

CATHOLICISM: ON “CERTAIN IDEAS”

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“The Church concentrates spirits
and broadens them. In this she is catholic.
She is ‘the concrete place of hope.’”

In his book, *Catholicism*, Henri de Lubac states that his goal is to highlight “certain ideas . . . so simple that they do not always attract attention, but at the same time so fundamental that there is some risk of our not finding time to ponder them” (18).¹ We will try, then, to “pay attention” to these ideas and to see how de Lubac “ponders” them. He ponders and presents these ideas, he adds, “as impersonally as possible, drawing especially on the treasures, so little utilized, in the patristic writings,” since these are “our Fathers in the Faith” (C, 19). The “impersonal” presentation thus takes as its rule the manner in which the faith was engendered by the Fathers, in “the unity of this Tradition” (C, 20). Correspondingly, it proceeds according to “the logic of our faith,” to “the heart of its mystery . . . the essence of its dogma” (C, 15). Among the ideas to be found in *Catholicism*, we will select those which seem simplest and most fundamental, the most interconnected, and which shed the most light on what is catholic.

¹R. Arnou notes that they cannot all be reduced to “the social aspects of dogma,” the book’s French subtitle (in *Gregorianum* 20 [1939], 302). All references to *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), are cited hereafter in the body of the text: (C, page number).

De Lubac first formulates the principle of the Church by moving from supernature to nature: "the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, a supernatural unity, supposes a previous natural unity, the unity of the human race" (C, 25). And this unity of the human race is "but one image of him who is." This image is spirit: "The same mysterious participation in God which causes the soul [*l'esprit*] to exist effects at one and the same time the unity of spirits [*des esprits*] among themselves" (C, 29). There is a radical "correspondence" between the triune unity of God and the unity of the human race and its salvation (C, 32–33). "In these conditions, all infidelity to the divine image that man bears in him, every breach with God, is at the same time a disruption of human unity" (C, 33). Such is "evil in its inmost essence" (C, 34). As a result of it, individuals are constituted as "so many cores" hostile both to God and one another (C, 34–35). According to the ancient perspective, "the redemption being a work of restoration will appear to us by that very fact as the recovery of lost unity," both with God and among men (C, 35). It is effected by Christ who, in taking on a human body, "incorporated himself in our humanity, and incorporated it in himself," according to St. Hilary's idea of *concorporatio* (C, 37–38). Christ is thus "the salvation of the whole," which each must accept in a "personal ratification" (C, 39). In so accepting, he puts on the "new man" . . . as he puts on Christ" (C, 45). Thus "this mystery of the new man is in the highest sense of the word the mystery of Christ" (C, 47).

This is the object of our hope: "all will be one Body and one Spirit, by reason of the hope in which they were called. And it is in the bond of this unity that glory consists" (C, 116). This unity is ontological, "though indeed it ought to be called . . . spiritual," for it is "both the image and the result of the unity of the Divine Persons among themselves. Not just a spiritual community, but a community of the Holy Spirit The likeness, which in every created soul must be the completion of the divine Image, is not that of a Spinozist God"; as Origen teaches, "it is that of a God of Love, the God whose very being is Love" (C, 116–117). Hope traverses or prevails over the entire body awaiting the final resurrection (C, 132), even those members of it who already enjoy the beatific vision (C, 121). Thus the radical correspondence between the unity of the divine Persons and the unity of the human race is actualized. It drives, in hope, the entire body of Christ, Head and Body: such is the Church's end.

So we see the link between beginning and end. It is because of this bond that the Church is *catholic*.² Indeed, the Church is the reunification of humanity, begun by Christ. Now the universal, which the catholic is, is, as de Lubac writes, “a singular and is not to be confused with an aggregate” (C, 48). “Like sanctity, Catholicity is primarily an intrinsic feature of the Church” (C, 49). As catholic, the Church is in principle, from this moment, the unity of men in Christ (C, 50), and her mission is to restore and to achieve the organic unity of human nature, which comes from its divine structure (C, 53). “The Church is a mother, but quite unlike other mothers she draws to her those who are her children and keeps them united in her womb” (53). Thus the Church is both catholic and mother. How is this realized in history? Through the miracle of Pentecost. The Christian novelty which came into being at Pentecost is a transfiguration of the people of Israel into the people of the New Covenant, of Israel according to the flesh into Israel according to the spirit (C, 58). The Church is composed predominantly of Gentiles, but “the idea of the Church, none the less, comes from the Jews” (C, 61). Founded by Christ and bound to his redemptive act, the Church is irreducibly catholic (C, 62). In continuity with the Hebrew concept of *Qahal*, she convenes and gathers those whom God calls: “She is a *convocatio* before being a *congregatio*” (C, 64). “She summons all men so that as their mother she may bring them forth to divine life. . . . This ‘Jerusalem from on high, our mother,’ who makes of us free men, is not envisaged by Paul as being merely in some far-off heavenly future; he sees it rather on the earth, in every city that has received the Gospel, already beginning its work of liberation; she it is who speaks by the mouth of the Apostles and of the heads of the churches” (C, 65).

Within the Church, there is a tension. On the one hand, “the Church, insofar as it is visible, is not the Kingdom, nor yet the Mystical Body, though the holiness of this Body shines through its visible manifestation” (C, 67).³ On the other hand, “The Church of

²On what is catholic, see Marc Pelchat, *L'Église, mystère de communion*, 187, 194, 197, 225–228, 230, 243, 246.

³The critical French edition reads, “the Church, insofar as it is visible, is not the Kingdom, nor yet the Mystical Body in its fulfillment, though it is already this Body in reality, the holiness of which shines through its visible manifestation” [—*Trans.*]

today is the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of heaven" (C, 72). She is catholic as visible and invisible, temporal and eternal, sinful and holy. "If Christ is the sacrament of God, the Church is for us the sacrament of Christ": such is her unity, which maintains the distinctions between the various aspects of the Church (C, 76). It is a unity which both centers her and expands her universally: catholic unity.

The Eucharist is par excellence "the sacrament of unity" (C, 89). It is "a union with Christ and at the same time a union of all" (C, 92). The Church is the reality of which the Eucharist is both the sign and the reality. It is this by "the very Act of the Eucharistic sacrifice itself" (C, 102), and by the power of the epiclesis (C, 110): "Our churches are the 'upper room' where not only is the Last Supper renewed but Pentecost also" (C, 111).

The social character of the dogma we have just touched upon is tied to its historical character. The account of salvation "will be the history of the penetration of humanity by Christ" (C, 141). This happens through the Mediator who "brings directly to the Father" (C, 147). Just as the Church was conceived from the idea of *Qahal*, salvation history was conceived through Israel. The God of the religion of Israel, the living God, is also a God of history. It is with Israel's contact with the peoples it encounters during the exile that "in the second part of the book of Isaiah universalism reached its zenith," and "a little later, there appears in the book of Daniel a philosophy of universal history," via Jeremiah and Ezekiel. From the book of Daniel on, the definitive triumph announced by Ezekiel "appears as the end of human history, and it is allied with the physical transformation of the universe" (C, 157). Israel's eschatology incorporates into itself cosmic phenomena to order them toward a historical event, a final judgment (C, 161). But "the historical character of the religion of Israel can be understood in all its originality only through its consummation in the religion of Christ. We should never forget that the explanation of Judaism is not to be found within itself" (C, 164).

The Church knows the history of God who comes toward man and can interpret it. For the history of God who reveals himself binds together history and spirit: historical realities have a spiritual depth and spiritual realities are to be understood historically. Understood thus, the history narrated by the Bible contains, in its way, "the history of the world." It manifests and actualizes itself as the history of the world according to a double "dispensation," the double "covenant" of the Old and the New Testament, because it

is “a mystery which was to be fulfilled, to be *accomplished* historically and socially, though always in a spiritual manner: the mystery of Christ and his Church” (C, 169–70).

How does the Church understand the Christian Event within the relationships between the Old and the New Testaments? Her understanding is twofold. If the New Testament, like the Old, is prophetic before the consummation of the age, it is unsurpassable, for “if Christ is beyond all figures of him, the Spirit of Christ cannot lead further than Christ. The New Testament will never date.” It is to be interpreted “in accordance with those principles that are laid down in it,” whereas the Old Testament designates “something else”: it prefigures and prepares the New (C, 171–72). Now, since, as Tertullian says, “Never does the shadow exist before the body, nor the copy come before the original,” the Christian fact “is both the substance and the model, the truth that is foreshadowed and reflected in the Jewish history that went before it The whole Christian fact is summed up in Christ—as the Messiah who was to come . . . who had to be prepared for in history, just as a masterpiece is preceded by a series of rough sketches; but as the ‘image of the Invisible God’ and the ‘first-born of all creation’ he is the universal Exemplar Christ, in so far as transcendent and existing before all things, is anterior to his figures, yet as a historical being, coming in the flesh, he appears after them But this living synthesis of the eternal and temporal is one in its duality: Christ existing before all things cannot be separated from Christ born of the woman, who died and rose again He who was sent by the Father ‘last of all in these days’ is the very same ‘by whom he also made the world.’ Late in historic time, but prior in priority to all time, Christ appears to us preceded by the shadows and the figures which he himself had cast on Jewish history” (C, 173–74). Such is the “unheard-of paradox” of the Christian fact, which inserts itself into the relationship between the two Testaments.

This paradox was grasped immediately. “Right from the beginning the essential was there, the synthesis was made, in the dazzling and confused light of revelation. *Novum Testamentum in Vetere latebat: Vetus nunc in Novo patet*” (C, 174). “If indeed the coming of Christ determined the ‘end of the Law,’ τέλος, the Law itself bore witness that its end was Christ, σκοπός. History and the Holy Ghost had met at last, and with the abandonment of an outworn literalism Scripture was made new in the everlasting newness of the Spirit” (C, 177). Thus, too, the Old Testament is

necessarily bound to the New, which brings it to fulfillment through the operation, or the Act, of Christ on the Cross, which alone unlocks the prophecies of the Old Testament. To bring to fulfillment does not mean to reveal “a meaning already present” and fully formed in the Old Testament. Rather, the redemptive Act “in some sort creates the meaning,” through a transfiguration of the Old into the New—even if, “for God, from the eternal point of view . . . the Old Testament contains the New already in a mystery” (C, 180–81). “A miraculous transformation this, on a par with, and fundamentally identical with, the miracle of our adoption as sons” (C, 182).

The Mystery of Christ, which is the object of Old Testament prophecy, “would not be complete were it not also the mystery of the Church”⁴ (C, 184). And for the Fathers, “in a certain sense the Church was nothing else than the human race itself, in all the phases of its history, in so far as it was to lead to Christ and be quickened by his Spirit” (C, 191).

But how is this sacred history the religious history of mankind? How do we reconcile the dogma of the universal call to salvation and the necessity of the Church for salvation (C, 217)? At the practical level, “if every man can be saved through a religion that he unwittingly possesses, how can we require him to acknowledge this religion explicitly by professing Christianity and submitting to the Catholic Church?” (C, 221). The answer can be found in what preceded this. If all men are members of the same body and if the salvation of the body—for humanity—consists in receiving the form of Christ, “that is possible only through the Catholic Church.” “Thus this Church, which as the invisible Body of Christ is identified with final salvation, as a visible and historical institution is the providential means of this salvation” (C, 223).

To carry out this task, the Church must extend everywhere in the world, “that the Kingdom of God may have more powerful sway in every soul.” This is a “necessity of her nature” (C, 227). For as long as she has not done so, the Church “cannot rest” (C, 230). In order to accomplish this mission, the Church needed the preparations of millennia: those of Jewish revelation, but also all the

⁴The expression “*mysterium Ecclesiae*” and “*sacramentum Ecclesiae*” can be found in St. Augustine (C. Couturier, “‘Sacramentum’ et ‘mysterium’ dans l’oeuvre de saint Augustin,” in H. Rondet, M. Le Landais, A. Luras, C. Couturier, *Études augustiniennes* [Paris: Aubier-Montaigne], coll. Théologie 28, 260–61).

“forms of religion, before or outside Christianity, shown to us in history” (C, 232). Hence the necessary role of unbelievers. As they are, “in the design of Providence, indispensable for building the Body of Christ, they must in their own way profit from their vital connection with this same Body In short, they can be saved because they are an integral part of that humanity which is to be saved” (C, 233). This presupposes a “supplying”: that of the Church and of the success of her mission (C, 233).

We now have the wherewithal to understand the venerable axiom: “Outside the Church, no salvation” (C, 234).⁵ This axiom means, positively, “Those who do not know the Church are saved by her, therefore, in such a way that they incur the obligation of belonging to her even outwardly directly they come to know her” (C, 237). This means, too, that there are holy pagans just as there were prophets heralding the Christ in Israel.

This Christian Novelty poses a twofold problem: if it contains the history of the world, it did not appear in it until recently; on the other hand, what is the role of Israel if the letter of the Old Testament is outdated and the Jewish people keep it? In order to respond to the first question, Paul “laid down the principle of the ‘dispensation of the grace of God,’” with the “stages of the natural law and the law of Moses, both of them necessary preliminaries for the coming of the fullness of time” (C, 247), There is a divine Pedagogy: “if God makes, as it were, fresh starts in his work and devises fresh methods to bring it to a successful conclusion, it is by no means a fresh work that he undertakes. It is always the same city that the Lord seeks to build” (C, 261–62). He waits for humanity to mature, he waits for man to become capable of assimilating the object of revelation, or for him to perceive in the abyss the need for a Savior. “The investment of human nature by the divinity takes place gradually, starting with the first dawn of natural light and continuing to the broad daylight of eternity Christ, then, was long awaited; he came *late*, but he did not *tarry*. It was in the natural order of things that he should come late. The Incarnation took place at its proper time” (C, 266). “Christianity, for those who lived in its first period, was at one and the same time both spring and autumn.

⁵Michael Figura, “Ausserhalb der Kirche kein Heil,” in *Theologie und Philosophie* 59 (1984): 568–69. See also Bernard Sesboüé, “*Hors de l’Église, pas de Salut*”: *histoire d’une formule et problèmes d’interprétation* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2005).

Complexio oppositorum. It was both an achievement and a hope. In the evening of the world the Cross was the consummation of all things, but on Easter morning a new day was born for mankind" (C, 268). "‘Christ has turned the setting into the rising sun.’ The old man has been overcome, and now the new Man arises. ‘Oldness’ is a sin, henceforward sin itself; it is evil, it is night, error, the essential error, want of faith in the complete newness of Christ The necessary preparations were of long duration, widely spaced out in stages; but the bright light of the Word made flesh shone forth all at once, for it was the sudden beginning of a stupendous revolution" (269–70).

"Now, like the coming of Christ, this coming of his Church is twofold": "the definitive autumn and spring, dawn and harvest time of eternity" (C, 271). "The Church realizes full well that she will never triumph completely over evil, that is, disunion" (C, 272). "The ‘mystery of iniquity’ has not yet wrought its greatest destruction." So too the Church "awaits no other triumph than that of her Bridegroom who reigned from the Cross—but there is no ‘beyond’ to her Cross in time itself." She knows herself to be a "stranger on earth"—"nevertheless here on earth she is tireless in attempting the impossible" (C, 273). "The Holy Spirit who spoke by the mouth of the prophets found a fresh interpreter in Paul; he ascribes to the Church, in her world-wide mission, the role that was Israel’s in regard to the neighboring peoples, while keeping for Israel according to the flesh a place in the reconciliation, the final integration" (C, 274).

For "the Church, and that means every man and the whole world in her, is predestinate." It is of this predestination that Paul speaks in chapters 8 and 11 of the Epistle to the Romans. Exalting the impenetrable judgments of God, Paul exults before "the ingenuity of the universal mercy that could bring the Jews themselves back to the unity of ultimate salvation after having made use of their blindness for the conversion of the Gentiles." "Likewise, in the eighth chapter Paul, lost in wonder, proclaims his faith in the success of the divine plan, in the completion of the Body of Christ" (C, 277). "In a few pregnant accurate phrases St. Irenaeus comments on this teaching. The salvation of the world is confided to the Church For definitively the Church is nothing else than humanity itself, enlivened, unified by the Spirit of Christ. She was willed by God ‘in order to give life to creation.’ Woe, then, to him who separates himself from her. If schism is the sin that leads to death, it is because death itself, damnation, is a schism" (C, 279). "The Church will not enter maimed into the Kingdom no

falling away will leave any gap in it. It is as nothing in the face of her fullness Since the head has triumphed, the whole body, the ‘Pleroma,’ will be saved” (C, 280).

How does the Church communicate to the world this Plenitude already given but yet to come, this autumn and spring? As Alexis Leproux demonstrates, she does so by communicating “catholicism” according to a “just immanence” and by virtue of an “irreducible transcendence.”⁶ The Church first communicated it in the Mediterranean world by a spontaneous movement, choosing the second of the following alternatives: to destroy the ancient religions, like Tatian or Marcion, or “to raise up, transform, make holy,” for “the work of the Creator, however spoiled by man, yet remains the natural and necessary preparation for the work of the Redeemer” (C, 284–85). It is by “penetrating into the very fabric of human history—yet without rending it,” that Christianity “has come to transform mankind and to renew the face of the earth.” This rests on the fact that “Jesus, our Savior, took the elements of his body from our race In like manner his Church: it is humanity that provides it with a body” (C, 286). It is in the transformation of these elements that humanity ceases to be pagan.

But as soon as the apostolate “is turned to a more distant field and appeals to alien peoples,” it needs a method. This is formulated according to a “twofold desire willingly to entertain whatever can be assimilated and to prescribe nothing that is not of faith,” and, correspondingly, by means of a “real exodus from the secret places of the soul.” In brief, the method comes into being through “a requirement of love itself” (C, 290), as in the practice of a Matteo Ricci or a Robert de Nobili, or the teaching of Benedict XV or Pius XI (C, 288–89): it is “a method of immanence, the most traditional of all” (C, 292), corresponding to “the logic of faith” (C, 290). In an antithesis to the Western exceptionalism that, beginning from the nineteenth century, conquered the world, the Church must identify “certain outstanding varieties of spiritual experience, in the broadest sense of the word, which are logically irreducible”; it is her mission “to purify and give fresh life to each of them, to deepen them and bring them to a successful issue by means of the supernatural revelation that she holds in deposit.” “She is mindful of those

⁶See Alexis Leproux, “Dépaysement et dépouillement,” *Revue catholique internationale Communio* 33, no. 5 (2008): 45.

providential harmonies" that can be compared to those of Greece and Rome (C, 295). Her visible catholicity is "*circumdata varietate*" (C, 297): she is catholic. "There is nothing good which Catholicism cannot claim for its own," since "Catholicism is religion itself. It is the form that humanity must put on in order finally to be itself." It possesses "a flexibility of infinite comprehensiveness, the very opposite of the harsh exclusiveness which characterizes the sectarian spirit" (C, 298). Contrary to the European imperialism that loses the sense of catholicity, another temptation arises from without: that of shutting Catholicism within its particularity, thereby depriving it of its missionary dynamism. To do this is to confuse Christianity with a human reality. "Only a great spiritual asceticism will overcome" such a temptation (C, 299). Without naiveté, the Church considers that "it is at its highest reaches that humanity must be understood." "The Church's method is not syncretist any more than it is naïve," for this would reduce revelation to a culture. She "rejected Gnosticism, a representative of the syncretist system" (C, 300). Without any liberalism but that of Charity, she unveils "the gentle severity of the Gospel" without loading it "with additional burdens" (C, 301). She follows the example of Paul with regard to Peter: Paul "refuses to change the Gospel to please other men, because then he would be unfaithful to Christ" (C, 302).

In the wake of the "decline of the Catholic spirit," the renewal that was taking place in 1938 demanded "an assimilation which is at the same time a transformation" (C, 321). It called for a reflection on the dialectic between person and society, between immanent and transcendent.

In his reflection on the Church, Henri de Lubac constantly pondered the unity of the Church and the distinctions it contains: the various aspects of the Church, its various members, its relation with the world, incorporation in Christ, the divine Persons. "The dogmatic 'paradox' makes us notice the natural paradox, for the former is a higher intensified statement of the latter. The paradox is this: that the distinction between the different parts of a being stands out the more clearly as the union of these parts is closer" (C, 328). After observing the union of parts on a biological and then a moral level, de Lubac turns to faith: "It is faith itself, by means of its most hidden mysteries, that brings us right up to the truth, though it cannot let us see it. It sets us in that very center, to us irremediably dark, whence issues the definitive light. For do we not believe that there are three Persons in God? It is impossible to imagine greater

distinctions than those of this pure threefold relationship, since it is these very distinctions that constitute them in their entirety. And do they not arise in unity, the unity of the one same Nature? The most complete expression of Personality appears to us thus in the Being of whom every being is a reflection—an image, a shadow, a trace—the consequence as well as the consecration of the highest unity” (C, 329). From the ontological point of view, we must “unite in order to distinguish”: “union differentiates” (C, 330–31). It is within being that Fr. de Lubac wishes “the better to understand the agreement between the personal and the universal” (327–28).

In its spiritual dimension, to be a person means to receive a vocation and play a role in a drama. “A person is not an idealized individual nor a transcendent monad”: “does not each one need ‘the other’ . . . so as to be awakened to conscious life?” This because of the more profound truth: “we must be *looked at* in order to be *enlightened*,” and to be a person is to play a role. “The summons to personal life is a *vocation*, that is, a summons to play an eternal role. Now perhaps it will be understood how the historical character that we have found in Christianity, as well as the social, emphasizes the reality of this role: since the flow of time is irreversible nothing occurs in it more than once, so that every action takes on a special dignity and an awful gravity; and it is because the world is a history, a single history, that each individual life is a drama” (C, 332).

Vocation and drama are realized in the triune Being. “In the One there is no solitariness, but fruitfulness of life and warmth of presence. *Numquam est sola Trinitas, numquam egens divinitas*. In the all-sufficient Being there is no selfishness but the exchange of a perfect Gift. The created mind, although so faint a copy of him who is, is nonetheless a reproduction in some sort of his structure—*ad imaginem fecit eum*—and practiced eyes can discern the stamp of the creating Trinity. There is no solitary person: each one in his very being receives of all, of his very being must give back to all. *Quid tam tuum quam tu? sed quid tam non tuum quam tu, si alicujus est quod es?*⁷ It is like a two-way method of exchange, a twofold mode of presence. Fundamentally, personality can be imagined as a network

⁷Augustine, commenting on the verse, “*Mea doctrina non est mea*,” *In Johannem*, tract. 29, n. 3 (PL 35, 1629). “What is proposed is, then, a spiritual definition, that is, a definition of the person from the spirit-*pneuma*, which knows itself not as an object, but by consenting to its being” (Éric de Moulins-Beaufort, *Anthropologie et mystique selon Henri de Lubac* [Paris: Cerf, 2003], 723).

of concentric shafts; in full development, if a paradox may be used as an expression of its interior paradox, it can be called a centrifugal center” (C, 332–33). This is the person’s life or death.

How are we to discern in the Church this “network of concentric shafts,” this “centrifugal center”? According to the Augustinian vision of the *Civitas Dei*. “Between its different persons, whatever the variety of their gifts, the inequality of their ‘merits,’ there obtains no scale of the degrees of being, but in the likeness of the Trinity itself—and, by the mediation of Christ in whom all are enfolded, within the Trinity itself—a unity of circumincession” (C, 334–35). Hence “Catholicism and personalism are in harmony and reinforce one another” (C, 337). It is thus that in the Church, “each individual needs the mediation of all, but no one is kept at a distance by any intermediary” (C, 334).

It is the Spirit who “makes universal and spiritualizes; he personalizes and unifies.” This can be seen in the conversion of St. Paul. “By revealing the Father and by being revealed by him, Christ completes the revelation of man to himself. . . . It is through Christ that the person reaches maturity, that man emerges definitively from the universe, and becomes conscious of his own being” (C, 339). And his “*conversion* is a *vocation*.” “That image of God, the image of the Word, which the incarnate Word restores and gives back to its glory, is ‘I myself; it is also the other, every other. . . . It is our very unity in God” (C, 340).⁸ From that point on, “there is no real unity without persisting difference.” In order to perceive it, we need “a real apperception which seizes at a single glance, beyond all spatial intuition, the bond between the personal and the universal” (C, 341).

This bond is realized only through the action of Christ. “A fully realized, that is, a perfectly universalized, person without Christ is an impossibility.” On the other hand, “Christ, by completing humanity in himself, at the same time made us all complete—but in God. . . . we are fully persons only within the Person of the Son, by whom and with whom we share in the circumincession of the Trinity” (C, 342).

The affirmation of the Transcendent takes place in two ways. First, by showing the necessary End of the unity to which society aspires. This is initially supported by the profound and natural

⁸A crucial page, as Éric de Moulins-Beaufort notes in *Anthropologie et mystique*, 732; see also his “Anthropologie et destinée spirituelle,” in *Henri de Lubac. La rencontre au coeur de l’Église*, ed. Jean-Dominique Durand (Paris: Cerf, 2005), 303.

aspiration toward human unity, and leads “men of good will to the threshold of Catholicism, which alone can effect this unity in its highest sense” (C, 353). Subsequently, it involves an affirmation that a “transcendent destiny which presupposes the existence of a transcendent God is essential to the realization of a destiny that is truly collective, that is, to the constitution of this humanity in the concrete” (C, 353). Of absolute necessity, humanity needs “an Eternal to make it complete Another to whom it can give itself.” This can also be seen *a contrario*: “‘Becoming,’ by itself, has no meaning; it is another word for absurdity” (C, 354).

In a second step, courage is needed to critique a “social dimension” that has been entirely temporalized: only the Presence of the Eternal can realize the unity of society. Here, de Lubac criticizes the Marxist system. To repudiate the transcendence of the Trinitarian God in the human spirit, made in the image of God, is to remove “the sole warrant of his own immanence” (C, 359). The absolute temporalism in which Marxism reaches its culmination is not only non-livable, “it is also something which cannot possibly be desired Marx’s social, historical man has only two dimensions, but the sense of the Eternal, the consciousness of the Eternal Presence which he must regain, will repair his loss” (C, 361).

The Church returns us to communion in “the Eternal found at the heart of all temporal development which gives it life and direction”: this is “first and foremost the social role of the Church” (C, 362). In the strict sense, her social role consists in incarnating charity (C, 365).

Conclusion

Catholicism articulates a twofold initial tension: between nature and supernature, and between beginning and end. The supernatural unity of the Church supposes the natural unity of the human race and accomplishes it, transposing the adage: “*gratia supponit naturam et elevat eam.*” The natural unity of the human race is that of the spirit, the image of the trinitarian God, and it is the spirit that discovers its likeness with the trinitarian God in eternal life. The Church concentrates spirits and broadens them. In this she is catholic. She is “the concrete place of hope.”⁹

⁹Moulins-Beaufort, “Anthropologie et destinée spirituelle,” 302.

She can do this through Christ. It is through Christ, through *concorporatio*, that Christ incorporates humanity in himself and incorporates himself in humanity. The Church continues the work that Christ began. She is poised between the human reality she assumes in the time of history, and human reality as it is accomplished in Christ. But she unites them. Sacrament of Christ, she unites them by means of the sacraments, preeminently the Eucharist, in which the bodily presence of Christ gives itself with a view to the ecclesial body. She knows this bodily reality; she knows its history. In her history, which she inherits from Israel, she reads the history of the world. The eschatology of Israel, as it is brought to fulfillment by Christ, gathers the history of the world, submitting it to God's Judgment. And the Church reads the history of Israel transfigured by Christ's act on the Cross and by the power of the Spirit, such that even as it is a figure of the consummation of the ages, the New Testament is unsurpassable: there is no figure beyond Christ, and the Old Testament is transfigured in an unheard-of paradox: "Late in historic time, but prior in priority to all time, Christ appears to us preceded by the shadows and the figures which he himself had cast on Jewish history" (C, 174). Thus transfiguring the history of Israel, the Church is also capable of transforming human history with the collaboration of unbelievers and with the help of holy pagans, by virtue of her mission and of the role of "supplying" that belongs to her visible institution and mission. She is present in time as in an autumn and a spring, in fulfillment and hope. She accomplishes her universal mission because she is predestined, such that Israel will be saved thanks to "the ingenuity of the universal mercy that could bring the Jews themselves back to the unity of ultimate salvation after having made use of their blindness for the conversion of the Gentiles" (C, 277). It is by the power of transformative assimilation that the Church makes manifest and effects that which is catholic. That which is social and historical is comprehended in the light of the mystery of Christ and of the Church, founded on the unity of the human race.

Such are de Lubac's simple and fundamental ideas on the Church. They unfold on the level of ontology, which moves from act to power. Fr. de Lubac is "too much of a philosopher"¹⁰ not to examine the Church in the light of being: he unites in order to

¹⁰Joseph Huby, "Le mystère de l'Église. Pour une meilleure intelligence du catholicisme," in *Études* 241 (1939): 303.

distinguish. He unites spirits among themselves and to God. The unity of spirits is that of the person as “a network of concentric shafts” and “a centrifugal center,” and the unity of spirits with God is that of a transcendence that guarantees immanence.

There is a “dialectic” between person and community, between immanent salvation and transcendent salvation. But because it moves from unity to distinction, this dialectic is always already overcome. As Maurice Blondel wrote to Fr. de Lubac, between the terms of the dialectic there exists “a relation of reciprocal causality and essential simultaneity.”¹¹ De Lubac cites this in “Mysterium Crucis,” the concluding chapter of his book. The unity that inspires and orients human activity is realized through the mystery of the resurrection, which is also the mystery of death: “*Exodus* and *ecstasy* are governed by the same law.” Much more, he who bore all men on the Cross was abandoned by all. “The universal Man died alone. This is the consummation of the *Kenosis* and the perfection of sacrifice. This desertion—even an abandonment by the Father—was necessary to bring about reunion. This is the mystery of solitude and the mystery of severance, the only efficacious sign of gathering together and of unity” (C, 368). The law of ecstasy is triggered by the fullness of the *kenosis* and abandonment by the Father. Through it, man opens himself to the plenitude he cannot give to himself, and this plenitude broadens and deepens him. Here we are beyond dialectic. But by means of dialectic, human reflection discerns, as far as it is able, this mysterious reality of ecstasy, of *kenosis* and the relation of the Father and the Son that reaches as far as abandonment. If we are to understand the dialectic presented in *Catholicism*, it is supremely important, it is decisive, that we perceive the relation between man and Christ, the interior reality of Christ and the triune life. And this perception flows beyond dialectic, into the transformation of man within the Mystery.—*Translated by Michelle K. Borrás.* □

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¹¹Letter of Blondel to Henri de Lubac, Magny [Côte d'Or], 18 September 1938.