

CURRENT THEOLOGY

A RECENT CRITIQUE OF P. DE LUBAC'S *SURNATUREL*

The burden of defending his theory of the supernatural order has been considerably increased for Père de Lubac by the solid scholarship of Père Guy de Broglie, S.J., professor of theology at the *Institut Catholique de Paris* and the Pontifical Gregorian University, in his recent treatise, *De fine ultimo humanae vitae*.¹ Although more than two hundred pages were actually printed before the publication of *Surnaturel* in 1946, they offer tacitly a deeper challenge to the entire elaboration of P. de Lubac's theory than any explicitly *ad hoc* critique written during the past two years; moreover, due to the inevitable delays of post-war publishing, P. de Broglie was able to add an appendix,² in which he marshalled and fused all the resources of his vast and minutely exact erudition into an explicit and masterly criticism of *Surnaturel*.

The scope of this note is merely to give in brief outline De Broglie's major arguments; a detailed discussion and evaluation of his contribution to the theology of the supernatural order will follow, it is hoped, in a subsequent issue of THEOLOGICAL STUDIES.

THE ESSENTIAL AIMS OF *Surnaturel*

As all previous critics have done, De Broglie stresses the need of grasping clearly the primary aims of *Surnaturel* before attempting an evaluation. These aims, he maintains are entirely theological,³ and may be reduced to the following four propositions.

1) Neither Saint Thomas nor any other theologian before Cajetan ever taught, explicitly or implicitly, a real possibility that finite spirits could be ordained by divine providence to a destiny inferior to the beatific vision;

¹ Paris: Beauchesne et ses Fils, 1948, pp. vi + 299.

² *Ibid.*, Appendix III: "Senserintne Aquinas et antiquiores generatim Scholastici creaturas spirituales ad visionem Dei necessario vocatas esse?" (pp. 245-64).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 245: "Paucis: liber est historicus materialiter, theologicus formaliter, seu ex parte finis manifestissime intenti. Minime quidem nova est apud theologos illa historiae conscribendae ratio; nec ullam reprehensionem per se meretur. Ac tamen fatendum est hoc describendi genus summe salebrosum esse: cum studium opinionum confirmandarum mentes impedire soleat ab objectiva illa factorum agnitione quam historia per se intendit. Hinc factum est ut, non obstante auctoris plane singulari ingenio et eruditione, assertiones eius non paucae obiectionibus multis occasionem praebant. . . . Ut ergo iudicium de densissimo illo libro ferri possit, *fines* eius primo intellegendi sunt, i. e., determinatae *theses theologicae* ad quarum propugnationem tendit."

rather, they taught that men and angels must be destined uniquely to this end.⁴

2) This doctrine in no wise conflicts with the gratuity, either of the beatific vision itself, or of all the other gifts which are proportioned to it. The true concept of gratuity does not in the slightest degree imply or require that these gifts could have been refused to man (supposing, of course, his existence by the negatively gratuitous gift of creation). On the contrary, gratuity involves uniquely the denial of any strictly juridical exigency intrinsic to human nature whereby God, in bestowing supernatural gifts, would be subordinated to His creatures in that precise degree of dependence proper to one who owes a debt in commutative justice.⁵

3) This sound and traditional theology of the supernatural order was unhappily disrupted in the sixteenth century by entirely new speculative reveries directed toward showing a necessary connection between the gratuity of the supernatural and the possibility of a state of pure nature.⁶ There were three chief causes of this departure from tradition: (a) Cajetan's theory of natural desire, whereby man cannot exceed in aspiration what he can attain through natural means; therefore, a true natural appetite for the beatific vision is impossible, and human nature could be completely satisfied in the attainment of a "natural" end; consequently, Cajetan excluded any line of reasoning which might indicate that a possible vocation to the beatific vision is inherently postulated by the very concept of a spiritual nature. (b) The second factor was an excessively juridical outlook which became prevalent in sixteenth-century theology; theologians of this era at first neglected, and then deserted completely, the traditional doctrine that God cannot be conceived as a debtor to His creatures; the next step was to maintain stupidly that all ontological exigencies of human nature exercise a strict juridical claim on God; consequently, the conviction became widespread that a divine economy which would be regulated entirely by the ontological exigencies of a creature could not be motivated by pure liberality, in such wise that from eternity God would have simultaneously decreed, not merely the existence, but also the necessary internal faculties and external aids postulated by the ontological exigencies of human nature; such a divine economy, it was maintained, would not be regulated by a transcendent and disinterested love, but by a rigid order of commutative justice. Although *Surnaturel* offers no documentation to establish the prevalence of this intellectual decadence, nevertheless, it contains the apodictic assertion that an excessively juridical view of man's relations to God pertained to "les conceptions générales qui formaient en quelque sorte

⁴ *Loc. cit.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

l'atmosphère intellectuelle respirée alors indistinctement par les théologiens de tout parti."⁷ By the reduction of all ontological exigencies to a species of juridical claims, there remained only one way to safeguard the gratuity of grace, i.e., to deny any exigency, even ontological, on the part of human nature for supernatural gifts; such a denial, however, is identical with the affirmation of the possibility of a divine economy in which man would in no wise be destined to the beatific vision. In such an intellectual atmosphere, then, only two alternatives were open for Catholic theologians: either to adopt the absurd and blasphemous theory that God grants grace as the fulfillment of an obligation in commutative justice, or to elaborate the unfortunate reverie of a state of pure nature.⁸ (c) Finally, the errors of Baius and Jansen indirectly but manifoldly contributed to the diffusion and almost universal acceptance of the new system. Baius, according to P. de Lubac, was completely dominated by the juridical outlook, to the extent that he reduced all relations between man and God to a scheme of commutative justice.⁹ The same basic viewpoint, though by no means so overt, was characteristic of Jansenism.¹⁰ The strong condemnation of these two systems by the Holy See had the curious effect of making orthodox theologians more indissolubly wedded to their theories of pure nature; however, it was precisely their own juridical outlook which prevented them from realizing the true import of the papal condemnations; according to P. de Lubac, the Church authoritatively proscribed only a strict juridical exigency, and by no means that ontological exigency for the supernatural which was the common heritage until the sixteenth century.¹¹

4) The primary and most important aim of P. de Lubac is to plead that, since he has exposed the stupidity of the theological legalism of the sixteenth century and has uncovered the only true sense of the Baio-Jansenistic heresy and of the papal condemnations, his theory of the supernatural order should win universal acceptance as a return to a more sane understanding of the gratuity of grace. Therefore, modern theology should discard entirely the useless, unfortunate and dangerous hypothesis of pure nature; it should espouse the view that human destiny to the beatific vision is so necessarily connected with the existence of a spiritual creature, that

⁷ De Lubac, *Surnaturel*, p. 150. To this sweeping statement de Broglie adds a gloss: "Ac tamen interpretatio praedicta eo magis confirmatione textuum indiguisset quod Scholastici saeculi XVII et XVIII fere omnes *eam explicite excludunt*. Expresse enim consentire solent Aquinati neganti Deum posse se habere ad creaturam ut debitorem ut et eorum commentariis in Iam, q. XXI, a. I, satis patet" (*op. cit.*, p. 248, note 2).

⁸ De Broglie, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

⁹ De Lubac, *op. cit.*, p. 18: "Baius, ou le juridisme pur."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-45.

¹¹ De Broglie, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

God could not in accord with His wisdom and goodness ordain man to any inferior goal.¹²

AN IMPORTANT EQUIVOCATION IN *Surnaturel*

As a preliminary to his positive critique, P. de Broglie points out several evidences of confusion and equivocation, of which all except one have been at least noted by other writers.¹³ Completely original to P. de Broglie is the observation that *Surnaturel* never distinguishes between the possibility of a state of pure nature, and the possibility that men and angels might not have been called to the beatific vision. The first question is not dogmatic, but purely theological and systematic; it supposes that some determinate end can be predicated of human nature as "natural," i.e., an end strictly proportioned to man's unaided activity, to which man has a necessary inclination. Obviously, for a Nominalist, maintaining that God could ordain any man to any end and different men to different ends according to His unconditioned *beneplacitum*, the notion of a concrete determinate end of man, conceived as a stable nature with universally valid and permanent attributes, would make no sense. But the Church does not forbid under pain of heresy the habit of philosophizing irrationally; hence, no matter how unsustainable Nominalism is philosophically, it does not seem to merit a theological censure; therefore, because of a philosophically untenable comprehension of the term "nature," one could deny boldly the possibility of a state of pure nature and still in no way offend against Catholic doctrine.¹⁴

The second question, however, much more simple and readily within the grasp of untrained minds is, according to P. de Broglie, not merely a matter of theological speculation; it is a dogmatic question: Could God create finite spirits and not destine them to the beatific vision? And it must be answered in the affirmative. P. de Lubac not only confuses these two totally distinct questions, but for all practical purposes identifies them and gives a negative answer to both. Precisely because of this confusion of two distinct questions, P. de Lubac considers the following assertions to be identical: (1) systematic speculations on the possibility of a state of pure nature by no means pertain to the faith and were not evolved by theologians until the sixteenth century; (2) the possibility of our not having been called to the beatific vision does not pertain to the faith and was unknown to Catholic

¹² *Loc. cit.*

¹³ Cf. the present writer's "Current Theology," THEOLOGICAL STUDIES, VIII (1947), 483-91, and "Discussions on the Supernatural Order," IX (1948), 213, note 2.

¹⁴ De Broglie, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

theologians before the sixteenth century. According to P. de Broglie, the first assertion is quite true and the second is wholly false.¹⁵

P. DE BROGLIE'S REFUTATION OF *Surnaturel*

In his positive critique, which can only be summarized here, P. de Broglie shows that Saint Thomas' view on the gratuity of the supernatural necessarily involves the possibility of our not having been called to the beatific vision. The main sources of this demonstration are from St. Thomas' doctrine on the state of infants who die without baptism;¹⁶ from his distinction between the *ratio debiti* of natural and supernatural gifts, which in the case of the latter excludes not merely all juridical claims, but also any ontological exigency in human nature;¹⁷ and finally, from his doctrine that it belongs to the natural rectitude of human nature to be able to love God *super omnia*.¹⁸

Next, P. de Broglie explains why an explicit and evolved theory of pure nature did not appear before the sixteenth century; this was due, he argues acutely, to the anthropomorphic notion of divine omnipotence common to all the early Scholastics and even to St. Thomas in his earlier writings, and consequently, to a vague and vacillating grasp of the notion of possibility itself. In the year 1266, however, St. Thomas formulated the golden principle by which the dogma of divine omnipotence was expressed for the first time in full accord with God's infinite transcendence: "In nobis, in quibus potentia et essentia aliud est a voluntate, et iterum intellectus aliud a sapientia et voluntas aliud a iustitia, potest esse aliquid in potentia quod non potest esse in voluntate iusta vel in intellectu sapiente. Sed in Deo est idem potentia et essentia et iustitia. Unde nihil potest esse in potentia

¹⁵ *Loc. cit.*; cf. also note 1: "Praedictae confusionis incommodum speciatim apparet ubi auctor verum sensum damnationis Baii sic illustrare conatur: 'La pure nature, définie comme nous l'avons dit, ne préoccupait pas beaucoup les premiers adversaires de Baius. Au reste, celui-ci lui-même n'en avait guère parlé (*op. cit.*, pp. 103, 104).' Hoc quidem verissimum est, si de *systemate philosophico* 'purae naturae' accipiatur. Si vero (ut in libro citato fieri solet) quaestio 'naturae purae' confunditur cum quaestione merae *possibilitatis non-vocationis* nostrae ad caelestia, falsum est Baium et primos Baii adversarios de hac quaestione non fuisse sollicitos, aut theologos tunc dubitavisse quin damnatio Pii VI ipsam hanc quaestionem solvere intendisset. Oppositum enim manifestum est, non modo ex *Explicatio doctrinae* quam Facultas Lovaniensis anno 1586, jussu Gregorii XIII, composuit, sed etiam e Bellarmino, qui, Lovanii docens (1570-76), opusculum composuit ad sententias Baii damnatas refutandas, in quo possibilitatem non-vocationis praedictae exponit ad intellegentiam pianae damnationis in primis pertinentem (Le Bachelet, *Auctarium Bellarminianum*, Paris, 1913, pp. 204 et 315)."

¹⁶ St. Thomas, *In II Sent.*, d. 33, q. 11, a. 2.

¹⁷ St. Thomas, *Sum. Theol.*, I-II, q. 3, a. 1, ad 2m; I, q. 21, a. 1, ad 3, a. 4.

¹⁸ St. Thomas, *Sum. Theol.*, I, q. 60, a. 5.

divina quod non possit esse in voluntate iusta ipsius et in intellectu sapiente eius."¹⁹

Formerly, divine omnipotence had been conceived as if it needed to be, as it were, extrinsically controlled and directed by other divine attributes, lest it produce created effects in themselves stupid or evil; however, after the *Summa Theologica* had become widely known, it was recognized universally, except by Nominalists, that nothing which would be contrary to any other divine attribute is truly possible as an effect of divine omnipotence. Therefore, since the true gratuity of our supernatural destiny postulates a true possibility of our not having been called to this lofty goal,²⁰ it would have been entirely in accord with God's wisdom, justice, goodness, and liberality, if He had freely destined us to some inferior end. Once this hypothesis was recognized as an objective possibility and not as a chimerical phantasy based on an unsustainable concept of divine omnipotence, it became immediately legitimate to elaborate a systematic theory of pure nature. That St. Thomas himself did not take this step is not surprising in view of the circumstances and preoccupations of his last eight years.²¹ During the next two centuries, the fourteenth and fifteenth, Thomism was engaged in a mortal struggle for its very existence, and had practically no opportunity for evolving the doctrine of St. Thomas; furthermore, the chief rival of Thomism during these two centuries, Nominalism, because of its excessive emphasis on divine voluntarism, was far removed from asserting the necessity of the beatific vision as man's uniquely possible destiny; thus, there was no polemical necessity or utility in elaborating a theory of pure nature. It was not until the sixteenth century, then, that Thomism could avail itself of the necessary academic leisure to evolve the doctrine of St. Thomas. P. de Lubac is quite right in attributing to Cajetan the first speculations on a state of pure nature; but why does he feel obliged to disparage Cajetan's attempt, tentative and unsatisfactory though it may have been, as an outstanding indication of theological decadence? Was it no

¹⁹ St. Thomas, *Sum. Theol.*, I, q. 25, a. 5, ad 1m.

²⁰ In the opinion of the present writer, De Broglie has proved this proposition beyond all possibility of doubt in the main part of his book; cf. especially, pp. 126-63, and pp. 184-86.

²¹ De Broglie, *op. cit.*, p. 262: "Quod ipse S. Thomas (iam tunc quadragenarius, et octo post annos decessurus) praedicti principii non omnes consequentias distincte evolverit, nihil mirationis habet. In qualibet enim disciplina vel arte humana, consuetum est ut ipsi magistri qui *principia* inveniunt et proponunt quibus cetera renovanda sunt non omnes illorum *applicaciones* distincte praevideant et evolvant. Et hoc eo magis attendendum est quod S. Thomas, praesertim ultimis suae vitae annis, nullatenus ducebatur pruritu illo omnia in theologia renovandi cui juvenes aetatis modernae immoderate indulgere solent."

rather a clear sign of a living Thomism, which was not afraid to grapple with new problems, or to try to bring to full maturity principles which St. Thomas had not had the opportunity to develop?²² Finally, the errors of Baius and Jansen enforced and accelerated the development of a theory of pure nature, which could no longer remain a matter of purely academic interest, but was accepted by all theologians, except the Augustinian school with its nominalistic tendencies, as the sole effective antidote to an insidious heresy.

CONCLUSION

P. de Broglie summarizes his criticism of *Surnaturel* in five brief conclusions. The fourth and fifth are so strongly worded that it is difficult to see how P. de Lubac can avoid answering them; for they state unequivocally that the theory of the supernatural order set forth in *Surnaturel*, as understood not only by P. de Broglie but by all who have written on it (whether in its favor or in opposition),²³ is not compatible with Catholic doctrine or sound philosophy:

1) Non videtur esse verum quod theologi saeculo XVIo anteriores necessitatem nostrae vocationis ad bona caelestia vel implicite admiserint.

2) Neque verum est theologos saeculi XVIIi et XVIIIi cum catholicos, tum haereticos (Baium, Jansenium) unquam concepissee exigentias *ontologicas* naturarum creaturarum ut exigentias *juridicas*, quibus Deus fieret *debitor* erga creaturam et ab ipsa *dependeret*.

3) Quod proinde documenta ecclesiastica, cum asserunt dona Adamo concessa 'indebita' fuisse, tantummodo intendant excludere a natura *titulum proprie juridicum* ad illa dona (quem nemo unquam propugnauerat), hoc non videtur rationabiliter sustineri posse.

4) Sed intellegenda sunt illa documenta in eo sensu in quo a theologis catholicis constanter intellecta sunt: ut scilicet excludentia exigentiam *ontologicam* seu *necessitatem* illorum donorum. Ad doctrinam ergo catholicam pertinere censendum est quod praedicta dona homini, etiam innocenti, *vere potuerint non concedi*.

5) Quamvis affirmatio illa (dogmatica) possibilitatis nostrae *non-vocationis* ad bona caelestia non aequivaleat affirmationi (mere systematicae) possibilitatis *oeconomiae naturae purae*, haec tamen ex illa legitime deducitur, dummodo mens, a puerilibus nominalistarum aut aegidianorum imaginationibus liberata, notionibus 'naturae' et 'omnipotentiae' et 'possibilitatis' *vere philosophicis* utatur.²⁴

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²² *Ibid.*, p. 263.

²³ Cf. note 13, *supra*.

²⁴ De Broglie, *op. cit.*, p. 264; it may be of interest to note that in the "Hebdomada Theologica" which was held at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome during the week of September 25th, P. de Broglie, together with PP. Lennerz and Boyer, took part in the papers and discussions on the supernatural order; it is to be hoped that these papers will soon be published.

THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AMERICA

To most theologians in North America and Europe, South America is as well known as the heart of Africa. For many reasons the work of the South Americans has not reached the attention of students in other parts. Moreover the South American conditions imposed on intellectual activities of a more abstract nature are not sufficiently propitious to make a significant contribution probable. In consequence the last edition of Ueberweg's objective and accurate history of philosophy in its five volumes dismisses all of Latin America with a single meagre paragraph.¹ However, since the publication of that work in 1928, South America, especially in Buenos Aires, has shown that it must be reckoned with, when philosophical discussions are in order.

What has it done in theology? Obviously, Catholicism has had much to do with the formation of South American *mores* and *Weltanschauung*. Great saints loved and labored in the southern continent. St. Peter Claver worked among the negro slaves in what is today Colombia. Blessed Mariana of Jesus hallowed the Quito of her time. St. Toribio, St. Rose of Lima, St. Francis Solano and Blessed Martín de Porres were contemporaries in sixteenth-century Lima, the metropolis of colonial Spanish America. Sainly missionaries found the martyr's death in Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. Catholicism not only erected monuments of sanctity, but also built temples of learning. The University of San Marcos, the oldest university in the new world, antedating anything in the United States, is no longer a Catholic university, but it was founded by the Church. The Church also founded many other universities, most of which have disappeared, though some still thrive under other auspices, for example, the University of San Felipe, which today is a flourishing institution known as the University of Chile. These universities were centers of theology; for in colonial times university activity was principally dedicated to divinity and law.

Obviously, then, South America had a theological tradition. What is left of it, and what does it produce? First of all, it must be admitted that South American theology, whether of yesterday or today, has made no transcendental contribution; on the other hand, it has not been reduced to sterile stagnation. No great movements can be discerned, although genuine life is evident in many places. Hardly any South American name rings familiar to northern theologians, though Penido of Brazil, by reason of his

¹ Cf. *Friedrich Ueberwegs Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* (12th ed., Leipzig, 1928), V, 414.