

## Notes and Comments

### Thomist Resurgence

by William L. Portier

A Review Essay of *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* by Fergus Kerr. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007. 230pp.

“The traditional Thomist cannot but be somewhat disconcerted by John Paul II’s references to Aquinas” (170). Thus Fergus Kerr on *Fides et ratio*’s claim that “The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others” (*FR*, 49). Kerr notes that for the past century, Thomistic philosophy was “generally believed” to be the Church’s official philosophy. “It sounds strange,” he observes, “to hear that the principles and methods of some other philosophy have to be respected in the exposition of Catholic doctrine—which other philosophy? one hears the Thomist enquire” (170).

In 1998, more than thirty years after the Second Vatican Council, *Fides et ratio* formalized the displacement of Aquinas and certain forms of Thomism from the center of Catholic intellectual life they had occupied during that extraordinary period between 1907 and 1962. During those years, one school of thought, neoscholasticism, came close to being

identified with the faith. The encyclical reintegrates Aquinas into a broadly construed and even pluralistic history of Christian thought. The Dominican Angelic Doctor is now one member of a “great triad” (*FR*, 74) that includes the Benedictine monk St. Anselm and the Franciscan friar St. Bonaventure. John Paul II’s historical tableau also features Origen and more recent and once suspect figures such as John Henry Newman and his Italian counterpart Antonio Rosmini. It also includes the existential Thomist, Étienne Gilson, the phenomenologist Edith Stein, and four Orthodox thinkers (*FR*, 74). *Fides et ratio* is far from the position that just any philosophy will do. The philosophy derived from St. Thomas is well-suited, and perhaps uniquely well-suited, to the needed realist approach to revelation. But it is no longer the only, nor the most privileged, approach. Rather than endorsing substantive Thomistic philosophical theses, *Fides et ratio* raises up Aquinas as a model for Christian inquiry.

As Kerr makes clear, such a treatment of Aquinas would have shocked the Dominican Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange and other neoscholastic thinkers of the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, a strong case could be made that the encyclical’s position on the proper stance of philosophy with regard to the Christian faith is closest to that of one of modern neoscholasticism’s fiercest critics, made a cardinal by Pope John Paul II in 1983, and mentioned by name last year in Pope Benedict XVI’s second

encyclical, Henri de Lubac, S.J.<sup>1</sup>

Given what de Lubac called the “ebb and flow of theology,” it should come as no surprise that contemporary intellectual descendants of Thomists from the first half of the twentieth century have begun to push back against the ground shift articulated in *Fides et ratio* and its reorientation of the role of Aquinas in the intellectual life of the Church. Nor is it surprising that one of the chief targets of this push is Henri de Lubac.

De Lubac famously criticized the

Thomist commentator, Cardinal Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1468–1534), for misinterpreting St. Thomas’s teaching on the natural desire to see God. De Lubac’s critique has itself recently come in for withering criticism from Ralph McInerny. McInerny cites the 2001 Roman dissertation in defense of Cajetan by Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters*.<sup>2</sup> In his favorable review of McInerny’s book and in his own book, *A Short History of Thomism*, Romanus Cessario, O.P., calls for the rehabilitation of Cardinal Cajetan and the modern tradition of commentary on St. Thomas. Appealing to Pope Benedict’s 2005 Christmas address to the Roman Curia urging that the documents of Vatican II be read in continuity with previous magisterial teaching, he calls for “a return to St. Thomas as well as an

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<sup>1</sup>After reviewing the positions in the debates of the 1930s on “Christian philosophy,” Avery Dulles concludes: “On the whole, the pope’s positions coincide most closely with those of de Lubac, who sought to mediate between Blondel and Gilson.” See “Can Philosophy Be Christian? The New State of the Question,” in *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought, Essays on Fides et ratio*, ed. David Ruel Foster and Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 3–21, at 18. See also Dulles’s essay “Faith and Reason: From Vatican I to John Paul II” which concludes this volume. See also David L. Schindler, “God and the End of Intelligence: Knowledge as Relationship,” *Communio* 26 (Fall 1999): 510–40 on de Lubac’s treatment in *Sur les Chemins de Dieu* (1956) of Aquinas’s claim in *De Veritate* q. 22 that “all cognitive beings know God implicitly in whatever they know.” This entire issue of *Communio* is devoted to *Fides et ratio*. In his 2007 encyclical *Spe salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI includes a long citation from the introduction to de Lubac’s “seminal book *Catholicism*” (para. 13). See Kerr, 184 for the book’s impact on the young Ratzinger. In citing Aquinas on faith as a *habitus*, Pope Benedict describes him in historical terms consistent with *Fides et ratio* as “using the terminology of the philosophical tradition to which he belonged” (para. 7).

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<sup>2</sup>Ralph McInerny, *Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), chapter three on “De Lubac and Cajetan.” Feingold’s work is cited at p. 73, n.13 along with Romanus Cessario, O.P., “Cardinal Cajetan and His Critics,” *Nova et Vetera* 3, no. 1 (2005): 109–118. For a lengthy treatment of Feingold’s “virtually impossible to lay hands on” volume and a convincing argument that it constitutes a “serious scholarly provocation” that deserves a serious hearing, see Reinhard Hütter, “*Desiderium Naturale Visionis Dei—Est autem duplex hominis beatitudo sive felicitas*: Some Observations About Lawrence Feingold’s and John Milbank’s Recent Interventions in the Debate Over the Natural Desire to See God,” *Nova et Vetera* 5, no. 1 (2007): 81–132, citations at 88 and 87.

unbiased reading of the commentatorial tradition that flows from him.” In this matter of continuity, Cessario urges “the spiritual descendants of both *la nouvelle théologie* and existentialist Thomism” to pay special attention to *Dei Filius*, the First Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith. McInerney, Cessario claims, “has the goods on the critics of the Thomist commentatorial tradition, who, no matter how well-intentioned they may have been, contributed to the destabilization of Catholic theology.”<sup>3</sup> By discrediting and departing from the manualist tradition of Thomism—Cessario’s “commentatorial tradition”—Henri de Lubac, and by implication, Pope John Paul II, have ruptured and destabilized Catholic theology. This is the central claim of the Thomist resurgence.

It is in this recent literature of the Thomist resurgence that Fergus Kerr’s *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* should be located. But Kerr is no simple neo-neoscholastic. More subtle and indirect, Kerr’s book is less straightforward in its advocacy of Thomism than McInerney’s or Cessario’s. In fact, Kerr has really written two books. The first book is an illuminating survey of ten theologians whose influence either on the

shape of the Second Vatican Council or on the subsequent history of Catholic theology is central and indisputable. Kerr includes separate chapters on his fellow Dominicans Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, and Edward Schillebeeckx followed by chapters on the Jesuits Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, and Bernard Lonergan. The last four chapters treat Hans Urs von Balthasar, Hans Küng, Karol Wojtyła, and Joseph Ratzinger. These theologians have been a part of his own life and Kerr in turn brings them to life with insight and a welcome wit. This is very much the survey that Blackwell editors wanted Kerr to write and it will serve beginning graduate students in theology well.

Kerr takes the book’s opening sentence from Walter Kasper in 1987, “There is no doubt that the outstanding event in the Catholic theology of our century is the surmounting of neoscholasticism.” “Anyone who began ordination studies in 1957, as I did,” he continues, “would agree.” Kerr has chosen his ten theologians because he sees them as connected in important ways with the “surmounting of neoscholasticism.” Representing neoscholasticism in Kerr’s survey is the Dominican master and “model Thomist” (10), Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange (1877–1964), treated in the second half of chapter one. Garrigou-Lagrange directed Karol Wojtyła’s dissertation at the Angelicum on St. John of the Cross and Kerr lets the reader know that, from Garrigou’s perspective, Wojtyła’s philosophy “is

<sup>3</sup>“Neo-Neo-Thomism” by Romanus Cessario, *First Things* (May 2007) accessed online. See also Romanus Cessario, O.P., *A Short History of Thomism* (original Italian edition 2003; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

not Thomist at all" (168). Though he is clear on Garrigou-Lagrange's limitations as "quasi-Euclidian" (12), Kerr treats him sympathetically. Kerr returns to Garrigou or to the "traditional Thomist" throughout the book, using him almost as a measuring rod for how far the subjects of each chapter have departed from Thomism. Such departure is, in Kerr's estimate, not always a good thing.

Paired with neoscholasticism in Kerr's survey is the Modernism, with its sensitivity to subjectivity and historical context, against which twentieth-century neoscholasticism was designed to "inoculate" (1) students of theology. The intellectual lives of Kerr's ten theologians were bounded on one side by neoscholastic Thomism and on the other by Modernism. "The history of twentieth-century Catholic theology," Kerr writes, "is the history of the attempted elimination of theological modernism, by censorship, sacking, and excommunication—and the resurgence of issues that could not be repressed by such methods" (4–5). The "Anti-Modernist Oath" of 1910 appears as the Appendix to the book.

In many respects, Kerr's survey is fair and well-balanced. For example, in the work of contemporary Dominicans, Jean-Pierre Torrell and in another Garrigou student, Servais Pinckaers (33), Kerr finds Garrigou-Lagrange's Thomism reaching "a degree of reconciliation" with the Thomism of his wayward student Chenu. Kerr has much more time for "transcendental Thomism" than either

McInerney or Cessario might have. He reads Rahner's "anonymous Christian" benignly as working out the claims of Vatican II about those who are not Christians. In returning to the conflict between Rahner and Balthasar, Kerr's sympathies clearly lie more with Rahner.<sup>4</sup> But he resists playing them off against one another. He finds both "rooted in the school of Jesuit spirituality" and hence "never as far apart as they may seem." History, Kerr suspects, will come to see their respective projects as "more complementary than conflicting, overlapping much more than their admirers and adversaries think at present" (104). In Lonergan's early work, published in English in 1971 as *Grace and Freedom*, Kerr finds "an as yet unsurpassed analysis of Aquinas's theory of divine transcendence and human liberty" (115).<sup>5</sup> Karl Barth, whose presence at Edinburgh, where Kerr works with the Catholic Chaplaincy, is a strong one, also appears throughout this book. Indeed, with Balthasar representing Barth's theological realism and Küng

<sup>4</sup>It is interesting to compare Kerr's treatment of Rahner-Balthasar as well as his treatment of de Lubac in this book with his treatment of these issues in the concluding chapter of his 1997 *Immortal Longings, Versions of Transcending Humanity* (University of Notre Dame Press), "The Natural Desire for God."

<sup>5</sup>Kerr's estimate is shared by Reinhard Hütter, who regards Lonergan's *Gratia Operans* (*Grace and Freedom*) as "still to be the benchmark analysis of Aquinas's profound treatment of this utterly complex topic." See Hütter, "Desiderium Naturale," 103, n. 42.

his protests for church reform, Kerr seems to read them together as something like right-wing and left-wing Barthians (my phrase, not Kerr's).

When Kerr treats Henri de Lubac, however, much of his even-handedness leaves him. And here we come to Kerr's second book. If one were to remove the chapters on Schillebeeckx, Rahner, Lonergan, Küng, and perhaps even Chenu, the second book comes more clearly into view. Its key lies in the subtitle *From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism*. After the sentences already cited on the surmounting of neoscholasticism from the book's opening paragraph, Kerr writes simply, "That the century ended with a reaffirmation of nuptial mysticism by influential theologians, we did not anticipate." Part of this book's purpose is to try to understand how this unanticipated reaffirmation of nuptial mysticism could have come to pass in a century that began with Garrigou-Lagrange. The short answer is Henri de Lubac.

In addition to a learned survey, Kerr has also written a sustained critique of what he calls "nuptial mysticism," his term for the theological anthropology or understanding of the image of God as male and female that emerges from Pope John Paul II's conferences on the opening chapters of Genesis. Kerr reads "nuptial mysticism" as an entirely innovative and possibly harmful interpretation of Genesis 1:27 and the *imago Dei*. Kerr ends his chapter on de Lubac with the astounding claim that de Lubac's books had the effect of destroying

neoscholastic theology (86). Kerr summarizes his treatment of de Lubac's key books with the claim that "de Lubac undermines neoscholastic dogmatic theology as radically as he destroys standard natural theology" (75). For this destruction Kerr cannot forgive him. The destruction of neoscholasticism, in Cessario's term, "destabilized" Catholic theology and enabled de Lubac to enshrine Origen at the center of the tradition and the Song of Songs at the center of the canon. Reading the Bible according to de Lubac's "pre-modern Catholic sensibility that he wanted to inhabit" (69) and with his insufficiently distinguished theology of nature and grace (188–89 with respect to Ratzinger), and with an assist from Karl Barth in Volume III of *Church Dogmatics* via Balthasar (197–99), John Paul II overturned completely the prior tradition about the *imago Dei* as residing chiefly in the intellective and volitional powers of the soul. In other words, as Kerr puts it, "It is not in our rationality but in our sexual difference that we image God—in our genitalia, not in our heads, so to speak" (194).

To the extent that Kerr sees the movement from neoscholasticism to nuptial mysticism as a decline, de Lubac is clearly the villain of this book. The destruction of neoscholasticism makes nuptial mysticism possible. It is here that Kerr's affinities with what I have called the Thomist resurgence are most clear.<sup>6</sup> But Kerr comes

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<sup>6</sup>In a provocative review of Kerr's book,

from the more progressive wing of Catholicism in the U.K. His primary concern does not seem to be the restoration of manualist or “commentatorial”—to his credit, Kerr refrains from using *commentatorial*—Thomism (though he remains a Thomist). Rather his chief concern seems to be that de Lubac’s destabilization of theology has allowed for nuptial mysticism to be established by church authority in the same way that neoscholasticism was established at the beginning of the century, and ironically by the very forces from which neoscholasticism was designed to protect the church.

Kerr’s Ratzinger chapter contrasts the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s 2004 *Letter on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World* with the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “The teaching of Pope John Paul II in the Wednesday Catecheses was evidently not ripe for inclusion in the Cate-

chism. In the Congregation document of 2004, however, this entirely new doctrine has become the only one.” Kerr allows some of his pique to show: “Amazingly, with that characteristic Roman Catholic talent for creative amnesia, the *imago Dei* theology that has held sway for 2,000 years is never even mentioned!” (196).

Nuptial mysticism has been on Kerr’s radar screen for a long time. A 1994 article warned *New Blackfriars* readers that a theological anthropology of the “eternal feminine” was “spreading fast in the Catholic Church,” supported by distinguished North American women scholars under the influence of Balthasar, somewhat ominously described by Kerr as “set to dominate Catholic theology for the next twenty years,” and John Paul II who “sings not far out of tune” with radical French feminists such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. Kerr is most alarmed by his interpretation of recent emphasis on the nuptial relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph 5:29). It seems to sexualize the Eucharist as “how Christ becomes one flesh with his Church.”<sup>7</sup>

This 1994 article sounded an alarm and reveals much about what Kerr is up to in *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, but in 1994 Balthasar and John Paul II occupied most of Kerr’s attention. De Lubac is not mentioned.

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“Theology After the Revolution,” in *First Things* (May 2007), Russell R. Reno, with some justification, has enlisted Kerr in a carefully reasoned case for renewing neoscholasticism or “standard” as opposed to “exploratory” theology. In the process, he almost completely ignores the centrality, boldness, and seriousness of Kerr’s critique of nuptial mysticism. In fact, the author or perhaps the editors go so far as to change the subtitle of Kerr’s book. *From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* becomes *From Chenu to Ratzinger*. Perhaps they are working with a newer edition that I am unfamiliar with. See the replies of Rodney Howsare and Larry Chapp and of Edward T. Oakes, S.J. in “Letters” for October 2007.

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<sup>7</sup>Fergus Kerr, O.P., “Discipleship of Equals or Nuptial Mystery?” *New Blackfriars* 75 (July/August 1994): 344–54, at 349, 352, 347, 350.

In the concluding chapter of *Immortal Longings* (1997), Kerr praises de Lubac's contributions to twentieth-century theology with the enthusiasm conventional at the time. The chapter near the end of *Catholicism* in which de Lubac anticipates the argument of *Surnaturel* Kerr describes as "brilliant." He treats sympathetically de Lubac's claim that it was Catholic theologians who invented the modern autonomous individual.<sup>8</sup> By 2002 Kerr suggested in *After Aquinas* that the furor over *Surnaturel* was de Lubac's own fault. With his "calculated insults" of eminent Thomists, de Lubac "himself set off the disputes in which the issues were perhaps obscured." "Few now doubt," he continues, "that when Thomas taught that human beings have a natural desire for the vision of God, he meant what he said." He concludes in the language of the Thomist resurgence that the significance of de Lubac's challenge to Thomism "can now best be recaptured by studying the ramifications of the network of scholarship which he disrupted so effectively." The verb *disrupt* suggests that between 1997 and 2002, Kerr read and was persuaded by revisionist estimates of de Lubac's critique of Cajetan emerging in the literature of the Thomist resurgence. Though Feingold appears only once and briefly in *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (73), Kerr

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<sup>8</sup>Fergus Kerr, *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 168–69.

begins his discussion in *After Aquinas* of the acrimonious controversy over *Surnaturel* by directing the reader to a weighty 300-page special issue of *Revue Thomiste* "for the most thorough analysis."<sup>9</sup> Kerr's alarm over nuptial theology, and especially its implications for the Eucharist, reappears here as he points out in the Conclusion that Aquinas "does not regard the eucharist as a nuptial mystery, with the celebrant as bridegroom and thus necessarily male." He distances Aquinas from Balthasar's nuptial understanding of the Eucharist.<sup>10</sup> Here as in 1994 Kerr, Balthasar represents the nuptial theology to which Kerr voices his aversion.

What changes in *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* is Kerr's blending of his critique of nuptial mysticism with his critique of de Lubac. This seems to be a matter of conviction rather than strategy. Kerr's chapter on Balthasar praises *Herrlichkeit* as "constituting by far the most impressive work by any twentieth-century Catholic theologian." He compares it with Barth's *Church Dogmatics* (123). Though Kerr's distaste for nuptial theology is palpable amid his restraint and he is bemused by Balthasar's popularity, he treats Balthasar in the main respectfully. He concludes with the

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<sup>9</sup>Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 134–38, at 231, n. 1 citing *Revue Thomiste* 101 (2001): 5–315.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 242, n. 1, citing Balthasar from *Elucidations* (London: SPCK, 1975), 150.

judgment that Balthasar “created an entirely different version of Catholic theology from anything ever imagined by regular disciples of Thomas Aquinas.” Kerr identifies Balthasar as “by far the most discussed Catholic theologian at present.” He notes the “overwhelmingly positive tenor” of the “ever-expanding secondary literature” but wonders if perhaps critics simply “do not know where to start” (144).

Kerr reserves his most deft and sometimes deadly rhetoric for his chapter on de Lubac. It is as if, in both de Lubac’s critique of Thomists and in his posture as a “man of the Church,” the Jesuit cardinal had gotten away with a colossal con and must be exposed. De Lubac, we are told, was “effectively self-taught” in philosophy and theology (67). His Aquinas is Gilson’s, his “philosophical culture” Maurice Blondel’s. Just as de Lubac had “wickedly” associated Garrigou-Lagrangé’s opinion on the natural desire to see God in Aquinas with George Tyrrell’s (*After Aquinas*, 137), Kerr returns the favor in his discussion of de Lubac’s “Thomism” (68). Unlike their Protestant contemporaries, de Lubac and his *ressourcement* colleagues were “never subjected to the discipline of doctoral research.” Rather, de Lubac’s Gregorian doctorate was conferred at the request of the Jesuit Father General “without de Lubac’s setting foot there or ever submitting a dissertation” (70).

As he had in 1997, Kerr acknowledges that de Lubac’s books became “major texts in modern Catholic

theology” (70). But his language suggests something dubious about these books. De Lubac “wove” them “out of his reading.” These books “he usually passed off as ‘occasional’ and put together at someone else’s urging” (70). De Lubac “disingenuously” called *Summae* a “merely historical” study (72). The phrase and the central insight for *Corpus Mysticum* came to de Lubac “leafing through volumes of Migne’s *Patrologia Latina*” (72). His studies of medieval exegesis resulted from his continuing “to browse through patristic and medieval theology” (76). Kerr’s prose is exquisite. His choice of the verbs *leaf* and *browse* seems designed to impugn de Lubac’s stature as a scholar.

Though Kerr treated it in 1997, he passes over quickly (73) de Lubac’s heroic resistance to the German occupation of France and the role of contemporary politics in the controversies surrounding *Summae*. Can it be theologically irrelevant that de Lubac reserved some of his own “barely coded insults” (73) for Thomists such as Pedro Descoqs, a well-known partisan of *L’Action Française*? De Lubac’s argument is precisely, as Kerr knows well, that Descoqs’ version of Thomism was not unrelated to his politics.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>For Kerr’s own treatment of the political context for debates surrounding *Summae* and the connection between *L’Action Française* and Vichy, see *Immortal Longings*, 166–67. In *After Aquinas* Kerr identifies Descoqs as de Lubac’s teacher and the “leading Suárezian Thomist of the day” and



The image of de Lubac that emerges from this chapter is that of an esoteric theological outlier posing as a man of the Church. With the aid of ecclesial renegades and outlaws from Origen to Teilhard, “manifestly offbeat and idiosyncratic figures” (86) from the margins of the tradition, de Lubac mysteriously managed to “destroy” neoscholastic theology and transform Catholicism in such a way that many now do regard him as a “man of the Church” (86). Is the implication that they are mistaken?

In addition to being a valuable survey, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* combines its sustained critique of nuptial mysticism with a critique of de Lubac that credits him with making it possible for Balthasar, John Paul II, and now Benedict XVI to establish nuptial mysticism as quasi-official Catholic theology. Kerr’s case against de Lubac is threefold. First, by destroying neoscholasticism he dangerously destabilized Catholic theology, leaving it without a center and prey to all manner of deviations and eccentric innovations. Chief among them is nuptial mysticism. Second, by filling the resulting hole at the heart of the tradition with Origen and other idiosyncratic figures, he legitimates the

pre-modern, insufficiently differentiated way of reading Scripture that we find in John Paul II’s Wednesday conferences and in the “browsings” that are de Lubac’s historical retrieval of patristic and medieval exegesis. It was de Lubac who reintroduced “this high theology of the epithalamic relationship between the believer and Christ” (83). Balthasar and Wojtyła would run with it. Commenting on the Bride and Bridegroom imagery in the 2004 CDF document on men and women, a frustrated Thomist can only ask, “What does it mean to say that these terms are ‘much more than simple metaphors?’” (200). Central to Kerr’s critique of nuptial theology is the intent to show that de Lubac, Balthasar, Wojtyła, and Ratzinger are not Thomists in any sense that Garrigou-Lagrange—and Kerr as well?—would recognize. Third, by insisting on a single final end, de Lubac insufficiently distinguishes nature and grace. He thereby renders appeals to “natural law” morality in regard to sexual ethics impossible (179). This involves a nest of contested historical claims about de Lubac’s interpretation of Cajetan and the so-called commentatorial tradition and about what St. Thomas actually taught regarding natural finality. The upshot is that de Lubac’s appeal to paradox looks more like “an irresolvable *aporia*” (75), incapable of maintaining the healthy and necessary distinctions between philosophy and theology. In spite of himself, de Lubac has fallen into the “trap of an amor-

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the “chief of the Jesuit theologians whom he wanted to discredit” (137). But he doesn’t mention Descoqs’ connections to right-wing French politics. On that, see Joseph Komonchak, “Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac,” *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 579–602, at 595.

phous supernaturalism.”<sup>12</sup>

What should readers make of this threefold case? Much of it is familiar to students of the mid-century controversies over *Supernatural*.<sup>13</sup> The old criticisms come now with new approaches to the complex questions of interpretation surrounding the original debates. In Kerr’s book, the familiar critique comes wedded to his own exigent criticisms of nuptial theology. As Kerr has said (182), it remains to be seen whether the nuptial mysticism he finds so disturbing will pass into the common teaching of the Church. It is indeed an innovation. Some might call it a development, even as they might celebrate the “destruction” of neoscholastic theology Kerr attributes to de Lubac as a liberating opening to and recovery of the great tradition’s “breadth and depth” (Komonchak’s phrase).

In spite of the book’s subtitle, the centrality of Kerr’s critique of nuptial mysticism to his book has eluded most reviewers in the United States.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed with an Introduction by David L. Schindler (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 20.

<sup>13</sup>See the summary of criticisms in David L. Schindler’s Introduction to the 1998 edition of *The Mystery of the Supernatural* cited above, at xxi-xxv, hereafter cited in the text.

<sup>14</sup>Reno’s review in which Kerr’s subtitle actually disappears has already been mentioned. See also the four reviews and Kerr’s very illuminating Author’s Response in the Review Symposium in *Horizons* 34 (Spring 2007): 101–17. Stephen J. Pope

Nevertheless, Kerr has written a serious critique of papal theology, arguing that it is an innovation. His argument is being discussed rather than condemned in the journal he has called “the ‘conservative’ counterblast to *Concilium*” (124). No one has or will shut Kerr down. The case will continue to be argued. All of this suggests that, rather than having destabilized Catholic theology, de Lubac has enriched it.

Many among younger generations of Catholics have received mostly silence from their elders on sexuality. Nuptial theology has a strong appeal to them. This, rather than the force of authoritative establishment is the source of the popularity that Kerr seems to find so alarming. What would Kerr offer in its place? In the matter of the historical questions surrounding *Supernatural*, Kerr has brought to the attention of a more popular audience what Reinhard Hüter has called the “serious scholarly provocation” generated by historical research such as Feingold’s and McInerny’s. This can only be a good. Perhaps de Lubac would consider it part of the ebb and flow of theology. In his Introduction to the 1998 edition of de Lubac’s *The Mystery of the Supernatural*

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devotes considerable space to nuptial theology in his substantive review but in the end seems to engage in the kind of dismissal of it that Kerr warned against in 1994. See *Commonweal*, 31 January 2008: 21–23. U.S. reviewers do not seem to understand why Kerr is talking about nuptial mysticism. His Author’s Response in *Horizons* is particularly illuminating on this.

(1965), David L. Schindler considered some of the issues raised anew by Kerr and the Thomist resurgence. He began by distinguishing “de Lubac’s basic thesis and the fundamental *élan* of his work from the detailed historical–philosophical and theological claims in terms of which he works out his thesis” (xxvi). As both Kerr’s book and the literature of the Thomist resurgence indicate, “all of these questions are legitimate and hence remain matters concerning which conscientious theologians and philosophers will continue to differ” (xxvi). But, as Schindler argues, any alternative proposal to de Lubac’s on the relation of nature and grace “must show how it can better account for the double burden presented by the Gospel, of an utterly gratuitous gift on God’s part coupled with the human person’s profound—non-arbitrary—desire for this gift.” Both aspects of this double burden are present “already at the beginning of each creature’s existence” (xxvii). These questions we shall continue to argue. For, after all, as both Aquinas and de Lubac would readily agree, in the end what is at stake are not human opinions but how the truth of things stands. □

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