Philippe Geneste

Humanisme et Lumière du Christ chez Henri de Lubac. Études lubaciennes 11.

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Henri de Lubac, S.J. (1896–1991) has been interpreted in various and highly contradictory ways, as a modernist, a theological conservative, a Thomist, a closet neo-Platonist, a proto-postmodern theologian, and as a post-liberal. Philippe Geneste interprets him in the only way plausible: as a Jesuit. *Humanisme et Lumière du Christ chez Henri de Lubac* was the doctoral thesis of Geneste, who died in an automobile accident in 2014. Jean-Pierre Wagner, Geneste's doctoral advisor, edited the thesis for publication in the series Les études lubaciennes.

The point of departure for this study is not what one might expect, a systematic analysis of the structure of human nature or the theology of natural desire for the supernatural in de Lubac's work. Instead, Geneste approaches anthropology and Christology from a tradition of Christian humanism rooted in Ignatian spirituality. Geneste, like many French scholars of de Lubac, resists overly-systematic readings of de Lubac's work. Geneste's methodology is significant. De Lubac's work has often been interpreted as if he developed discrete areas of theology—the supernatural, theological method, natural theology, and exegesis. This approach is understandable, since de Lubac intervened into the principal debates concerning theological method, systematic theology, and historical theology in the Catholic Church in the twentieth century. Geneste expands the horizon, showing how de Lubac is situated within a broad tradition of Christian humanism.

In Part 1, "Henri de Lubac, a Jesuit Representing the Authentic Humanist Tradition," Geneste presents de Lubac's humanism as a theological humanism. Creatures are understood only in their relationship with God. The theme throughout his writings is "the human being is, by nature, oriented towards God" (27) due to the "real parallel" between the gift of creation and the gift of redemption (78). God's actions in history, and particularly the incarnation, impact the human horizon. As Geneste indicates, de Lubac's anthropology is rooted in an Ignatian method of imagining creation in light of its destiny. Ignatian spirituality impacted de Lubac's theological writings, including those on the supernatural, the spiritual interpretation of scripture, and for his engagement with humanist traditions. Geneste shows that, according to de Lubac, the Renaissance humanist figures Pico della Mirandola, Erasmus, and Charles de Bovelles captured the immense dignity of humanity. The Renaissance humanist conception of the ontological unity of humanity was based upon the union of humanity with the transcendent. For de Lubac, the elevation of humanity in Renaissance humanism was inspired more by the scriptures than by its

infatuation with Greek philosophy. A distinct humanist tradition was indebted primarily to an Aristotelian view of human nature, present in the writings of Cajetan, and contributed to producing the “new man” of atheist humanism. Geneste’s key contribution is to indicate the links between de Lubac’s recovery of a patristic vision of humanity, his assessment of modern atheist humanism, and his engagement with Renaissance and early modern humanism.

Part II, “Christian Humanism, Philosophical Humanism: Cross-Profiles” treats de Lubac’s interpretation of humanism in European philosophical traditions, and his assessment of an inhuman twentieth-century European absolutism. Geneste explains that, according to de Lubac, a Christocentric humanism, which recognizes humanity’s inherent orientation to fulfillment in Christ, became obscured in modernity. The result were various streams of humanism: on the one hand, “absolute humanism,” which enshrines a Rousseauian account of natural human goodness and, on the other, a tradition of “transcendental humanism,” which “intends to enthrone the divine in the very heart of the human city” (149). Geneste describes the advocates of “pure nature,” a concept of human nature possessing only a terrestrial destiny, as unwitting allies of “absolute humanism” and *laïcité*. He interprets Action Française and the anti-modernist advocates of a new Christendom as part of the stream of transcendental humanism. According to Geneste, de Lubac develops a Christological humanism in response to these streams. The natural desire is oriented not merely to the “supernatural” as its only end, but to Christ, the word made flesh.

In Part III, “A Christology Wrapped in the Study of Joachim de Fiore,” Geneste turns to de Lubac’s engagement with the twelfth-century monk Joachim de Fiore in *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore*. Joachim’s exegetical posterity are those who followed his biblical hermeneutics and his spiritual posterity, those who adopted his form of eschatological expectation. Joachim’s innovation is the prophecy of the final period of history, the new age of the Spirit, in which will be delivered the “eternal Gospel.” Geneste’s argument is that, for de Lubac, Joachim does not only expect an age in which the work of Christ is superseded and surpassed, but also an era of a “spiritual” humanity. The modern descendants of Joachim—Hegel, Lessing, Saint-Simon, Marx, and many others—seek to create, in some form or another, a new humanity. That modern philosophies of history generate a humanism apart from the Word made flesh, a “Gospel of humanity” (224). Geneste’s valuable analysis draws from de Lubac’s engagement with Joachim the outlines of a Christocentric anthropology and a spirituality of incorporation into Christ.

Although Geneste correctly assesses that de Lubac traces the “mystical immanentism” of modernity back to Joachim, he overstates de Lubac’s

disagreement with Joachim. Geneste writes that Joachim proposed “a theological vision against the sense of the Tradition. [...] Joachim, one could say, even rejects the ideas of the revelation of God, of the supernatural vocation of humanity, of the Spirit seeking to penetrate history by always integrating it into Christ” (183). Yet for de Lubac, Joachim is a sympathetic figure who, against a nascent medieval rationalism, rediscovered the dynamism of the Spirit present in history. De Lubac explains, “His ‘internal dynamism’ was consequently not an entirely aberrant force” (*Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 3, trans. E. M. Macierowski [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009], 418). De Lubac wanted to retain and integrate Joachim’s hope while purifying the perilous elements of his thought. Nevertheless, Geneste’s interpretation is valuable, for it indicates de Lubac’s criticism of the trajectory of the Joachimite tradition.

It is arguable that we live in the world de Lubac feared, a world that is anthropocentric and inhuman at the same time. De Lubac sought to open the heart of this world to its secret desire, which, as Geneste shows, is found in the mystery of Christ. In *Humanisme et Lumière du Christ chez Henri de Lubac*, Geneste leaves behind a significant contribution on de Lubac’s Christocentric anthropology. Furthermore, he provides the scaffolding for further examination of modern Christian humanisms and spirituality.

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