

# Introduction

Henri Sonier de Lubac, SJ (1896–1991) remains a puzzling figure for interpreters of twentieth-century Catholicism. In the twenty years since his death, interest in de Lubac has not faded. In part, this is because his scholarship had a considerable influence on the shape of Catholic theology prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). As the meaning of the Council has become contested, so has the interpretation of de Lubac’s theology and the *nouvelle théologie*, the loosely affiliated group of scholars with whom de Lubac associated.<sup>1</sup> The *nouvelle théologie* remains critical for understanding the theological and pastoral shifts leading to the Second Vatican Council. Increasingly, scholarship on de Lubac and the *nouvelle théologie* has come from authors of Protestant and Anglo-Catholic traditions, who appeal to the *nouvelle théologie* as a resource for ecumenical engagement and for the renewal of their own theological traditions.

1. For recent studies on the *nouvelle théologie* and *ressourcement* see Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor to Vatican II* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010); Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Hans Boersma, “Sacramental Ontology: Nature and the Supernatural in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac,” *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1015 (2007): 242–73; Brian Daley, “The Nouvelle Théologie and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and the Science of Theology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 4 (October 2005): 362–82.

Henri de Lubac was one of the most visible theologians of the *nouvelle théologie* movement, and, beginning in the 1940s, drew controversy for his theology and his work as an editor of early Christian writings. His proposals concerning nature and grace in *Surnaturel* (1946) made him suspect to the theological establishment in Rome, and he became the subject of intense debate.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary interpreters have suggested that de Lubac's primary theological contribution was to dismantle a secular ontology hidden within much of modern Catholic theology and to recover a "Christianized ontology" inspired by the early church. John Milbank has painted de Lubac as a protopostmodern theologian whose metaphysics of nature and grace underlies his radical integration of faith and reason. Milbank's highly influential interpretation confirms the deepest suspicions of contemporary neothomists, who fear that de Lubac's theology demolishes the ontological difference between nature and the supernatural. While the neothomists are generally appreciative of Lubac's other intellectual contributions (e.g., his ecclesiology and his recovery of patristic and medieval biblical interpretation), they echo the criticism of de Lubac's controversial work *Surnaturel* from over sixty years ago: de Lubac's ontology fails to respect the relative autonomy of nature and undermines the gratuity of grace.<sup>3</sup> A Christianized ontology remains at the center of the debate over de Lubac's theological contribution.

However, the theme that occupies the majority of de Lubac's writings is not ontology, but rather history and its fulfillment. His

2. See Matthew Bernard Mulcahy, OP, *Aquinas's Notion of Pure Nature and the Christian Integralism of Henri de Lubac: Not Everything Is Grace*, American University Studies (New York: Peter Lang, 2011); Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas and His Interpreters* (Washington, DC: Sapientia Press, 2010); Serge-Thomas Bonino, *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2009).

3. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 2010; Mulcahy, *Aquinas's Notion of Pure Nature*.

first book, *Catholicisme* (1938), outlined a Christian understanding of salvation as an historical process, contrasting this understanding of history with Platonism, on the one hand, and historical immanentism, on the other. *Histoire et esprit: l'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène* (1950) recovered a Christian understanding of history embedded within the practice of "spiritual interpretation" of Scripture. The four volumes of *Exégèse médiévale* (1959–64) traced the history of spiritual interpretation of Scripture from the patristic to medieval periods. In de Lubac's interpretation, the spiritual interpretation of Scripture functioned as both a theological method and an implicit understanding of the history of salvation. His two-volume *La Posterité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore* (1979–81) outlined the transmutation of a patristic and medieval understanding of history through the influence of Joachim of Fiore. He traced the evolution of Joachim's thought to political and secular forms in modernity. De Lubac's interest in a Christian understanding of history was more than an isolated undertaking. His various theological projects are all shaped by his preoccupation with history and its fulfillment, arguably the same preoccupation that shaped his generation's spiritual outlook and theological interests.

### **An Enigmatic Theologian**

While it is generally agreed that Henri de Lubac was one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, it remains difficult to assess the nature of his theological contribution and the inner coherence of his work. It is how de Lubac wrote rather than what he wrote that makes him difficult to interpret. David Williams declared that "a less systematic systematician is difficult to imagine."<sup>4</sup> His body of writings remains difficult to interpret

due to his idiosyncratic methods, his “third person style,” and the occasionality and sheer diversity of his writings.

First, de Lubac did not fit naturally into any rigid theological discipline, as he specialized in neither “dogmatic” nor “historical” theology. His initial academic appointment was as a professor of fundamental theology at the *Institut catholique de Lyon* in 1929. The opening lecture for his course on fundamental theology, published as “Apologétique et théologie” in 1930, was programmatic for de Lubac’s future scholarship.<sup>5</sup> “Apologétique et théologie” argued that doctrine sheds its light on the whole of human reality. Doctrine’s intelligibility derives from the orientation of the soul to God. The discipline of apologetics must not be seen as a purely rationalistic exercise, but must involve the presentation of the faith in its wholeness and beauty. De Lubac’s subsequent scholarship sought to present the faith of the early church to a new generation. His first book, *Catholicisme*, suggested new directions for Catholic ecclesiology through the recovery of patristic thought.<sup>6</sup> His book *Corpus mysticum* (1944) sought a recovery of an ancient notion of church and sacrament for the present day.<sup>7</sup> De Lubac’s proposals concerning the supernatural took the form of historical research on the history of patristic and scholastic thought. In general, his writings reflect an assumption of the unity among the disciplines of dogmatic theology and historical theology. These writings were historical

4. David M. Williams, *Receiving the Bible in Faith: Historical and Theological Exegesis* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 132.

5. Henri de Lubac, “Apologétique et théologie,” *Nouvelle Revue théologique* 57 (1930): 361–78.

6. Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988). Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Unam Sanctam 3 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1938).

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

studies with systematic theological intent; they were never a disengaged narration of the past.

Furthermore, de Lubac's historical research implied suggested new frameworks for doing theology. De Lubac and the *nouveaux théologiens* generally resisted the neoscholastic domination of theological discourse in favor of theological pluralism.<sup>8</sup> Although they were trained as neoscholastics, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Jean Daniélou, Yves Congar, and de Lubac were attentive to historical development and resisted the ahistorical methods of neoscholasticism in favor of methods attentive to historicity. The departure from neoscholasticism left a vacuum difficult for the *nouvelle théologie* to fill. As a result, it lacks the clarity of methods, sources, and foundations within neoscholasticism that gave theology the appearance of a science. These theologians were forced to improvise, drawing resources from the patristic and medieval periods and from the wider Christian tradition. The patristic and medieval periods offered "new" ways of thinking about the nature of theology, though prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the implications of these shifts in theological methodology were uncertain. Because de Lubac's body of work developed during a time of radical upheaval in theological methodology, his methodology often appears to be unclear or idiosyncratic.

8. A growing body of literature examines the impact of the *nouvelle théologie*. See Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology*; Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*; A. N. Williams, "The Future of the Past: The Contemporary Significance of the Nouvelle Théologie," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 4 (2005): 347–61; Daley, "Nouvelle Théologie and the Patristic Revival"; Étienne Fouilloux, "'Nouvelle Théologie' et Théologie Nouvelle (1930–1960)," in *L'histoire religieuse en France et en Espagne: Colloque international, Casa de Velázquez, 2–5 avril 2001: Actes*, ed. Benoît Pellistrandì, vol. 87, Collection de la Casa de Velázquez (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2004), 411–25; Agnès Desmazières, "La nouvelle théologie, prémisse d'une théologie herméneutique? La controverse sur l'analogie de la vérité (1946–1949)," *Revue Thomiste* 104, no. 1/2 (2004): 241–72; Aidan Nichols, OP, "Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie," *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 1–19.

Second, even in comparison with other *nouveaux théologiens*, de Lubac exhibited a particular allergy to theological systematization and methodological foundations. De Lubac often avoided speaking in his own voice, but rather expressed his opinions through the writings of other authors. Hans Urs von Balthasar explained that de Lubac wanted the voice of the ancient church to have a clear expression within his writings.<sup>9</sup> John Milbank, on the other hand, suggests that de Lubac's writings took on an increasingly historical and third-person form after 1950, when he was removed from teaching and his writings were under suspicion by the Catholic authorities. Milbank theorizes that de Lubac hid his authentic but heterodox theological opinions under the cover of historical studies.<sup>10</sup> Whatever the underlying cause may be for avoiding the first-person voice, his style of writing resists the easy discovery of the systematic considerations guiding his work.

Third, de Lubac's writings were responses to the problems of his day. Establishing theological coherence among his various writings remains a problem because these works are notoriously difficult to reduce to clear systematic positions. De Lubac described his writings as occasional, the choice of topics determined by situations imposed upon him rather than by some preconceived plan.<sup>11</sup> He likened the development of some of his writings to a disorderly evolution or autogenesis. In an interview with Angelo Scola, he admitted that *Exégèse médiévale* grew "in a rather vague order, without any

9. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 26–27.

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

11. Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings* (San Francisco: Communio Books, 1993), 369. Originally published as Henri de Lubac, *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits*, Chrétiens aujourd'hui 1 (Namur, Belgium: Culture et Vérité, 1989).

preconceived plan, and with enormous *lacunae*.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, de Lubac’s studies ranged across topics in early church history, medieval history, ecclesiology, medieval to modern scholasticism, modern atheistic thought, mysticism, fundamental theology, Renaissance studies, and literary criticism. Unifying features and foundational insights are not easy to pin down.<sup>13</sup>

A final obstacle to discerning the coherence of de Lubac’s theological reflection is its incompleteness. In his autobiographical reflection, *At the Service of the Church*, he admitted that the idea at the center of his thought, which would be communicated in a projected book on Christ and mysticism, would never be completed: “I truly believe that for a rather long time the idea for my book on Mysticism has been my inspiration in everything. I form my judgments on the basis of it, it provides me with the means to classify my ideas in proportion to it. But I will not write this book. It is in all ways beyond my physical, intellectual, and spiritual strength.”<sup>14</sup> This admission reflects de Lubac’s notion that conceptual formulation always falls short of theological truth. It is consistent with his tendencies away from theological system.<sup>15</sup> The heart of his theology remains unexpressed; the center remains unarticulated. The incompleteness of de Lubac’s work stands as a caveat against

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

13. Rudolf Voderholzer writes, “Henri de Lubac left no masterpiece of systematic theology, no comprehensive summa of his thought. His work is both many-faceted and versatile. His writings do not carry out a long, preconceived plan.” Rudolf Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 107.

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

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

excessively systematic interpretations of his thought. At the same time, it proposes something positive about his theological vision: authentic transcendence requires that complete synthesis occur only beyond the present horizon. The incompleteness of his work testifies to its eschatological character and its apophatic tone.

### Ontology and History

Despite these obstacles, many have recognized signs of a consistent theological vision that permeates de Lubac's diverse writings. Instead of speaking of his "systematic theology," Voderholzer refers to his "synthetic thinking" and "synoptic presentation."<sup>16</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, in *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (1991), spoke of an "organic unity" amidst a "multiplicity of themes."<sup>17</sup> Yet determining precisely what that organic unity consists in remains a difficulty. Two major interpretations have arisen in describing the coherence of de Lubac's corpus: an ontological interpretation and an historical interpretation.

One proposal relates de Lubac's theological method, ecclesiology, sacramental theology, and other theological themes to his ontology, particularly his account of the supernatural and the natural, that informs his entire theological project. This proposal was popularized by John Milbank's *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (2005), in which he argued that the core of de Lubac's work is the debate on the supernatural, most authentically articulated in de Lubac's 1946 book *Surnaturel: Études*

16. Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac*, 108–9. Susan K. Wood speaks of an "organic unity." Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 129.

17. Balthasar, *Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 10. The title of the German original is more suggestive of unity within diverse themes: *Henri de Lubac: Sein organisches Lebenswerk* (1976; Henri de Lubac: his organic life's work). The conclusion of *Theology of Henri de Lubac* was taken from Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Le cardinal Henri de Lubac, l'homme et son oeuvre*, (Paris: Éditions Lethielleux, 1983).



*historiques*. Milbank explains, “Most of de Lubac’s other writing . . . in a sense works out the thesis of *Surnaturel* in relation to ecclesiology, exegesis, inter-religious dialogue, and secular social and scientific thought.”<sup>18</sup> For Milbank, *Surnaturel* communicates a core theological insight: the rejection of a hierarchical duality between nature and grace, and nature and the supernatural. In sum, de Lubac saw nature and the supernatural as different intensities of being rather than as formally distinct. While Milbank admits that de Lubac never developed a formal ontology, he nevertheless proposes that de Lubac’s fundamental vision was guided by an Augustinian–Neoplatonic account of being.

Milbank’s account of the unity of de Lubac’s theology has influenced an ontological interpretation of the unity of his work. Bryan C. Hollon’s book on de Lubac, *Everything Is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac* (2009), is a significant engagement with and corrective to Milbank. The title suggests an ontology of creation in which the partition between supernatural and natural has been dissolved.<sup>19</sup> Matthew Bernard Mulcahy, in *Aquinas’s Notion of Pure Nature and the Christian Integralism of Henri de Lubac* (2011), appropriates Milbank’s ontological interpretation of de Lubac’s work and identifies the core inspiration of de Lubac with that of Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy.<sup>20</sup> The subtitle, *Not Everything Is Grace*, more provocatively captures the heart of the question as to whether de Lubac’s ontology preserves the distinction between nature and grace.

18. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 4.

19. Bryan C. Hollon, *Everything Is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009). To be precise, however, Hollon’s interpretation, “Everything is sacred,” diverges considerably from Milbank. Hollon does not attribute to de Lubac an implicit Neoplatonic ontology of participation, as does Milbank. Instead, he frames the sacrality of creation in terms of the historical participation in the Christ event, a participation illuminated by the practice of “spiritual interpretation” of Scripture.

20. Mulcahy, *Aquinas’s Notion of Pure Nature*.

Similarly, Hans Boersma interprets de Lubac, and *nouvelle théologie* as a whole, through the lens of ontology. He theorizes that de Lubac recovered a metaphysics—which he calls “sacramental ontology”—that functioned as a common systematic method.<sup>21</sup> Sacramental ontology concerns the “sacramental character of all created existence” and functions as the link between the theology of nature and the supernatural and the theology of the church in de Lubac’s thought.<sup>22</sup> His recent book, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery*, expands these ideas in an effort to identify the internal coherence within the *nouvelle théologie* as a movement.<sup>23</sup>

There are merits to speaking of de Lubac’s ontology or sacramental ontology. Yet there are also limitations. Ontology—whether in regard to a Christian-Neoplatonic ontology or a postmodern Christian ontology—suggests that the principal categories of de Lubac’s theology are philosophical rather than historical. The predominant themes and discourses within his work revolve around *chronos* (time) or *kairos* (the opportune moment) rather than *ontos* (being). However, it is more accurate to say that the ontology found within de Lubac’s account of the supernatural and natural is derivative of his understanding of the history of salvation and its fulfillment.

21. Boersma borrows the term *sacramental ontology* from Dennis Doyle, who writes that de Lubac’s doctrine of the supernatural “provides an ontology that allows for speaking of knowledge of God in an historical and critical framework,” which assumes that the historical nature of God’s revelation does not occlude knowledge of God, but is a means to knowledge of God’s self. Dennis M. Doyle, “Henri de Lubac and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 60, no. 2 (1999): 209–27.

22. Boersma, “Sacramental Ontology,” 243–4.

23. While Boersma admits that the theologians associated with the *nouvelle théologie* did not constitute a homogeneous theological school, he contends that their approach to diverse theological problems—including the interpretation of Scripture, the theology of history, the development of doctrine, nature and grace, and ecclesiology—evinced an underlying sacramental view of reality. He closely relates this sacramental view of reality with Neoplatonic ontology.

The second line of interpretation of de Lubac's work emphasizes *chronos* and *kairos* over *ontos* as the basic unifying features of de Lubac's thought. Balthasar suggests that the multiple themes in de Lubac's writings are systematically connected with the organic center: the natural desire of the creature for God. According to Balthasar, the "principal problem" that de Lubac addressed is that the finite creature tends through a "positive dynamism . . . toward a goal that cannot be reached 'from below' but is nevertheless necessary."<sup>24</sup> The dynamism of the creature for God permeates de Lubac's fundamental theology, his theology of salvation history, and cosmology-eschatology.<sup>25</sup> Adding that these theological themes cannot be reduced to each other, Balthasar contends that each theme shares a common "structural principle of the divine plan."<sup>26</sup> He notes that the structure of God's plan in history is the underlying subject of de Lubac's *Exégèse médiévale*, despite its focus on the development of biblical interpretation.<sup>27</sup>

Like Balthasar, Susan K. Wood contends that de Lubac's investigations into early Christian scriptural interpretation concern a theology of history.<sup>28</sup> Wood demonstrates the parallels articulated in de Lubac's writings between the senses of Scripture (literal, allegorical, anagogical), the multiple meanings of the "body of Christ" (historical, sacramental, ecclesial), and multiple significations of liturgical practice (memorial, presence, anticipation). According to Wood, the pattern of salvation history is the basic structure that informs de Lubac's theology of Scripture, sacraments, and the church.

24. Balthasar, *Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 12.

25. *Ibid.*, 62.

26. *Ibid.*, 63.

27. *Ibid.*, 76.

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

Similarly, Brian Daley has suggested that the *nouvelle théologie's* recovery of patristic and medieval exegetical practices—namely, the figural or spiritual interpretation of Scripture—was central to its shift away from both neoscholastic ecclesiology and theological methodology. Daley concludes that the patristic revival in the *nouvelle théologie* allowed for a broadening of theological methodology and a revival of a sacramental mentality. From the Greek and Latin fathers, the *nouvelle théologie's* rediscovery of “sacramental modes of thought” through “figural exegesis . . . [as a] way of reading all history as really speaking of Christ, was the heart of the *nouvelle théologie*, the greatest lesson it had learned from reading the Fathers.”<sup>29</sup> The recovery of spiritual exegesis in the *nouvelle théologie*—most evident in the work of Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou—explains its growing appeal to Protestant theologians as a resource for theology and ecumenism.<sup>30</sup>

### **Towards an Eschatological Unity**

Building on the work of Balthasar, Wood, and Daley, I argue that the pattern of redemptive history and its eschatological fulfillment constitute the theological axes of de Lubac's work. De Lubac's eschatology remains an often-overlooked feature of his theological writings. Against the backdrop of a renewed awareness of the end in Roman Catholicism during the twentieth century, de Lubac's theology appears essentially eschatological.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Roman Catholicism communicated an apocalyptic interpretation of modern history and the church's place in the modern world through official church pronouncements and messages from the appearances of Mary. In

29. Daley, “Nouvelle Théologie and the Patristic Revival,” 382.

30. For example, see Hollon, *Everything Is Sacred*; Hollon, “Ontology, Exegesis, and Culture in the Thought of Henri de Lubac” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2006).

the twentieth century, apocalypticism in Roman Catholicism became more acute. The apocalyptic, the experience of evil, and God's judgment were also the subjects of literary reflection, for example, in Georges Bernanos's *Sous le soleil de Satan* (1926) and Paul Claudel's *Paul Claudel interroge l'apocalypse* (1952). In the mid-1940s, the question of the apocalyptic was addressed directly in the debate over the "theology of history" within the *nouvelle théologie*. During the German occupation of France, it became clear that an apocalyptic understanding of history was at the root of fascist ideology. Writers associated with the *nouvelle théologie*—Henri-Marie Féret, Gaston Fessard, Joseph Huby, and Jean Daniélou—began to rethink a Christian view of history, one that takes seriously God's ongoing presence in the world, in light of the philosophies of history promulgated both by fascists and Marxists. The central question that emerged concerned the relationship between the sacred history communicated in Scripture and historical experience punctuated by the war, the Shoah, and the liberation of Paris.

The debate over the theology of history within the *nouvelle théologie* in the 1940s is not unlike the current reflections on the recovery of the apocalyptic within Christian theology.<sup>31</sup> As Cyril O'Regan suggests, on the one hand, apocalyptic theology is a powerful "visionary option," transmitting an image of Christianity as a way of life, the anticipation of restoration, and the establishment of divine justice.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, apocalyptic theology could be a dangerous tool of sectarianism, triumphalism, or worse. The debate over the theological meaning of history in the 1940s attempted to

31. See Cyril O'Regan, *Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009); Nathan R. Kerr, *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009).

32. O'Regan, *Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic*, 127.

address both the promises and dangers of the apocalyptic as a mode of interpreting Scripture and the world.

For the *nouvelle théologie*, representing the telos of history and the eternal in the present became an overarching concern. Especially for de Lubac, the theological meaning of history became the axis of his work. While de Lubac presented an outline of patristic historical and eschatological thought in *Catholicisme*, it was in *Exégèse médiévale* that he outlined the development of Christian thinking about history and its fulfillment. De Lubac's *La Posterité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore* traced a stream of apocalyptic theology from the medieval theologian Joachim of Fiore through the modern era. De Lubac also recognized an impulse opposed to Joachim within a stream of Christian mysticism that lacked the virtue of hope or the element of expectation. In a mysticism divorced from history and an apocalyptic understanding divorced from mysticism, Western modernity had inherited the pathological remains of a Christian understanding of "the end," reconstituting them in secular variants. De Lubac's work sought to recover an early Christian understanding of eschatology from the patristic period, a unity of historical expectation and mysticism.

De Lubac should not be interpreted in an overly systematic or foundational manner. He never elaborated a systematic eschatology that would coordinate the various aspects of his thinking. Yet de Lubac's various theological interventions evince a common structure organized around the relationship between redemptive history and its fulfillment. De Lubac's eschatology, which arose against the backdrop of diverse apocalyptic and eschatological streams in modernity, constitutes the organizing principle and guiding intuition of his diverse theological projects.

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*Between Apocalypse and Eschaton: History and Eternity in Henri de Lubac* examines de Lubac's understanding of history and its fulfillment in light of the eschatological consciousness within twentieth-century Catholicism and the shifting methodology in Catholic theology during that period. The study is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Eschatology as the 'Storm Center,'" shows that the eschatological resurgence in early twentieth-century theology was part of a broader eschatological turn in modernity. The instability of the meaning of time and history characterized *fin-de-siècle* European culture. This instability manifested itself eschatologically. Antimodernist Catholics tended to interpret this instability in apocalyptic terms, reflecting the loss of a clear framework for discovering eternity in time. The *nouvelle théologie* movement, and particularly the post-World War II debate over the "theology of history," sought to reconcile a vibrant Catholic apocalyptic sensibility with a modern historical consciousness.

Part 2, "Temporal Ruptures," outlines de Lubac's formulation of a theology of history that responded to diverse eschatological strands within modernity. De Lubac recovered a Christian understanding of history from the patristic tradition, especially from the writings of the Egyptian theologian Origen (185–254 CE). For de Lubac, a Christian understanding of history was transmitted through ancient methods of interpreting the Bible, methods of spiritual interpretation that can be traced back to Origen. This Christian consciousness of history eroded with the erosion of spiritual interpretation in the Middle Ages. According to de Lubac, a modern apocalyptic consciousness can be traced to a rupture in the tradition of scriptural interpretation.

Part 3, "The Eschatological Structure of De Lubac's Thought," shows that de Lubac's historical-eschatological thinking constitutes the fundamental inspiration for his various theological projects and interventions. His theology of revelation, Christology, sacramental

theology, ecclesiology, and understanding of the supernatural share a common structure inspired by his eschatology.