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**Is Divine Grace Really Beyond
Human Comprehension? An Exploration of the
Theology of Henri De Lubac**

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Introduction

Divine grace in the whole mystery and economy of creation and redemption is defined in Catholic Theology² as God’s gratuitous and

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² Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, vol.II, trans. Ernest Graf (St. Louis. B. Herder Book Co. 1961

condescending love reaching out to helpless human beings to transform them into adopted children of God the Father, living members of the Son's body and sharers of divine life through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Grace justifies, sanctifies and renovates the interior person. It gives to converted human beings a new being, enabling them to live a virtuous life based on faith, hope and love. Grace is necessary for attaining communion with God. By communicating himself to human beings gratuitously, God makes helpless and unmerited human beings, new creatures with the ability to relate with him in knowledge and love. Divine Grace, then is God's love for human beings, finite creatures, transforming them by gratuitously giving them a new and a higher nature: the divine nature. Divine grace is the loving quality of God in his dealings with free and conscious human beings who do not merit this elevation. It is the unmerited favor of God in regard to human beings. Divine grace is perfection coming from the Incarnate God of the natural condition of human beings through the religious experiences of Revelation and Redemption in Christ. Divine grace is that which heals, forgives, elevates and transforms human beings into new creation of the Holy Spirit for the glory of the Father.

How does Henri de Lubac, the outstanding French Jesuit theologian (1896-1991)³ who did not elaborate a comprehensive theology of divine grace, explore the mystery of divine grace, a mystery beyond all telling and analysis? In which way does Henri de Lubac's Christian anthropology shed light on the gracious relation of God to human beings? What are the implications of Henri de Lubac's theology of divine grace on Christian spirituality?

Our theological reflection will highlight Henri de Lubac's perspective on divine grace by using one of his books on nature and grace.⁴ The background of his theology of grace is the naturalistic

³ For Henri de Lubac all human beings are naturally oriented towards the supernatural. John Milbank in his book: *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac And The Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (William B. Eerdmans Pub; 2005, gives some insights about the natural desire for the supernatural as the key to integrating faith and reason, divine grace and human nature.

⁴ Henri de Lubac during his long life has published more than forty volumes. The most important works are: *Catholicism* (1938); *Corpus mysticum*; (1944); *Le Drame de l'humanisme athée* (1944); *Proudhon et le Christianisme* (1945); [Footnote continued on next page ...]

view of the cosmos in which everything in hierarchical order has a permanent principle of being, and activity with an end. In this perspective, what makes human beings who they are is their human nature, the fact that they are human beings. Human nature is designed in such a way that it tends toward fulfillment over and above its own natural forces and potentialities. Human beings are made in God's image and are ordained to what is radically transcendent: the supernatural. God, in complete freedom gratuitously bestows upon human beings, after the first gift of creation, the second gift of being spiritually united to him in knowledge and love through the incarnation of his Son. This second gift called divine grace is experienced through the religious experiences of God's people in Scripture and in the Church.

The Fathers of the Church both Greek and Latin and later theologians such as Karl Barth⁵, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Rahner and Henri de Lubac have shown in their works how divine grace can transform human beings open to Christ's revelation and work of redemption. In this essay we will limit ourselves to the significant contribution of Henri de Lubac, to the theme of divine grace by exploring his concept of human nature, and, the radical distinction between the natural condition and the supernatural. We

Surnaturel (1946); *Paradoxes* (1946); *Le Fondement théologique des missions* (1946); *Histoire et esprit* (1950); *Affrontements mystiques* (1950); *Aspects du Bouddhisme I* (1941); *La Rencontre du Bouddhisme et de l'occident* (1952); *Méditation sur l'Église* (1953); *Amida-Aspects du Bouddhisme II* (1955); *Nouveaux paradoxes* (1955); *Sur les chemins de Dieu* (1956); *Correspondance Blondel-Valensin* (3 volumes, 1957, 1965); *Exégèse medieval I and II* (1959); *Exégèse medieval III* (1961); *La pensée religieuse du père Teilhard de Chardin* (1962); *Exégèse médiévale IV* (1964); *La prière du père Teilhard de Chardin* (1964); *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* (1965); *Le Mystère du surnaturel* (1965); *Correspondance Blondel-Teilhard* (1965); *Teilhard, Missionnaire et apologist* (1966); *Images de l'abbé Monchanin* (1967); *Paradoxe et mystère de l'Église* (1967); *L'Eternel féminin* (1968); *Athéisme et sens de l'homme* (1968); *Commentaire du préambule et du chapitre I de la constitution dogmatique "Dei Verbum"* (1968); *La Foi chrétienne* (1969); *L'Église dans la crise actuelle* (1969); *Correspondance Blondel-Wehrle* (2 volumes, 1969); *Les Églises particulières dans l'Église universelle* (1971); *Père Teilhard de Chardin: Lettres intimes..*(1972); *Pic de la Mirandole* (1974); ...

⁵ Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964)

will also pay attention to Henri de Lubac's concept of divine grace with its metaphysical and cosmological backgrounds. Finally we will explore divine grace in Henri de Lubac's thought as virtues or habits infused in the depth of the human person as permanent dispositions for action impacting Christian spirituality.

A. The Experience of Grace in Henri de Lubac's Thought

Henri de Lubac explored the theme of divine grace in his book *A Brief Catechism on Nature & Grace*.⁶ He understood divine grace through two correlative terms: nature and the supernatural.⁷

In its theological sense, nature "is then a purely correlative term which consequently can be properly understood only in its relationship with the other term supernatural"⁸ Supernatural is the divine reality radically different from the order of cosmos. "Supernatural is proposed to us as an entirely gratuitous relationship, one which is totally un-naturalizable".⁹ Supernatural is the very being of God in a love relationship with human beings. It is "the reality of the communication that God makes of himself in Jesus Christ in which "the Christian mystery "consists".¹⁰

The Supernatural one might say, is that divine element which man's effort cannot reach (no self divinization!) but which unites itself to man, "elevating him as our classical theology used to put it, and as Vatican II still says (*Lumen Gentium*, 2), penetrating him in order to divinize him, and thus becoming as it were an attribute of the "new man" described by Saint Paul. While it remains forever "un-naturalizable", it profoundly penetrates the depths of man's being. In short, it is what the old Scholastics and especially St. Thomas Aquinas called (using a word borrowed from Aristotle which has often been completely misunderstood) an "accidental form" or an "accident". Call it an accident, or call it *habitus*, or "created grace"

⁶ Henri De Lubac, *A Brief Catechism On Nature & Grace*, translated by Brother Richard Arnandez, E.S.C., Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1984.

⁷ J.P. Kenn, *The Supernatural* (New York: Alba House, 1972)

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32. Citation of Maurice Blondel, in *Etudes philosophiques* 6 (1931):3-5

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40. Citation of Henri Bouillard in "l'idée de surnaturel et le mystère chrétien" in *L'Homme devant Dieu*, Théologie 58 (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1964) vol.3, 153-66.

these are all different ways of saying (even if one thinks they need various correctives or precisions) that man becomes in truth a sharer in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).¹¹

The supernatural is of different order and does not eliminate or prolong the order of human nature. Without absorbing human nature in the supernatural which is God's relation to human beings, and without annihilating human nature in the supernatural, human nature receives from inside the influx of God's Spirit, of a new life of adopted sons and daughters of God. Through created grace emanating from the transcendent and infinite God, a "connaturality" is established gratuitously between God and human beings. In classical theological language this has two names:

One is an objective name and denotes reality in itself, and this is grace, which is a sharing in God's own intimate reality; as sanctifying grace "it gives us a share in God's being; as "actual grace" it enables us to live this reality and act within it. The other name is subjective and shows our consciousness of its presence; it is divine virtue (i.e. an aptitude, a capacity to turn ourselves towards God) and is thus the triad: faith, hope and charity.¹²

Divine grace as created grace is a share in God's Trinitarian life. It is the capacity to relate to the persons of the Holy Trinity in knowledge and love. Divine grace as created grace is not extrinsic to human nature but it is the relationship of the Trinitarian God to human nature that transforms human beings into self-aware partakers of divine life. Human beings experience divine grace as created grace when the Spirit of God received from the Son enables them to recognize God as their Abba (Rom. 8:15; Gal.4: 4-7; Rom. 8:26). This "Abba experience" according to Henri de Lubac is based on human natural desire for the infinite, transcendent and incomprehensible God. Human beings have a basic tendency toward the supernatural because the human mind in its limitless power of knowledge is open to the supreme good: God. The human will in its longing for the absolute Good ultimately finds rest in God according to Saint Augustine. For Henri de Lubac, human beings made out of nothing in their lameness,

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 41-42.

¹² P. 42-43. Citation of Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *De l'intégration: aspects d'une théologie de l'histoire*, French trans, Bourboulon et al. Brussels and Paris DDB, 1970, p. 106.

find complete fulfillment only in God, the absolute goodness. The implicit knowledge of God and the implicit movement of the will towards God make human beings open to created unmerited grace.

Created grace in light of Henri de Lubac's thought, is the creative presence of the Holy Trinity transforming and enabling human beings to relate in knowledge and love; which they are made for as social and spiritual beings. Human beings as knowing beings experience created grace when they seek truth and respond to the needs of their fellow human beings in love. The actual grace is the result of human thoughts and actions oriented towards God in whom the believers abide in love. Created grace is a habit, a permanent disposition to relate to the Holy Trinity in faith, love and charity. Divine grace or uncreated grace in Henri de Lubac's thought is that which elevates human nature to its end which is beyond its capacity. It is the love of God empowering human nature. Created grace is not added to human original nature as a second nature. It is not superimposed upon human nature. Created grace is infused by God in the permanent self of human being turning to God and sharing his own life. Maurice Blondel expressed this idea in these terms:

The supernatural is not an arbitrary "something extra", a form extrinsic to man ... It is an adoption, an assimilation, an incorporation, a consortium, a transformation which, through the bond of charity, insures both the union and the distinction of two incommensurables...the supernatural is not a sort of distinct being a receptacle into which we are to be absorbed, emptying us of our human nature; it is on the contrary intended to be in us, in *nobis* without ever being on that account something coming from us *ex nobis*¹³

The supernatural in a paradoxical way unites the Spirit of God to the human spirit, transforming human nature for an intimate union with God that respects the otherness of God and his infinite distance to human nature.

By divinizing human beings, created grace

Expresses at one and the same time both the divine transcendence, the gratuity of the gift, God makes of himself, the "grace", and also the deep realism of the

¹³ Maurice Blondel, *Exigences philosophiques du christianisme*, (Paris P.U.F.1950) p.58 and 162.

quality of “children of God” which is won for men in principle by the incarnation of the Word.¹⁴

Human beings are divinized by grace. They are children of God by adoption through the virtue of the incarnation of the Word. Habitual grace or created grace penetrates the depth of created spirits through infused virtues of faith, hope and charity. Created grace as an elevating habit is a quality of God’s presence in created spirits making human beings attuned to the Spirit of God. Created grace gives to human beings elevated to the end proportionate to their nature, a new nature inherent and appropriated to the permanent self of human beings. Human beings in their orientation toward the supernatural need the created grace in order to fulfill the end of their God given nature. By responding to created grace in complete freedom, human beings come to a right relationship with God. They participate in God’s life by partaking of his very nature. They reflect in their new way of life, the goodness and love of God. Graced human beings appreciate what is born “not of blood, nor of the flesh, nor of man’s will (Jn. 1:1) and they are ready to welcome the God who comes down (Eph. 4:9-10). With uncreated grace, human beings are enabled to do all that is true, just, beautiful, upright and praiseworthy in their new individual behavior and for the sake of common good and right living before God. Divine grace came practically and historically into human existence through the incarnation of God’s Son Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:16). Jesus Christ is the source of God’s grace in the world. Divine grace as a free gift is introduced in human history when the Son of God, Jesus Christ assumed human nature by being born as a man. The incarnation of God’s Son unites divine nature to human nature according to the celebrated dogmatic definition of the Council of Chalcedon (451). Throughout his life, from conception to death, the God-man, Jesus Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit. The transforming presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus Christ infused in his person, the virtues of faith, love and hope. Jesus Christ was united to God and led a life pleasing to God, doing his will at every moment of his historical and earthly existence. Risen from the dead, Jesus Christ won for the Church, his body, the created and habitual grace as the first born of many (Col. 2:19). From Jesus the

¹⁴A *Brief Catechism on Nature & Grace*, p.50.

head of the Church and from his transformed humanity, flows out divine grace, created grace, habitual grace, communicated for the spiritual union and growth of his disciples with him. The humanity of Jesus Christ united with divinity is the cause of divine grace. By participating in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, his disciples are transformed (Gal. 2:20). The man Jesus Christ mediates God's grace (1 Tim. 2:5). He justifies, sanctifies and renovates the interior self of his disciples.

As the model and means of human sanctification, Jesus Christ is the divine grace. He is the free gift of God that enables human beings to share God's life. As a pioneer of faith, hope and love, Jesus Christ opened the way to salvation (Heb. 2:10). Through Jesus Christ, human beings have a permanent relationship with God. They acquire in Jesus Christ, the ability to know and love the Father with the presence of the Holy Spirit in them. Divine grace makes human beings the adopted children of God and sharers of God's life. Through divine grace God calls human beings to a personal union with himself as human nature is ordained to this supernatural end. Human beings experience divine grace in their conscious religious experiences of self-transcendence as finite and limited creatures in Henri de Lubac's theology. Divine grace is a supernatural power, a new nature elevating human nature for the sharing of God's life. It is an experience of the transformation elevating human beings to a higher level of being.

B. The Christian Anthropology of Henri de Lubac

Henri de Lubac has developed a Christian anthropology free of dualisms between reason and faith, philosophy and theology nature and grace. His conception of human beings is characterized by the orientation of human beings toward the supernatural. The mystery of the supernatural is revealed in creation through the descent of God present in Christ the Lord, imparting faith, knowledge, patient hope maturing in the labor of love. For Henri de Lubac, human beings have a natural desire for supernatural fulfillment. Against Cajetan's interpretation of Saint Thomas Aquinas' anthropology¹⁵, Henri de

¹⁵ The Dominican Cardinal Cajetan (1469-1534) claimed that there is a two-storey view of the world, with a self-sufficient "natural" world at the bottom and an added "supernatural world at the top."

Lubac claims an innate natural desire for the supernatural fulfillment in human beings. His theological investigations as historian of Christian thought led him to deny the theory of “pure nature” necessitating an added extrinsic grace or supernatural. For him, human beings are creatures of God oriented toward their Creator.

Divine grace as the second gift of God, after the first gift of creation, brings to their fulfillment natural abilities, inclinations and desires of human beings as created spirits designed for knowledge and love of the supreme good: God. There is no pure nature but the supernatural is already within and beneath all moral and religious actions of human created spirits. Human beings as creatures of God are open to God and his revelation in Christ. Created grace does not destroy the human nature but brings it to fulfillment. Created grace deeply impacts genuine human nature which is human life in communion of knowledge and love with the Holy Trinity. Created grace redeems human life by elevating human beings to a higher nature, the divine nature. Human beings cannot be conceived as “natural” self-sufficient beings in need of added grace completely external to their immanent dynamism.

Human existence is God’s gift of creation. Human beings in knowing, feeling and willing are ordained to find their fulfillment in God their Creator. The process of receiving created grace is linked to the prevenient grace that is the initiative of God who draws self-aware and free human beings to their supernatural end through their cooperation by moving their will and by infusing habits of faith love and hope in their concrete and historical existence.

Humility is the fundamental disposition of graced human beings toward the wonder of Incarnation and, in Christian anthropology humility is more than a moral virtue.

Christianity made of humility something more than a virtue; its very mode and rhythm, its secret savor, its external and yet intimate attitude both carnal and spiritual, its situation, its way of life, its continual experience, almost its very being.¹⁶

¹⁶ Charles Péguy, “Un Nouveau Théologien” , in *Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1914* ed. Marcel Péguy, *Bibliothèque de la pléiade* 114 and 122 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), vol.2, 1066.

Humility is central for the understanding of Christian anthropology.

Humility is not that moral virtue which St. Thomas places in the domain of temperance...even though he recognized that it held a privileged place in the wider field of moral living in general. It is a virtue which addresses itself to the fundamental truth of our religious relationships, to the essential reality of things. It places in the first rank the existence of a personal God, all powerful and omnipresent, who takes the first step towards man. It is the humility of the most blessed Virgin in the Magnificat that enables the creature to understand itself in its total dependence on God. ..The logic of the Gospel is inspired by this humility of Christ, the one who is both God and man, humility central to the Christmas mystery.¹⁷

Through the lens of humility, human beings are seen as creatures of God whose radical incompleteness calls for an openness to their maker and Creator. Human reason is also seen as the reflection of God's eternal reason. As non-self-sufficient creatures, human beings cannot claim to create at will their own values out of nothing. True Christian humanism consists in accepting human created beings as the work of the living and transcendent God who displays his humility by making "himself partially immanent in his creatures by that *kenosis*, that "excentration", that "movement of descent" which is the Word's incarnation."¹⁸

The descent of God "who transcends anything that might be attained by human efforts"¹⁹ in creation out of humility through the Kenosis of the Son opened up to limited human creatures a possibility to know God who is infinitely elevated above all that exists. This knowledge of God from God comes to human minds in a way different from that of the object of human science.

The object of faith is quite different. It can never be subjected to reason either by the intuitions of a genial intellect or by a collective effort, or even by history's slow maturing. Christian faith can be – and history shows that it was indeed – the promoter of reason, but it is

¹⁷ Paul VI, Audience of November 29, 1976, in *Documentation Catholique* (Janvier 16, 1977), 58.

¹⁸A *Brief Catechism on Nature & Grace*, p. 61.

¹⁹A *Brief Catechism on Nature & Grace*, p.65.

not itself, a science or a revealed philosophy; such expressions are devoid of meaning. To use Pascal's words again it belongs to a different order.²⁰

Faith knowledge is characterized by the presence of the mystery of the supernatural in God's creation. Faith knowledge belongs to a different order of reality that excludes all objectivation.

Expressed in symbols, narratives, concepts and dogmatic formulas, faith knowledge is a shaded light on human condition

Far from reducing or "encapsulating" or violating the mysteries, "faith knowledge" is on the contrary to protect them against the constantly renewed attempts to seize hold of the mystery so as to imprison in unchanging human constructs. Our Fathers in the faith, the main authors of the great Trinitarian and Christological definitions, were above all wary of a sacrilegious "curiosity". One makes a great mistake in imagining that the intense labor which led to the texts of Nicea, Ephesus or Chalcedon was inspired by a desire to go beyond the simplicity of the Scriptures, or even to adapt the expression of Christianity to a given "cultural milieu".²¹

Faith knowledge cannot be adequately expressed in words of human origin (1 Cor. 13:12) Faith knowledge can only catch a glimpse of the mystery as the love of Christ surpasses all knowledge (Eph. 3:19). It is indispensable to mark out the human journey toward eternity. The Incarnation of God's Son makes possible a cataphatic language of faith leading to silence and adoration anticipating in hope that which human beings in the present earthly condition cannot see (Rom. 8:25). So faith knowledge in the light of eternity is an attitude of receptive trust leading to a deeper love of God.

In the Christian anthropology of Henri de Lubac, human beings are not called to scrutinize the mystery of the supernatural as the Gnostics of all times do; instead they are called to be transformed by the Spirit of Christ (Rev. 21:5). Human beings are invited to be parts of the "new heavens and a new earth" (Rev. 21). They await their Savior Jesus Christ who will transform them unto the body of his glory (Phil. 3:20-21). This transformation occurs in the depth of human beings (2 Cor. 3:18) and it requires the renewal of the mind

²⁰A *Brief Catechism on Nature & Grace*, p. 66.

²¹ A *Brief Catechism on Nature & Grace*, p.p. 67-68.

(Rom. 12:2). Thus, human transformation by the grace of Christ is not merely the full flowering of aspirations and deepest desires. It is divine love realizing the union of two incommensurables: God and man.

God being what he is, the supernatural elevation of man is conceivable, and possible only through an operation which is totally different from simple expansion or the simple moral communication of wills... We must not imagine that man can make the journey to God with ease... We must keep in mind the *natural* heterogeneity distinguishing God and man ... There is an abyss that must be bridged... Divine love has found the way to *communicate what is incommunicable* ... But God cannot fail to be himself. And to make us his, to make us over into himself, there is a trial, a transformation in love that must be suffered and willed, so that this incommunicable One may communicate himself without our ceasing to be ourselves... The Gospel, however fully human it may be, still shows this specific characteristic: that it demands a *denuo nasci*... We must then resolve either to take this “revelation” seriously or else to remain in the domain of an a-Christian wisdom; and I call by that name the wisdom which would see in Christ nothing but a moral paradigm... valuable because of his example, and not by his action which is intimate and transforming and deifies us in the strict sense.²²

The effect of divine grace in human life is transformation. Transformation means the effect of Jesus Christ coming in creation and remolding the hearts of human beings from the inside.

Transformation in the language of Henri de Lubac is “Jesus Christ, the transcendent made it partially immanent.”²³ Jesus Christ is God’s gift implanted in the depth of human hearts joining nature and supernatural in intimate union according to the paradox of the two natures in Christ. The supernatural has the function in human life to permeate and to spiritualize the natural order without eliminating its proper ways of proceeding. The supernatural informs, purifies, deepens and brings to completion the natural order without alienating human beings from their roots. The supernatural produces in human

²² Maurice Blondel and Lucien Laberthonnière, *Correspondance Philosophique* (Paris, Seuil, 1962).

²³ *A Brief Catechism on Nature & Grace*, p. 85.

history a faith centered on God. This faith centered on God anticipates eternal life beyond the space and time continuum (Jn. 6:27; Rom. 5:21). Without neglecting human and earthly tasks which have no absolute value, human beings are called to live for the “new creation” or the Kingdom of God. Human and earthly tasks are about good social organization, good and successful policy respecting the dignity of human beings and the search for a safe, secure, just and peaceful society. A passionate dedication to the well-being of fellow human beings is required for human progress, development and liberation. This pursuit of human progress, development and liberation must be in reciprocal relation with the supernatural end of human beings according to the prayer of Charles Péguy:

May all this earth be like a heaven on earth, may all men’s hearts beat as one, may the earth be a beginning of heaven ²⁴

Henri de Lubac in his Christian anthropology defines salvation as God’s gift:

Salvation is a gift of God; it is entry into the Kingdom, the Kingdom preached by Jesus, which cannot be “won by political struggles, nor grasped by men’s speculations, nor even conquered by their moral efforts. One cannot whether for oneself or for the world, plan for it, organize it, build it, construct it; one cannot even imagine it or get any idea of it; for it is something given, a bequest; we can only inherit it. The coming of the God’s Kingdom is a miracle and action of God”.²⁵

Graced human beings enter into the Kingdom by a new birth (Jn. 3). The life of the Kingdom belongs to the supernatural order. It leads to a special kind of existence centered on God. The Christian anthropology of Henri de Lubac reminds human beings of their divine supernatural vocation through the distinction and unity of the correlative terms, nature and supernatural. Nature and supernatural belong to two different orders of reality in their dissimilarity and heterogeneity. In the actual and present condition of human beings there is also the reality of sin. The mystery of the Incarnation of God’s Son and his revelation has a redemptive aspect. In the light of

²⁴ Charles Péguy, “Le mystère de la charité de Jeanne d’Arc” *Oeuvres en prose, 1898-1914*, vol.2, 1403.

²⁵ *A Brief Catechism on Nature & Grace*, pp. 106-107.

God's Son, Incarnation and redemption, grace can also mean forgiveness. As mercy, pardon and love of the sinners, grace calls for a radical conversion (Mk. 1:15; Acts 2.:38). Grace as mercy, pardon and love of the sinners, liberates human beings from the slavery of sin through the process of the rebirth and transformation. By breaking away from God, the sinner deprives himself or herself from the joy of knowing God and being known by him. Grace restores the sinful human beings into the fellowship of God by giving the knowledge of salvation and revealing the merciful kindness of God (Lk. 1:76-78).

C. Henri de Lubac and Christian Spirituality

Genuine Christian spirituality is about the life of human beings transformed by the merciful kindness of God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:4). God manifests his merciful kindness by taking the initiative to bring about the redemptive Incarnation of his Son who became the brother of human beings. Christian spirituality is about the covenant life sealed by the God-man at Calvary to redeem the human nature, created and sinful. In the New Covenant, sinful human beings are gratuitously called to repent and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins and the renewal of a life which is pleasing to God, a life in imitation of Christ in his community, the Church. In this Christological and ecclesiological perspective, to sin is "a refusal of God's invitation to share his life."²⁶ The life of God coming from the Man Jesus who is God the Son Incarnate and Redeemer of sinful human beings is a remedy for human limited nature wounded by sin. The redemptive Incarnation of the Son liberates human beings from the captivity of sin and misuse of their free will. The gracious life of God in Jesus Christ forgives, heals, liberates from sin and gives access to God the Father through the Holy Spirit.

Salvation offered in Christ is the sharing of the divine life. A Christian spirituality which offers human beings something less than sharing God's life may not be faithful to the Gospel. Henri de Lubac in his Christian spirituality is for an integral and inclusive humanism as Jesus Christ in his humanity is the model and inspiration of the new life of divine grace. Human beings have a special position in creation

²⁶ *Brief Catechism on Nature & Grace*, p. 169.

as they are made to relate to the Creator in knowledge and love. Human beings cannot be perceived as closed to God their Creator and to his revelation in Jesus Christ. Divine grace brings human beings to their fulfillment by affirming in human life what is true, upright, beautiful and good in created spirit. Divine grace fulfils the natural condition of human beings by elevating human beings to a higher life: the life of God. The gracious life of God heals the wounds of sin and makes the forgiven sinners partakers of the very being of the Holy Trinity. Christian spirituality in Henri de Lubac's line of thought takes the humanity of Jesus as the source of created grace seriously. Jesus' humanity is united to the godhead of the Son and in constant dialogue with the other persons of the Holy Trinity. The humanity of Jesus is transformed by participating in the life of the Holy Trinity. As divine grace in the context of Revelation is Jesus Christ, the Man of God filled with the Holy Spirit, his followers are called to enter into the mystery of his Incarnation. The mystery of the redemptive Incarnation of Jesus Christ is re-enacted in Christian initiation. Through the liturgical celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ his disciples share the victory of their pioneer of faith by embracing his spirit of generosity and sacrificial love. Divine grace is the life of Christ in the hearts of his followers (Jn. 7:37). It is the reproduction of Christ in the living members of his body, the Church. The Church's life consists in manifesting the divine life of Jesus Christ in the world. By growing and maturing in Jesus Christ, his followers through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in them experience habitual grace which is an enduring and transforming personal relationship with the persons of the Holy Trinity. Habitual grace is a permanent disposition to know God and to love him after the pattern of Jesus Christ who emptied himself of his divine prerogatives by becoming a man of the first century Judaism (Phil. 2:7). Actual grace is the specific acts of knowledge and love the followers of Jesus Christ are called to perform in order to participate in the life of their Master and Lord. Such acts of knowledge and love include, self-knowledge, hearing and interpreting the Word of God with spiritual insights, praying, thinking about one's religious experiences, living rightly and acting generously.

Ordinary followers of Jesus Christ experience God's grace by calling on God's mercy which is related to his victory over the power

of sin through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. (Jn. 19:30). The love and obedience of Jesus Christ paid the price of human redemption (Mk.10:45; 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18; Heb. 9:12).

Christian spirituality according to Henri de Lubac is incarnational. It deals with God's solidarity with human beings in his incarnate Son. The Son by becoming man, is "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep and who are made alive in him (1 Cor. 15:20-22). The Son of God sums up all human beings in his divine person through his incarnation. In Jesus Christ, victorious of sin and death, human nature is healed and liberated and God was in the humanness of Jesus Christ reconciling the world with himself. In His humanity, transformed by his paschal mystery, human beings share the new life derived from him. Divine grace derived from Jesus Christ breaks the power of sin and inspires right living that is pleasing to God. Divine grace heals the alienation of human beings toward one another by strengthening human solidarity and social harmony in the mystical body of Jesus Christ. Divine grace deals successfully with the divided self of human beings by offering peace, joy and righteousness. Divine grace makes human beings friendly to their environment and opens the gate of blessings to a reconciled humanity with God in Jesus Christ. Divine grace is experienced in human moral decisions to overcome evil and to lead a meaningful life pleasing to God as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.

Concluding Remarks

The theology of divine grace of Henri de Lubac in *a Brief Catechism on Nature & Grace* uses the supernaturalism terminology of nature and habit. Henri de Lubac reflects on divine grace with his Roman Catholic background of technical metaphysical and ontological language. In his thoughts on grace, there is an attempt to criticize Scholasticism which has reduced grace as an habit added to nature. For him, divine grace is God's favor on behalf of human beings who are open to their supernatural end. Created grace is God's free gift which does not lie in human powers of knowing, feeling and willing. Divine Grace is the power of God's love leading human beings to their supernatural end. Through created grace, God acts inwardly upon human beings infusing the virtues of faith, love and hope in their deepest self transforming them through their religious

experiences into sharers of his life. Divine grace is also associated with the sinful condition of human beings. In this perspective, divine grace means forgiveness of sin and revelation of the merciful kindness of God. Divine grace calls for the conversion of the sinner and offers a remedy for the wounded sinful human nature. It gives access to God, and repentant sinners become the partakers of divine life by turning away from their destructive lifestyle.

In *A Brief Catechism on Nature & Grace*, Henri de Lubac for the sake of the exposition of Catholic doctrine on divine Grace used the technical language of speculative theology to make his point. This theological language is compatible with the biblical account which narrates divine grace as the Incarnation of God's Son uniting in his divine person divine nature and human nature. This grace of hypostatic union transforms the humanity of Jesus, the source of habitual grace and actual grace for his followers.

Divine grace is not beyond human comprehension but theologians need to construct different and diverse models to account for the mystery of God's love which is beyond all telling and analysis. The model proposed by Henri de Lubac is the one of nature and supernatural relevant to Catholic Thomistic tradition of the twentieth century.

Today we are more familiar with the personalistic approach of divine grace with the phenomenology of religious experiences in its encounter with the Mystery of God willing the salvation of all, generally, universally and even outside the boundaries of Christianity. In this context Grace is the personal hidden presence of God transforming human history into his reign or Kingdom.



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