended middle'. Both readings presuppose the fact that de Lubac is trying to answer a 'what' question: 'What does grace presuppose?' This is the reason why, on the one hand, de Lubac is considered "theologically unconvincing or incoherent", and, on the other hand, "conceptually pernicious or irrelevant".³¹¹

According to Larsen, Braine has made clear a crucial point: both sides think that de Lubac is answering a metaphysical question, yet there are good reasons to think that he in fact does not do so. Braine convincingly suggests taking 'nature' in a non-technical sense so that it means something more like 'personal identity' or 'person.' "What if de Lubac was not making a material claim about human nature, but rather was suggesting that the way in which God loves the world shows something about how we are constituted relationally? [...]. The best way to appropriate de Lubac theologically, following Braine, is to allow a less metaphysically inclined de Lubac to emerge. [...] Braine's de Lubac is answering a 'who' question rather than a 'what' question".³¹² In other words, we are suggested to consider de Lubac as an Augustinian theologian.³¹³

c) Christopher Cullen

After examining the recent principal works on this debate, Cullen also focuses on the significance of the term 'nature' and provides an interesting explanation of its place in the discussion, that "ultimately results from the explosive force of the concept of 'nature' as it comes to the Latin West from its original provenance in ancient Greek philosophy".³¹⁴

Cullen also explains that this debate is important for the understanding of secondary causality. The concept of nature and its own causality is important to explain divine causality in the world, and to oppose occasionalism (all is divine causality) and naturalism (divine causality simply conserves the whole).³¹⁵

³¹⁰ S. LARSEN, *The Politics of Desire: Two Readings of Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace*, «Modern Theology» 29 (2013/3) 279–310.

³¹¹ *Ibidem*, 309.

³¹² *Ibidem*, 310.

³¹³ "I have tried to provide a prolegomena for a constructive reading of de Lubac as neither a Janzenist, nor a Thomist, nor a radical Bulgakovian Origenist neoplatonist, but rather as an Augustinian" (*ibidem*). In a note he specifies that "supporting this view is the way Augustine uses the term 'nature' to describe something like what Hütter means by 'state' and by what Braine may mean by 'person.'" (*ibidem*, note 103).

³¹⁴ C. CULLEN, *The Natural Desire for God and Pure Nature: A Debate Renewed*, «American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly» 86 (2012) 705–730, here 722.

³¹⁵ Cfr. *ibidem*.

According to Cullen, de Lubac's position is at odds with metaphysical realism, for the denial of "a proportionate end for a nature or essence involves rejecting the teleology deeply embedded in metaphysical realism and hylomorphism, especially that of Aristotle".³¹⁶ In fact, Cullen says that de Lubac's thesis that man is "ontologically constituted, in the very structure of his soul, for a supernatural end" leads to a "re-configuration of nature and its distinction from grace".³¹⁷

Cullen believes that Aristotle's description of connatural happiness involves a certain degree of transcendence, and that it depends on a vision of nature that is open to transcendence and to God.³¹⁸ He believes that these transcendently oriented views of nature by philosophers such as Aristotle "seem to avoid the immanentist secularism that de Lubac so fears, while also preserving the integrity and intelligibility of nature".³¹⁹ Cullen argues that St. Thomas preserves this notion of connatural beatitude found within the Aristotelian vision of nature.

d) Edward Oakes

Edward Oakes has written several contributions to the debate. Although he shares some of the points made by authors like Feingold and Long, his main criticism to Feingold's thesis lies in the fact that Feingold's whole (theological) argument relies on the existence of limbo: "there can be no question that Feingold's attack on de Lubac, as well as his defense of the commentary tradition, directly entails, at least for him, the existence of limbo".³²⁰ As we have seen, Feingold states that de Lubac's thesis on a natural desire to see God is not compatible with what St. Thomas says on the absence of spiritual suffering in limbo. For if the desire to see God is innate in man, then its absence will entail suffering, which St. Thomas denies in the case of limbo. Oakes appears to think that in Feingold's argument limbo is necessary for the following reason: an elicited natural desire depends on something previously known, and for this reason can only be relevant for someone who has already reached the age of reason. An unbaptized child cannot therefore have this natural desire to see God and will necessarily end in limbo.

Oakes who had also criticized Milbank's approach,³²¹ tried to find a point of reconciliation between both sides of the debate by referring to the figure of Matthias Joseph Scheeben.³²² According to Oakes, both positions (intrinsicists and

³¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

³¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 725.

³¹⁸ Cfr. *ibidem*, 726-727.

³¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 727.

³²⁰ E.T. OAKES, *The Supernatural Controversy: A Survey and a Response*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 9 (2011/3) 625-656, here 639.

³²¹ Cfr. IDEM, *The Paradox of Nature and Grace: On John Milbank's The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 4 (2006/3) 667-696.

³²² Cfr. IDEM, *Scheeben the Reconciler: Resolving the Nature-Grace Debate*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 11 (2013/2) 435-453; and especially his last book: IDEM, *Nature and Grace*, in *A Theology of Grace in Six Controversies*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (MI) 2016, 1-46.

extrinsicists, or continuists and discontinuists) are legitimate; they find their basis in Thomas himself, who perhaps didn't realize the tension of his texts at least as the contemporary debate is presented. "But, if Scheeben is right, the two can only be reconciled if the imagery of the debate moves away from architecture and becomes nestled in the imagery of love and marriage".³²³ We have already seen a similar proposal in White, and it will be further developed in Swafford.

e) Raymond Moloney

Moloney presents and prefers Lonergan's contribution to this debate.³²⁴ The Canadian Jesuit's famous affirmation, which stated that pure nature is a concrete possibility, but a marginal theorem in the work of Aquinas, is seen as less emphatic than de Lubac's position. In fact, for Lonergan, "a purely natural order cannot be dismissed as an abstraction. The very concreteness of human questioning within our own experience underlines his conviction that notions of pure nature and of humanity's natural end retain some objective meaning and reality even within a supernatural order".³²⁵

Moloney explains how "Lonergan's distinction of vertical and horizontal finality helps to vindicate the basic thrust of de Lubac's position while doing justice to the integrity of human nature and its innate orientation toward its natural end".³²⁶ Certainly, according to Lonergan, essentialism became the dominant way of thinking in Renaissance Scholasticism, and this shows the focus of the 'pure nature' school on "the dualism of natural essences with an exigency for natural ends on the one hand, and supernatural essences with an exigency for supernatural ends on the other".³²⁷

However, at the same time, the problem with de Lubac's approach to the apparent contradiction is not only that he does not have "the way out provided by the distinction between two kinds of finality, but he also has the problems associated with his reduction of pure nature to an abstraction. In his case the line between paradox and contradiction becomes more difficult to draw. Lonergan

³²³ *Ibidem*, 44.

³²⁴ R. MOLONEY, *De Lubac and Lonergan on the Supernatural*, «Theological Studies» 69 (2008/3) 509–527. Moloney does not make any reference to Feingold's book, just to Mansini (and Ryan), who had criticized Lonergan's approach.

³²⁵ *Ibidem*, 518.

³²⁶ *Ibidem*, 519. See also N. ORMEROD, *The Grace-Nature Distinction and the Construction of a Systematic Theology*, «Theological Studies» 75 (2014/3) 515–536, especially 529–536, devoted to Lonergan. There he refers to B.J. HIMES, *Lonergan's Position on the Natural Desire to See God and Aquinas' Metaphysical Theology of Creation and Participation*, «The Heythrop Journal» 54 (2013/5) 767–783. Both quote the extensive study on Lonergan of J.M. STEBBINS, *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan*, Toronto University Press, Toronto 1995. About Lonergan on this topic, in relation with the grace-freedom question, see J.R. BROTHERTON, *The Integrity of Nature in the Grace-Freedom Dynamic: Lonergan's Critique of Bañezian Thomism*, «Theological Studies» 75/3 (2014) 537–63.

³²⁷ MOLONEY, *De Lubac*, 520.

considers him ‘mixed up’ on the point, particularly on the question of the natural desire as an exigency for the supernatural”.³²⁸

f) Rupert J. Mayer

Last but not least, we move our attention to Rupert Johannes Mayer’s study on Aquinas’ vision of this topic.³²⁹ His particularity in the English speaking debate lies in his critical view both of Lubac’s and Feingold’s analysis of Saint Thomas.

Mayer’s point of departure is Aquinas’ text from *Super Boetium de Trinitate* that serves as the title of his study: “man is inclined to his last end by nature, though he cannot reach it by nature but only by grace”.³³⁰ Although Aquinas distinguishes in other texts two last ends, or a natural happiness from a supernatural one, in any case, he says that the latter is related to nature as such: “*Non est aliquid naturae, sed naturae finis*”.³³¹ This is possible as the two ends are related as the imperfect and the perfect.

The intrinsic ordination to grace does not lead to the problem of a nature necessarily calling for grace, because Aquinas explains how in the beginning human nature was ordered to beatitude not as to an end proper to man by reason of his nature, but given him by divine liberality. Therefore, there is no need for the principles of nature to have sufficient power to achieve that end without the aid of special gifts with which God in His generosity supplements.³³² It is clear then that for Aquinas there is an ordination from nature to grace, which is insufficient, but that exists. This is the point that, according to Mayer, was lost by Cajetan, under the influence of Scotus, who exaggerated the capacity of such inclination. And so, “whereas Aquinas could say that human nature has its end in the beatific vision, but cannot reach this end by its own power, Cajetan holds that nature is not inclined to something which is beyond the whole power of nature”.³³³ For his part, de Lubac held the same principle as Aquinas (human nature having an end that it cannot reach by itself) but with a Scotistic interpretation.³³⁴

It is in this light that Mayer sees the question of the natural desire to see God, for it constitutes a real but insufficient ordering of human nature to its final end,

³²⁸ *Ibidem*, 521.

³²⁹ R.J. MAYER, *Man is inclined to his Last End by Nature, though He cannot reach it by Nature but only by Grace. The Principle of the Debate about Nature and Grace in Thomas Aquinas, Thomism and Henri de Lubac. A Response to Lawrence Feingold*, «*Angelicum*» 88 (2011) 887-939. In a previous article, Mayer had shown that de Lubac’s idea, according to which Scotus and Aquinas have the same view about the natural desire to see God is false. Mayer maintains that de Lubac and Cajetan coincide in interpreting Aquinas depending too much on Scotus’ ideas: IDEM, *Zum desiderium naturale visionis Dei nach Johannes Duns Scotus und Thomas de Vio Cajetan. Eine Anmerkung zum Denken Henri de Lubacs*, «*Angelicum*» 85 (2008) 737-763.

³³⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 6, a. 4, ad 5.

³³¹ IDEM, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a, q. 62, a. 1, co.

³³² Cfr. IDEM, *Man is inclined*, 891, where he refers to THOMAS AQUINAS, *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 10, ad 2.

³³³ MAYER, *Man is inclined*, 899-900.

³³⁴ Cfr. *ibidem*, 903.

the vision of God. In order to sustain the gratuity of grace, Mayer refers to the distinction between antecedent and consequent will of God. “The divine will to give grace to human nature or to give grace in general is a primary intention or antecedent will, not a will necessarily following upon the consideration of human nature. Natural order and gratuity do not contradict each other because nature is ordered to salvation as a possible gift of divine liberality. The natural order to salvation does not force God to give grace or salvation to every human being or to human nature because it is a conditional order to a possible gift”.³³⁵ The consideration of consequent will shows that grace is a conditional gift, as “only the supernatural virtues incline man sufficiently to the beatific vision. Hence, the natural desire to the beatific vision may exist in man as an insufficient desire for the last end, even though the human nature is not naturally proportioned to the vision of God and has no active force to attain that end”.³³⁶

This leads Mayer to criticize Feingold’s position on the natural desire. He admits that “in a certain sense the development of the Thomistic tradition which culminates in the description of the natural desire to see God as a conditional, elicited act is even justified. Knowing that the beatific vision is our unattainable end, human nature might say: I would long for the beatific vision, if I could reach it”.³³⁷ Nevertheless, Mayer affirms that this is not the natural desire to see God of which Aquinas speaks. Feingold “does not see that the desire to know is only a prolongation of the will’s desire for happiness, which is the source or natural appetite given by God from which any other desire stems, so that the natural desire for cognition of the truth is included in the natural desire for beatitude. This desire is given by God with our nature, and not only an elicited act following upon knowledge of a good [...]. Aquinas explains that the vision of God is the end of all our desires, especially of the natural desire for beatitude, and not only of the natural desire to know. But if the natural desire to know is included in the natural desire for beatitude, the distinction between apprehending God’s essence as the essence of the first cause and as the object of beatitude vanishes in a certain sense, and the whole argument centered on a natural desire to see God which is a necessarily elicited act of the will due to knowledge of some good becomes untenable”.³³⁸

The point Mayer wants to make clear is that Aquinas never distinguished between a natural appetite and a naturally elicited act in the way the later tradition understood it. In *Contra Gentes*, lib. 2, cap. 55, Aquinas explains that there is no natural appetite in intelligent substances *from the sole inclination of natural principles*.³³⁹ The inclination to the good follows upon the human form and is

³³⁵ *Ibidem*, 920-921.

³³⁶ *Ibidem*, 913, note 93.

³³⁷ *Ibidem*, 933.

³³⁸ *Ibidem*, 929-930.

³³⁹ Cfr. *ibidem*, 930.

not an elicited act of the will due to knowledge. Not only human operation, but the whole human existence is ordered to a transcendent end. According to the principle *agere sequitur esse* the desire for beatitude reveals this transcendence of the human existence.

In this sense, Mayer observes that the natural desire following upon a thing's form becomes a natural desire as elicited act because of knowledge. Then, while Suárez considers the natural desire for beatitude in general as an innate appetite limited to the end proportionate to nature, Sylvester considers the elicited act as serving to call the transcendence of the desire, and Feingold tries to affirm both.³⁴⁰

Some of the issues can be solved if we understand correctly Aquinas' notion of natural appetite. The natural desire to see God "is not an elicited act that is specified by a particular kind of beatitude, but reserved for the natural appetite that longs for beatitude in general. Aquinas calls this natural appetite a desire for the beatific vision because he realizes and proves that only the vision of God may satiate the human heart's deepest desire".³⁴¹ Consequently Mayer arrives at an important conclusion: "one should not speak about an innate appetite in the works of Aquinas. The latter terminology cannot manifest the reality described by Aquinas because it overlooks the phenomena on which his understanding is based. In this sense, the traditional Thomism deviates from Aquinas' thought".³⁴² After all, as Feingold himself admits, we do not find the distinction between innate and elicited desires in Aquinas' texts. Mayer then concludes that, though Aquinas writes about elicited acts of the will, he never thought about a naturally elicited act of the will due to knowledge of a certain object. "Aquinas would answer that we have an insufficient ordering to the beatific vision even by our nature, but we cannot sufficiently determine the desire for beatitude without the help of grace".³⁴³

The intrinsic ordination of nature to grace, expressed by the natural desire to see God (understood correctly), is perfectly compatible with the recognition of the possibility of pure nature. Aquinas' texts on this point make it clear that the concept of human nature in itself does not depend upon God's plan to give grace, and this leads Mayer to criticize de Lubac's notion of 'concrete nature', as it "signifies a nature which depends upon God's will to give grace and is known by faith alone. Hence, any philosophical consideration that abstracts from this concrete or historic nature leads to the hypothesis of a pure nature, i.e. a nature whose natural desire does not depend upon God's will to give grace. This pure nature does not exist concretely, i.e. in the world which God created and destined to the beatific vision. According to Aquinas, human nature does not depend upon

³⁴⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*, 932.

³⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 934.

³⁴² *Ibidem*, 935.

³⁴³ *Ibidem*, 936.

God's will to give grace. The spiritual nature in its will is not the image of God's decision to give grace, but the image of the divine nature or love itself. Therefore, we are able to abstract an understanding of human nature from the concrete instances of this nature here and now, by simple apprehension, without abstracting from God's will to give grace. Hence, the pure human nature can be known by us and is not an hypothesis, though the attainable and natural end would be a final end only in the order of pure nature and not in the order of grace".³⁴⁴

At the end of his study, Mayer summarizes the debate in the xx century from the accusation of extrinsicism addressed to Cajetan and the Thomistic tradition by de Lubac, to the accusation of intrinsicism addressed to de Lubac by Feingold. Mayer enters into the discussion sustaining that Feingold's conception of a natural elicited and conditional desire as a point of meeting of the natural and the supernatural orders, and as preserving the gratuity of grace, is not enough. For "an I-would-if-I-could desire is ultimately no connection to God because it would seek the apprehension of the first cause if, and only if it knew that it would be able to reach this end. Such a position hardly differs from Cajetan's idea of a pure nature which develops a natural desire for the beatific vision when it is confronted with revelation. Neither does the natural desire to see God as described by Sylvester seem to prepare nature for the beatific vision".³⁴⁵

Mayer proposes to rediscover the authentic notion of the natural desire according to Aquinas as "the origin of all the other acts of the will which determine the desire for the last end in general in regard to specific goods. We might call the natural desire the human gravity towards the last end according to a common *ratio*. If the natural desire is only an elicited act and not a natural appetite, it loses the position of a first principle of all the acts of our will".³⁴⁶ According to Mayer, if the desire for beatitude cannot be actualized at all times, it is not present by its power in every other desire. And so, he concludes, "a nature that is inclined towards supernatural beatitude in God through elicited acts and not through itself, cannot overcome the danger of an extrinsicism of grace. Such a nature is not ordered towards supernatural beatitude *as nature* or in its existence, but only in its naturally elicited acts. Hence, grace remains extrinsic to this nature as nature".³⁴⁷

³⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 907; there, in note 76, Mayer observes that, in the eyes of Healy, de Lubac does not exclude the notion of natural beatitude, but the idea of natural beatitude as final end. However, Aquinas' remark concerning a hypothetical consideration shows that he discusses natural beatitude as attainable final end of a pure nature. Further philosophical observations about the limits of the distinction between concrete and abstract nature can be found in F. INCIARTE, *Natur und Übernatur. Ihr Verhältnis zueinander nach Henri de Lubac*, «Theologie und Philosophie» 74 (1999) 70-83.

³⁴⁵ MAYER, *Man is inclined*, 937.

³⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 937.

³⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 938. A similar position can be found in G.A. JUÁREZ, *La doctrina tomasiana sobre el deseo natural de ver a Dios según Domingo María Basso, O.P.*, «Sapientia» 67 (2011) 263-271; in this article Juárez adds that part of the confusion comes from the fact that the natural desire should be considered as a desire of the intellect, and not of the will, as both the Thomist tradition and de Lubac believe (without quoting him, Juárez is close to Lonergan's position). The same author published three years earlier his doctoral thesis, directed and prologued by G. Emery: *Dios Trinidad en todas las creaturas*

VI. THREE SPECIFIC STUDIES ON PURE NATURE

1. *Steven Long: Natura pura and the recovery of nature in the doctrine of grace*

In his book,³⁴⁸ Steven Long, who follows and puts himself in continuity with Feingold's work, highlights three particular points: firstly, the proportionate natural end of man in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas; secondly, that nature is a positive concept and not merely defined by grace; and thirdly, that pure nature does not cause secularism.

a) The proportionate natural end of man

According to Long, in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas man is ordered to a proportionate natural end, which is naturally knowable. This end, he argues, is what defines the species of man. However, man has been created with an ordination to a supernatural end, which is the beatific vision; this supernatural end is man's only ultimate end and it is only in this end that man attains perfect happiness (although it does not define his species). Thus man is inclined to an end that is beyond his capacities. However, Long argues that for St. Thomas this does not exclude the existence of a proportionate natural end.³⁴⁹ Long believes that in de Lubac's view the supernatural end is converted into man's natural end, whereas Long argues that St. Thomas clearly distinguishes man's proportionate natural end from his supernatural ultimate end.

However, this does not mean that man has two distinct ends. Long explains that man has a natural desire to see God which is the desire to know Him specifically as First Cause, as Creator of the world. It is founded in the natural desire to know the cause of any effect, and is elicited by the knowledge of the existence of God through his effects. Man's natural desire to know the essence of things is only satisfied with the essence of God. Grace is needed to elevate this natu-

y en los santos: estudio histórico-sistemático de la doctrina del Comentario a las Sentencias de Santo Tomás de Aquino sobre la omnipresencia y la inhabitación, Ediciones del Copista, Córdoba 2008; see especially 596-597.

³⁴⁸ S. LONG, *Natura Pura: on the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace*, Fordham University Press, New York 2010. Steven A. Long is Professor of Theology at Ave Maria University (Florida), and Corresponding Academician of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas. As we have seen earlier, in our discussion of other authors, he had already dealt with our topic in previous publications, some of which were included in this book. Cfr. especially *Obediential Potency, Human Knowledge and the Natural Desire for God*, «International Philosophical Quarterly», 37 (1997) 45-63; *On the Possibility of a Purely Natural End for Man: a Response to Denis Bradley*, «The Thomist» 64 (2000) 211-237; *On the Loss, and the Recovery, of Nature as a Theonomic Principle: Reflections on the Nature/Grace Controversy*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 5 (2007/1) 133-183.

³⁴⁹ That the supernatural end is man's ultimate end does not mean that there is not an end "proportionate to nature that is further ordered in grace to the ultimate supernatural finality", then "for St. Thomas there is a proximate and natural end, defining of the species, which is distinct from and inferior to the final end of supernatural beatitude" (IDEM, *Natura Pura*, 23).

ral desire to desire for the beatific vision. Thus, “once God reveals Himself and his gift of divine life, the natural desire thus elevated and supernaturalised in grace inclines toward it absolutely by inclining toward the infinitely higher end of union with the Uncreated Persons of the Holy Trinity”.³⁵⁰ Long argues that, in St. Thomas, there is only one ultimate end, to know God, but there are varying degrees in this knowledge. The proportionate end is “further ordered in grace to the ultimate supernatural finality”, and then “for St. Thomas there is a proximate and natural end, defining of the species, *which is distinct from and inferior to the final end of supernatural beatitude*”.³⁵¹ All creation is ordered to God, and man is ordered to the contemplation of God through his natural powers. But through grace, man is further ordered to his supernatural end, and this further ordering is the transformation of nature, a transformation in which nature does not lose its integrity. “[T]he way in which the higher creation of man and angel is naturally ordered to God as End is infinitely lesser than the way in which supernatural grace, elevating and redirecting nature and enabling it to participate in the very love of God, orders the creature to God as End [...]. Human and angelic nature are indeed ordered to God in precision from grace, but along an infinitely lower trajectory than that of supernatural grace, so that only with divine aid may these natures be elevated within the higher arc that passes into the very mystery of God Himself”.³⁵²

Some have objected to Long’s analysis of de Lubac on this point. For de Lubac does speak of a natural end in *Duplex hominis beatitudo*.³⁵³ However, de Lubac’s argument is that this natural end is purely terrestrial. This appears to be inconsistent with St. Thomas’s discussion of limbo. For St. Thomas explains that unbaptized infants attain a certain natural fulfilment without the beatific vision. Thus, Long concludes, the deprivation of the beatific vision is not a punishment for man’s natural powers.³⁵⁴ Additionally, Long presents St. Thomas’s argument on the possibility of a purely natural love for God —connatural to man without the gift of grace. In this way, through his will man can direct himself to God as his connatural end.³⁵⁵

b) Nature as a positive concept

The second point in Long’s analysis concerns the integrity of nature. Long believes that without the existence of a proportionate and natural finality, not only does pure nature disappear, but also human nature itself simply becomes an empty space for grace and void of any real content. Long considers that the implications

³⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 21.

³⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 23.

³⁵² *Ibidem*, 24-25.

³⁵³ Cfr. DE LUBAC, *Duplex hominis beatitudo*, 290-299.

³⁵⁴ Cfr. LONG, *Natura Pura*, 243-244.

³⁵⁵ Cfr. *ibidem*, 45-47.

of de Lubac's thesis are found in the writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar and his use of the term 'concrete nature.'³⁵⁶ For Balthasar, like de Lubac, focuses on man as he concretely exists in history, i.e. ordered to a supernatural end. Long believes that in Balthasar's discussion nature loses its integrity and its very intelligibility, saying that it can only be defined in reference to the supernatural.

Long explains that even though grace permeates the whole of human nature, this is not destroyed because of grace. While it is transformed, it still remains human nature and can be known in precision from grace. According to Long, human nature is recognisable precisely because of its proportionate natural end. This is the case even though man has been created in grace, for "created nature is ontologically prior to the reception of grace even if the two are temporally simultaneous, because it requires a created receiver of grace to receive grace".³⁵⁷ Nature has a specific content and is therefore intelligible. Because of this specific content, which is defined by the natural proportionate end, we can "acquire knowledge of a real principle in man".³⁵⁸ This principle is acquired through abstraction. Long believes that the notion of pure nature is implied by the very principle of human nature. For human nature can be known even when man is created in sanctifying grace. Long says that the state of pure nature is the condition in which God would have not called man to the supernatural end, and in which man would only have his natural powers; "its *possibility* seems to follow simply from the divine omnipotence and from the definition of human nature".³⁵⁹ Long maintains that the denial of the hypothetical possibility of this state of pure nature is liable to end in the negation of the possibility of knowing nature in precision from the order of grace. He argues that the state of pure nature is possible simply because of man's capacity to abstract human nature, of his capacity to know human nature through his knowledge of men.

c) The anti-secularist character of a true theonomic notion of nature

Long's final point concerns de Lubac's claim that the system of pure nature has been the cause of secularism. He agrees with de Lubac that nature has lost its theonomic character, that it has gradually become isolated from the divine and set up in opposition to it. However, he disagrees that this has been caused by pure nature. In fact, Long believes that de Lubac's solution exacerbates the very problem he tries to solve, since it empties nature itself of any meaning. Long provides his own hypothesis for this separation, and finds it in Molina's conception of human freedom in the 16th century. Essentially, Long sees the problem in the separation of human nature and action from divine authority. For Molina con-

³⁵⁶ Cfr. *ibidem*, 54-91.

³⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 67.

³⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 88.

³⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 61.

ceives human freedom as independence from “divine governance and causality”, a sort of ‘indifference’ to divine providence.³⁶⁰

According to Long, in St. Thomas the fact that man has been left to himself does not signify that he is excluded from divine providence. Rather, it means that he acts of himself and directs himself towards his end freely. Yet this free action is contained within the providence of God. The will is free, yet it partakes of the eternal law and tends towards the good. God, as Creator, is the cause of the being and actions of creatures even when they act freely; at the same time allowing them to act for themselves (secondary causality). Long believes that Molina’s misunderstanding of human freedom removes nature’s theonomic character and implies that the natural law is not a participation in the eternal law. Long’s argument is that, in this way, the natural order does not lack a reference to God, for it is naturally ordered to God and falls under the divine governance. As he explains “all of creation is ordered *ad Deum*, and man naturally desires God as *Cause and Principle of finite nature*—a natural desire that is not by its essence formally a desire for supernatural beatific vision. Rather, it is a real but limited created dynamism toward God as Cause of finite being, reflective of that spiritual dignity in man that constitutes a potency of obedience for what God may bring forth through his grace”.³⁶¹ Thus the natural order is, Long emphasises, not isolated from God, but carries in itself the “impress of the ordering wisdom of God”.³⁶² Nature is not therefore radically autonomous from God, for “all created being and action derive from God as First Cause”.³⁶³

Long concludes that for this reason the natural order has imprinted on it a natural teleology that implies an ethical order discoverable by human reason. He explains that, for St. Thomas, the natural law is the rational participation of the eternal law. Therefore, pure nature does not lead to secularism for it does not imply the “demarcation of a realm *outside the governance of the eternal law*”.³⁶⁴ He says that, through grace, the natural mode of participation in the eternal law is transcended. Both ends of these participations refer to God, but not in the same way; the first refers to “God as principle of created nature” and the second to “God revealed in Himself”.³⁶⁵ Long argues that this is what allows the discovery of moral truths. For there is a natural moral law, since nature, in itself, is ordered towards an end; and this end gives rise to moral norms that can be known apart from Revelation.

³⁶⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*, 37-38.

³⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 44.

³⁶² *Ibidem*, 23.

³⁶³ *Ibidem*, 25.

³⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 42.

³⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 25.

2. Bernard Mulcahy: Aquinas's notion of pure nature and the Christian integralism of Henri de Lubac

Mulcahy makes in his book³⁶⁶ a significant attempt to show that “Christian theology has long been at home with the theory and practice of considering human nature apart from the gifts of grace and without reference to any supernatural *telos*”.³⁶⁷ Before entering into his principal arguments, he devotes an entire chapter to the origins of the notion of pure nature in primitive Christianity and Judaism: in the use of the term *physis* due to Hellenistic influence, the idea of election from among the peoples found in Judaism and Christianity, the presence of a “religiously neutral political sphere” in the Roman Empire and an understanding of ‘the world’ as the purely natural realm, distinct from the sacred.³⁶⁸ After this, Mulcahy studies, respectively, Aquinas’s, de Lubac’s and Radical Orthodoxy’s views on the notion of pure nature. We will follow these three steps, taking into account some critical reviews to this work.³⁶⁹

a) Aquinas’s notion of pure nature

Mulcahy presents quite a thorough analysis of six areas in which he believes St. Thomas uses at least implicitly the notion of pure nature: human mortality, infused gifts and virtues, limbo, kingship, natural law and the autonomy of the sciences.³⁷⁰ Overall, his interpretation of St. Thomas seems fairly solid. Regarding the first area, human mortality, Mulcahy makes clear how, “without a notion of *natura pura*, it would not be possible to treat immortality as a gift, either supernatural or preternatural; or, at best, one could call it a gift only in precisely the same sense as all existence is a gift. In this latter case, we would be left saying that bodily immortality is natural to us – something that Thomas, for one, certainly does not hold. Admittedly, Aquinas does not use the exact phrase ‘pure nature,’ but it is clear that he invokes and teaches the idea”.³⁷¹ Thus, in conclusion, “Thomas plainly considers human nature in abstraction from our supernatural destiny in teaching that death is natural to us inasmuch as we are bodily composites”.³⁷²

³⁶⁶ B. MULCAHY, *Aquinas’s Notion of Pure Nature and the Christian Integralism of Henri de Lubac: Not Everything is Grace*, P. Lang, New York 2011. Fr. Bernard Mulcahy, OP, is a friar from the province of St. Joseph (eastern province) who is teaching at St. Mary’s Seminary in Houston (Texas).

³⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 147.

³⁶⁸ Cfr. *ibidem*, 21-48.

³⁶⁹ Cfr. A. NICHOLS, *Book review of Bernard Mulcahy’s Aquinas’s notion of pure nature and the Christian integralism of Henri de Lubac: Not everything is grace*, «New Blackfriars» 93 (2012) 614-615; T.M. OSBORNE, JR., *Natura Pura: Two Recent Books*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 11 (2013/1) 265-279; L. FEINGOLD, *Review of Aquinas’s Notion of Pure Nature and the Christian Integralism of Henri de Lubac*, «The Thomist» 78 (2014/1) 152-156.

³⁷⁰ MULCAHY, *Aquinas’s Notion*, 49-122.

³⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 56.

³⁷² *Ibidem*, 71.

In his discussion on the necessity of the infused virtues, Mulcahy includes a number of key texts in which St. Thomas clearly distinguishes between a con-natural end to which man can strive through his own powers and God as object of supernatural happiness.³⁷³ Mulcahy argues, like Long, that this knowledge of God is man's natural ordination, and that it is not to be confused with man's new finality – the beatific vision. However, he does not explain in what way this natural end is further ordered and elevated by the supernatural end. He simply concludes that, in this way, man has two distinct ends.

This point becomes somewhat problematic in his treatment on kingship. Mulcahy explains that spiritual and earthly spheres have their own finality and autonomy. According to him, St. Thomas “distinguishes the duties of kings and clergy in terms of the human ends they promote, with the supernatural end of union of God *excluded* from the royal purview, precisely because it is an end extrinsic to human nature”.³⁷⁴ Aquinas distinguishes “the day-to-day good secured by good government from the ultimate good of union with God. These two goods are not the same; they are two different (albeit compatible) ends”.³⁷⁵ His language seems almost to suggest a natural finality isolated from God. We do not believe that Mulcahy limits man's natural finality to purely worldly ends, but he does not clearly explain the imperfect beatitude that man can attain in this life through his natural powers. His explanation could seem to suggest that it involves only human goods; in this view God would not be man's natural end.³⁷⁶

Despite the general solidness of his analysis of the texts of St. Thomas, Mulcahy does not appear to sufficiently distinguish between nature in itself and the hypothesis of pure nature. He says that the idea of pure nature is “the idea of our nature in its own inherent constituents, as affected neither by the accidents of grace nor of sin”.³⁷⁷ His arguments perhaps would be more adequate for a defense for the consistency of nature, rather than for the hypothetical notion of pure nature. In his discussion on the presence of the natural law and the law of grace in man, he says that “if grace is in us ‘as though added on to nature,’ then it must be possible to think of nature without that addition”.³⁷⁸ To consider pure nature is not simply to think about nature without grace – this is to think about nature itself. Nature exists, and can be known in reality through abstraction. Pure nature, on the other hand, does not exist; it requires a further speculative step,

³⁷³ Cfr. *ibidem*, 56-66.

³⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 80.

³⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 82.

³⁷⁶ Mulcahy emphasizes the autonomy of the secular to such an extent that he almost appears to see God only as man's supernatural end. Mulcahy's conception of secularity can be seen, for example, in his discussion about the place of Christians in the Roman Empire. There he mentions that the early Christians had no problem with participating in pagan religious festivals, arguing that they were merely civic duties (*ibidem*, 33). There seems to be the suggestion of a radically autonomous vision of the secular sphere in Mulcahy's work.

³⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 41.

³⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 95.

about what God could have created if he had so desired.³⁷⁹ Feingold and Long make this step, and are then able to clearly analyse the problem concerning nature that arises from the denial of pure nature. For them they are not the same thing, although one implies the other.

b) De Lubac's supernaturalization of the natural

Mulcahy's reflections on these points are addressed so as to manifest his disagreement with Henri de Lubac's reading of St. Thomas Aquinas on pure nature.³⁸⁰ Mulcahy identifies the starting point of de Lubac as his reading of the Jansenist crisis (and Baianism), discussed in *Surnaturel* and *Augustinisme et théologie moderne*. There de Lubac explains that Baius and Jansen erred in their interpretation of St. Augustine, but part of their theology was valid. However, de Lubac argues that the Jansenists' denial of the notion of pure nature, the result of a distortion in theology due to an excessive influence of Aristotle, was not part of the condemnation. Nor was the thesis, continuing on from Baianism and based in St. Augustine's theology, that human nature is essentially ordered to the beatific vision, with the implication that "it is unintelligible without reference to that supernatural end".³⁸¹

While Mulcahy accepts de Lubac's conclusion that the condemnation of Jansenism and Baianism did not include a condemnation of the negation of pure nature, he disagrees that secularism in France was the result of the theological notion of pure nature or scholasticism. De Lubac believed that the Neo-Scholastic theology prevalent at the beginning of the 20th century was characterised by an extrinsicist view of human nature and grace. His alternative was an integralist vision that insisted on man's essential ordination to supernatural beatitude. This contrasted strongly with the scholastic understanding, which saw grace as "a transcendent gift, as a naturally unexpected and essentially accidental (in the Aristotelian sense) elevation of human nature".³⁸²

³⁷⁹ In Mulcahy's discussion on man's capacity to naturally love God above all things, he resorts to the term 'integral nature', and describes it as ungraced and equivalent to St. Thomas's expression *in solis naturalibus* (cf. *ibidem*, 93-94). But, as we have seen, Torrell states that 'integral nature' describes Adam before the fall, "in possession of the privileges with which God endowed him at the moment of his creation, but *abstracting from sanctifying grace*" (TORRELL, *Nature and Grace*, 171). Then, the expression *in statu naturalium* is not equivalent to "in the state of pure nature"; rather it means by "natural powers alone" (*ibidem*, 169). Being part of the same concrete reality of our first parents, integral nature and the state of original justice cannot be separated; however, they can be considered under different aspects. 'Integral nature' clarifies the distinction between nature and grace and safeguards nature's autonomy. From this, it would appear that, in his analysis of the texts of St. Thomas, Mulcahy demonstrates the consistency of nature itself.

³⁸⁰ "As we have sought to demonstrate, there is every reason to affirm that Thomas, and other thinkers before him, recognised the intelligibility of human nature as constituted solely in its natural powers and without reference to the added *telos* of trinitarian beatitude" (MULCAHY, *Aquinas's Notion*, 169).

³⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 139.

³⁸² *Ibidem*, 148.

Mulcahy perceives a certain nominalistic attitude in de Lubac's thinking, "especially in regard to the individuation of human beings in the concrete".³⁸³ He refers here to de Lubac's use of terms such as "concrete nature" or the "particularity of my individual being".³⁸⁴ Mulcahy argues that this terminology demonstrates a misunderstanding by de Lubac of the principle of individuation in St. Thomas, almost seeming to suggest that humanity is "made up of many natures, one for each individual", whereas "all human beings share in a single, universal nature, being a series of individual creatures who each occur in his or her own particular material embodiment".³⁸⁵

Mulcahy argues that de Lubac's denial of any real distinction between human nature and the concrete individual implies the lack of a real distinction between essence and existence.³⁸⁶ As a result, he is led to consider the desire to see God as something essential and part of human nature in itself. And "if an orientation to divine beatitude is ours by nature, then it would follow that there is no need of the further grace emanating from the depths of the divine freedom. Instead of being by nature human, we would be quasi-divine".³⁸⁷ Mulcahy believes that de Lubac's defense of the gratuity of grace is insufficient, and that his thesis implies that man is "naturally supernatural" for we are "naturally reliant upon supernatural elevation for the attainment of our intrinsic and essential heavenly *telos*".³⁸⁸ This is the result of the confusion between man's nature as it is concretely found in this existing world and human nature itself. As we have seen, some authors have pointed out that de Lubac's use of the term 'nature' is imprecise, but Mulcahy does not discuss in depth this apparent lack of precision.

For Mulcahy, the notion of 'pure nature' is intimately tied up with the idea of secularity³⁸⁹. According to him, the absence of the notion of 'pure nature' will necessarily end in an integralist vision and a denial of a valid secular sphere. He believes that de Lubac's thesis supernaturalises the natural, and that this does away with the integrity of the secular sphere.

c) Radical Orthodoxy's integralism as heir of de Lubac

This is precisely the case of Radical Orthodoxy, "the latest flowering of Henri de Lubac's thesis on the supernatural"³⁹⁰, and for this reason Mulcahy gives great importance to this movement, as he considers it the legitimate heir of de Lubac.

³⁸³ *Ibidem*, 155.

³⁸⁴ Cfr. DE LUBAC, *The Mystery*, 69; see also expression like: "nature in its concrete reality" (*ibidem*, 124).

³⁸⁵ MULCAHY, *Aquinas's Notion*, 155.

³⁸⁶ Cfr. *ibidem*, 156.

³⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 153.

³⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 169-170.

³⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 196.

Mulcahy sees continuity between de Lubac's thesis on the supernatural and the 'integralism' of John Milbank. This integralism implies a rejection of secularity: "no sphere of life or society, no art or science, can be autonomous or self-sufficient: everyone and everything is an integral part of a single whole, and this whole can only be ordered and understood in a fully Christian theological vision".³⁹¹ Like de Lubac, Milbank argues that the notion of pure nature encouraged the consideration of scientific disciplines and aspects of life independent from faith or the supernatural, and as a result led to the exclusion of Christian from society. Milbank's aim, in the words of Mulcahy is to restore a "vision of all reality as an integral whole".³⁹² Mulcahy strongly disagrees with the holistic, supernatural vision of Radical Orthodoxy. If everything can be only considered in the light of grace, then Christianity exiles itself – the very thing that de Lubac had tried to resolve. Instead, allowing room for pure nature enables the Church to dialogue with the world.

Although Mulcahy sees Radical Orthodoxy in continuity with de Lubac, he realizes that there are substantial differences between them, especially concerning the denial of objective truth. For Radical Orthodoxy "story appeals to a truth that lies, not in the correspondence of thought to reality, but in the doctrine of the incarnation of the eternal Word in a human discourse".³⁹³ Obviously, Mulcahy does not agree with this theory of knowledge, for "our personal vision may be tested against publicly known realities, against the truth not only of Scripture, ecclesial authority, and tradition, but also of wisdom and learning wherever they are to be found".³⁹⁴

These last considerations make us think that perhaps Mulcahy's analysis pays more attention to John Milbank and *Radical Orthodoxy* than to de Lubac. Not only does his description of Milbank as the post-modern heir of the thought of Henri de Lubac not appear to be adequately supported by the investigation, but also his discussion of de Lubac is somewhat incomplete – for example, as we have seen, de Lubac does allow for the possibility of the creation of man without the calling to the supernatural end. Mulcahy focuses more on the political and historical context in which de Lubac lived, as he thinks that these historical circumstances provided the foundation for his thesis on the supernatural, yet this thesis does not seem to be based on solid evidence.

³⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 13.

³⁹² *Ibidem*, 181.

³⁹³ *Ibidem*, 194. According to Milbank, St. Thomas teaches that human reason is not autonomous, that there is no purely natural intellectual power. This rules out the possibility of a sound philosophy independent of *sacra doctrina*. Milbank, along with Catherine Pickstock (another theologian of the Radical Orthodoxy movement), believes that in St. Thomas's epistemology the object of the intellect is not the nature of the reality concerned, but rather that reality's participation in the divine Being. They argue that, in St. Thomas, the intellect does not know the nature of the created reality in itself; rather man only knows reality insofar as it imitates God (cfr. *ibidem*, 192-193).

³⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, 195.

3. Andrew Swafford: *Nature and Grace. A New Approach to Thomistic Ressourcement*

After analysing Mulcahy's work one could wonder whether it is possible to progress can be made in the dialogue between advocates of the pure nature tradition and Lubacian theologians. In this sense, the recent publication of Swafford's book constitutes an interesting turning point.³⁹⁵

a) Description of the two traditions

Swafford starts by recognizing that in this debate we need to bring together two principles: the Christocentric dimension and the necessary distinction between nature and grace. There are two theological sensibilities, one tending to stress the intrinsic union between nature and grace in the history of salvation, and the other tending to highlight their distinction, precisely to make clear the newness of Christ. The first is 'intrinsicism', the second 'extrinsicism'. Obviously, de Lubac is representative of the first, while recent advocates of the pure nature tradition (especially Feingold and Long) represent the second.

Swafford examines the possibility of building a bridge between both positions, while sustaining the valid exigencies of each side. He believes that this is accomplished in the theological work of Matthias Joseph Scheeben, an almost forgotten figure of the XIX century, whose theological approach has received sympathy from authors of both traditions.

In his analysis, Swafford emphasizes what he considers the fundamental epistemological category that determines de Lubac's position: *paradox*. "De Lubac's project is precisely the attempt to hold together the juxtaposition of man's *natural* desire for the beatific vision, along with the *gratuitous* character of its fulfillment – a juxtaposition which is made possible by way of his characteristic teaching on the category of paradox".³⁹⁶ In his view, we separate mystery into different aspects because of our limitations, yet this separation is not proper to mystery itself. In reference to the nature/grace question, de Lubac believes that theology has suffered a kind of Christian rationalism that examines mystery with the rules of our human logic. In this way, our distinctions have in fact compromised the unity of the mystery. De Lubac exhorts theologians instead to "unite in order to distinguish".³⁹⁷

As we commented earlier, Swafford sees a certain change in sensibility in de Lubac's last work on the supernatural, the *Brief Catechesis*, where the French theologian feels the need to point out the distinction between nature and grace,

³⁹⁵ A. SWAFFORD, *Nature and Grace: A New Approach to Thomistic Ressourcement*, Pickwick, Eugene (OR) 2014; published also in James Clarke & Co, Cambridge (UK) 2015. Andrew Swafford is Associate Professor of Theology at Benedictine College (Atchison, Kansas).

³⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 51.

³⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, 54. The quotation comes from DE LUBAC, *Catholicism*, 329.

as he had done also in his 1965 twin works. Some of these texts, as we have seen before, have been quoted by supporters of the pure nature tradition as in agreement with their claims.

A point on which both sides disagree regards the way of understanding the gratuity of the supernatural as distinct from the gratuity of creation. For de Lubac insists, with Ockham, that God is no debtor to anyone in any way whatsoever; while others, referring directly to Aquinas on this point (I³, q. 21, a. 1, ad 3), defend the notion of *debitum naturae*, as it implies God's debt not to anyone but to himself and the order he has created.³⁹⁸ As Swafford indicates, it should be considered here that "the notions of dependence and gratuity are not exactly the same thing, and it is generally the blurring of these two issues which is behind objections against the *debitum naturae*. While it is the case that all creation is dependent upon God and His providence, as we just pointed out, the gratuity of creation and the gratuity of supernatural grace are not at the same level".³⁹⁹

b) Feingold and Long on limbo

This clarification about *debitum naturae* has to be added to those other concepts central to the debate (obediential potency, natural end, etc.) whose right understanding has been made possible thanks to the work of both Long and Feingold.⁴⁰⁰ The most significant point regarding their claim on the notion of pure nature in Swafford's study is without doubt the question about limbo. Here, Swafford finds an interesting divergence between both supporters of the pure nature tradition, "for the latter employs limbo as a *premise* in his argument in order to defend the possibility of man's purely natural end, while the former is much more sensitive to the fact that the concrete ordination of the present economy necessarily modifies the hypothetical possibilities of pure nature".⁴⁰¹ That is, Feingold thinks that Aquinas's position on limbo implies the existence of a purely natural end in *this* economy. Yet Long is more cautious for at least two reasons: in this economy God has further ordered nature to grace; and the present condition of sin inhibits nature's ability to attain natural good (as grace is not only *elevans* but also *sanans*.)⁴⁰² Swafford maintains that "the *hypothetical* possibility of pure nature differs vastly from the prospects of its *concrete* realization in the present divine economy", and so he prefers Long's position, who emphasizes "the fact that since

³⁹⁸ Cfr. SWAFFORD, *Nature and Grace*, 82.

³⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, 11.

⁴⁰⁰ Among the elements Swafford recognizes in Feingold's study, a risk in de Lubac's view is the loss of the intelligibility of the natural order and metaphysical realism, in favour of voluntarism and nominalism (cfr. *ibidem* 104, 110); and the inconsistency of the notion of concrete nature (cfr. *ibidem*, 112-113). Along these lines, Long's insistence on the theonomic character of the notion of nature should be mentioned, an element that is surprisingly lacking in de Lubac's accusation that the pure nature tradition leads to secularism (cfr. *ibidem*, 119-126).

⁴⁰¹ *Ibidem*, 40.

⁴⁰² *Ibidem*, 130.

the eternal law governing this economy orders man to grace, the actual possibility of man's purely natural end cannot remain unaffected thereby".⁴⁰³ In other words, "while the natural order is ontologically dependent upon the Word in an ultimate sense, the natural order retains its own distinctive perfection and intelligibility nonetheless [...]. Understood in this light, the notion of the 'independent' intelligibility of the natural order is perfectly compatible with the Christocentric foundation of all reality, as taught by Saint Paul and the early Fathers of the Church".⁴⁰⁴

c) Scheeben, the reconciler of extrinsicism and intrinsicism

This is precisely the point that leads Swafford in the last part of his study to the theology of Scheeben, who by recourse to the Incarnation brings home the fact that "the intelligible possibilities of pure nature, abstractly considered, are necessarily modified by the concrete ordination of divine providence".⁴⁰⁵

In fact, the German theologian, a Thomist who reads Aquinas in the light of the Greek Fathers, tries to bring out the supernatural character of Christianity, against naturalism and rationalism that try to destroy all that is specifically Christian. This implies a clear distinction between the natural and the supernatural: "On the created plane the natural is really distinct from the supernatural, and is not necessarily connected with it. The supernatural is added to nature as a new, higher reality, a reality that is neither included in nature, nor developed from it, nor in any way postulated by it".⁴⁰⁶ So Scheeben holds the thesis of the pure nature tradition regarding obediential potency, *debitum naturae*, natural desire and so on.

Moreover, it would seem that he defends the existence of a purely natural end in this economy. But there are texts where the German theologian explicitly denies such a hypothesis: "And therefore a final natural end is in fact no longer possible as an ultimate end [...]. Thus there is in fact no double final end, one for the natural order and one for the supernatural".⁴⁰⁷ Lubacian authors will be at home with affirmations like this one: "In the present order purely natural relationships do not exist alone and apart, and therefore cannot be made to prevail in isolated self-sufficiency".⁴⁰⁸

Scheeben insists on this distinction of nature and grace because it is the only way to show the splendor of their union. "Union of both is based upon their very

⁴⁰³ *Ibidem*, 115.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 137.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, 132.

⁴⁰⁶ M.J. SCHEEBEN, *Nature and Grace*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene (OR) 2009, xvii; quoted in SWAFFORD, *Nature and Grace*, 150.

⁴⁰⁷ M.J. SCHEEBEN, *Handbuch der Katholischen Dogmatik*, III/IV, Herder, Freiburg i.B. 1961, 467; quoted in SWAFFORD, *Nature and Grace*, 167.

⁴⁰⁸ SCHEEBEN, *Nature and Grace*, 275, quoted in SWAFFORD, *Nature and Grace*, 148.

difference, and the subordination of the lower to the higher is shown to be the supreme elevation of the former".⁴⁰⁹ There are not two economies, one natural and the other supernatural, but only one concrete economy, rooted in the unity of divine providence.⁴¹⁰ The Incarnation is viewed as the foundation of the order of grace. Following the distinction between creation and generation, Scheeben distinguishes in man a presence of God as Creator and a presence of God of a supernatural character through grace. The latter implies a new metaphysical order of reality, in which we share divine filiation in Christ, being raised to the bosom of the eternal Father. In line with Irenaeus, Scheeben affirms that the Word became man for this reason, that man can become son of God.⁴¹¹

So, according to Scheeben, the inherent connection between human nature and the supernatural order of grace is brought about through the Incarnation, which leads to a permanent relation between the Eternal Son and all humanity. Such union is described using the image of marriage: "The Fathers view the Incarnation itself as a marriage with the human race, inasmuch as it virtually contains everything that can lead to the full union of the Son of God with men".⁴¹²

Scheeben's Christocentrism implies not just that Christ is the head of every human being but that He is the head of all creation. The Incarnation unites God intrinsically with all of creation, as we read in *Gaudium et spes* 22, and in Saint Paul's Christological hymns (specially Col 1,16). Swafford concludes his study saying that while "Scheeben is certainly an avowed Thomist, he is no less steeped in the Christocentrism of the Bible and the Church Fathers; and for this reason, no one captures the nature-grace dynamic better than he, as a mystery comprised of both distinction and unity".⁴¹³

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the end of a study in which so many authors and their ideas on the same topics have been reviewed, one feels great difficulty and a certain uselessness in attempting to add something new. At the same time, this sensation would be a temptation to stop thinking about one of the major themes in Catholic theology.

We have the impression that, if the appearance of de Lubac's *Surnaturel* was a wholesome event for theology, the same should be said about Feingold's work on the supernatural. Both have provoked a necessary debate, which has helped to clarify a number of points, while others remain open to the legitimate divergence of sensibilities within Catholic doctrine.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*, 169.

⁴¹¹ Cfr. *ibidem*, 170-171, 176.

⁴¹² M.J. SCHEEBEN, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, Herder, St. Louis 1946, 543, quoted in SWAFFORD, *Nature and Grace*, 191.

⁴¹³ *Ibidem*, 196.

The notion of obediential potency is emblematic in this respect. When the Neo-Scholastic insistence erred in its *mere non-repugnance* and purely passive character, de Lubac's (and others') criticism forced contemporary Thomists to explain it in terms of a *specific* obediential potency, carefully distinguishing it from the general obediential potency of creatures. In this way, they identified it with the expressions *capax Dei* or *capax gratiae*, so linked to the Fathers of the Church, especially Saint Augustine.

The question of the natural desire to see God is more complicated, and it is clear that there are still some elements of divergence. De Lubac's and Feingold's insistence on an innate or, alternately, an elicited desire are both interpretations on a point to which Aquinas never referred with precise terminology, and was a posterior development. The strength of this desire is perfectly compatible with its imperfect character: in the end, we do not really know what we desire. The Augustinian 'restless heart' encounters the Maritainian, often referred to by Feingold, "desire which does not know what it asks like the sons of Zebedee when they asked to sit on the right and on the left of the Son of Man".⁴¹⁴

This is not the place to enter into this discussion, nor into the dispute on whether this desire belongs to the intellect or to the will. What can be said with certainty is that, as we have seen, it is possible to affirm a 'strong' notion of the natural desire to see God and, at the same time, a coherent notion of pure nature and the purely natural final end of man. This was the conclusion of Alfaro in the early fifties, and has been held by different contemporary theological schools (including those of Rahner, Balthasar or Lonergan, with their more or less problematic tensions) and also from a more classical Thomistic tradition, for example Scheeben; in our view, this compatibility could be better understood by going deeper in the metaphysical notions of participation and *actus essendi*.⁴¹⁵ In general, we are convinced that the best way to avoid both extrinsicism and intrinsicism is to develop a right notion of creation.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁴ J. MARITAIN, *Approaches to God*, Harper, New York 1954, 97; quoted in FEINGOLD, *The Natural Desire*, 403, see also 177. In his Encyclical on Christian hope, Benedict XVI referred to eternal life using the paradoxical expression "known unknown" (cfr. BENEDICT XVI, Enc. *Spe Salvi*, 30 november 2007, n. 12).

⁴¹⁵ This is the well-known approach of the Italian philosopher Cornelio Fabro; see, among others, his volume *Partecipazione e causalità*, Edivi, Segni 2010 (orig. 1960). A partial application of this approach to the theology of grace can be seen in some essays included in F. OCÁRIZ, *Naturaleza, gracia y gloria*, Eunsa, Pamplona 2001, in which one encounters precisely a study on Scheeben. Two Italian studies have transferred this approach to the interpretation of the natural desire in Aquinas, cfr. A. CIAPPA, *Partecipazione e desiderio naturale di vedere Dio in S. Tommaso d'Aquino*, Tipografia Nigri-za, Verona 1965; M. NARDONE, *Sul problema del desiderium naturale videndi Deum nell'ottica tomistica della partecipazione secondo la prospettiva di Cornelio Fabro*, «Sapienza» 40 (1997/2) 172-240.

⁴¹⁶ Cfr. S. SANZ, *Natural-sobrenatural*, in A.L. GONZÁLEZ (ed.), *Diccionario de Filosofía*, Eunsa, Pamplona 2010, 781-786; S. SANZ, *Creation and Covenant in Contemporary Theology: A Synthesis of the Principal Interpretative Keys*, «Nova et Vetera», English edition, 12 (2014/1) 217-253. This is especially clear when we consider the problem of the notion of 'concrete nature' as opposed to an 'abstract nature', which in itself reflects a dualistic vision of existence and essence, or, in other terms, a dua-

It is precisely the issue of pure nature and the final end that has been really and fruitfully clarified, beginning with de Lubac's original thesis, and later criticism by Feingold, Long and others. These authors have made it clear that a right notion of pure nature has nothing to do with the *cliché* of a nature closed in itself, as has been repeated by most critics of Cajetan and Suárez. We should carefully distinguish the hypothetical state of pure nature from the reality of human nature in itself, the former being subordinate and a consequence of the latter. Long has convincingly shown the need to retrieve the theonomic dimension of the notion of nature, for to the real Thomistic tradition, even in the hypothesis of pure nature, the final end of man is always God. There is no reason, then, to put aside such a concept, which, well used, serves to clarify the Christian mystery.⁴¹⁷

To summarize, using a terminology we have found in some authors, we could say that the intrinsicists tend to highlight the natural desire to see God while the extrinsicists prefer to insist in the importance of the notion of pure nature; both tendencies, if they are not taken to the extreme, can validly exist within Catholic doctrine. Our study has shown that there are authors on both sides who tend to highlight the differences, while others, also on both sides, try to see the coincidences. It should not be difficult to identify them along the pages of this *status quaestionis*.

In this sense, it is good to realize that both de Lubac and Feingold have been able to balance their positions. In the first case, we saw how de Lubac tried to clarify his thought and modified his initial rejection of pure nature. There are texts from his later study on the supernatural completely acceptable to his critics, for example the following phrase referred to by Feingold: "The desire itself is by no means a 'perfect appetite.' It does not constitute as yet even the slightest positive 'ordering' to the supernatural. Again, it is sanctifying grace, with its train of theological virtues, which must order the subject to his last end; at least, it alone can order him 'sufficiently' or 'perfectly,' or 'directly.' This grace is a certain 'form,' a certain 'supernatural perfection' which must be 'added over and above human nature' in order that man 'may be ordered appropriately to his end'."⁴¹⁸ Feingold, while maintaining his critical approach, has also tried to balance his ideas, as can easily be seen in the new conclusions of the second edition of his work, where he elaborates his theory of the four states of the desire for God

lism between '*de facto*' and '*de iure*'. The real point behind the badly expressed distinction between concrete and abstract nature is to highlight the primacy of the personal act of being over nature.

⁴¹⁷ In his study on the supernatural in modern and contemporary theology, Colombo affirms that pure nature, after *Humani generis*, is a mandatory concept for theology (COLOMBO, *Del Soprannaturale*, 211). At the same time, at the end of his study, he specifies that it is a legitimate notion, but cannot constitute the foundation of theological anthropology, because it refers to a hypothetical situation (*ibidem*, 355).

⁴¹⁸ DE LUBAC, *Mystery*, 85.

in man, and admits that “elements of this distinction are present in de Lubac’s *Mystery*, chapter 5”.⁴¹⁹

Whether one prefers the Lubacian and more Augustinian ‘unite to distinguish’ (paradox) or the Maritainian and more Thomistic ‘distinguish to unite’ (analogy), it should be clear that in both are found Christocentric perspectives that lead to the recognition of the *proprium* of our faith: “man/the world created in Christ, whose more or less explicit comprehension, has suggested to highlight the supernatural as their qualifying characteristic”.⁴²⁰ In the end, as Joseph Ratzinger said in 1964, we come back to the Scriptural starting point, which enables us to understand that behind the faceless notions of the natural and the supernatural, we should see the concrete names of Adam and Christ. Only on this biblical level does our dialogical reality will be apparent, pointing to an Adam destined in God’s plan to be saved in Christ as he from himself never could be saved.⁴²¹

ABSTRACT

This study offers a *status quaestionis* of the recent debate on the notion of pure nature in English speaking publications. After a brief description of de Lubac’s position and the controversies around *Surnaturel*, from the years of its publication to the Toulouse Symposium in 2000, we examine then the rebirth of the debate in Feingold’s study, and the numerous reactions to this work. As this study deals specifically with the notion of pure nature, we concentrate our attention on three recent books (Long, Mulcahy, Swafford) on the topic. It seems to us that the present *status quaestionis* allows for the compatibility between a strong notion of the natural desire to see God and a right understanding of pure nature.

⁴¹⁹ FEINGOLD, *The Natural Desire*, 433, note 20, where he adds: “However, he never clearly distinguishes these four forms or stages in the desire for God”.

⁴²⁰ COLOMBO, *Del soprannaturale*, 360.

⁴²¹ “Indem wir dieses sagen, ergibt sich zugleich, daß wir über die antlitzlosen Begriffe Natur und Übernatur hinausgeführt werden, und daß dahinter die konkreten Namen sichtbar werden: Adam und Christus; und erst auf dieser Ebene, auf die uns die Schrift stellt, wird das Eigentliche des Dialogs sichtbar, in dem es darum geht, daß Adam, der immer schon im Gedanken Gottes dazu da ist, in Christus eingeholt zu werden, von sich aus nie diese Einholung selbst vollziehen kann” (J. RATZINGER, *Schöpfungslehre. Nachschrift der Vorlesung*, Münster 1964, 146).