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# Christology, Public Theology, and Thomism: de Lubac, Balthasar, and Murray

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Martin Marty suggests that the term "public" in public theology identifies the place where "strangers [can] meet on common ground."<sup>1</sup> This suggestion will suffice to indicate the general concern of the present paper.

Among the issues that must be taken up by Christians who would address this concern for establishing common ground with non-Christians is that of the integrity of human nature. More exactly, the question is: how are we to understand the form of nature relative to the form of grace given in Jesus Christ? This question indicates the christological context of my concern.

Finally, with respect to the third term in my title, "Thomism": the past two days of discussion have made it abundantly clear how vexed is the question of who most adequately represents the mind of Aquinas or indeed authentic Thomism, and I will not enter directly into that debate here. Rather I am going to assume for present purposes that de Lubac, Balthasar, and Murray are all indebted to St. Thomas in some significant if not uncontroverted sense. This assumption permits a focus on what to me is a prior and indeed more important question: namely, which of their "Thomisms," if we allow them all to be called such, is most faithful to the Gospel as interpreted in the central Christian tradition?

It would be irresponsible to make any pretense of providing, within present limits, anything approaching a complete argument with respect

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1. "From Personal to Private, From Political to Public Religion," Inaugural Lecture on Religion and Public Life, Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, University of Notre Dame (February 9, 1984), p. 11.

Robert McElroy in his recent book on John Courtney Murray defines public theology as "the effort of the mainstream Christian churches and theologians in the United States to articulate a substantive role for spiritual values in public life which does not violate the spirit of American pluralism"; in *The Search for an American Public Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 5. Again, David Tracy suggests that the concern of a public theology is to establish a discourse that is "available to all persons in principle"; in David Tracy and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Talking About God: Theology in the Context of Modern Pluralism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), p. 3.

to our three theologians. The intention is merely to try to identify the terms which seem to be the necessary and most basic ones for addressing properly the concern noted above—though of course I recognize that establishing terms is already the important beginning of an argument.

I will consider in turn: first, some texts which I take to be indicative of the respective positions of our three theologians on the relation of nature and grace; secondly, the sense of the public character of (Christian) theology, that is, of the “common ground,” which follows from these different positions; and, thirdly, the hermeneutical question. For reasons which will become evident, the issues raised here lead us directly into the interpretation of conciliar documents, not only of Vatican II but of earlier councils.

### I. Christology: Nature and Grace

(1) I begin with a quotation from Balthasar’s *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe (Love Alone)*:

For the creation, the forms of nature, have developed and opened themselves in spirit and in love to the unending fruitfulness of grace, receiving their final form from above so that everything natural is reformed, recast and re-orientated. The archetype of this whole development is found in the way Christ’s human nature stands out—ecstatically—in relation to his divine person, from which he draws his human existence; the mission he receives from the Father forms not only his office and destiny as Redeemer, but the essential traits of his individual nature.<sup>2</sup>

The points to which I wish to draw attention with respect to this quotation are two. First, that the forms of nature receive their “final form from above”; secondly, that the archetype for this is found in Jesus Christ, in Christology.

Regarding the first point, then: it is Balthasar’s position, following the patristic and High Scholastic tradition, that grace orders nature from the beginning of nature’s existence. Firmly maintaining the distinction between nature and grace, Balthasar’s affirmation is nonetheless meant to exclude dualism of both a “hard” and a “soft” sort. It excludes the hard or cruder form of dualism found in the “pure nature” hypothesis characteristic of much of the modern period, according to which nature was conceived first in terms of its own finality, to which was then “superadded” a second, now “supernatural,” finality. But Balthasar’s theology excludes a softer or more subtle form of dualism as well:

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2. New York: Herder, 1969, pp. 101-102.

namely, one that accepts that there is, *de facto*, only one ultimate end for nature, a supernatural one, but which nonetheless fails to take sufficient account of the fact that this end already gives direction and thus (in some significant sense) *form* to nature. Balthasar's theology, in other words, excludes as well any view that fails to recognize that the one (ultimate) finality of nature, which is for the God of Jesus Christ, in ordering nature from its beginning, thereby orders nature (and all of its penultimate ends) *from within*. In short, Balthasar rejects the notion of a mere harmony between the two orders, insofar as such harmony is conceived, however subtly or unconsciously, in terms of an extrinsic relation.

Evidently, several qualifications are important for proper understanding here: first, the gratuitousness of the supernatural ordering of nature and that of the creation of nature must be distinguished, even though both occur simultaneously. Secondly, the order of creation and the order of redemption, and their corresponding "graces," must be distinguished. Thirdly, the supernatural ordering of nature must be seen as established, not independently of the historical person Jesus Christ, but precisely in virtue of Jesus Christ, and indeed of the church which is Christ's body. These qualifiers cannot be developed here; but it is important to take note of them.<sup>3</sup>

3. Perhaps most especially the third one, since it is the sense of Jesus Christ and indeed the church as the *a priori* for every presence of grace in the cosmos that determines the crucial differences between the major streams of Catholic thought in recent decades represented by Balthasar on the one hand, and Karl Rahner on the other. It is beyond the scope of this paper to give detailed attention to such differences.

For Balthasar's sense of those differences, see, *inter alia*, his *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung einer Theologie*, 4th ed. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1976), pp. 308-313; *Henri de Lubac: sein organisches Lebenswerk* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1976), p. 60; *The Moment of Christian Witness* (Glen Rock, New Jersey: Newman Press, 1969), pp. 60-76 and *passim*. Fundamentally, the issue is this: once one affirms a (*de facto*) unity (within distinctness) of the natural and the supernatural orders, there remains the crucial question of how one is to interpret the "a priori" character of this relation. How one understands this "a priori" determines the relative sense of "symmetry" (and indeed "mutuality" of relation) between the two orders. For Balthasar, the relation that is given "a priori" must be viewed first "from above." For Rahner, on the other hand, the tendency is toward an "a priori" viewed first transcendently or "from below." These different tendencies are of momentous consequence: what is at stake is nothing less than whether (in what sense) nature (man; reason; world) will be the measure for grace (God; revelation; Church), or grace for nature. See also the discussion of Rahner in Joseph Ratzinger's *Principles of a Catholic Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), pp. 161-71; and de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), p. 132, fn 2.

In sum, then, my first concern with respect to the text cited above is merely to insist that, for Balthasar, nature, wherever it is found, always-already bears within its depths the vestige of—an internal *ordering* toward—the form of love revealed by the trinitarian God in Jesus Christ.

The second point of the text is that, for Balthasar, the relation of nature and grace indicated here has its archetype in Jesus Christ. That is, it takes its meaning—by way of analogy, if I may introduce a term that needs to be treated with care<sup>4</sup>—from the formula of the relation of the two natures in Christ. The crucial point to note is Balthasar's emphasis: the *unity* of Christ's divine person penetrates Christ's human nature, even as it leaves that nature its essential distinctness—indeed, creates that distinctness. Jesus draws his human existence from the Father and from his divine person; and the mission he thereby receives from the Father forms not only his office and destiny, but the essential traits of his individual nature. In an “analogous” manner, our human nature takes its deepest meaning from being brought into the service of God's revelation, that is, by virtue of the downward movement of God's grace and love which affects us (already and not yet) from the moment of our created existence.<sup>5</sup>

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4. The required qualifications here are at least two: first, in accord with the formula of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the similarity between the divine-human relation in Jesus Christ and the divine-human relation in all other persons does not rule out but on the contrary presupposes an infinite difference between those two relations. Secondly, then, those relations are nonetheless “analogical” rather than merely equivocal in character: but only with the crucial qualification that the analogy is Christ's doing and not our doing. The analogy is “from above” first, and only consequently “from below.” (There is a sense in which Balthasar's “ana-logy” is first a “kata-logy”: cf. Wolfgang Treitler's discussion in his article in *The Life and Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. David L. Schindler [San Francisco: Communio Books/Ignatius Press, 1991].) There is only one hypostatic union. The pertinent point is simply that Jesus Christ has nonetheless utterly freely offered to share with creation his relation to the Father and not some other relation, and this offer serves to order creation from the beginning (already and not yet).

It is beyond our purpose to develop Balthasar's understanding of analogy as indicated here. But see, for example, the brief but pertinent discussion, “The Cross and Philosophy,” in *Mysterium Paschale* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), pp. 56-66, where Balthasar charts a course between too much continuity between Jesus Christ (the Cross) and the structures of the world (philosophy) (*e.g.*, as in the case of Hegel) on the one hand, and sheer paradox (*e.g.*, as in the case of Luther) on the other. And cf. also fn. 5 below.

5. Cf. the following statement by Balthasar: “Christ is the one and only criterion, given in the concrete, by which we measure the relations between God and man, grace and nature, faith and reason; and Christ is, though he has a human nature, a divine Person. This is the determining factor in the relationships. His humanity is the

This, then, indicates Balthasar's interpretation of the formula given at Chalcedon and developed in subsequent councils: the two natures which are ever distinct ("in duabus naturis inconfuse") nevertheless actualize this distinctness only *from within the unity* of the one divine person ("indivise"; "unam personam atque subsistentiam"). Balthasar's sense of the way unity (of divine person in Jesus Christ) establishes the context within which alone distinctness (of divine and human natures in Jesus Christ) can be properly understood, provides the archetype (analogy) for his understanding of the unity and distinctness of grace and nature.

(2) We turn, then, to Henri de Lubac. The text I offer is from an article written in 1932, and was in fact cited by John Courtney Murray in the context of their—de Lubac's and Murray's—common rejection of Robert Bellarmine's theory of the Church's indirect power over the temporal order.

De Lubac says as follows:

The law of the relations between nature and grace, in its generality, is everywhere the same. It is from within that grace seizes (*reprend*) nature, and, far from diminishing nature, raises it up, in order to make it serve its own ends. It is from within that faith transforms reason, that the Church influences the state. As the messenger of Christ, the church is not the guardian of the state; on the contrary she ennobles the state, inspiring it to be Christian and thereby more human.<sup>6</sup>

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expression and instrument of the divinity, and by no means is the divinity the expression and instrument of the humanity. In every respect, the humanity is fulfilled in that it sees itself, with all its upward stirrings, brought into the service of God's revelation, into the downward movement of his grace and love" ("Characteristics of Christianity," in *Verbum Caro* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989], pp. 161-80, at 162-63.

6. Henri de Lubac, "Le pouvoir de l'église en matière temporelle," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 12 (1932): 329-54, at 343-44. It should be noted here that de Lubac is writing prior to and therefore independent of Murray's distinction between state and society. It would be anachronistic—not to mention false—to charge de Lubac with anything like a theocratic tendency in the text cited. It is the very point of this article, as well as of a lecture on the same topic given at about the same time (1931), to reject theocracy. Nonetheless, the theological presuppositions that inform de Lubac's rejection of theocracy are significantly different from those of Murray. Though the point cannot be argued here, the difference between them is indicated in the fact that, for de Lubac, the proper purpose of the church, that is, even in the temporal order, is sanctification (because *all* of human being has its end and salvation in Jesus Christ), whereas, for Murray, the proper purpose of the church in the temporal order is humanization and civilization (because and insofar as one must distinguish the spiritual and temporal ends of human being: see, to take but one example, Murray's "Governmental Repression of Heresy," in *Proceedings of the*

There are two points in this text to which I wish to draw attention. The first, consistent with what we already saw in Balthasar, is that grace (or faith) acts from within nature (or reason), and thus transforms nature. The second is that the influence of grace (faith) thereby makes nature (reason) more—and not less—human. Grace's transformation of nature neither leaves nature be nor modifies it merely "accidentally," nor does it turn nature into something essentially different.<sup>7</sup>

The pertinent point for present purposes, then, is that what nature is is most fully revealed (*de facto*) in its order to grace; what nature truly is (in the one concrete order of creation) is revealed progressively more, the more it is transformed in and by grace. It is crucial to take note of what is implied in de Lubac's way of formulating this truth: *because* and insofar as one is Christian, one is *thereby* more human. Given the primitive relation between grace and nature, it follows that in some significant sense grace and nature each tell us something about the other. But de Lubac's understanding of this sense is missed if one fails to notice the asymmetry implied in his formulation: to wit, that the human informs us properly about grace, about what is truly divine, not "in itself" or as *separate* from grace, but only as itself anteriorly ordered by grace. In a word, grace's interpretation of what is natural is the anterior condition for nature's interpretation of what is "graced" or indeed compatible with the order of grace.<sup>8</sup>

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*Catholic Theological Society of America* 3 [1948]: 26-98, at 65-66, where he says that the Church must seek to animate from within the various rational structures and processes of society, but only to help these achieve their own finalities as determined by their nature.)

De Lubac's article cited above, as well as the 1931 lecture, are reprinted with several slight modifications in Henri de Lubac, *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), pp. 199-233 (the lecture appears on pp. 222-33, as a supplement to the article).

7. On the term "transformation" (as preferable, for example, to the term "elevation"), see de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1980), pp. 81-99; and p. 49. See also *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, pp. 291-311, esp. p. 294.

De Lubac points out that the term "accident" is in fact susceptible of a correct use with respect to the grace-nature relation (*A Brief Catechesis*, p. 46f.). What is necessary is that one recognize the extent to which a more conventional ("Aristotelian") sense of the terms "accident" and "substance" needs to be deepened and expanded to accommodate the uniqueness of this relation: on this, see Balthasar, "Der Begriff der Natur in der Theologie," in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 75 (1953): 455.

8. The asymmetry implied here indicates the point on which turn the crucial differences between de Lubac on the one hand, and Karl Rahner on the other, for example, with respect to the understanding of nature and "common human ex-

Of course, the sense of this priority must be properly understood. Certainly it is possible to have some knowledge of the integrity of nature directly through experience, and thus both “before” and as distinct from the order of grace. The point is simply that this knowledge will in any case be of a grace-related nature (of a nature always-already concretely ordered, positively or negatively, consciously or unconsciously, to the God of Jesus Christ) and thus not of a “pure nature,” whether one is aware of this relation (or ordering) or not.<sup>9</sup> Such knowledge therefore

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perience” in Christian ethics. For those who follow Rahner, “the resources of Scripture, dogma, and Christian life are the fullest available ‘objectifications’ of the common human experience” (Richard A. McCormick, S.J., “Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?” in *The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J. [New York: Paulist Press, 1980], pp. 156-73, at p. 162); or again, Christian faith provides motivating power for insights which are in principle available to all human beings (*ibid.*, p. 170). For those who follow de Lubac, Jesus Christ, in assuming human nature and thus natural law, thereby already establishes the basic horizon for the latter’s proper meaning. Jesus Christ is thus, in a sense that is inclusive and not exclusive of “natural law,” at once the formal-universal and the concrete-personal norm for moral life (see Balthasar, “Nine Theses in Christian Ethics,” in *The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, pp. 190-206, at p. 191, and *passim*).

For views consistent with that of McCormick as expressed here, see Josef Fuchs, S.J., “Is There a Specifically Christian Ethics?” in *The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, pp. 3-19; *idem.*, “Christliche Moral: Biblische Orientierung und menschliche Wertung,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 205 (1987): 671-83; and John Langan, “The Christian Difference in Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 131-50. For views consistent with that of Balthasar, see Joseph Ratzinger, “Magisterium, Faith, Morality,” in *The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, pp. 174-89; and Angelo Scola, “Christologie et morale,” *Nouvelle revue théologie* 109 (1987): 382-409.

Robert McElroy, in *The Search for an American Public Theology*, indicates the fundamental agreement of Murray with the view of Fuchs that “the material content of Christian ethics is identical with that of the human ethics produced by reason,” and thus that “the superiority of Christian ethics over natural ethics is a superiority of horizon and motivation, not a superiority of action or behavior” (pp. 150ff). This claim of agreement between the two authors seems to me both interesting and accurate. It is nonetheless beyond the scope of this paper to develop the point: namely, to show the sense in which the autonomy of the natural order on the part of Murray and Fuchs is understood in similar ways, albeit from different directions (“neo-Scholastic”: Murray, and “transcendental”: Fuchs); and to show further how this similarity-in-difference leads the two thinkers to—respectively—“neoconservative” and “progressive” senses of the autonomy of the cultural-social order relative to Christianity.

9. The point of this paragraph is emphatically not to deny the possibility and legitimacy of a distinctly philosophical understanding of nature (regarding the distinction between the natural/philosophical and supernatural/theological or-

must be judged *by* the order given in Jesus Christ, as the necessary condition for determining finally the sense in which what it tells us is truly compatible *with* that order.

It does not seem to me necessary to belabor the evident agreement between de Lubac's understanding of the grace-nature relation here and that of Balthasar as noted earlier:<sup>10</sup> the context that is established in and by the order of grace provides the horizon within which the integrity of what is distinctly natural must—in the real order of things—ultimately and most properly be understood. A useful analogy here is that employed by de Lubac regarding the spirit-body distinction. As de Lubac points out, the true integrity of the body is secured best within an anterior unity of spirit-body (Thomism), and not in the body as pushed outside of or made extrinsic to spirit (Cartesianism).<sup>11</sup>

(3) We turn, then, to John Courtney Murray. The quotation I offer is from a long article originally presented to the Catholic Theological

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ders, one must always keep in mind the following: "duplex ordo cognitionis, proprio objecto, propria methodo" [Denzinger 1795, 1799]). The issue is simply whether the integrity of nature (philosophy) which indeed is required in the Catholic tradition entails a "purity of nature," or entails the claim at least to be able to abstract such a "pure nature"—in suchwise that one could be certain that what one had thus abstracted had no traces whatever either of the supernatural or of sin. Regarding this point see the important discussions by Balthasar in *Theologik*, vol. 1, *Wahrheit der Welt* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag), pp. xi-xvii, especially xi-xiii; and "Von den Aufgaben der Katholischen Philosophie in der Zeit," *Annalen der Philosophischen Gesellschaft Innerschweiz* 3 (December-January, 1946/47): 1-38, especially pp. 5-6. See also, generally, Part Three ("Denken und Denkform im Katholizismus") of Balthasar's *Karl Barth*, pp. 263-386. Balthasar's view on this matter turns on a central principle: the more complete and concrete one wishes one's philosophy to be, the more one must recognize the historical order of things—wherein there has always been some purification due to faith, or some obscuring due to sin.

10. On the differences between himself and de Lubac on the grace-nature distinction, see Balthasar, *Henri de Lubac*, p. 61, fn. 36. De Lubac logically distinguishes three moments in God's plan: (1) creation of spiritual being; (2) the supernatural finality imprinted in its nature; (3) the free offer of participation in God's life. Balthasar asks whether (1) and (2) do not coincide conceptually. That is, if one starts theologically from the point of the unity of God's salvific plan, is not the whole an indivisible act of God's freedom which can, in the order of execution, be conceptually analyzed only into two moments—(1-2) and (3)?

11. See *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, pp. 42-43.

In connection with my discussion of de Lubac in the present article, see *A Brief Catechesis*, pp. 43ff, where de Lubac suggests that the perfect model for understanding the union in difference between the creature and its Creator is to be found in the circumincession of the three Persons of the Trinity.

Society in 1948, entitled "Governmental Repression of Heresy." In the context of his discussion regarding the work of John of Paris (d. 1306), Murray states as follows:

[The relations between the two powers—between the spiritual and temporal—] are to be determined on theological principles—basically, those that govern the relations between nature and grace—and not by considerations of political reality, or by feudal concepts of social unity. As grace does not destroy nature, so the institution of the Church has not destroyed the spontaneously natural aspirations of man to a good political society; and this society is as autonomous as the social instinct that produces it. Again, as the harmony of nature presupposes their enduring distinction, so the harmony of the two powers is conditioned by the fidelity of each to its own nature and end; each obeys the one God and ministers to the one man, but each does so in its own order. Finally, as grace completes nature, not by invading the order of nature but by elevating it, so the spiritual and temporal powers complete one another, not so that one assumes the other's functions, but so that each favors the performance by the other of the other's own functions, the favoring being done by each *suo modo*.<sup>12</sup>

First, two preliminary comments. Although clearly I cannot offer additional textual evidence in this forum, I take the distinction between nature and grace as formulated here to be representative of Murray's published work throughout his career. That distinction, albeit in terms which shift with context, is decisive in each of the key areas of his concern throughout his life.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, then, it is important to note that Murray himself, as the text already makes clear, sees this distinction as establishing the basic horizon within which he takes up each of his concerns. But it is equally important to recognize that he nonetheless sees the distinction as one that can be taken for granted, at least by Catholics. Murray therefore sees no need for extensive argument on its behalf and on its own terms. Rather, he sees his task largely as that of developing the as-yet unseen consequences of the distinction for the social-political order, that is, in the light of the new circumstances of modern democracy. We will need

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12. "Governmental Repression of Heresy," p. 57.

13. I attempt to document this claim in some detail in a forthcoming book. Perhaps I should note here that I take the claim to be accurate, even granting Leon Hooper's argument on behalf of a later (post-1959) influence of Lonergan on Murray: that is, precisely in terms of an evolution in Murray from a more "timeless" or "abstract" appeal to natural law to a more historically sensitive appeal (cf. J. Leon Hooper, *The Ethics of Discourse* [Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 1986]). But this is matter for discussion elsewhere.

later to comment on Murray's mode of procedure here. But first we need to ask the obvious question: isn't Murray's assumed distinction between grace and nature one that a Catholic can and indeed must adopt?

In addressing this question, it must suffice for present purposes to draw attention to the ambiguity resident in Murray's language, an ambiguity, that is, which I believe is brought into relief by the theology of Balthasar-de Lubac. "Harmony," "completing," "fidelity of each to its own nature and end," and the like: these terms are indeed all tradition-honored terms, and are susceptible of authentically Catholic interpretation.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, what the work of Balthasar-de Lubac I think makes clear is that the sense of that interpretation is hardly self-evident. The terms "harmony" and "completion" (and indeed all the key phrasings of the text cited) as indicative of the relation between the two orders can be understood in at least two ways, depending on the relative priority one accords unity and distinctness in one's conception of that relation. A priority—anteriority—of unity entails a relation between orders which is first from within; a priority of distinctness entails a relation between orders that is first from without. The difference, in other words, is between a relation that is intrinsic and a relation that is extrinsic, and consequently between contrasting senses of the integrity of what is distinct. What is at stake in these contrasting senses is nothing less than the difference between the primary meaning of integration on the one hand, and of fragmentation (or indeed secularization) on the other.

My proposal is that it is just this difference between an intrinsic (*de facto*, not *de jure*) and an extrinsic relation between the orders of grace and nature that is implicated in the different formulations of Balthasar-de Lubac and Murray regarding grace and nature. The issue which Balthasar-de Lubac bring into relief with respect to Murray is whether Murray, notwithstanding his affirmation of one end as common to the two orders, does not still conceive these orders, even if unconsciously or with great subtlety, as lying alongside each other, as if they were first outside of each other; or again as layered on top of each other, as if grace came *after* nature. From the perspective of Balthasar-de Lubac, it seems clear to me that Murray does in fact conceive the relation between the two orders in just this sort of extrinsic way.<sup>15</sup>

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14. Cf., for example, Balthasar, "Analogie und Natur," *Divus Thomas* 1 (1945): 3-56.

15. Another way of indicating what I am attempting to get at here: de Lubac characteristically says that what is Christian is "thereby more human." Murray more characteristically makes statements such as that the order of human society determined by reason represents a common "Christian ground" indeed, but only because it is common human ground ("Intercredal Co-operation: Some Further

But with this let me reiterate again the limits of the present paper. My intention is to suggest, first, that there are important substantive differences between Balthasar-de Lubac and Murray regarding the grace-nature distinction which are carried in what may appear to be only subtle differences of language; and, secondly, that these substantive differences are decisive for how one conceives the task of Christianity in relation to the world.<sup>16</sup> That there are differences and that these are laden with consequences for Christian praxis (to which topic I will turn momentarily) seems to me not likely to be disputed by interpreters of Murray. What is more likely to be called into dispute is the legitimacy of suggesting that terms like “extrinsic” or “fragmented”—and hence “secularized”—aptly characterize Murray’s position. Clearly the use of such terms presupposes an argument on behalf of the Balthasarian-Lubacian perspective which it nonetheless cannot be my concern to provide here. Once again, my intention in the present forum is merely to identify the argument that needs to be taken up—on both sides—and to set the terms of that argument. Of course central to that eventual argument will be the question of which perspective—Balthasar’s or Murray’s—best interprets the main Catholic tradition. I will return to this point in the third part of my paper.

## II. The Public Character of Christian Theology

If Christian theology is to “go public” in a pluralistic society, it must of course be able to give an accounting for the common ground that is a necessary condition for communication between Christians and non-Christians. All three of our theologians see the need to speak publicly as part of the essential mission of Christian theology. The difference between them turns not on *whether* a Christian must seek “common ground,” but on *what terms*. My purpose will be merely to indicate how

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Views,” *Theological Studies* 4 (1943): 103). The different senses of distinctness and consequent symmetry in the grace-nature relation that are suggested in these different formulations I believe are indicative of a fault-line that runs between the respective theologies of the two men. Regarding the nature of this fault-line, cf. the discussion of de Lubac above, as well as the comments in fn 9 and fn 22.

16. See, for example, Balthasar, “Der Begriff der Natur in der Theologie,” pp. 452 and 461, where he points out how the interpretation of the grace-nature distinction affects one’s understanding of the structures of metaphysics, ethics, apologetics, politics, and the entire praxis of Christian life. And see the general discussion regarding “christocentrism” in the third part of my paper. Joseph Komonchak’s “Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac,” *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 579-602 provides an interesting look at de Lubac which is pertinent here.

their different understandings of the grace-nature relation set those terms.

All of our theologians, then, recognize that some appeal to a “common nature” is necessary in the doing of “public” theology. The difference is that Balthasar-de Lubac’s sense of this “common nature” takes its primary meaning from within the order of person: from the ontological order of love and relation as revealed by the trinitarian God in Jesus Christ in and through the *fiat* of Mary and the church. Balthasar understands human nature first (ontologically) by way of analogy<sup>17</sup> to the “Abba” expressed by Jesus to the Father, and again to the Cross of Jesus—and thus to the agapic and kenotic love revealed in Jesus. Balthasar’s approach here does not imply that one must invoke the name of Jesus Christ, and indeed of the trinitarian God, Mary, and the church, in every public conversation. It does imply that, though one can, for purposes of discussion and communication, distinguish nature in its integrity from within the fundamental horizon given in grace, one can nonetheless never (in one’s own understanding) *separate* nature from that more fundamental horizon—and hence from the personal order of love whose ontological meaning is given in Christology, trinitarian theology, ecclesiology, and mariology.<sup>18</sup>

In a word, then, the key for Balthasar-de Lubac is that nature from the beginning is embedded (de facto) in only *one concrete historical order*: namely, that of person and love, as these are ultimately revealed in the life and death of Jesus Christ. There is no actual human nature—anywhere, even in America—that is not ordered from its depths to the transforming love of Christ’s life-in-death; there is no human heart within which this call to love does not resonate.

Murray’s difference from Balthasar-de Lubac on the meaning of “common ground,” then, hinges on the different way in which he distinguishes the order of nature from the order of grace. Drawing on what we said earlier, we can summarize here by saying that Murray seeks to establish “common ground” on the basis of a nature which is (first) separated from the order—and hence *form*—given in grace. The meaning of the nature to which Murray appeals as common thus is not one that takes its beginning from the meaning of person and love as

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17. That is, with the qualification recorded in footnote 4 above.

18. For the sense in which the concept of person takes its ultimate meaning from within theology, see Balthasar, “Zum Begriff der Person,” in *Homo Creatus Est* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1986), pp. 93-102; and Joseph Ratzinger, “Zum Personenverständnis in der Theologie,” *Dogma und Verkündigung* (Munich: Erich Wewel Verlag, 1973), pp. 205-23. These articles appear in the North American *Communio* in Spring, 1986 (Balthasar) and Fall, 1990 (Ratzinger).

revealed in Jesus Christ; and it is consequently not one that has intrinsic need of transforming love for it to be rationally accessible.

If I might put all of this in the most general terms, I would say it as follows: both Balthasar-de Lubac and Murray affirm an analogy of being—and thereby are able to identify structures of reality that are “common,” indeed universal. The difference between them lies in the way they see it as possible or appropriate to detach the analogy of being from the analogy of faith.<sup>19</sup>

Of course this summary leaves the difference between the theologians expressed schematically and indeed in largely negative terms. For present purposes, it will suffice to illustrate the positive sense of that difference by the different models for public discourse to which our theologians characteristically appeal. Murray’s model is the person of civility; the tradition to which he most readily appeals is what he calls the “tradition of reason.” Balthasar’s model, even—precisely—for public discourse, is on the contrary the saint;<sup>20</sup> the tradition to which he most

19. See in this connection the following statements by Balthasar: “In this sense Christ can be called the ‘concrete analogy of being,’ since he constitutes in himself, in the unity of his divine and human natures, the proportion of every interval between God and man. And this unity is his person in both natures. The philosophical formulation of the analogy of being is related to the measure of Christ precisely as is world history to his history—as promise to fulfillment, the preliminary to the definitive. He is so very much what is most concrete and most central that in the last analysis we can only think by starting with him; and every question as to what might be if he did not exist, or if he had not become man, or if the world had to be considered without him, is now superfluous and unnecessary” (*A Theology of History* [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963], pp. 74-75).

“Herein lies the solution to the theological problem of universals. . . . (Christ) himself is the idea made concrete, personal, historical: *universale concretum et personale*” (*ibid.*, p. 89).

“In the last analysis there are not two lines of progress because there are not two universalisms existing side by side, for the human (abstract) universal of the natural order is always subordinate to the (concrete) universal of Christ, in whom all things are brought into unity” (“God Speaks as Man,” in *Verbum Caro*, pp. 69-93, at 90).

On the theological problem of “universals,” see also “Characteristics of Christianity,” pp. 170-71; on the connection between the analogy of faith and the analogy of being, see also *Karl Barth*, p. 390 and *passim*.

20. Or indeed the witness unto death (in, with, and for Jesus) called a martyr: cf. *Who Is a Christian?* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1968).

The more general point here involves the whole of Balthasar’s undertaking in his trilogy: there can be no seeking and indeed speaking of the truth (no being truly reasonable) without the engagement of one’s “subjectivity” and one’s action: it is no accident that Balthasar’s “logic” (*Theologik*) is preceded by his “aesthetics” (*Herrlichkeit*) and his “drama” (*Theodramatik*). Of course, the burden of this sug-

readily appeals, precisely for examples of reasonability, is that of the communion of saints. The differences of emphasis represented in these models are not merely happenstance; they are functions of different convictions about when and how one might legitimately abstract from the personal order of love revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

We conclude our brief treatment here, then, with two important qualifiers. First, with respect to Murray, it is of course true that Murray is open to an eventual appeal to transforming love as necessary for a full and complete employment of reason by a Christian. The point is merely that this eventual appeal to love, from the perspective of Balthasar-de Lubac, will always come too late and too extrinsically (*i.e.*, positivistically), in terms of both the form (subject) and the content (object) of one's public discourse.<sup>22</sup>

With respect to Balthasar-de Lubac, then, what needs to be emphasized is that their insistence on a concrete context of loving witness does not remove them from a context of natural law. There is much discussion in ethics today about the difference between a so-called ethics of discipleship or narrative on the one hand, and a natural law ethics on the other. Balthasar's position includes even as it transcends both these approaches to ethics. It does so for a christological reason: Jesus Christ has assumed, not destroyed, nature (natural law), even as his divine person now reveals the deepest—ontological—meaning of that nature.<sup>23</sup>

### III. The Hermeneutical Question

In conclusion, then, I would like to speak briefly to the hermeneutical question which is raised by the foregoing discussion, at least for anyone who takes seriously the conciliar tradition of Christianity.

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gestion is entirely missed if one fails to see that Jesus Christ is that in terms of which subjectivity and action are ultimately and most properly to take their meaning.

21. Cf. Balthasar: "Christ did not leave the Father when he became man to bring all creation to fulfillment; and neither does the Christian need to leave his center in Christ in order to mediate him to the world, to understand his relation to the world, to build a bridge between revelation and nature, philosophy and theology" ("Theology and Sanctity," in *Verbum Caro*, pp. 181-209, at 195).

22. Cf. here the statement of de Lubac: "To humanize before Christianizing? If the enterprise succeeds, Christianity will come too late, its place will be filled. And do they think that Christianity has no humanizing value?" (*Paradoxes* [Paris: Seuil, 1959], p. 46).

23. For a discussion of Balthasar pertinent to the sketch I have offered here, see the outstanding overview by Marc Ouellet, P.S.S., "Balthasar and the Christian Foundations of Ethics," *Communio* 17 (Fall 1990): 375-401.

In a monograph on Vatican II's "Declaration on Religious Freedom" prepared two years ago for the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences, Walter Kasper states that the true significance of this declaration lies without doubt in its "solemn confirmation that man has a right to religious freedom."<sup>24</sup> Warmly endorsing this achievement, Kasper nonetheless goes on to point out what were the limits of the declaration. These limits are to be found in the declaration's lack of a comprehensive theology of religious freedom (p. 39; cf. pp. 31-41). Kasper's point is not that it was the task of a conciliar declaration to provide this comprehensive theology, but that in any case this theology is still needed, to fill out, deepen, and interpret properly the meaning of the declaration.

Essentially, what such a theology must do, according to Kasper, is develop the christological roots of religious freedom. As St. Paul says (Gal. 5:1), it is Jesus Christ who has made us free. As *Gaudium et spes* states, Jesus Christ is "the key, the center, and the purpose of the whole of man's history" (GS 10; cf. also GS 45). What remains still to be developed, then, is how human dignity and freedom are anchored in Jesus Christ: how Christ's hypostatic union is both the foundation for and gives the primary meaning of man in his or her relation to God and indeed to all else in God. This task involves showing the sense in which truth, love, and freedom mutually imply one another, how each is a necessary condition for the other.<sup>25</sup>

Elsewhere, in a chapter of a recent book, Kasper takes up the question of the hermeneutics of conciliar statements generally.<sup>26</sup> Acknowledging that, as has been frequently noted by others, the texts of Vatican II often leave so-called conservative and progressive statements side by side, with no attempt at reconciliation (p. 170), he goes on to insist that it is in fact completely within the conciliar tradition for such juxtapositions to remain: that the "theoretical mediation of these positions is a task for the theology that comes afterwards" (p. 171).

In the light of these suggestions by Kasper, then, my comment for present purposes is a simple one: namely, that an important example of juxtaposed statements in the documents of Vatican II that require further theoretical mediation are those that accord priority to what has been called christocentrism on the one hand, and to the autonomy of the created order on the other.<sup>27</sup> My proposal is that the theologies of

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24. *Wahrheit und Freiheit* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1988), p. 36.

25. It is perhaps worth noting here that, as Kasper remarks, the necessary connection between truth and freedom was insisted upon by Karol Wojtyła in an intervention during the third session of the council in 1964 (p. 26f).

26. *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 166-76.

27. For texts of the council that affirm a legitimate autonomy of the created order,

Balthasar-de Lubac and Murray are illustrative of these contrasting statements of the council—or better, that their respective theologies serve in important ways to *undergird* the different interpretations of the council that stem from these contrasting statements.<sup>28</sup> The question of

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see for example: GS 36; 41; 56; 76. Cf. McCormick's gloss on GS 41 ("Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?" p. 168f.) for an illuminating sense, especially in light of what was said in fn 8 above, of the alternative interpretations that are apparently available. See also here de Lubac's discussion of Schillebeeckx's "L'Eglise sacrement du monde" in *A Brief Catechesis*, Appendix B, pp. 191-234; and Angelo Scola's "Cristo 'Lumen Gentium'," in the Italian *Communio* (September-October 1987), pp. 5-17, where, among other things, he discusses the striking expression used by John Paul II in his first trip to Argentina, when he defined the Church as "*forma mundi*."

28. See in this connection the following discussions regarding the council: Balthasar, "Das Konzil des Heiligen Geistes," in *Spiritus Creator* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1967), pp. 218-36; de Lubac, *Athéisme et sens de l'homme: Une double requête de Gaudium et spes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968); Joseph Ratzinger, "The Church and Man's Calling," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 5, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), pp. 115-63. Cf. in particular the trenchant comment by Ratzinger: "[I]t seemed to many people. . . that there was not a radical enough rejection of a doctrine of man divided into philosophy and theology. They were convinced that fundamentally the text was still based on a schematic representation of nature and the supernatural viewed far too much as merely juxtaposed. To their mind it took as its starting-point the fiction that it is possible to construct a rational philosophical picture of man intelligible to all and on which all men of goodwill can agree, the actual Christian doctrines being added to this as a sort of crowning conclusion. The latter then tends to appear as a sort of special possession of Christians, which others ought not to make a bone of contention but which at bottom can be ignored. This was the real reason for the protest against the 'optimism' of the schema [all these objections refer to Text 4]. It was not a question of imposing a pessimistic view of man or of constructing an exaggerated theology of sin because of a certain correspondence with some forms of Lutheran thought. The text as it stood itself prompted the question why exactly the reasonable and perfectly free human being described in the first articles was suddenly burdened with the story of Christ. The latter might well appear to be a rather unintelligible addition to a picture that was already quite complete in itself. Consequently the text was blamed for only apparently choosing a theological starting-point in the idea of man as the image of God, whereas in reality it still had a theistically-coloured and to a large extent non-historical view. As opposed to this, it was urged that the starting-point should be Christ, the second Adam, from whom alone the Christian picture of man can be correctly developed. Advocates of this position could point to the fictitious character of a supposedly rational picture of man and therefore say that the only realistic picture must start from the actual Christian creed which, precisely as a confession of faith, can and must manifest its own intelligibility and rationality. . ." (pp. 119-20 [regarding GS 12]).

the nature-grace distinction, or again of “public” theology, whatever else it is, is also, and fundamentally, the question of the christological meaning of the created order.

Let me put the matter more sharply: it has become commonplace to assert that Vatican II has vindicated the theology of Murray.<sup>29</sup> There is of course an obvious and important sense in which this is true: religious freedom has been vindicated. But the question that is nonetheless still begged in such an assertion—or so it seems to me, in the light of both the theological claims of Balthasar-de Lubac and the hermeneutical comments of Kasper—is that of the christological context and ordering of human freedom implied in and by Murray’s work. Specifically: Murray’s work relative to the “Declaration on Religious Freedom” is guided by a definite sense of human (social-political) autonomy which in turn represents but the concrete carrying through of a definite sense of the grace-nature distinction. It is clear that the council has affirmed religious liberty. What is not clear, when one takes note of the many christocentric texts of the council, particularly in the light of theologies such as those of Balthasar and de Lubac, is that the council has thereby embraced the sense of autonomy, and thus of the grace-nature distinction, which mediates Murray’s interpretation of religious liberty.

But let me repeat what I said earlier. Murray himself was explicit about how decisive the grace-nature distinction was for his work. The problem, as we indicated, is that he nonetheless took his sense of that distinction as something which was evident, at least for Catholics, and which therefore had merely to be applied to the social-political order—that is, in the light now of the new circumstances of modernity. The burden of the work of Balthasar-de Lubac, it seems to me, is that Murray’s sense of grace and nature in fact cannot be taken as self-

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29. See for example: Dennis P. McCann, *New Experiment in Democracy* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1987), p. 26; David Hollenbach, “Foreword,” in Leon Hooper, *The Ethics of Discourse*, p. ix; Avery Dulles, S.J., *The Reshaping of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 8. It seems to me worth pointing out here that John Courtney Murray’s understanding of religious liberty is no more (and no less) normative for interpreting Vatican II’s “*Dignitatis humanae*” than is Joseph Kleutgen’s understanding of the faith-reason relation normative for interpreting Vatican I’s “*Dei filius*.” I do not make this statement for polemical purposes; nor do I intend the comparison to bear first on the detail of the respective textual histories. Rather, I mean merely to recall what seems to me a central principle of Catholic hermeneutics: namely, that the meaning of a conciliar text, however much it is (of necessity) anchored in the concrete thought of a given person or group of persons, nonetheless becomes complete only when and insofar as it is integrated with texts from earlier councils and indeed the whole of the main Christian tradition. I have indicated in the body of my paper what this implies in the present case.

evidently true in or for the Catholic tradition; that it must on the contrary now be argued and defended on its own terms.

In sum, then, my point is this: that the distinction for which Murray—and those who would follow him—must yet give an accounting is not, first or most fundamentally, that between the social-political order of the Middle Ages and of modernity, or again between the liberalism of Jacobin France and of revolutionary America; it is rather the distinction between divine person and human nature in Jesus Christ and, in this context, between divinity and all of humanity.

For those who still might be inclined to think that we are quibbling here over fine theoretical issues that have little practical import, it seems to me worth recalling in conclusion that the early church was occupied for centuries in her councils in an effort to get clear about some very fine christological distinctions. She knew that what was at stake in understanding properly the sense of the unity and distinctness of natures in Jesus Christ was nothing less than whether there had been an Incarnation. What I am suggesting is that it is this same issue, in a truly analogous form, that is before us in the present case: namely, whether or in what sense there is or can be a continuing extension of God's incarnation into the time and space of the cosmos. Only in addressing this question of God's presence in Jesus Christ and his church, and in turn in the world created in Jesus Christ, can we situate ourselves properly to judge whether we are in fact, to use Murray's words, truly "revers[ing] the secularist drift," or on the contrary merely contributing to it.