Étienne Gilson and Henri de Lubac

Lettres de M. Etienne Gilson adressées au P. de Lubac et commentées par celui-ci.

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Volume XLVII of the *Complete Works* of Cardinal Henri de Lubac, S.J. is a revised edition of the first edition (nineteen letters, published in 1986). Thanks to the thorough archival work of Jacques Prévotat and Marie-Gabrielle Lemaire, the present volume contains fourteen previously unpublished letters from de Lubac to Etienne Gilson, for a total of thirty-nine letters. The additions include various letters, and two texts written by de Lubac in 1986 on the “extended family of Thomists and Scholastics.” (p. 216; p. 221). A historical introduction by Prévotat, a theological commentary by Jean-Pierre Wagner, an index, and translations of Latin expressions complete the new edition.

Apart from the first and last letters, the exchange between Gilson and de Lubac took place over the course of the 1960s. De Lubac waited more than twenty years to publish these letters, and although the foreword to the 1986 edition provides several anecdotes, the reason for publishing them is not explicitly stated. As the 2013 introduction indicates, de Lubac’s primary objective was to make public Gilson’s agreement with him on how Thomas Aquinas should be read. As an internationally renowned specialist on medieval philosophy, Gilson’s opinion was highly regarded. The theologian and philosopher shared the idea that it was necessary to “return to the true St. Thomas” (Gilson I, July 8, 1956, p. 60) rather than just reading his critics, especially Cajetan and Suárez—since the Thomists often transformed, or even corrupted Aquinas’s thought (Gilson I, July 8, 1956, p. 59 and XII, June 21, 1965, p. 116). This interpretive choice, which meant moving from “exaggerated Thomism to the actual study of St. Thomas” (de Lubac II, July 20, 1956, p. 70–71) enabled the rediscovery of Aquinas’s position on several fundamental subjects, such as the supernatural, obediential potency, the natural desire for God, the dynamic life of the Spirit, negative theology, the doctrine of creation, and the “starting point in the ultimate end” (Gilson VI, December 17, 1961, p. 88). Such strong agreement immediately created a “discreet and robust friendship” between de Lubac and Gilson (de Lubac, 1986, p. 53).

However, there is a paradox at the heart of this accord. Where de Lubac founds the philosophical basis for his position in Maurice Blondel, Gilson claimed not to understand the philosopher from Aix-en-Provence. Indeed, Gilson rejects Blondel’s “mixing of genres” (de Lubac, 1986, p. 82), maintaining a delicately balanced idea of philosophy—if Christian—as within faith (as opposed to the Louvain Thomists and Maritain’s followers), which must nevertheless not be philosophy on the threshold (against Blondel and the theolo-

gians he inspired). Blondel's "patient effort of integration" (de Lubac XIII, June 24, 1965, p. 141) collides with Gilson's "purely historical" position (de Lubac, 1986, p. 222), which is not immune from becoming "doctrinal historicism" (de Lubac, 1986, p. 137).

Another lasting disagreement between de Lubac and Gilson concerned Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Both scholars affirm that their intellectual friendship was not tarnished because of this dispute, but de Lubac does seem to refrain from writing everything he thinks (de Lubac XIX, April 9, 1967, p. 162) and continually finds excuses for Gilson (de Lubac, 1986, p. 153–161). This is the same methodological issue of interpretation as for Aquinas—should one read the author or his critics? Gilson apparently did not apply to Teilhard the method he advocated for reading Aquinas (p. 93, 158, 162). Yet, the subjects Teilhard dealt with were the questions twentieth-century culture asked of Christian faith, echoing on the one hand, the Christological and scriptural rediscovery of Christ's role in creation, and on the other, the importance restored to understanding (Christian) revelation as history. The scientific discoveries linked to the secular idea of evolution should have encouraged theologians to rethink divine design without disregarding these facts. Gilson, however, is satisfied with slogans, caricatures (de Lubac, XVII, April 2, 1967, p. 152), and even "posthumous Teilhardism" (de Lubac, 1986, note 5, p. 159). He does not register de Lubac's objections (Gilson, VII, May 13, 1962, p. 90–92 ; XV, July 22, 1965, p. 145), who finally reproaches him for being "unmoving" (de Lubac, 1986, note 2, p. 94).

The editors of this volume want to insist on a final central aspect of the correspondence between Gilson and de Lubac: the two men's agreement on certain post-conciliar events in the life of the Catholic Church. They shared regrets about the French translation of the *Credo* (1965 letters) and the loss of 'liturgical sacredness' (Lubac XXII, May 18, 1967, p. 168 ; Gilson XXXI, 1969, p. 189). They expressed their support for Paul VI, in particular with regard to the encyclical *Humanae vitae* (Gilson XXVI, September 3, 1968, p. 175). They saw their time as nothing but the "fever of decomposition" (de Lubac, 1986, p. 57) and "aimless wandering among ruins" (de Lubac XXIV, November 7, 1967, p. 172, an allusion to Gilson, *Les Tribulations de Sophie*, 1967).

Although these thirty-three letters are brief and their themes fairly conventional (the most frequent being thanks upon receiving a publication), they are a pertinent contribution to de Lubac's *Complete Works*, and facilitate a more detailed understanding of the Jesuit's thought. The intellectual encounter between Gilson and de Lubac does, however, feature a blind spot. In a 1936 article, de Lubac intervened in the debate on Christian philosophy (Prévotat, p. 24). As Wagner notes (p. 46), he suggested going beyond the viewpoints of

not only Emile Bréhier, Jacques Maritain, and Gilson, but also those of Blondel, Antonin Sertillanges, Pierre Rousselot, and especially those of Gabriel Marcel (de Lubac, 1986, p. 230) and Claude Nicolet. Yet, Gilson never explicitly refers to this broader body of scholarship, while de Lubac returns to it only partially in 1986 (Letters I, IV, XII). A full investigation of the exchange between Gilson and de Lubac would require developing this dialogue in relation to the Jesuit's entire theological corpus.

(Translated from the French by Katherine Shirk Lucas)

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