MODERN PENTECOST: HENRI DE LUBAC ON ATHEISM AND THE SPIRITUAL

POSTERITY OF JOACHIM OF FIORE

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Abstract

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In this study of the theology of Henri de Lubac, S.J., I examine de Lubac’s confrontation with what he calls the “spiritual posterity” of Joachim of Fiore. I argue that this tradition is one of the principal phenomena against which de Lubac’s theology is framed, showing that he interprets it primarily as a source for the atheism he faced in early twentieth century France and for the theological problems he identified in the postconciliar Church. His judgment is that the theology of Joachim of Fiore and the spiritual movements he inspired lay the foundations for atheistic reinterpretations of Christian doctrine.

I also develop a creative reconstruction of de Lubac’s theological alternative to Joachimism—the part of his late work, La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore, which he was unable to complete. I argue that de Lubac’s confrontations with Joachimism allowed him to re-present his positions from earlier writings (on the Trinity, exegesis, the Church, and the eschaton) as always already providing an alternative to Joachim’s teachings, as well as a response to his atheist interlocutors. The dissertation advances our knowledge of de Lubac by illuminating a hitherto poorly-explored area of his thought. It also adapts from this study
new insights about the nature and purpose of fundamental theology, the theology of history, and the Church’s engagement with the modern world.
To Brendan,

For giving me eyes to see and ears to hear.
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“Pentecost means that the religion of the Father and the religion of the Son are to be fulfilled in the religion of the Spirit, that God no longer exists in Heaven, but rather in human society and communication, wherever men assemble in His name.”

-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non sens*

“The philosopher also celebrates his Pentecost.”

-Karl Friedrich Göschel
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CHAPTER 1:

“JOACHIM IS MORE ALIVE THAN AUGUSTINE”:
THE OCCASION AND STRUCTURE OF DE LUBAC’S
CONFRONTATION WITH JOACHIMISM

Of all the figures in Church history to have captured Henri de Lubac’s imagination, none inspired in him as much fascination and anxiety as the 12th century exegete, Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202). It is now a familiar observation that de Lubac regarded the Fathers of the Church as masters worthy of emulation. In this Cistercian abbot, however, he found only a consummate adversary, an “enormous boulder in the course of Christian thought.”¹ Why, we might ask, would a thinker of such obscurity preoccupy de Lubac more than any other figure he studied? Or to echo the question raised by Hans Urs von Balthasar, “what good does this serve, this detailed work woven around a Calabrian abbot apparently lost in the darkness of time?”² This is the question about de Lubac’s theology I intend to address.

De Lubac’s earliest writings on Joachim identify him as the source of questionable exegetical theories and apocalyptic prophecies. He first considers Joachim in the pages of

¹ Henri de Lubac, At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances That Occasioned His Writings (San Francisco: Communio Books, 1993), 155: “I had not been seduced by this strange Calabrian abbé but had been vividly struck by the powerful originality of his exegesis and methods as well as by the fullness of his dream.”

History and Spirit (1950), refuting claims that he was a faithful follower of Origen. De Lubac’s treatment remains brief in The Splendor of the Church (1953), where he suggests affinities between Joachim’s theology and the Montanist heresy. Finally, in 1961, de Lubac began his first extended investigation of Joachim, devoting a chapter of his Exégèse médiévale (Medieval Exegesis) vol.3, and part of vol.4, to the abbot’s works. In each of these studies, de Lubac takes issue with Joachim’s innovative claims about the senses of scripture, the relation between the Old and New Testaments, and his alleged spiritual understanding (intellectus spiritualis) of salvation history.

As time passed, however, de Lubac’s preoccupation with Joachim came to involve much more than eccentric opinions in the history of exegesis. Rather, he became increasingly attentive to the effective history of Joachim’s ideas: the traditions that arose in later generations, bearing his name yet radicalizing his teachings. As de Lubac came to discover, over the course of centuries Joachim had been invoked by movements at the

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3 Henri de Lubac, History and Spirit: the Understanding of Scripture According to Origen (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007). De Lubac does mention Joachim in his earlier work, Catholicism, but only in a footnote alluding to his understanding of the Trinity. See Henri de Lubac, Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 118.


6 By 1976, de Lubac appears to have begun focusing more heavily on Joachim’s historical thinking, with his publication of “Joachim de Flore jugé par saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas,” in Pluralisme et œcuménisme en recherches théologiques: mélanges offerts a R.P. Ducas; O.P., ed. Yves Congar (Leuven: Peeters, 1976), 37-49.

margins of orthodoxy and even outside of Christianity altogether—claimed as the inspiration for Spiritual Franciscans, Radical Reformers, Enlightenment humanists, and even “esoteric Marxists.”

After the completion of his *Medieval Exegesis*, de Lubac began identifying these trajectories in the reception of Joachim’s thought (what he calls his “posterities”): an “exegetic line” of commentators who embraced Joachim’s approach to scripture, and a “spiritual line,” made up of “the theologians, ‘the spirituals,’ prophets, philosophers, reformers, revolutionaries, and enthusiasts of every kind.” And while de Lubac judged the former to be at present little more than a “withered branch,” he deemed the latter to be a thick and thriving “forest.”

Thus when, in the 1970s and early 1980s, de Lubac focused exclusively to this second line of Joachim’s heirs and published his two-volume study, *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore* (1979, 1981), his fascination with Joachim’s legacy was more than the curiosity of a Church historian. It reflected his concern that these theologians, philosophers, spirituals, and revolutionaries were in fact distorting Joachim’s ideas to undermine the mysteries of the Catholic faith. For de Lubac this spiritual line tends inevitably to redefine history and Christianity’s place within it: to reduce the Church to the world, the Kingdom of God to social utopias, and the supernatural to the secular sphere. *La postérité* is therefore best

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9 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 156.


11 Ibid., 14.

12 Ibid., 15.
understood as de Lubac’s attempt to read the ‘signs of the times.’\textsuperscript{13} More than a religious phenomenon in his eyes, Joachimism concerns one of the intellectual traditions at the very heart of modern unbelief.

The present chapter is devoted to the occasion and the structure of de Lubac’s confrontation with Joachimism. The first section addresses the occasion of \textit{La postérité} in the immediate context of de Lubac’s later writings. Here I compare what he sees as a crisis in the postconciliar Church with what he identifies as features of Joachimism, in order to clarify why Joachim’s posterity is a pressing concern for him. I then examine connections between de Lubac’s account of this crisis and his earlier writings on the preconciliar Church, in order to argue that de Lubac identifies the problem of Joachimism with the problem of immanence.

The second section addresses de Lubac’s diagnosis of Joachimism as a deviant theology of history that eventually makes modern philosophies intelligible. This suggests further that de Lubac identifies Joachimism with what he sees as an atheistic reading of Christian doctrine. Finally, the third section addresses the nature of de Lubac’s response. I argue that in order for de Lubac’s theology to constitute a response to Joachimism, it must contain an alternative account of history. His encounter with Joachimism thus reveals the extent to which his theology is \textit{intrinsically a theology of history}. In addition, it must offer a more compelling and comprehensive interpretation of the very realities over which atheism claims exclusive dominion. I argue, then, that de Lubac’s theology is in this sense \textit{intrinsically }

\textsuperscript{13} De Lubac, \textit{At the Service of the Church}, 156. He notes that it was because of the topicality of the theological issues involved that he “attached to this work [\textit{La postérité}] an interest that was more than mere acquisitiveness.”
apologetic, presenting the mysteries of salvation history as answers to the problems posed by atheist humanism.

1.1 Spiritual Crises

1.1.1 Joachimism and the Postconciliar Crisis

For de Lubac, as for so many of his contemporaries, the Second Vatican Council represented a long-awaited and much-deserved vindication.\(^4\) It signaled, in his view, not only the demise of the reigning intellectual culture to which he famously took exception, but also magisterial endorsement of the renewal for which he had struggled throughout his career. In spite of frustrations during his time on the council's Theological Preparatory Commission and his silence about his contributions as a peritus, it is now widely recognized that many of the council’s teachings were informed by the once-suspect ideas of de Lubac, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, and their theological kin.\(^5\) Indeed, the number of de Lubac’s later works which function as ‘commentaries’ on conciliar documents shows the extent to which he saw his own theological agenda coinciding with that of the council fathers.\(^6\) Given these signs of redemption after years of silence and stigma, patiently

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\(^4\) Signs of de Lubac’s rehabilitation include John XXIII’s donation to the *Sources chrétiennes* series and his appointment of de Lubac and Yves Congar to the council’s theological preparatory commission. Also telling was Paul VI’s invitation to de Lubac to concelebrate Mass on the occasion of the approval of the Constitution on Divine Revelation (Nov. 18, 1965). The pope then invited de Lubac, along with Oscar Cullman and Jean Guitton, to dine with him in the papal apartments. See Rudolph Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac: His Life and Work*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008), 84 and 86.

\(^5\) Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac*, 86.

endured, one might expect to find in de Lubac’s later writings a sense of optimism, that a necessary balance was being restored after a generation of regrettable excess.

However the dominant tone of de Lubac’s postconciliar writings is of an unmistakably different kind. Expressions of hope are discernible, but even a casual survey of these works betrays their critical temperament and rather discouraging sentiments about the implementation of the council’s teaching. Clément Locher, J.-P. Manigne, Jean-Louis Schlegel, and Marc Pelchat all make reference to de Lubac’s seemingly pessimistic disposition in the years following Vatican II, a time that could justly be called de Lubac’s “dark hours.” However this impression is not the effect of cynicism, but more likely results from the fact that, in his later years, de Lubac was engaged in scholarship of a critical nature: that of diagnosing the symptoms of a profound crisis in the Church. Far from predicting signs of progress, de Lubac believed that the seeds of the council would flourish slowly and always alongside an abundance of tares. Consequently, he thought it prudent only to expect a period of “profound upheaval” following in the council’s wake, just as preceding Church councils had given rise to their own characteristic imbalances in interpretation.

So although de Lubac saw the council’s potential for renewal, it proved to be the occasion of “a spiritual crisis such as has seldom before shaken the Church,” compared with which “the modernist crisis at the beginning of this century can hardly be considered as more than a hint of what was to come.” Indeed, he considered it to be a greater threat to

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18 See de Lubac, At the Service of the Church, 146: “I am not giving into pessimism.”

the Church than the “separated theology” of the Neo-Scholastics, whom he often credits with undermining the vitality of the faith. He even describes the crisis as taking a greater emotional toll on him than his struggles following the promulgation of *Humani Generis*, struggles which came to define his reputation and ultimately resulted in his silencing by the Jesuit leadership.\(^{21}\)

In a variety of his postconciliar writings, de Lubac identifies the following features of the crisis. The first feature, and perhaps its most sufficient description, is its pneumaticism. Pope John XXIII and others had envisioned Vatican II as “a new Pentecost,” but what de Lubac sees in its subsequent interpreters is a clear distortion of this image. Many, he notes, view the postconciliar period as a new dawning of the Holy Spirit’s activity; so new, in fact, that it breaks with the institutions Christ was believed to have founded. Theologians were now invoking the Spirit as the agent of a rupture within the Church, and the vital principle of a Christianity beyond the confines of creeds and dogmas. De Lubac cites Henri Bourgeois’ search for an “anti-institutional spiritualization” and a charismatic impulse more revolutionary than the Spirit’s “bridled” presence to the preconciliar Church. On this view it is the role of the Spirit, in a Church whose life is “artificial and without interiority,” to bring about an “irruption that will trouble our routines and reawaken us from our dogmatic slumbers.”\(^{22}\)

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21 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 146. The crisis, he writes, “has an incomparably more painful effect on me than the trials on a more personal level that have not been spared me—and I do not have to defend myself from this pain as from that of times past.”

This pneumaticism supports the second feature: the separation of the council’s “spirit” from its “letter.” This reading was exemplified among certain of the council’s theological interpreters who operate with what de Lubac deems to be a profound misunderstanding of the council’s purpose—or more drastically, a profound betrayal of that purpose. In works like The Motherhood of the Church (1971) and A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace (1980), de Lubac inveighs against the activity of what he calls the “para-council”: the collective of theologians who present themselves as the authoritative voice of conciliar interpretation.23 This para-council results from an “artificial” opposition between the magisterium and the theological guild, suggesting that the latter is a rival source for doctrinal definition. Its interpretations are then characterized by a commitment to what certain theologians see as the council’s unrealized promise, rather than to the content of the documents themselves. Here de Lubac’s descriptions align with criticisms of the “spirit of Vatican II” offered by fellow theologians of his persuasion like Joseph Ratzinger.24 The often explicit dissociation of the council’s “spirit” from its “letter” even corresponds to what de Lubac and others saw as the willful betrayal of the council’s commitment to aggiornamento (the Church’s “updating” relative to the modern world).

The third feature of the crisis concerns the nature of the Church. Arguably, for de Lubac, the most troubling interpretations were those which saw in the ideal of aggiornamento the grounds for a radical transformation of the Church’s visible structure. He cites the repeated calls for a “New Church” in the writings of French thinkers, including the authors of the “secret” pamphlet Aggiornamento ou mutation? (1965). Here the passage from letter to


24 See Joseph Ratzinger, Theological Highlights of Vatican II (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2009).
spirit and the “updating” of the Church are rendered as a qualitative break with the Church of the past, exemplified for de Lubac by the hermeneutic of a “breach” or “inaugurating rupture” (*la rupture instauratrice*) in the writings of his one-time disciple, Michel de Certeau. He also cites Jean-François Six in summarizing the position:

> The Christianity of tomorrow will be...a new Church bestowed on us, begotten by the Spirit. This offspring [*enfant*] will no longer possess the features of the Church we’re familiar with...the world requires a great transformation from time to time...Today the Spirit demands that Christians...leave behind their “unconscious” living of the faith in order to speak anew...26

In short, the postconciliar crisis threatens to sever all ties with the Church’s visible structure and tradition as they had been perennially understood.27

Lastly, de Lubac criticizes what we might call the utopian character of the crisis. Here he has in mind those who see this “new Church” of the Spirit realized within history, envisioning the postconciliar period as a time of “universal reconciliation.”28 For some, this transition beyond the institutional Church was framed as an evolution of religion itself, the realization of a Church of “love” freed from the constraints of law, sacrament, and other conceptual residues of Hellenism and Judaism.29 The crisis suggests, in other words, a three-fold view of Christian history, relegating the time of the Law and the institutional Church to the past, and seeing the promise of both realized once and for all in a new age. De Lubac also criticizes this as the ideology of progress, for nothing, he says, is more fatal to true


26 Ibid., 445.

27 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 146.


renewal than the conviction of inevitable progress. He speaks elsewhere of the “quagmire of ‘progressivism’” as the primary force leading to spiritual disintegration, and even refers to this progress as a false idol, of the same character as those ideologies he opposed in the early decades of the 20th century.

What’s most important about these features of the crisis is that they provide the immediate context and occasion for de Lubac’s work in *La postérité*. They are, in short, the key to understanding why de Lubac turns his attention away from Joachim’s followers in the history of exegesis (*Exégèse médiévale*, vol.4) and toward Joachim’s followers in the history of philosophy and theology. Already in 1968, de Lubac suggests that the source of these most distinctive features—its pneumaticism, its privileging of the “spirit” over the “letter,” its call for a new Church, and its utopianism—can be traced to the tradition Joachim initiates.

Joachimism then appears to offer an historical precedent for the claims being made by the council’s mistaken interpreters. For instance, in his prophetic writings, Joachim argues for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit—a true Pentecost—when the Spirit’s activity in the Church brings Christ’s work to completion. He argues as well for a hermeneutic in which the spirit perfectly fulfills the biblical letter, rendering it obsolete. In addition, he writes of the Spirit inaugurating a new Church (*nova ecclesia*), a spiritual Church (*ecclesia spiritualis*), no longer bound to the order of sacraments or priests. Finally, Joachim envisions all of these features

30 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 147.

31 See de Lubac’s letter to Jean-Pierre Wagner, Appendix 7:3 in *At the Service of the Church*. Cf. Ibid., 149: “I refused to bend the knee before those successive Baals that had the name of Maurrasism, Hitlerism, integrism: I now see other Baals, having invaded the sanctuary, demand the same adoration, and their servants use the same kind of procedures that characterized the old integrism with the opposite sign, from as early as 1914...I do not accept the practice of covering the worst enterprises with the magic words of progress, forward movement, opening or renewal.

coalescing in the final phase of a three-fold history, a coming age (status) of the Holy Spirit, before the end of time.

Joachimism, then, names de Lubac’s reading of the crisis in the categories of the Church’s history. When he invokes it, he is not merely offering opinions on the teachings of a medieval thinker. He is evaluating something he believes to be a present and pressing concern. He sees Joachimism, in other words, undergoing an “astonishing revival of life” within the Catholic Church. Yet after investigating the reception of Joachim’s ideas in history, de Lubac concludes that its features are not only limited to the confines of the Church. He argues rather that the greatest danger of the postconciliar crisis—and thus of Joachimism—is a more potent form of the crisis he identifies in the first half of the century. What the features of Joachimism inevitably tend toward, he believes, is a reduction of the supernatural to the natural: what he elsewhere refers to as “immanentism.”

1.1.2 Immanentism and the Preconciliar Crisis

As it happens, the task of discerning periods of crisis is one de Lubac undertakes more than once throughout his career. His rather grim diagnosis following the Second Vatican Council centers, in fact, upon two distinct but related phases of a single crisis. Far from seeing the council as its source, de Lubac affirms on the contrary that Pope John XXIII convened the council as the Church’s response to a crisis long preceding the events of the 1960s. Closely following the earlier diagnoses of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. (1881-

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1955), de Lubac describes this preconciliar condition as a “crisis of civilization,” a “metaphysical crisis,” even “a crisis of cosmic nature and magnitude.” It is most importantly a spiritual crisis insofar as it signals a decisive change and instability in the religious life of mankind and creates cultural impediments to one’s proper relationship with the divine.

This whole work of [modern] thought, whose greatness we must not fail to recognize, is paid for in practice by the loss of the living God. The world then becomes a world of abstractions, when it is not absurdly reduced to a world of phenomena. In losing its mysterious innermost depth, it has lost its soul. Man is isolated, uprooted, “disconcerted.” He is asphyxiated: it is as if emptiness had been formed in him by an air pump…The consequence is not only a social imbalance. The world itself appears “broken.” There is, at the innermost part of consciousness, a metaphysical despair.

The situation in question is, as Christopher Walsh rightly points out, the crisis of modernity itself, which de Lubac defines according to the distinctive limitations it imposes upon the human spirit, that is, the rejection of mystery and “the refusal to see in man any transcendent aspiration...” De Lubac is naming, in other words, a state of imbalance not only for the Catholic Church, but for European culture as such. Modern men and women have undergone a transvaluation: they have effectively lost their taste for God. Whereas

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37 De Lubac, “Teilhard and Problems,” 140: “the very foundations of the human anima religiosa, on which the Church has been building for two thousand years, which are changing in dimension and nature.”


40 De Lubac, “Teilhard and the Problems of Today,” 146.
transcendent realities were once thought to be the foundation of human values, they now appear to be disconnected from the exigencies of nature.

De Lubac first encountered this fading of belief in the social structure of his formative years, which Rudolf Voderholzer refers to as *la séparation.*\(^4\) *La séparation* signifies the complete separation of the ecclesial and political spheres, born out of the Revolution and the demise of the *ancien régime.*\(^4\) It is an ideological divide between French Catholics and secular republicans; a divide apparent in the many tensions that overshadowed de Lubac’s entry into the Jesuit order. Fearing the influence of a rapidly-developing liberalism, the French Church had aligned itself with counter-revolutionary forces, compounding anticlerical sentiment in the wider public. The failure of reconciliation efforts by Christian Democrats in the 1890s, the radicalization of the *l’Action française* movement following the Dreyfus Affair, and the anti-clerical policies of Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau (1846-1904) and Émile Combes (1835-1921) all served to widen the divide. More directly, the closing of Jesuit colleges in 1903, the expulsion of nearly twenty-thousand religious in 1904, and the repeal of the Napoleonic Concordat in 1905, forced de Lubac and other young Jesuits to pursue their novitiate in England.\(^4\) All of these factors combined to ensure that the dwindling of the Church’s influence had become a cultural reality.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1960), 88-89: “What is lacking is taste for God. The most distressing diagnosis that can be made of the present age, and the most alarming, is that to all appearances at least it has lost the taste for God. Man prefers himself…”


\(^4\) The *ancien régime* was the social and political organization in France lasting from the 15th through the 18th centuries under which the Catholic Church enjoyed significant privileges.


In de Lubac’s eyes, one of the primary causes of this condition originated within the Church itself, with the formation of what he referred to as the “the ivory tower” of la théologie séparée. The collapse of the ancien régime had signaled a paradigm-shift for the social existence of the Church, and as a solution to the apparent constriction of its scope and mission, the Church attempted to recover some measure of the social integrity it had previously enjoyed. The new model for the Church’s relationship with civil society, it was agreed, lay in the Christendom of the late Middle Ages. Consequently the Church’s response on the intellectual plane was to foster the Neo-Scholastic renaissance (endorsed by Leo XIII’s Aeterni Patris in 1879) as the key to reclaiming the elusive synthesis between faith and reason, Church and society.

Yet for de Lubac, this turn to the Scholastic paradigm, however pure in intention, was accompanied by a fatal refusal to engage with the promise of modern developments. In this way, he argues, Neo-Scholasticism exhibits a paradoxically modern attitude toward the past, precisely in its anti-modern self-definition. Catholicism came to constitute itself as a world of meaning distinct from the common culture, and therefore as a sub-culture disengaged from the experiences of non-Catholic men and women. Its intellectual discourse reflected this introversion, rendering it a “separated theology.”

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47 The popes of the 18th and 19th centuries were consistent in their judgments that the social ills of modernity stem from philosophical and theological errors. Cf. Joseph Komonchak, “Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism,” Cristianesimo nella Storia 18 (1997), 374.

Against this background, de Lubac’s most famous work, *Surnaturel: Etudes historiques* (1946), can be read as an early diagnosis of this preconciliar crisis. For here he argues that the condition of *la séparation* was made possible by Neo-Scholasticism’s appeal to an anthropology of “pure nature” (*natura pura*). This account of human nature, “pure” in the sense of possessing an integrity distinct from supernatural principles, was in de Lubac’s eyes the subject of a rather tragic history. It marked a subtle reversion to a Hellenistic, pre-Christian definition of nature, one at home in an immanent cosmic order. This definition—and the notion of a distinct natural end for humanity which it entails—was adopted by theologians in order to resolve disputes about the reception of Augustinian teachings. Yet de Lubac argues that this assimilation, even in the works of St. Thomas, represents a fragile tension, always capable of distorting the Christian vision should the intellectual context allow for it.

49 Komonchak, “Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism,” 378: “…largely either unwilling or unable to winnow the wheat from the chaff in the modern developments, the Church constructed another world of meaning and value, a distinct social body within the larger society, a culture distinct from that which directed the ruling and planning classes. Roman Catholicism, in its worldview and in its organization, was this third body, no longer the common culture, despite its continuing totalizing claims, but rather a sub-culture forced to compete in a market place of meaning and value not only with other religious bodies but with secular systems which throughout the century were gaining more and more political power and more and more control over the minds of men.”


51 De Lubac argues that the concept of *natura pura* receives its first definitive treatment in the writings of theologians like Denys the Carthusian (1402-1471). It then makes its way into the bosom of Thomism with Thomas Cajetan (1468-1534), whose influence helped establish it as a key principle in the exegesis of St. Thomas. The concept also functioned prominently in the disputes surrounding the works of Michael Baius (1513-1589) and Jansenius (1585-1638), serving then as a theoretical mechanism for securing the gratuity of grace in the face of naturalist tendencies and heterodox Augustinian theologies. De Lubac’s claims have been challenged, however, by a number of Thomist scholars. See, for instance, Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Naples: Sapientia, 2010).
Consequently, when the radical Augustinianisms of Baius and Jansenius arose in the sixteenth century, “pure nature” was appealed to as a corrective, leading in de Lubac’s eyes to a gross overcompensation. The imbalanced stress upon the relative sufficiency of nature tended inevitably toward the separation of the two orders, and the more humanity was conceived of as a closed and sufficient whole, the more Christianity appeared to be devoid of meaning for humanity and, in the end, dispensable. De Lubac refers to this dynamic, following Maurice Blondel, as extrinsicism: the definitive exiling of the supernatural, and the baptizing of a nature “that might be acceptable to a deist or atheist.”

Such developments make for a Christianity with no appeal to the common culture and no critical power over it. It is rather atrophied, “cut off from all its source of nourishment,” and therefore “easy prey to every form of seduction from outside.” It is, in other words, incapable of preventing nonreligious creeds from filling the void it leaves behind. De Lubac criticizes this affaissement spirituel, or spiritual decline among European Catholics, in shorter works from the 1940s. He sees it perhaps most vividly in the


53 De Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 146, 232-233: “They were dooming themselves to see [the supernatural order] as merely a kind of superstructure. It followed inevitably that man could not only have managed quite well without it, but that even now he could with impunity disregard it. It was deprived of any hold on human thinking or human existence. Christian thought was thus bounded by a narrow circle, in a quiet backwater of the intellectual universe, where it could only waste away. By the good offices of some of its own exponents, who were aiming to preserve its transcendence, it became merely an ‘exile.’”

54 Ibid., 47. Cf. de Lubac, Catholicism, 166-167. De Lubac does acknowledge that this so-called “separatist thesis” was even a seemingly advantageous tool for demarcating Catholic orthodoxy during the Modernist crisis, as its original intention was to protect the supernatural from reduction to the natural sphere.


56 De Lubac, “Christian Explanation,” 443

acquiescence to Nazism among his fellow countrymen during the French occupation. He sees it also in the decadent Thomism of some of his adversaries in the French clergy, who despite their presumption of preserving the faith from Modernism, subjected it all the more to ideological manipulation. Many Thomists, for instance, had treated their support of *l’Action française* as morally binding on Catholics, betraying ignorance of the Comtean sympathies of its leader, Charles Maurras. More troubling still were those who provided theological support for the Vichy regime, the French vassal of Nazi fascism.

Later in 1965, de Lubac summarizes the problem with extrinsicism, *la théologie separate*, and *l’affaissement spirituel* in the following way: Catholics “wishing to protect the supernatural from any contamination” had in fact “exiled it altogether—both from intellectual and social life—leaving the field free to be taken over by secularism.” They had constructed a Catholicism having so little to do with natural realities that they allowed secular worldviews to claim dominion over nature—to reconfigure it, that is, without any reference to God or

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58 Many of de Lubac’s early writings on the theme of “spiritual crisis” emerge from this context, during which time he—along with fellow Jesuits Pierre Chaillot and Gaston Fessard—began secretly printing the *Cahier du Témoignage chrétien*, the organ of what de Lubac called his “spiritual resistance to Nazism.” He saw it as the task of the *Cahier* to preserve the minds of the French, and de Lubac was forced to leave Lyons (“capital of the Resistance”) and live under a false name for a period of six months. See de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 48ff; *A Theologian Speaks*, 1ff.


60 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 144: “I have known a traditionalist Thomist à la Bonald, a Thomism as patron of “l’Action française”, a Thomism as the inspiration of Christian Democracy, a progressivist and even a neo-Marxist Thomism, and so forth…And no salvation outside of each in its turn…I have more than once observed a ‘Thomism’ that was scarcely more than a tool in the hands of the government, the rallying point of a party, the password of a troop of ambitious careerists, or even the empty shell of a thoughtless conformity, the padlock closing the door to all understanding of the thought of others. Even today, despite all the supervening changes, this still makes it difficult for me to be very loud in proclaiming that I am a Thomist.”


the supernatural. “Separated theology” then creates the conditions for a “separated philosophy” (*philosophie séparée*). As Maurice Blondel and Victor Delbos had shown a generation earlier, in the wake of the Church’s cultural recession, the intellectual life of early twentieth century France had come to value immanence as the very measure of rationality. Immanence in this sense signifies the logical interconnections of human thought, which are presumed to constitute a closed system: tolerating only what is intrinsic to the structure of human consciousness or is logically presupposed by it. De Lubac feared that reason so insulated from Christian principles would inevitably forsake any neutrality and instead become *anti-theological*. As Oliva Blanchette puts it:

> It was then only a matter of time before reason, left by itself on the side of knowledge, would begin to think it could find immanent within itself…all the truths necessary for reason, and thereby end up radically excluding the world of faith. From juxtaposition, philosophy thus moved to opposition and incompatibility with anything supernatural.

Fortunately, de Lubac claims, the Second Vatican Council had largely resolved the problem of extrinsicism, and from its very first session, had definitively overcome the errors of Neo-Scholasticism. The problem facing the Church in the postconciliar period was thus no longer the problem of isolating the supernatural from the natural. It was now rather a matter of conflating the two. According to de Lubac, it is a great paradox that one can only properly distinguish nature from the supernatural by learning how to unite them.

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64 Ibid., 131-132

65 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 145; *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, xxxv.

that by first misconstruing their distinction—as with *la théologie séparée*—one only ensures that attempts to unify the principles are equally problematic. This is, in short, the new danger that the council occasions. Nature and the supernatural have been so separated that it is no longer possible to correctly discern their relation to one another. And insofar as the postconciliar crisis seeks unity, but presupposes this separation, it inevitably confuses the terms. It therefore constitutes a “new modernity,” reproducing and even compounding the errors of the “petrified modernity” preceding it.67

This explains why secularism or immanentism becomes a new focus of de Lubac’s writings during and after the 1960s. Here it is no longer a question of secularism laying claim to aspects of nature once abandoned by theology. It is now a question of “that secularism…beginning to enter the minds even of Christians”,68 of “an attempt by Christians to include the Church herself in an all-embracing secularism.” Falsely reuniting nature with the supernatural means identifying the latter with the former, reducing Christianity to a set of purely immanent truths. De Lubac defines this kind of immanentism as…

[What] is made in the end to embrace the whole field of churchly institution, the whole of worship, the whole object of faith, the whole of life, until there is nothing left—not even prayer—to recall to the Christian the presence and summons of God…In this view, the Church fades away into the world, the religious into the profane, eternal into temporal, mystery into completely human speculation. This means betrayal of the Gospel. The Kingdom of God vanishes. The whole world becomes externalized and without depth.69

67 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 145.


69 De Lubac, “ Teilhard and the Problems of Today,” 181. De Lubac often (though not always) distinguishes secularism from the more ambivalent process of secularization (*laïcization*). The latter, to his mind, signifies a process initiated long ago, bearing a potentially salutary effect for the Church. The original aim of secularization was to more clearly distinguish the kingdom of Caesar from the Kingdom of God and to free the respective integrities of Church and world.
A variety of de Lubac’s late works, including *L’Église dans la crise actuelle* (1969), *The Motherhood of the Church* (1971), and especially *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* (1980), testify to his preoccupation with immanence. In his 1971 “Introduction” to *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, he writes: “today we are witnesses of an endeavor that wants to dissolve the Church into the world… the tide of immanence is growing irresistibly.” He describes “pure immanence” as a “temporal heresy,” which brings the supernatural down to the level of nature and mistakes the Church for the world. It likewise mistakes the council’s openness to the world with a commitment to temporal progress. Such a view, de Lubac suggests, rejects any supernatural knowledge and values the infinite progress of humanity in its stead.

More specifically, de Lubac argues that the immanence of the postconciliar period is a “*historical* immanence.” Unlike many forms of Modernism and even what Blondel referred to as “*historicism*” earlier in the century, this view expresses itself as a philosophy of history. It is “concentrating completely upon history,” presenting its absorption of the supernatural as the end of a historical development. In this way it trades upon the categories of Christian views of history in order to figure itself as the fulfillment of the Church’s promises:

It becomes all the more attractive as, presenting itself as the heir of Christianity (at last fully understood), far from rejecting it, it claims at last to fulfill perfectly the hopes awakened by Christ in men’s hearts; and it is all the more formidable in being borne along on the most powerful current of thought in the age, and in presenting itself as making the only valid response to the challenge of historicity.

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72 De Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, xxxvi, n.5.

73 Ibid., xxxv-xxxvi.
It is the historical character of this immanence that leads de Lubac to identify it with Joachimism. Above all, what Joachimism provides is a theology of history, and what distinguishes it from alternative theologies is its focus on progress within history. Joachim argued that movement through the ages is accompanied by progress in human freedom, peace, and understanding—all of which culminate in the coming status of the Holy Spirit. His emphasis, de Lubac notes, is on a this-worldly perfection for humanity, before the Parousia and the eschaton. The real threat that Joachimism poses to the postconciliar Church, then, is not simply that it countenances doctrines of questionable orthodoxy, like that of a new pneumatic Church replacing the clerical one. It is that Joachimism’s configuration of Christian beliefs tends to conflate the supernatural with the natural, the transcendent with the immanent. De Lubac thus sees it as a kind of theological precedent for immanence:

More exactly, the Joachimite idea has not ceased to act as a catalyst. In the variety of forms that it has assumed, scholarly or popular, it has constituted one of the principle intermediaries [relais] on the path leading to secularization, that is to say, to the denaturing of Christian faith, thought, and action.74

Under the various forms it has assumed, I consider Joachimism to be a still-present and even pressing danger. I recognize in it the process of secularization, which, betraying the Gospel, transforms the search for the kingdom of God into social utopias. I see it at work in what was so justly called the ‘self-destruction of the Church.’ I believe that it can only increase the suffering and bring about the degradation of our humanity.75

In sum, then, de Lubac’s argument is that after the Second Vatican Council, the problem of immanence has taken on a new and more potent form. Not merely presenting a challenge to a Christianity too isolated to defend itself, it is now masquerading as the most


75 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 156-57.
compelling interpretation of that Christianity. Joachimism provides the theological grammar that makes this position intelligible. It follows that when de Lubac invokes Joachimism, he is not primarily referring to a distinct theological movement inspired by Joachim and consigned to the past. He is referring to the ways in which modern thinkers appropriate Joachim’s ideas in support of immanentism. In this sense, when confronting Joachimism, de Lubac is confronting—in a new form—the same fundamental problem he deals with throughout his scholarly career: the disastrous consequences of sundering the natural and supernatural orders. Joachim’s “astonishing revival of life” means that something from outside of the Church (immanentism) has now been re-inscribed within the Church, under the mantle of Joachim’s teachings.76

What de Lubac makes clear in the pages of La postérité is the fact that Joachimism is so well disposed to play this role it had a role to play in bringing about what was “outside” of and opposed to the Church before the council. The unbalancing of nature and the supernatural that characterizes the modern period was not simply the work of “pure nature” and its well-meaning advocates. It was also experienced in concrete terms in Joachimism’s unbalancing of the relationships between Christ and the Spirit, the Old and New Testaments, the clerical and the spiritual Church, and the temporal and eschatological domains. In short, de Lubac argues that Joachimism is one of the traditions that made modern secularism possible, if not inevitable.

76 Ibid., 145.
1.2 Joachimism as “Substitut Mystique”: De Lubac’s Diagnosis

1.2.1 From Apocalypse to Immanence

In expressions of modesty characteristic of his writing, de Lubac often describes himself as little more than a historian of the Church’s tradition. He reminds his readers that he never devoted himself to “scientific” theology, nor did he obtain the professional formation for it. Instead…

I have sought rather, without any antiquarianism, to make known some of the great common areas of Catholic tradition…such a task called more for a reading across the centuries than for a critical application to specific points; it excluded any overly preferential attachment to one school, system, or definite age…

Besides, to each his task! I have never claimed to be doing the work of philosophical systematization or of theological synthesis…But, leaving this twofold kind of task to others with the necessary gifts, it is in a more general way to the great tradition of the Church, understood as the experience of all Christian centuries, coming to enlighten, orient; expand our poor little individual experience, to protect it from aberrations, to open it to the paths of the future, that I once again recently made appeal…

In an important sense, de Lubac’s self-assessment is clearly correct. Many of his books and essays fall within the genre of genealogy or intellectual history. For instance, when he was part of Joseph Huby’s weekly reading group (“La Pensée”) in the 1920s, de Lubac saw it as his task to confirm in Church history the positions of Maurice Blondel, Pierre Rousselot, and Joseph Maréchal; a task which led to publications like *Surnaturel: études historiques* and *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*.78 Similarly in his *Corpus Mysticum*, de Lubac examines changes in the meanings of Christ’s “body” and the Eucharistic character of the Church over

77 Ibid., 143-145.

78 Ibid., 34-35.
the course of centuries. His wartime essays, like the “Letter to My Superiors” (1941) and “Spiritual Warfare” (1943), trace Nazism to revivals of ancient paganism, and even his writings on Buddhism deal with the Amida or “Pure Land” tradition in historical terms. In sum, as Rudolph Voderholzer notes, much of de Lubac’s scholarship involves the work of “conceptual archaeology.”

His research on Joachim’s “spiritual posterity” is certainly no exception. The argument of La postérité is executed, in other words, through a series of judgments about the reception of theological concepts over time. De Lubac’s preferred metaphors reveal the extent to which he reads Joachimism as an effective history: it is a “catalyst,” an “intermediary” on the way to secularization, and a “mystical substitute for the process of rationalization.” Here de Lubac is echoing a passage in The Drama of Atheist Humanism, where he notes that those who rationalize Christian doctrines often require “a mystique” to evoke enthusiasm for their claims. This mystique is a kind of spiritual supplement, providing symbols to make abstract ideas more readily accepted by hearts and minds. By referring to Joachimism as a “mystical substitute,” then, de Lubac is arguing that Joachim’s theology has

82 Voderholzer, Meet Henri de Lubac, 181.
83 De Lubac, La postérité I, 15.
undergone a series of “metamorphoses,” conditioning—and in turn being appropriated by—the advocates of modern immanentism.

How is it, then, that the ideas of a twelfth century Cistercian became a “mystical substitute” for immanentism? Implicit in de Lubac’s narrative is an account of how theological ideas influence philosophical ones, or how distortions in theology’s subject matter can lead to its own dissolution. His standard for making judgments of this kind can be found in a passage from The Mystery of the Supernatural: what he calls the paradoxical structure of Christian doctrines. Paradox here names the tension or polarity that results when the human mind comes in contact with divine mystery. According to de Lubac, the truths of Revelation appear before the intellect in a relation of two terms whose harmony lies beyond (though not opposed to) its rational horizons. It is a supernatural harmony, only accessible in the shadow of faith, and it therefore requires the believer to hold seemingly irreconcilable propositions together (for instance, Christ is both fully God and fully man, the Church is both visible and invisible, Mary is both virgin and mother, etc.). In this way the paradox testifies to the supernatural character of the truth being revealed; a sign that the mystery in question remains beyond the grasp of reason: “Paradox is the reverse of what, properly speaking, would be synthesis…It is the provisional expression of a view which remains incomplete, but whose orientation is ever toward fullness.”

85 De Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 169: “A synthesis indeed; but for our natural intellect, it is a synthesis of paradox before being one of enlightenment.”; and p.171: “Revealed truth, then, is a mystery for us; in other words it presents that character of lofty synthesis whose final link must remain impenetrably obscure to us. It will forever resist all our efforts to unify it fully.” Cf. Catholicism, 327.

86 Voderholzer, Meet Henri de Lubac, 119.

defining doctrine, on this view, is to uphold the balance between the seemingly irreconcilable poles of the mystery.

This balance then serves as evidence of a resolution beyond the limits of natural reason. Yet because our minds and wills are obscured by sin, we are always tempted to reconcile the terms of the apparent contradiction in a synthesis of our own, disrupting the balance and favoring one term at the expense of the other. In most cases this “over-eagerness to reconcile the contrasting elements of the mystery” is intended as a correction to an imbalance of an opposite kind, as when theologians appealed to the concept of pure nature. It nonetheless amounts to a kind of impatience with mystery and a distortion of its content. In short, de Lubac suggests here that the impulse to rationalize Christian doctrine is formally equivalent to the impulse of heresy: the reduction of mystery to what is more easily and even exhaustively grasped by natural reason.⑧

So it is that de Lubac identifies a “theology of pure rationality” underlying these first refusals to abide with mystery.⑨ As an interpretation of Revelation devoid of paradox, this “theology” configures Christianity in a way that renders it amenable to further and more comprehensive refusals of mystery. It thereby conditions attempts to make rationality the sole measure of faith, until Christian doctrines become “laicized ideas,” Christian ideas “gone mad,”⑩ and little more than vestiges of their Christian ancestry. Rationalization on this view exists first in the form of theology, that is, as an interpretation of Revelation (though imbalanced from the perspective of orthodoxy). Then, detached from their origins, the concepts of this theology are put in service of views entirely devoid of mystery. This, for


⑨ De Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 175.

de Lubac, explains how theological deviations lay the foundation for modern immanentism. Separate philosophies exist first as secularized theologies.91

This kind of analysis is clearly at work in the “historical thesis” of de Lubac’s Surnaturel (Augustinianism and Modern Theology). However, while the genealogy of pure nature examines changes in the concepts of theological anthropology, when de Lubac turns his attention to Joachim’s posterity, he is primarily concerned with the rationalizing of concepts in the theology of history: what Karl Löwith describes as the “the methodological regress from the modern secular interpretations of history to their ancient religious pattern.”92 In the third volume of Medieval Exegesis, de Lubac suggests that the proper balance in doctrines of history involves holding the invisibilia Dei (the transcendent relation to God) in tension with the futura (the historical relation to God). He then claims that Joachim disrupts this balance in a distinctive way, by reducing the invisibilia to the futura. He attempts to “conceive an eschatology upon earth and thereby transform hope—at least a primary phase of hope—into utopia.”93 De Lubac’s claim is that by emphasizing the temporal future to the detriment of the vertical or mystical dimension, Joachim creates a distinctive avenue for historical immanentism to develop, a pattern of thought upon which modern philosophies of history will trade.

What then would lead Joachimites to favor a view of this kind? This particular imbalance, de Lubac argues, is a product of Joachim’s place in the tradition of apocalypticism. “Apocalypticism” designates a kind of theology of history and a particular

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91 De Lubac, Augustinianism and Modern Theology, 265.


93 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis III, 327.
way of understanding its consummation. Alternatively, the term “apocalypse” designates the literary genre in which apocalyptic views develop. In his Catholicism, de Lubac describes the pivotal role that apocalypticism plays in the emergence of historical theory. Here he anticipates the thesis later popularized by Löwith: that the Christian belief in an eschaton—a definitive end and orientation to history—was necessary for all later views that ascribe meaning to the structure of time. De Lubac also affirms that Christian theologies of history have their roots in Jewish apocalypticism. As Bernard McGinn has shown, Christianity derives from this milieu an understanding of history as teleological, as unified across a series of ages, and as marked by a pattern of crisis, judgment, and vindication for the just. The theological divisions of history that characterize Christian writings derive from, and claim to fulfill, this “philosophy of universal history” found in the Hebrew Scriptures.

More specifically, de Lubac suggests that Joachim’s imbalance is related to an ancient form of apocalypticism known as millenarianism or chiliasm. Chiliasm, as a Christian phenomenon, develops its themes in light of the canonical Christian apocalypse, The Book of Revelation. There are, for instance, chiliastic movements that associate the events of Revelation with a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, fulfilling and even surpassing the work of Christ. Some also find in it evidence of a spiritual illumination that abrogates both Law

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94 Long after the genre of apocalypse died out, Christian apocalyptic eschatologies were carried on in different genres, principally in exegetical works and biblical commentaries. It is in this sense that Joachim’s theology can be considered apocalyptic: it carries on essential features of apocalyptic content in works that are not apocalypses.


96 De Lubac, Catholicism, 156.


98 De Lubac, Catholicism, 157.
and Gospel, and of a new spiritual Church (spiritales) succeeding the “carnal” Church (psychici) of institutions and sacraments.\textsuperscript{99} However the most important motif for chiliasm is found in Revelation chapter twenty, where the seer John envisions the binding of Satan and the reigning of the martyrs with Christ for a thousand years.\textsuperscript{100} What most distinguishes the chilists is their literal interpretation of this millennial period: they view this earthly Kingdom as a central part of Christian hope, preceding the Parousia and the general resurrection. In spite of the appeal it had among many of the Church Fathers (including Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, Victorinus, and Lactantius), de Lubac believes that chiliasm’s expectation of a new historical age tends to overemphasize the \textit{futura} at the expense of the \textit{invisibilia}.

According to de Lubac, this chiliastic theology of history is what finds new life in the twelfth century writings of Joachim. On his view, then, Joachim does not originate its errors, but rather gives them a new and definitive form when he reimagines the millennial kingdom of Revelation as the coming \textit{status} of the Holy Spirit. This leads Joachim to configure other doctrines in similar ways, providing the pattern de Lubac identifies in the Church’s postconcililar crisis. Joachim likewise envisions the third \textit{status} as the full outpouring of the Spirit’s presence on earth. He also envisions a spiritual understanding that will surpass the literal senses of the Old and New Testaments, as well as a “new Church of religious” (nova ecclesia religiosorum), a spiritual Church succeeding the rule of clerics and the mediation of sacraments.\textsuperscript{101} Each of these features is ordered, in other words, by Joachim’s three-fold

\textsuperscript{99} See de Lubac’s discussion of Montanism and Tertullian in \textit{La postérité I}, 38-40. Here he refers to Montanism as an “only somewhat accurate precedent for Joachim’s ideas” and notes that thinkers like Eugène Antichkof and others to this effect make what is largely “an imaginary connection.”

periodization of history and by his reading of the millennial kingdom as the Church’s fulfillment within history.

Moreover, these judgments about Joachimism are hardly peculiar to de Lubac. He is joined by a number of his contemporaries who provide support and, in some cases, direct precedents for his interpretation. Among de Lubac’s fellow theologians, Hans Urs von Balthasar is likely the first to identify vestiges of apocalypticism in modern thought. In his doctoral thesis, *Die Apokalypse der Deutschen Seele* (1937-39), Balthasar examines the ways in which eschatological patterns find new life in German philosophy and literature. And like de Lubac, he argues that it is the current of “chiliastic dreaming” that disrupts the balance between our historical future and our relation to God in the present. Balthasar identifies Joachim as the culmination of this trend, judging him to be the figure most responsible for reducing the eschaton to an inner-worldly sphere. In this way Joachim initiates a significant strand of what Balthasar identifies as a Promethean impulse in modern philosophy.102 Other Catholic theologians like Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu reaffirm Balthasar’s fundamental claim of a connection between Joachimism and secular forms of thought.103

Balthasar’s observations were formative not only for Catholic theologians like de Lubac, but also for a group of German intellectual historians, like Karl Löwith, Jacob Taubes, Ernst Benz, and Eric Voegelin; all of whom give Joachimism a central place in the

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formation of the modern age.¹⁰⁴ Karl Löwith (1897-1973), for instance, interprets Joachim as a turning point in his theory of secularization. He aims to show that the idea of truth’s historicity emerges first in Joachim’s “theological historism,” rather than in later non-Christian philosophies. For Joachim, he writes, “the Christian truth itself has, like the logos of Hegel, a temporal setting in its successive developments…the truth itself has an open horizon and a history which is essential to it.”¹⁰⁵ Moreover, he argues that the future reception of Joachim’s vision ultimately hastens its devolution into modern ideologies of progress. Joachim’s followers soon project the status of the Holy Spirit directly onto the development of human secular history:

“Joachim . . . could not foresee that his religious intention—that of desecularizing the church and restoring its spiritual fervor—would, in the hands of others, turn into its opposite: the secularization of the world which became increasingly worldly by the very fact that eschatological thinking about last things was introduced into penultimate matters, a fact which intensified the power of the secular drive toward a final solution of problems which cannot be solved by their own means and on their own level . . . .The revolution which had been proclaimed within the framework of an eschatological faith and with reference to a perfect monastic life was taken over, five centuries later, by a philosophical priesthood, which interpreted the process of secularization in terms of a ‘spiritual’ realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.”¹⁰⁶

Jacob Taubes (1923-1987) confirms much of Löwith’s thesis, though he arguably puts greater emphasis on the importance of apocalypticism for the Joachimites. He agrees

¹⁰⁴ Löwith, Meaning in History, 156.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 159. Löwith continues: “As an attempt at realization, the spiritual pattern of Lessing, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel could be transposed into the positivistic and materialistic schemes of Comte and Marx…The source of all these formidable attempts to fulfill history by and within itself is the passionate, but fearful and humble, expectation of the Franciscan Spirituals that a last conflict will bring history to its climax and end.”
with Löwith that apocalypses emerge from within the Jewish faith and its rejection of cyclical
time (“the historical view of the world is based on the ideas of creation and final
redemption”). Yet one of the central claims of his *Occidental Eschatology* (1947) is that
apocalypticism possesses a “rhythm” that favors the rise of chiliasm. Its central motif, in
other words, is the formation of God’s Kingdom on earth. The revolutionary potential of
this idea can be seen especially in the way Joachim depicts the advent of God’s earthly
Kingdom as a new “spiritual” condition for the Church (*ecclesia spiritualis*). The *ecclesia
spiritualis*, Taubes argues, leads to a sense of progress beyond all institutions: “the
proclamation of God’s Kingdom presses toward its realization. This rhythm of proclamation
and realization, of ‘ecclesia spiritualis’ and ‘on earth’ permeates eschatological events.”
Like Löwith, then, Taubes lends support to many of the claims de Lubac makes years later in
*La postérité*, as he reads in figures like Müntzer, Lessing, Hegel, and Bloch the transformation
of Joachim’s teachings.

Ernst Benz (1907-1982), a scholar who has published extensively on the Spiritual
Franciscans, offers a similar account of apocalyptic themes informing modern views of
history. Like the other authors under discussion, Benz argues that modern notions of
progress are nourished by the ancient expectations of God’s Kingdom on earth: “The idea
of progress,” he writes, “is a secularized form of chiliastic intuition.” Yet Benz stands apart
in his attempts to trace Joachim’s ideas back to the early Christian heresy of Montanism. The
Montanists, he argues, were the first to introduce the element of progress into the history of

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107 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 16.

108 Ibid., 85.

salvation; a progress ushered in by the Spirit or Paraclete, whose coming marks the culmination of salvation history.

The doctrine of the Holy Ghost, as evolved in Montanism, found its spontaneous development in Joachim of Fiore...The concept of the Holy Ghost as a creative power initiating a new phase of the history of salvation was again spontaneously brought to the fore by him....This doctrine also was the starting point for many social and political ideas of modern times.\textsuperscript{110}

The Holy Spirit is therefore the force directing the temporal order to its consummation, which, according to Benz, makes historical progress intelligible. He also argues that Joachim saw this progress in the passing away of the institutional Church, having relegated it to the status of Christ. In its place, a new form of the Church emerges in the freedom and knowledge brought by the Holy Spirit. This transition, however, is revolutionary in its implications: “By joining the idea of progress and development with the prophecy of the imminent fulfillment of the history of salvation, Joachim has created the model for the religious, social, political, and philosophical utopias of modern times.”\textsuperscript{111}

Lastly, Erich Voegelin (1901-1985), in works like \textit{The New Science of Politics} (1951), views Joachim as the thinker most responsible for “immanentizing the eschaton.”\textsuperscript{112} Voegelin understands modernity as a progressive realization of immanence, effected by ideas he associates with the Gnostic heresy. For this claim—his “Gnostic thesis”—Voegelin is deeply indebted to Balthasar, who describes Gnosis as a mythical counterpart to Christian soteriology and, moreover, as a recurring phenomenon in the history of Western thought.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 35-36.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 48.

\textsuperscript{112} Voegelin, \textit{The New Science of Politics}, 118-121.
Voegelin in turn sees the Gnostic tendency to self-divinize as the principle unifying a variety of modern thinkers in the cause of immanentism.

Hence, in his *New Science*, Voegelin labels Joachim a “Gnostic prophet”: “In his trinitarian eschatology Joachim created the aggregate of symbols that govern the self-interpretation of modern political society to this day.” Among these symbols he includes the spiritually perfect society of the third *status*, the passage beyond institutional authority, and the Spirit’s reign as a symbol of immanent fulfillment. Voegelin’s reading also aligns with Löwith’s thesis. Joachim’s periodization of history has created the impression that history has to have an intelligible structure ordered toward a definite goal. And although Voegelin’s claim of Joachim’s Gnostic heritage lacks sufficient textual evidence, de Lubac does echo it with qualification.

When de Lubac describes Joachimism as a “mystical substitute” for rationalization, then, he is summarizing what he takes to be the reception history of Joachim’s ideas. It is an instance of a broader trend according to which apocalyptic views provide the necessary framework for modern accounts of history. More specifically, for de Lubac Joachim’s doctrinal imbalance lays the foundation for more extensive rejections of mystery, and ultimately for accounts of history that reject mystery altogether (historical immanentism). In this de Lubac’s reading finds significant support among his contemporaries, and in addition it explains why so many modern thinkers identify Joachimism as a fitting symbol for their views. Yet if Joachimism is a “mystical substitute” for rationalization or immanentism (the reduction of the supernatural to the natural, the Church to the world, etc.), then it is not

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113 Ibid., 111.
114 Ibid., 118-119.
merely a religious pattern in the service of views devoid of mystery. It is ultimately a religious pattern in the service of views devoid of belief in God. As de Lubac realizes, what Joachimism offers—what the “spiritual posterity” finally constructs—is a reinterpretation of Christian doctrine shorn of its reference to God.

1.2.2 Joachimism and the Atheistic Hermeneutic

In his memoirs, de Lubac notes that his first serious reflections were the product of conversations he had with atheist comrades fighting alongside him in the First World War. He collected these reflections in his De la connaissance de Dieu (1945), and again in The Discovery of God (1956), which he offered as a modest apologia addressed to these unbelieving friends. From then on, de Lubac’s interest in atheism would span his entire scholarly career. It undoubtedly motivated his interest in Maurice Blondel while he studied philosophy in Jersey between 1920 and 1923.\footnote{De Lubac, At the Service of the Church, p. 19.} His intervention in the Christian philosophy debates of the 1930s (‘On Christian Philosophy’, 1936) was as much a response to rationalists like Émile Bréher and Léon Brunsevig as it was a response to his fellow Catholics.\footnote{Henri de Lubac, “On Christian Philosophy,” trans. Sharon Mollerus and Susan Clements, Communio 19 (1992), 478-506. Cf. De Lubac, At the Service of the Church, 24.} And his first work of lasting significance, Catholicism (1938), was occasioned by criticisms from ‘aggressive free-thinkers’ like Gabriel Séailles, Émile-Auguste Chartier, and Marcel Giron.\footnote{De Lubac, Catholicism, 15.} Even his studies on the supernatural (Surnaturel, 1946) were, he says, at the heart of discussions on modern
unbelief.\textsuperscript{118} It is little wonder, then, that de Lubac gained a reputation as an expert on modern atheism.

It is, moreover, unsurprising to find that his concerns about atheism are more than simply academic in nature. The first section of his most extensive work on the topic, \textit{The Drama of Atheist Humanism}, was developed from a series of studies he presented at “semi-clandestine” anti-Nazi conferences during the German occupation of France, later published in the journal \textit{Cité nouvelle} and the \textit{Cahiers du Rhône} between 1941 and 1943.\textsuperscript{119} The second section adapts his faculty lectures on Auguste Comte, and the third reproduces a number of articles he had written on Dostoyevsky. As Francesca Murphy and Joseph Komonchak have noted, De Lubac’s engagement with these thinkers was part of his effort to reinforce the Catholic Church against threats from both the French political right and the French political left.\textsuperscript{120} His critique of Comte, for instance, is likewise directed against the positivism of Charles Maurras and \textit{l’Action française}, a movement which de Lubac suspected of inspiring fascist sympathies in his fellow Catholics.\textsuperscript{121} Similarly his studies on Feuerbach and Nietzsche are intended to expose the anti-Christian heritage of Nazi beliefs. On the left, de Lubac’s critique of Marx can be seen as part of the dialogue between French Communists and Catholic intellectuals in the 1930s. On both fronts, de Lubac’s arguments in the \textit{Drama} served as models for Catholic critiques of atheism in the post-war period.

\textsuperscript{118} De Lubac, \textit{Surnaturel}, 35. Here de Lubac notes in addition that the question of the supernatural ‘formed the crux of the problem of Christian humanism’.

\textsuperscript{119} De Lubac, \textit{At the Service of the Church}, 40.


\textsuperscript{121} De Lubac, \textit{The Drama of Atheist Humanism}, 266.
As the title of his work suggests, de Lubac concentrates his attention on the tradition of atheism that claimed the mantle of humanism. Here ‘humanism’ refers to those movements supporting the edification of humanity ‘into the irreducible, perfectible bearer and guarantor of dignity, equality, and freedom.’ As early as the 1910s, humanisme had become a major part of the social projects of the Third Republic. Yet it was in the previous century that such social projects were united with a vision of humanity opposed to reliance on God. According to de Lubac, figures like Feuerbach, Marx, Comte, and Nietzsche were responsible for constructing this vision, and thus helped to shape the spiritual crisis he discerns in the twentieth century. No longer content to formulate arguments against God’s existence, these thinkers saw in their atheism the conditions for a well-functioning human society. In France, for instance, Henri de Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte proposed elaborate social systems mirroring the structure of Catholic institutions. Even Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, rather than merely convince the world of God’s demise, sought to realize the revolutionary kernel hidden within Catholic social teachings. In the hands of these figures, in other words, atheism had managed to reestablish itself on the foundations of humanism, giving rise to the tradition de Lubac labels “atheist humanism.”

By the 1960s, de Lubac’s criticisms of atheist humanism had found confirmation among many of his contemporaries. They also found confirmation in the Second Vatican Council’s Gaudium et Spes—the teaching of which he helped to formulate. Yet when de Lubac returns to the same figures and themes with renewed interest in his Athéisme et sens de l’homme: une double requête de Gaudium et spes (1968), he identifies more precisely the feature that the atheist humanists have in common: their dependence upon, and distortion of, Christian

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122 Stefanos Geroulanos, An Atheism that is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 4-5.
doctrines. It is not merely the case that these thinkers base their atheism on a common humanist foundation. What distinguishes them from other atheists is that they present their arguments as a comprehensive re-interpretation of Christian categories—what de Lubac calls the “atheistic hermeneutic” of Christianity.123

They attempt, in other words, to refute the Christian faith by “comprehending” it, “appropriating” it, “developing” it, and finally “surpassing” it from within.124 For de Lubac, then, atheist humanism reveals itself to be parasitic upon Christianity, a hermeneutic that “grafts itself onto its dogma in order to empty it of its kerygmatic contents, all the while conserving it as symbolic.”125 De Lubac describes it as a strategy of absorption, intended not to denounce the faith so much as to develop it, and to extract the essence of atheism from within the logic of Christianity itself. It operates by retaining the symbolic structure of theology while infusing it with a “truer meaning” limited to the natural plane. It attempts, in other words, “to realize in a profane way this human core of Christianity.”126

A brief comparison reveals that this “atheistic hermeneutic” of Christianity names the same fundamental phenomenon that de Lubac identifies with immanentism in the postconciliar period. In his essay, “Teilhard and the Problems of Today” (1971), he equates the secularism of the preconciliar crisis with atheist humanism: “secularism is then simply a new name for a variety of atheistic humanism.”127 Likewise in The Splendor of the Church, he describes immanentism in the same terms:

126 De Lubac, Athéisme et sens de l’homme, 27.
And one of the most powerful of these currents of thought is that of immanentism, which attacks the realities of the faith not so much by a frontal denial as by an interior undermining. It claims to deepen them and to discover the real meaning of them by a process of interiorization; its guiding principles are those of a sacramentalism turned inside out...According to it, God is not ‘dead’; he is assimilated. He becomes the symbol of man, as man has become the truth of God...It is one step farther in the long process of immanentizing, which is finally to ‘lead to the complete elimination of the fictitious being’ [God].

De Lubac is claiming, in other words, that the approach to Christianity being promoted in the postconciliar Church is essentially the same as the approach taken by the atheist humanists. If Joachimism functions as a pattern of symbols for historical immanentism, it is then having the same effect on Christian doctrines as the writings of the atheist humanists.

What then are the features of this hermeneutic? First, de Lubac suggests that it often presupposes a particular philosophy of history. Each thinker with whom de Lubac associates this view offers an account of human reason or nature developing historically, with earlier periods converging upon an age of perfection. Second, each of these thinkers gives Christianity (and even Judaism) a necessary place within this gradual process, interpreting it as a stage that is destined to be surpassed by a more comprehensive perspective. Third, this future perspective is conceived as an immanent and exclusive humanism, and hence a fully realized atheism. A philosophical discourse (rationalism, idealism, materialism, etc.) becomes the rightful heir of Christianity as a matter of historical and logical necessity. Fourth and finally, the atheistic hermeneutic retains the concepts and symbols of Christianity as it purports to supply their true meaning. The Church’s theology and practices are

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128 De Lubac, The Splendor of the Church, 224-225.
comprehended when their true referent is revealed to be an immanent reality rather than a divine one.

In works like *The Drama* and *Athéisme et sens de l'homme*, de Lubac points to prominent examples of this hermeneutic in German and French thought from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Among the Germans, the Enlightenment rationalism of G.E. Lessing is arguably the first and most influential. De Lubac notes Lessing’s propensity to equate mystery with what has not yet been made rational, and to see in his pursuit of religion’s intelligibility the very constitution of its meaning. His *Education of the Human Race* envisions a future age when reason will no longer rely on religious myths, thereby rendering Christianity a temporary and pedagogic stage of human understanding; one meant to cede its place to the philosophical discourse that supplies its ultimate truth.\(^{129}\) De Lubac also names G.W.F. Hegel as the highest expression of Lessing’s strategy: he is the one who most rigorously exploits Christian doctrines and “the one who contributed the most to the establishment and the victory of atheism.”\(^{130}\) Although his philosophy is deeply indebted to a modern form of Lutheranism, de Lubac holds that Hegel establishes a “general schema” for atheists who follow him by claiming to accomplish Christian history in his discourse of idealism. The Christianity of symbols and faith, he argues, gives way to the Absolute religion, or pure religion of the Spirit. Hegel thereby reinterprets the mysteries of revelation from the perspective of Reason (*Vernunft*), absorbing all that was previously impenetrable to the mind.\(^{131}\) His is a pattern that comes to be exploited by figures like Bruno Bauer, Friedrich Engels, and of course, Karl Marx.


On the French side, de Lubac sees the atheistic hermeneutic in authors like Jules Michelet, Henri de Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Comte, for instance, envisions the human race evolving from the primitive age of belief in God, through an age of metaphysical reasoning, to the ‘definitive religion’ of positivism, which understands intellectual, moral, and social questions in terms of immanent natural laws. So too with Proudhon. In his *The Un-Marxian Socialist: A Study of Proudhon* (1948), de Lubac notes that Proudhon saw his own atheism as more radical than that of the shallow free-thinkers of his day: “From religion we are taking everything and assimilating everything, ideas, myths, sentiments, in a word, its soul; we leave the Church only the dead letter, the mummy.”

Proudhon sees Catholicism in particular as simply a nascent stage in the development of human thought. It constitutes a kind of allegory for his own version of socialism, identical in substance but more primitive in form. It is, at best, something necessary for reason to gain consciousness of itself, but to the extent that it endures, it is an hallucination. Hence Proudhon presents his thought as a theory of social and economic laws clothed in Christian symbols; a “theology of immanence” or “apocalypse of the Revolution.”

The clearest representative, however, is undoubtedly Ludwig Feuerbach. De Lubac devotes an early essay in the *Drama* to Feuerbach, and later in *Athéisme et sens de l’homme* refers to him as the “principal originator” of the atheistic hermeneutic. He is arguably the first to

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134 Ibid., 229, 231.

unfold the atheistic implications of Hegel’s theology, and he ascribes to Christianity a necessary place within the development of human reason. However humanity’s progress is now able to see God as nothing more than illusory subject, bearing attributes that really belong to the essence of Man. The true meaning of theology can therefore only be found in anthropology, and Christian doctrines must be reinterpreted as symbolic expressions of human truths:

With this “re-reading” that claims to be in-depth, the attributes of God, for example, are not inevitably nothing…they are transferred from their imaginary subject to their real subject. This real subject is nothing other than the human species, because “the object of man is nothing other than his objective being itself…God is the interior manifested, the self of man expressed.” Or, about the Incarnation of the Word, one will say, in these neighboring terms from a traditional formula and which an honest Christian would perhaps judge acceptable, that “the God become man has only revealed the man become God.” Or further, the death and resurrection of Christ will become the most beautiful symbols of what happens within man, etc.  

Already in the pages of *Athéisme et sens de l’homme*, de Lubac suggests that this interpretation of Christian doctrine trades on “a tradition that goes back to Joachim of Fiore.” This is a claim de Lubac deepens in *La postérité*, when he counts many of these exemplars of the atheistic hermeneutic among Joachim’s spiritual posterity. The arrangement of symbols and doctrines these thinkers utilize are often, in other words, those favored by Joachimism. De Lubac argues then that Joachimism provides a kind of precedent for the atheistic hermeneutic, as a reading of Christian doctrines that makes a reductive, this-worldly interpretation of them more conceivable. For example, Joachimism offers an account of humanity’s development in knowledge, peace, and freedom through history, culminating in

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136 Ibid., 25-26 (translation mine).
137 Ibid., 43-44.
an age of fullness. It gives an important and necessary place to institutional Christianity within this history—the *status* of Christ, the hierarchical Church, and sacramental mediation. Yet it also prophesies a time when these features of the Christian religion will no longer be valid: they will be “surpassed” and fulfilled in a *status* where the mediations of the past will at best be retained as symbolic. Finally, this age or *status* of the Spirit is not our entrance into eternity, but something within history, marked by a fullness of understanding that alone supplies the true meaning of what Christian doctrines reveal through veils and images.

Joachimism provides, in short, a version of Christianity that justifies abrogating some of its central features, in favor of something so different as to be outside the bounds of Christianity altogether. While Joachim and many of his medieval followers envisioned only a new and fuller state of Christian realities, the modern heirs of his ideas simply reimagine their own philosophies as the true fulfillment of his third *status*. Here, then, is the form de Lubac believes Joachimism has finally taken, after countless metamorphoses over hundreds of years. When he describes it as a “mystical substitute,” it is ultimately for an atheistic reading of Christian doctrines that it substitutes. So to fully understand de Lubac’s writings on atheism, it is necessary to read his earlier works like the *The Drama* in light of his writings on Joachimism. Alternatively, it follows that to fully understand what de Lubac means by Joachimism—and to grasp why he deems it such an imminent threat to the Church—it is necessary to read his writings on Joachimism in light of his writings on atheism. Only when Joachimism is judged on these terms, and not merely as a set of teachings Joachim himself professed, can one then discern the ways in which de Lubac’s theology offers a compelling alternative.
Thus far I have examined the occasion of de Lubac’s work in *La postérité* and what de Lubac understands Joachimism to be. I’ve argued that in the context of his later writings, de Lubac’s interest in Joachimism is occasioned by a crisis in the Church that exhibits some of the general features of Joachimism. Apart from its pneumaticism, its preference for the spirit over the letter, its call for a new Church, and its utopianism, de Lubac identifies in this crisis a more pernicious phase of secularism or immanentism: the reduction of supernatural realities to natural ones. As a result, what de Lubac means when he invokes Joachimism (his diagnosis) is not primarily the set of beliefs Joachim himself espoused, but rather a complex history of receptions. It includes, first, an imbalanced theology of history that privileges temporal realities (*futura*) over eternal ones (*invisibilia*), thereby making immanent philosophies of history intelligible. This means, second, that de Lubac identifies Joachimism, in its modern incarnation, with atheism. It invariably serves as an interpretation of Christianity that modern thinkers invoke to justify their passage beyond Christ, the institutional Church, and belief in God altogether.

However de Lubac intended *La postérité* to be more than a work of analysis. He intended it also to be a work of confrontation. James Pambrun is therefore correct to read *La postérité* as a new stage in de Lubac’s fundamental theology, “which has taken the shape of an ‘affrontement mystique’ with the major spiritual currents of our age.”¹³⁸ De Lubac laments that he was never able to complete the “doctrinal conclusion” he envisioned for the two

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volumes, and so a developed theological response to Joachimism is largely absent from the pages of La postérité. He does, however, hint at passages and sections from other texts (like History and Spirit and Splendor of the Church) as the outlines of what his alternative to Joachimism might have been. It is part of my thesis in this dissertation that one can determine de Lubac’s response to Joachimism—and thus what his missing conclusion would have contained—by examining the positions he takes in other works, even as they address quite different questions and concerns. I argue that this confrontation with Joachimism gave de Lubac the opportunity not to develop new theological opinions, but rather to re-present the opinions he had developed throughout his career with new depth and urgency.

In the later chapters of the dissertation (ch.3 and 4), I examine the contours of de Lubac’s response in more detail, by comparing de Lubac’s positions on important doctrinal topics with those held by Joachim and his modern followers, drawn both from La postérité and from a variety of works composed over a period of approximately fifty years. In the remainder of the present chapter, however, I intend only to justify this approach in principle. I argue that de Lubac’s theological method ensures that his thought was always already structured to constitute a compelling alternative to Joachimism. De Lubac’s theology was shaped, for instance, by his confrontations with history, immanentism, and atheism. It is then because of Joachimism’s associations with the theology of history, immanentism, and atheism, that de Lubac’s thought was ready-made to refute Joachimism before he ever addressed it by name. In what follows I argue that there is present in de Lubac’s works a theology of history which safeguards against the errors of Joachimism, as well as an understanding of doctrine that comprehends human nature more adequately than the atheistic hermeneutic. This is to say that de Lubac’s theology is intrinsically both a theology of history and an apologetics.
1.3.1 De Lubac’s Theology as Theology of History

The most important development for understanding De Lubac’s achievements is the paradigm shift in theology begun at Saulchoir and Fourvière in the 1930s and 1940s. For its adherents (the misnamed “nouveaux théologiens”), the guiding principle, and the term now indelibly associated with them, was ressourcement. Ressourcement signifies a refusal to abandon the modes of inquiry once prominent in the Church’s thinking. It calls for a return to sources, a renewed contact with the whole Christian tradition in its scriptural, liturgical, and especially, its historical dimensions. Indeed, historicity was the greatest catalyst for this change in method, and in this respect the “new theology” was hardly revolutionary. Neo-Scholasticism itself involved a return to historical sources, as seen in Joseph Kleutgen’s Die Theologie der Vorzeit (1853-60) and Die Philosophie der Vorzeit (1860-63). Yet in the eyes of Thomists like Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange and Marie-Michel Labourdette, the ressourcement proposed by the “new theologians” too closely resembled Modernist historicism. In truth these thinkers (including de Lubac, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, Henri Boulliard, and Jean Daniélou) desired merely to expand their appeal to traditions beyond those of St. Thomas and his commentators. They even saw in twentieth-century Thomism an eclipse of history, and turned to the historical reasoning found in the Scriptures and the Church Fathers as the necessary remedy.


Maurice Blondel’s *History and Dogma* (1904) helped shape this approach among the Jesuits like de Lubac (“jésuites blondelisants”) studying at Ore Place between 1906 and 1926. Against the Neo-Scholastics, Blondel argues that God’s Revelation does not consist in a set of propositional truths, but rather in a living encounter that has taken place—and continues to take place—in history. Hence the content of Revelation ultimately exceeds rational formulas, and requires instead the knowledge of a living tradition: “in order to understand dogma fully one must bear within one the fullness of the Tradition which has brought it to light.” However, Blondel opposes his theory as much to the historicism of thinkers like George Tyrrell, Alfred Loisy, and Friedrich von Hügel as he does to the extrinsicism of the Neo-scholastics. Reducing dogma to the relativity of historical events is just as problematic, he reasons, as disconnecting it from history altogether.

Soon Pierre Rousselot, S.J. joined his voice to Blondel’s and developed his insights in works like the “Petite théorie du développement du dogme” (1909)—the preface of which de Lubac authored. According to Rousselot, Christ himself is what Revelation communicates, not external truths about him. And because Christ communicates himself personally through the medium of history, theology’s turn to history means greater insight into what God has revealed. Thanks to Rousselot’s influence, Blondel’s alternative to both Neo-Scholasticism and Modernism helped determine the course of reflection at the Jesuit theologate in Lyons.

Among the Dominicans, the turn to history was deemed necessary “because God has revealed himself in the events and words of human history.”

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142 Voderholzer, “Dogma and History,” 656.
Mettepeningen, the one who took the first steps toward a new method was Yves Congar, O.P. In the mid-1930s, Congar, like de Lubac, criticized theology’s isolation from society and culture. The remedy, he argued, was a more historical, pastoral, and incarnational method of reflection.\textsuperscript{144} In order to achieve this remedy, Congar produced a number of historical studies and popularized the work of Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838), the Tübingen theologian who pioneered the study of the Fathers and the integration of history with theology.\textsuperscript{145}

Similarly, in his \textit{Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir} (1937), Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., argues that the object of theology is not simply Revelation, but Revelation as it is expressed through the ages of the Church’s pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{146} This object must therefore be approached in its various historical instantiations; instantiations which then serve as a constant source of renewal in the present.\textsuperscript{147} Access to the data of Revelation entails in this way a kind of discernment: of how these data are shaped by their history and in turn shape the histories of other ideas.\textsuperscript{148} As rector of Saulchoir, Chenu made the strongest case for theology’s integration with historical study in the Dominican order—one that proved formative long after he was censored by Pope Pius XII.


\textsuperscript{144} Mettepeningen, \textit{Nouvelle Théologie}, 47. Congar, like de Lubac, rejected the moniker, “new theologian,” describing it as a “monster” existing only in the imaginations of those seeking to criticize it.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{146} Marie-Dominique Chenu, \textit{Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir} (Etiolles: Le Saulchoir, 1937).


\textsuperscript{148} De Lubac, \textit{Corpus Mysticum}, xxv: “As for me, my gaze will always end up fixed on the history of human thinking itself, and even more on that of Christian theology.”
Yet as Joseph Flipper notes, even among the Jesuits and Dominicans who recognized the importance of history, disagreements arose over what its implications for theology would be. A debate on the “theology of history” began with the publication of Henri-Marie Féret, O.P.’s *L’Apocalypse de saint Jean: Vision chrétienne de l’histoire* (1943), which further determined the questions facing the advocates of *ressourcement*. Like many of the Church Fathers, Féret argued that the Book of Revelation is the key to a theological reading of history. More importantly, Féret raised the issue of the text’s prophetic meaning: he interpreted the symbols of Revelation as containing insight about future historical events. He even saw them as prefiguring a state of progress for the Church, a condition in which the world would come to reflect Christ more fully before the end of time (an “organization of the world here below conformed to the truth of the Gospel”).

De Lubac’s teacher, Joseph Huby, S.J., soon responded to Féret in his 1944 essay, “Apocalypse et histoire.” He too acknowledged a prophetic meaning in Revelation’s symbols, but against Féret, he denied that this meaning refers directly to future events within history. Rather, the prophecies offer a veiled way of referring to what is occurring spiritually in the present. The symbols are about the reign of God intervening in the world through Christ and his Church, since all prophesies of scripture were fulfilled in principle in the events of Christ’s life. While Huby admitted that Revelation’s symbols have something to do with future realities, he denied that the prophetic sense itself operates like the literal or historical sense of scripture.

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Two other figures who proved influential for de Lubac joined the debate in the following years. In his essay, “Théologie et histoire: à propos du temps de la conversion d’Israël,” De Lubac’s friend, Gaston Fessard, S.J., criticized Féret’s understanding of the prophetic sense as a departure from the tradition of the Church Fathers, and likewise as encouraging the kind of this-worldly expectation found in Marxism and utopianism.¹⁵¹ For Fessard, in contrast, the “historical categories” used in apocalyptic texts signify a deeper or spiritual meaning of historical events, rather than additional events that have yet to take place. To restrict these categories to a particular time in the future, he argues, is to restrict their import for the Church in its present condition; whereas if they refer to a deeper “spiritual” sense, they can be applied meaningfully to the Church at all times. The definitive character of Christ’s life was crucial for Fessard, as were the ways in which we still relate to that life “contemporaneously.”

Jean Daniélou, S.J., argued much the same point in his contributions to the debate (“Christianisme et histoire” and “A travers les revues: Christianisme et progress,” 1947). His theology of history also stressed the qualitative difference between the spiritual sense and the expectation of further historical facts. Drawing on the Church Fathers, Daniélou argues that the literal events of the Old Testament function as the “sacraments” of the future events that fulfill them (cf. Sacramentum futuri, 1950). Yet the Old Testament finds this fulfillment in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. In this sense, he argues, the types and figures of the New Testament cannot prophesy a coming fulfillment in the same way as those of the Old: for Christians the end of history is already present in Christ’s Incarnation. The eschaton is

breaking into the age of the Church, but in a hidden way, “under the sacrament.” There is thus no future dispensation to succeed the Church and its hidden way of making present what Christ has achieved. It exists rather in a state of tension between the world that is passing away, and the entrance into eternity that alone remains its future.

The debate between these thinkers reveals the importance of reclaiming the theology of history for the advocates of *ressourcement*. It also reveals that they were beginning to determine positions within the theology of history that would later structure de Lubac’s confrontation with Joachimism. First, Huby, Fessard, and Daniélou express concerns about chiliastic readings of Scripture and how these could lend support to Marxism and other forms of historical immanentism. Second, they emphasize the transcendent relation to God beyond history (*invisibilia Dei*) to ensure balance between the Church’s present and its eschatological destiny. Third and finally, they acknowledge that a balanced theology of history depends upon the spiritual sense of Scripture: one conceived of as history’s deeper meaning, fulfilled in Christ rather than in a coming historical age.

In fact, as even Daniélou points out, de Lubac himself had anticipated—and even inspired—many of these themes in his 1938 work, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*. His main argument in this work is that Christianity (or rather the salvation that defines it) is inherently social. De Lubac concludes from this, however, that Christianity is equally historical in nature: “For if the salvation offered by God is in fact the salvation of the human race, since this human race lives and develops in time, any account of this salvation will naturally take a historical form…” He argues, moreover, that only for Christianity is

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153 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 141.
history truly real. Here he contrasts the Christian view of time with that of the Greek cosmos, for which events are merely pale reflections of timeless realities, caught in a cycle of generation and corruption. He contrasts it also with the view of time he ascribes to Buddhism and Hinduism, for which history is an illusion and salvation an escape from it. Uniquely for Christians (and to a lesser extent, Jews), the temporal order is given a definite terminus, a destiny beyond itself, and consequently a meaning and purpose. De Lubac concludes, paradoxically, that history is more significant for Christians because their relation to eternity requires them to pass through history: they only ascend to God through the temporal, making use of it as Christ did in his Incarnation. Only in this way is history given “an ontological density and fecundity,” and salvation connected with humanity’s past and future.

With Christianity, then, the varieties of religious ascent common in the ancient Mediterranean (those of Platonism, Gnosticism, Manicheism, etc.) are replaced with a model of our progress toward God through the ages. The periods of history, on this view, are more than quantities of time. They are the stages of humanity’s spiritual maturation, the subject of which is the Church. According to de Lubac, this explains why, for so many Christian theologians, speculating about history was at the center of their thinking about God. For their God (the God also of the Jews) revealed himself as the God of history. He acts in history and communicates through it. He enters into history, even personally uniting it to himself in Christ, giving it a “religious consecration.” In short, de Lubac argues, that especially in his Incarnation, God has made history “the necessary interpreter between God

154 Ibid., 137-140.
155 Ibid., 141.
156 Ibid., 156.
and man.” This entails that historical realities are imbued with a divine significance, and that our relation to the divine will, before the eschaton, pass through the medium of history. As de Lubac summarizes: historical things must be interpreted spiritually (historika pneumatikos); and spiritual things must be interpreted historically (pneumatika historikos). 157

In support of these claims, de Lubac appeals to the Church Fathers, in whose writings he finds a balance between our transcendent relation to God and our relation to future events. 158 Indeed, his ressourcement of Augustine of Hippo and Origen of Alexandria would provide the foundation for his alternative to Joachim’s theology of history. This is the case not only because de Lubac viewed Augustine and Origen as theologians of history in their own right, but also because they produced some of the most influential criticisms of chiliasm in the early Church.

De Lubac cites Augustine’s works as the first to satisfy his intellectual hunger following World War I. For him Augustine models a theology that takes the form of historical presentation: especially in his City of God, he writes, Augustine’s approach to doctrine is a reflection on salvation history. 159 As much in Augustine as in Irenaeus, Eusebius, and Clement of Alexandria, scripture functions as a treatise on world history, and “the historical character of the religion of Israel can be understood in its originality only through its consummation in the religion of Christ.” 160 More importantly, Augustine’s approach took exception to chiliastic readings of this history. Bernard McGinn notes that chiliasm was a potent force in the early Church, but its influence was comparatively short-

157 Ibid., 165.

158 Ibid., 156, n. 67.

159 See de Lubac, Dieu se dit dans l’histoire, 38; Catholicism, 148-165.

160 De Lubac, Catholicism, 164-65.
lived. This was due in large part to a growing tradition that read the symbols of Revelation (including those of chapter twenty) *spiritually*, rather than literally. This exegetical approach gained traction in North Africa of the fourth and early fifth centuries, especially in the writings of Tyconius and Augustine. And while Tyconius was the first to compose a comprehensive spiritualizing commentary on the Book of Revelation, it was Augustine’s theology of history that effectively silenced chiliastic interpretations.161

According to Augustine, the exegetical error par excellence was the attempt to predict the arrival of the Kingdom at a given time in the future.162 He consistently rejects any effort to correlate the events of external history with what remains an inner history of love manifest to God.163 The reason he discourages such speculation is because of his conviction that Christ has fulfilled all prophecies according to the letter of Scripture. Within his historical schema, based on the days of creation, the coming of Christ marks the beginning of the sixth age and the last decisive event: Christ occupies the very center of history, the revelation of its true significance, and the realization of all that was promised in the time of the Old Testament.164 Augustine was convinced that the age of the Church would be the last before history’s resolution, and consequently the millennial kingdom prophesied in Revelation 20 should be interpreted spiritually as Christ’s reign in his Church—under the sacraments, enlivened by his Spirit. The remainder of history, then, is characterized by an irresolvable tension, even corruption, rather than by progress toward a new historical age.165

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162 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 162, n.81
De Lubac wrote even more extensively on Origen, beginning serious studies of his thought in the 1930s. He published sketches of these studies in the *Sources chrétiennes*, gave lectures on Origen’s homilies, and finally produced his monumental *History and Spirit* (1950), which became a standard reference work on Origen’s exegesis. De Lubac sees Origen, like Augustine, as a theologian of history: his whole work amounts to “a theological meditation on sacred history.”\(^{166}\) More specifically, de Lubac argues that Origen provides the antidote to the errors of Joachimism long before they are even made.\(^ {167}\) He does this by addressing the same symbols and images that are central to Joachim’s theology, but interprets them in a way that avoids the kind of imbalance de Lubac associates with chiliasm. For instance, Origen affirms (like Joachim) the existence of a more perfect spiritual understanding of the Gospel (the “Eternal Gospel” found in Revelation 14) which in a way succeeds its literal sense. However he resists identifying this spiritual understanding with a gift of the Spirit in a coming historical age. On the contrary, Origen identifies the vision of God in eternity as the only understanding to which the literal sense of the Gospel could point. According to de Lubac, then, Origen upholds the belief that the literal events of Christ’s life fulfill the promises made to Israel; and to the extent that these events point beyond themselves, they signify the fullness of eternal life, not other events within time.

Immediately following the Second Vatican Council, de Lubac revisits the question of history in his commentary on the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, “La Révélation divine: Commentaire du préambule et du chapitre I de la Constitution «Dei

\(^{165}\) De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 162.


Verbum» du Concile Vatican II” (1968; abridged: Dieu se dit dans l'histoire: la Révélation divine, 1974). Here he argues that the Council helped restore the kind of reflection exemplified in Augustine and Origen: a “more living contact with the mystery of Christ and salvation history,” freeing the Church to contemplate “revelation actually occurring in history.”

Revelation, he notes, always occurs in and by means of history—in the events, gestures, and words which culminate in the Incarnation. Our knowledge of God himself (theologia) always requires our orientation to God’s historical form (oikonomia). In this way, history functions as a kind of medium structuring our experience of the divine. Yet de Lubac is also careful to stress that Christianity never warrants speculation about history for its own sake. The temporal order only acquires its ultimate meaning in what transcends and fulfills it; or rather, in its ability to make present what lies beyond it. In this sense, de Lubac’s understanding of history is essentially sacramental. It is an indispensable, created reality which mediates our personal encounter with God, mirroring what for de Lubac is the true and greatest Sacrament: Jesus Christ.

From these points, it is clear that the theology of history is at the center of de Lubac’s thought, and as Susan Wood suggests, may qualify as the unifying principle of his entire corpus. It is even possible to say that all true theology for de Lubac is, of its very nature, theology of history. If God has “consecrated” history and made it the “necessary interpreter” between himself and humanity, then Revelation “endows everything with a


169 De Lubac, Dieu se dit dans l'histoire, 42-44.

170 De Lubac, The Splendor of the Church, 202-203.

The very object of theology includes history, and its method requires reflection upon history. This entails that all the data of theology (all “spiritual things”)—even those that seem ahistorical—must be thought “in a historical manner.” \cite{173} De Lubac concludes that the theology of history should not be considered a marginal enterprise in the contemporary Church: rather, “every theologian must be, more or less, a theologian of history.” \cite{174}

What this discussion of method reveals is an important point about de Lubac’s confrontation with Joachimism. It demonstrates that de Lubac’s theology differs radically from Joachimism, but is similar enough in kind to make a confrontation between them intelligible. If de Lubac failed to compose his doctrinal alternative in \textit{La postérité}, yet identifies his own theology as a theology of history, then it’s possible to locate his alternative vision in the positions he develops elsewhere. Even when he is writing on topics occasioned by very different circumstances, we have grounds for re-presenting his claims (about the Trinity, Scripture, the Church, the Eschaton, etc.) as the components of a theology of history opposed to Joachim’s posterity. Not only does de Lubac suggest this when he gestures toward an outline of his alternative in earlier works; but as I’ve shown, de Lubac was predisposed from his earliest writings toward positions that safeguard against Joachimite errors.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{172} De Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 164.
\item \textbf{173} Ibid., 165.
\end{itemize}
1.3.2 De Lubac’s Augustinian Apologetics

Although de Lubac’s writings often defy simple classification, I am inclined to hold, with Rudolph Voderholzer, that “if one nevertheless insists on assigning de Lubac to a particular theological department, then we will have to call him a fundamental theologian.”¹⁷⁵ For as Voderholzer notes, before de Lubac composed his greatest historical studies, he served as professor of fundamental theology on the Faculté de théologie catholique in Lyons. To privilege de Lubac’s role as a fundamental theologian in this way is to highlight his expansive apologetic sensibility, which he himself describes, in a letter to the Vicar General of his order, as a central motif of his work: “The sole passion of my life is the defense of our faith.”¹⁷⁶ David L. Schindler even identifies this as the élan underlying his theology:

De Lubac’s work is “apologetic” in the deepest and truest sense: within the context of a radical openness to all that is human, his theology shows how the fullness of Catholic dogma reaches to the heart of human reason, or again how the supernatural reaches to the heart of nature. Catholicism, in other words, in its “integral” and not reduced version, opens to and comprehends all that is human…¹⁷⁷

This means that for the theologian there will always be a task oriented ad extra: that of diagnosing the currents of unbelief in society and presenting the faith as a more compelling worldview. And because de Lubac identifies the strategy of modern atheism as a comprehensive hermeneutic (an “atheistic hermeneutic” of Christianity), he argues that a theology equipped to address it must be equally comprehensive. It must include, in other words, not only the content of revealed truths, but also a re-interpretation of atheism from

¹⁷⁵ Voderholzer, Meet Henry de Lubac, 109.
¹⁷⁶ De Lubac, At the Service of the Church, 324.
¹⁷⁷ David L. Schindler’s “Introduction” to The Mystery of the Supernatural, xv.
the perspective of those truths. So it is that in *Athéisme et sens*, and elaborating upon the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* (§19-21), de Lubac proposes what he calls the “Christian hermeneutic” of atheism.178

What then does de Lubac mean by a “Christian hermeneutic” of atheism? Just as atheist humanism claims to more adequately explain the meaning of Christian mysteries, de Lubac argues that Christianity in turn must present itself as a more penetrating interpretation of the realities over which atheism claims dominion. It does not refute its opponents’ claims with an array of syllogisms, but instead treats Revelation as a “light” that discloses the meaning of created realities in their relation to God. To view Revelation as such a “light” is to treat it as a superior interpretive principle; one that more fully comprehends human nature and its destiny. With this hermeneutic, then, the theologian proceeds to identify the antinomies that arise within human existence and to demonstrate how these antinomies can only find resolution in the mysteries of Christian Revelation. It thereby offers an account of humanity no longer imprisoned or alienated by God, but one in which God “grounds, transfigures, and eternalizes the being of man and his values.”179

This notion that Christian mysteries cast a new ‘light’ on human nature is present in de Lubac’s earliest essay, ‘Apologetics and Theology’, which he delivered as his inaugural lecture at Lyons in 1929. Here we find de Lubac’s proposal for revising the discipline of fundamental theology, correcting the Neo-Scholastic manuals which treat doctrine as ‘a block of revealed truth with no relationship whatsoever to natural man.’180 This model—“a

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179 Ibid., 46.

180 De Lubac, “Apologetics and Theology,” 93.
worthless apologetics” — refrained from the content of Revelation in the formulation of its arguments, relying rather on miracles and claims of prophetic fulfillment as signs of its credibility (as if “by the arbitrary nature of a ‘divine decree’”). For de Lubac, in contrast, we must recall that doctrines are not merely concerned with God in himself, but also with the whole of created reality in its relation to God. Theology is then an understanding (of all things) through faith and not merely an understanding of faith. On these terms, what counts as the strongest evidence for Catholicism are not extrinsic signs like miracles and prophecies, but the “supernatural brilliance” of the doctrines themselves, that is, their ability to illuminate the human condition and resolve its disparate elements.

Here we see one of de Lubac’s earliest calls for the reunification of nature and the supernatural, as well as his earliest endorsement of the Church Fathers as the means to achieve it. Yet it is clear in this context that de Lubac is trying to integrate nature with the supernatural not for the sake of a more balanced dogmatics, but rather for the sake of good apologetics. His ressourcement of the Fathers is therefore part of his attempt to recover an apologetics uninhibited by the strictures of Neo-Scholasticism: “not, indeed, a new apologetic, but a renewal of the most traditional form of apologetics.” What he seeks is a discourse based on faith’s integration with reason, according to which revealed truths can penetrate, comprehend, and transform all that is human. And although de Lubac sees the principle of this unity in a broad patristic consensus on the human spirit (imago Dei), he

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181 Ibid., 95.
182 Ibid., 93.
183 Ibid., 101.
184 De Lubac, Catholicism, 352.
believes its most systematic form—the *desiderium naturale*—was developed by Augustine and refined by his Medieval followers (esp. Thomas Aquinas). Hence, he identifies Augustine as the primary source and “admirable model” for this kind of apologetics (an “Augustinian apologetics”), grounded in the claim that “our hearts are restless until they find rest in thee.”

186 It’s primarily this restless heart, he argues, that allows Augustine to relate divine mysteries directly to human aspirations.

According to William Portier, this “Augustinian apologetic of the restless heart” had been at the center of French religious sensibility in one form or another since the seventeenth century. It was especially evident in the revival of Augustinian readings of St. Thomas and the *desiderium naturale* to which de Lubac contributed. In the 1920s, de Lubac’s teacher, Joseph Huby, encouraged him to research the natural desire in the writings of St. Thomas and his commentators, as a potential solution to the problem of extrinsicism. And as Chad Pecknold and Jacob Wood argue, the fruit of de Lubac’s research was in part a revival of the position developed by Giles of Rome (1246-1318) and his Aegidian school, the authoritative reading of St. Thomas’s teaching within the Augustinian order. 187 Giles attempted to show that the desire of created intellects can only be satisfied by the immediate vision of God—something they must receive as a free gift. As de Lubac himself notes, contemporary advocates of the Aegidian reading, like Gioacchino Sestili (1862-1939) and his fellow Jesuit, Guy de Broglie (1889-1983) had set the terms of his own interpretation years later. 188 De Lubac’s version of Thomism was, in short, part of a distinctively Augustinian

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188 De Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 188; *At the Service of the Church*, 35.
version of Thomism taking hold in French Catholicism, as a viable alternative to the Neo-
Scholastic consensus.

In addition, de Lubac’s two greatest philosophical influences were also a central part
of this Augustinian revival and the renewed interest in the natural desire. As is well known,
de Lubac relies heavily upon the thought of Maurice Blondel, having corresponded with him
and having studied his *Action* (1893) and *Letter on Apologetics* (1896) during his time as a Jesuit
scholastic. Blondel’s principal contribution was to demonstrate the dependence of human
nature and philosophy on revealed religion. He provides a precedent for de Lubac by
analyzing the will’s desire to transcend every natural limitation as it strives for an object
capable of fulfilling it. For Blondel, the human spirit (‘action’) is in this sense more properly
‘transnatural’ than it is natural: we can always discern a ‘trace’ or ‘echo’ of the supernatural
within nature to explain its need for resolution in a higher end (simultaneously necessary yet
impossible for it). Blondel’s philosophy thus provides some of the theoretical justification
for de Lubac’s account of the supernatural. He also came to agree with de Lubac and Huby
in the 1930s, both of whom identified Augustine’s ‘restless heart’ as the model for his
science of action.

As with the question of history, many of Blondel’s insights were taken up and
developed within Thomism by Pierre Rousselot, whom de Lubac credits with defining the
intellectual trajectory of the Jesuits at Lyons. De Lubac names Rousselot as his chief
influence and even claimed that all of his own efforts were directed toward having

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189 De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 183.

190 Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 149.

Rousselot’s insights accepted within Catholic theology. Like de Lubac, Rousselot sought to reform contemporary versions of Thomism which, in practice, treat the human intellect as a “closed and perfect system.” His thesis was to identify the desire for the beatific vision with the very nature of the intellect. Rousselot thus evaluates every intellectual operation in light of its final, supernatural end. The human mind is a capacity for God (capax Dei), but dynamically conceived: a movement that exceeds oppositions as it strives for ever higher levels of intelligibility. De Lubac’s writings on the supernatural served mainly as the historical support for this position, arguing that this kind of dynamism is not only an authentic interpretation of St. Thomas’s teaching, but an authentic interpretation of the Patristic understanding of the human spirit.

De Lubac applies this Augustinian perspective in his “On Christian Philosophy” (1936), where he presents it as a response to the ‘separated philosophy’ of scholars like Emile Bréhier and Léon Brunschvicg. At issue in the ‘Christian philosophy’ debates (1931-1935) was the possibility of a reason ordered to the Christian faith, and alternatively, of a reason that rationalizes Christian mysteries out of existence. In his contribution, de Lubac argues that reason must be considered aspirationally or “naturally” Christian, since our desire for the supernatural ensures that our antinomies—and thus philosophy itself—can only find resolution in what God reveals of himself. It follows that faith is more than a power to believe truths of a supernatural order. It is simultaneously “a new power of interpreting the visible world and natural being,” what Rousselot calls a “renaissance of reason.” Revealed mysteries are then shown to expand the human spirit by illuminating its “unperceived

193 Ibid., 737.
depths,” while synthesizing all natural knowledge in the light of faith.\textsuperscript{195} De Lubac’s position is, as Hans Urs von Balthasar notes, that of a “suspended middle,” for which philosophy never stands apart from its ultimate transcendence into theology.\textsuperscript{196}

What both Blondel and Rousselot identify as the fruit of Augustinianism—a vision of the supernatural “simultaneously necessary and impossible for” humanity—summarizes what de Lubac names the structure of paradox.\textsuperscript{197} However here de Lubac is not use the term to refer to a feature of Christian doctrine, namely its balancing of seemingly opposed truths. He is using the term to refer to the “paradox of man”: the seemingly irreconcilable qualities we possess as a result of God ordaining us to an end beyond nature. Because the \textit{desiderium naturale} is the most distinctive feature of human nature, there can be no comprehensive “definition” of humanity accessible to reason when left to its own devices. In the face of our God-given orientation to a supernatural state, all merely natural categorizations are relativized, and at best form an incomplete glimpse into the truth of the human spirit. Our identity (what God has destined us to be) is exemplified in a consummation beyond what our natural powers can attain, and consequently we will always appear as beings of mystery before the gaze of reason.

The human paradox, in other words, names our structural resistance to any totalizing synthesis of reason here below. Reason will always run up against aporias that it cannot master, precisely because their synthesis is of a supernatural character.\textsuperscript{198} The recurrence of

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 498-499.
\textsuperscript{196} Balthasar, \textit{The Theology of Henri de Lubac}, 15.
\textsuperscript{197} De Lubac, \textit{The Mystery of the Supernatural}, 17: “Augustine’s work,” he claims, “offers us one of the most profound expressions of that ‘fundamental paradox which is man’s relationship to God.’”
antinomies witnesses to how our self-transcendence outstrips the sufficiency of any natural explanations, like the birth pangs of its higher calling. And for de Lubac it is this poverty of nature and reason in light of God’s providential ordering that helps explain how the Christian faith “comes to reason’s rescue”: how, that is, Revealed mysteries qualify as “answers” to the deepest questions of our nature in ways that immanentist principles cannot.  

Catholicism, he argues, presents in its doctrines the supernatural principles that resolve nature’s aporias. Yet insofar as this resolution remains beyond the powers of nature, it will always remain mysterious to the eyes of reason. This is how de Lubac attempts to avoid the charge of Modernism in his apologetics, upholding the mystery of revealed dogma (“all the mystery survives”) while yet finding in it the answers to the most fundamental questions of the human condition. The light that Christian doctrine sheds upon human nature remains a light of faith, a disposition holding the two terms of a paradox in tension. It acknowledges that the solutions of religion, in order to prove compelling, will always require an act of faith:

The Trinity, the Incarnation and grace project floods of light everywhere, but like the luminous cloud that guided the Hebrews in the desert, these mysteries remain in obscurity for our feeble eyes. It is out of this darkness…that faith lights the darkness of the soul—of the soul and of all things.

How then does de Lubac’s understanding of apologetics shape his confrontation with Joachism? If the above points summarize what he means by a “Christian hermeneutic of atheism,” and if he sees in modern Joachism an “atheist hermeneutic of

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198 De Lubac, Paradoxes of Faith, 9: “Paradox is the reverse of what, properly speaking, would be synthesis…It is the provisional expression of a view which remains incomplete, but whose orientation is ever toward fullness.”

199 De Lubac, “Apologetics and Theology,” 103. Cf. “On Christian Philosophy,” 487: “…to know that philosophy, unable to give the total response to the problem of man and yet unable to disinterest itself in this response, cannot finds its place of completion and rest—a rest always active—except in revelation. This is to say that philosophy, by its own movement and without exterior prompting, tends toward revelation.”

Christianity,” then it follows that de Lubac’s conception of Christian doctrine was always already opposed to the conception associated with Joachim’s spiritual posterity. For the latter, the paradox of Christian doctrine is a surd, and the paradox of human nature a state of imperfection or alienation; the overcoming of which means reducing the ostensibly supernatural to a plane of immanence, reason, and synthesis. For the former, however, all attempts to resolve the paradox within the bounds of immanence are revealed to be at odds with the most fundamental human aspiration. Immanentism and atheism are therefore shown to betray what is essential to human nature precisely in their attempts to fulfill it at the expense of the supernatural. An important part of de Lubac’s confrontation, then, is his attempt to expose the bankruptcy of such reductions and the ways in which they alienate the human being from its true vocation and dignity. Equally important is his presenting revealed mysteries as the key to resolving the apparent contradictions of our nature. De Lubac’s confrontation with Joachimism is, in this sense, a confrontation between two competing hermeneutics.

It follows, moreover, that if de Lubac’s model of apologetics includes presenting doctrines not only as truths about God in himself, but as truths about all things in relation to God, then every position de Lubac takes on Christian doctrines includes, in principal, an “apologetic form.” We are justified, in other words, in finding in all of his theological arguments an apologetic claim: a claim that the divine mysteries represented in them constitute a more coherent and compelling account of the human being and the world than those proposed by modern Joachimites. In order to demonstrate how de Lubac’s “doctrinal conclusion” could have constituted a refutation not merely of Joachim himself, but also of his modern “heirs,” it is necessary to demonstrate how his interpretation of various doctrines sheds light on the human condition.
1.4 Conclusion

In the opening pages of *La postérité*, de Lubac cites the words of Jürgen Moltmann, in a letter to Karl Barth, as evidence of his work’s topicality: “Joachim is more alive today than Augustine.” In this chapter, I’ve attempted to clarify not only de Lubac’s judgment about this topicality, but also the structure of his confrontation with Joachimism. First, addressing the occasion of *La postérité*, I’ve argued that de Lubac saw features of Joachimism in the crisis he identifies following the Second Vatican Council; features including pneumaticism, a privileging of the “spirit” over the “letter,” the call for a new Church, and a utopian reading of Church history. Its most alarming feature, however, reveals its connection with a crisis before the council: its immanentism or secularism. For de Lubac, Joachimism was a matter of pressing concern, then, because it signifies a new form of the same challenge he dealt with throughout his career: the confused relation between nature and the supernatural. Here, however, the threat was a matter of conflating these principles rather than separating them, reducing the Church and its creed to the immanence of the world.

These points about the occasion of de Lubac’s work inform the first point about the structure of his confrontation; namely, his diagnosis of Joachimism, or what he takes Joachimism to be. Here I’ve argued that because de Lubac understands Joachimism as a form of historical immanentism, he interprets it primarily as an imbalanced theology of history. He views it, in other words, as an apocalyptic version of Christian thought whose deviations from the Church’s tradition make later philosophies of immanence intelligible. Secondly, then, when de Lubac deals with Joachimism, he is dealing principally with a history of effects (Joachim’s “spiritual posterity”)—a history that conforms to, and even helps to shape, what de Lubac calls an “atheistic hermeneutic of Christianity.” The effect that
Joachimism comes to exercise on Christian doctrines, in other words, is equivalent to the effect that nineteenth and twentieth-century atheists exercise on it.

Lastly, the final point I’ve sought to clarify about the structure of de Lubac’s confrontation has to do with his own approach to theology. I’ve argued here that the changes in theological method de Lubac supports make his understanding of Christian doctrine ideally suited to respond to the claims of Joachim’s posterity. First, I’ve argued that contained within de Lubac’s *ressourcement* is the claim that all theology is, in principle, a theology of history. This ensures that the positions he takes on any Church doctrine—even when its relation to history is not explicit—are components of a theology of history. Secondly, I’ve argued that contained within de Lubac’s *ressourcement* is the claim that all theology is equally, and in principle, apologetic. This ensures likewise that de Lubac’s doctrinal positions can always be presented as parts of a more compelling and coherent worldview than the doctrinal positions of his atheist interlocutors. In both senses then, de Lubac’s entire theology is in a position to offer an alternative to what he takes Joachimism to be (an unbalanced theology of history and an atheistic hermeneutic of Christianity). It is in a position to offer an alternative theology of history, and an alternative account of immanent realities.

The goal of this dissertation is to complete the task de Lubac set for himself, but left unfinished, in the “doctrinal conclusion” to *La postérité*. My thesis is that the confrontation with Joachimism provided de Lubac with the occasion to re-present the major themes of his theology as always-already constituting a compelling refutation of Joachimism. This suggests that to fully understand de Lubac’s writings on history, as well as his writings on atheist humanism, it is necessary to read his arguments in the context of his writings on Joachimism. Indeed, it is arguable, given his rhetoric late in life, that de Lubac came to
recognize in Joachimism the greatest adversary to which his theology was opposed from its inception.

In the remaining chapters, I will support my thesis by expanding on the points I’ve made above about the structure of de Lubac’s confrontation. In Chapter Two, I examine de Lubac’s diagnosis of Joachimism in more detail. Here I present an outline of Joachim’s theology of history, explain the problematic tendencies de Lubac locates in Joachim’s thought, and examine how these tendencies inform the claims of Joachim’s heirs. I focus especially on de Lubac’s criteria for including a range of different thinkers among Joachim’s posterity—even and especially when their views depart from those Joachim himself held. In conversation with scholars who are critical of de Lubac’s reading (Marjorie Reeves and Bernard McGinn), I propose a pattern of views regarding four doctrines (the Trinity, spiritual exegesis, the Church, and the eschaton) as the best measure for evaluating de Lubac’s judgments about Joachimism. I propose this as a systematic representation of what is often unsystematic and implicit in La postérité. I also argue that it is, at times, more informative than de Lubac’s own rhetoric for determining how Joachim serves an inspiration for later atheistic thinkers.

In Chapters Three and Four, I expand upon the suggestions I’ve made about re-presenting de Lubac’s doctrinal positions as an alternative theology of history to, and a more coherent worldview than, the doctrinal positions of Joachim’s posterity. Here I examine the positions he develops in a variety of different works throughout his career on the topics I’ve noted as most important for Joachimism: the Trinity and spiritual exegesis (Chapter Three), as well as the Church and eschaton (Chapter Four). For each topic, I begin with a more detailed description of Joachim’s arguments before explaining how and why de Lubac attempts to avoid the errors he ascribes to Joachim in his own theology. I then examine
briefly how Joachim’s positions are transformed by prominent modern thinkers among his posterity, before demonstrating how de Lubac’s positions contain a refutation of their immanentism.

In the final chapter (Chapter Five), I turn to the topic of de Lubac’s abridged conclusion to La postérité: what he calls “Contemporary Neo-Joachimisms.” Here he discusses the features of Joachimism he discerns in a variety of theologians writing between the 1960s and 1980s. More specifically, I summarize his criticisms of two kinds of Neo-Joachimite theology: that of Jürgen Moltmann and that of the Latin American Liberation Theologians (principally in the writings of José Comblin). De Lubac argues that each of these theologies too closely approximates Joachim’s doctrinal imbalances, and as a consequence the apologetic force of their claims—their status as compelling alternatives to atheist views—is undermined. Indeed, in both cases, de Lubac sees their theologies as overdetermined by modern thinkers in Joachim’s lineage. I also devote space to the writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar; a figure whose critique of Joachimism mirrors de Lubac’s, and who functions for him as a model of non-Joachimite theology. Finally, I conclude with my own critical reflections, stressing the ways in which de Lubac’s theology of history aligns with features (even the unrealized promise) of Joachim’s thought. Here I give special attention to de Lubac’s own suggestions for a rapprochement, especially his use of the category “semi-Joachimism” to exonerate thinkers in Joachim’s line who avoid his characteristic errors.
CHAPTER 2:

AGES OF THE SPIRIT: DE LUBAC ON THE CURRENTS OF JOACHIMISM

In Chapter One, I argued that de Lubac’s understanding of Joachimism depends upon a genealogy or history of effects. As Emmanuel Falque notes, de Lubac evaluates Joachim in light of the after-life of his ideas: it is a matter of tracking the “metamorphoses” that his theology undergoes in succeeding generations.201 I summarized these metamorphoses in a story that begins with apocalyptic views and ends with historical immanentism. Hence de Lubac’s frequent descriptions of Joachimism as an “intermediary” on the road to secularization, and a “mystical substitute” for rationalization.202 I concluded from these points that when de Lubac invokes Joachimism, he is referring directly to the appropriations of Joachim’s thought (his spiritual posterity), and only indirectly to Joachim himself.

In the present chapter, I examine in greater detail what this spiritual posterity involves and how de Lubac evaluates it. This task poses a number of challenges, especially because de Lubac offers so little in the way of reflection on his method. Nonetheless, his


202 De Lubac, La postérité I, 14-15.
extensive use of metaphors in *La postérité* offers some guidance. He studies the “traces”\(^{203}\) that Joachim’s ideas leave behind; the “branches”\(^{204}\) and “forests”\(^{205}\) that grow out of them; and the “streams” and “currents”\(^{206}\) that flow from them. His preferred metaphor, as his title suggests, is that of a “posterity.” It is a story of parents and children, and in most cases illegitimate children.\(^{207}\) What de Lubac finds in Joachim is a pattern that unites the theologians and philosophers, visionaries and revolutionaries he considers in a common heritage—in spite of their radical differences from one another and from the abbot whose name they invoke. Ultimately de Lubac intends to persuade his readers that the “currents” of Joachim’s posterity flow “not only within the Church or at its margins,” but also “into the secularized thought of modern times.”\(^{208}\)

In the remainder of this chapter, I first present an overview of Joachim’s theology of history. In the process I consolidate what de Lubac sees as Joachim’s innovations regarding four doctrines: the Trinity, spiritual exegesis, the Church, and the eschaton. For each I explain how de Lubac identifies aspects of Joachim’s position that stand in tension with others, and, indeed, with the theological tradition as a whole. I then examine de Lubac’s narrative concerning the spiritual posterity, specifically how the tendencies in Joachim’s own writings could determine further deviations from the theological tradition. Finally, I reflect

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\(^{203}\) De Lubac, *La postérité II*, 338.

\(^{204}\) De Lubac, *La postérité I*, 14.

\(^{205}\) Ibid., 8.


\(^{207}\) De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 156.

critically on de Lubac’s use of the category “spiritual posterity,” addressing the criticisms offered by two prominent scholars of Joachimism.

2.1 Joachim’s Theology in Outline

According to Bernard McGinn, Joachim of Fiore is not only the most important apocalyptic thinker of the Middle Ages, but is also one of the most important theorists of history in the Western tradition. Born in Calabria, part of the Norman kingdom of Sicily, in 1135, Joachim developed his thought in a context of social upheaval. During his lifetime, southern Italy was embroiled in war between the Norman barons and the Holy Roman empire; conflicts raged between the papacy of Alexander III and the secular rule of Frederick I; and the military threat of the Saracens in the Mediterranean (the “Beast from the Sea”) all gave the impression that events in Europe would soon reach a prophetic climax. The drama of history was ripe for a resurgence of apocalyptic interpretation.

In this context, Joachim’s prophecies appeared as the fruit of a truly original inspiration. He was more preoccupied with studying scripture in the remote monastery of San Giovanni than he was with attending to the theological opinions of his day. As a result, many of his most important claims lack any precedent in the writings of his immediate predecessors or contemporaries. It is rather from his personal spiritual experience that much of his insight derives. Joachim believed his teaching was the result of a direct illumination from God about the course of his providence. He conceived of his work, in short, as the

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product of a “spiritual understanding” (intellectus spiritualis) that unveils the hidden meaning of the scriptures.\footnote{De Lubac, La postérité I, 47-48. According to de Lubac, Joachim was confident that he was one of the “spiritual men” who would signal the status of the Holy Spirit before its fruition.} And it is from the perspective of this gift (a “foretaste” of the coming age) that he develops novel renditions of the following doctrines.

2.1.1 Trinitarian Theology: Spiritual History

Although Eastern approaches to the Trinity are often ascribed to him (due to his charge of “quaternity” against Peter Lombard),\footnote{McGinn, The Calabrian Abbot, 21-22.} Joachim remains fundamentally Augustinian in his views on the Trinity. Like Augustine, he is committed to the strongest possible sense of God’s unity, even when different acts are ascribed to the divine persons in salvation history. He is also a critic of Sabellianism, Arianism, and even Greek pneumatology, endorsing Augustine’s teaching on the filioque as determinative for his own thinking. In fact the only aspect of Joachim’s theology that was censured at the Fourth Lateran Council was his opinion on a single passage from Lombard’s Sentences.\footnote{Reeves, Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future, 24-26.}

The originality in Joachim’s Trinitarianism, however, relates to his claim that God’s Triunity informs the structure of history. For Joachim, to argue that history reflects the nature of the Trinity is not to claim that God depends on time or is constituted through it. Rather, it is to claim that history, like all of creation, is created in the image of the Trinity (imago trinitatis). It takes the form it does because the God whom it reflects is both one and
three. As Joachim argues in works like the *Expositio in Apocalypsim* and the *Psalterium decem chordarum*, history derives its unity across its many phases from the unity of God’s nature, as well as from the unity of the three persons acting *ad extra*. Yet history also derives its divisions from the relations between the divine persons. History, on this view, is nothing other than these divine relations unfolding in the created world. As Marjorie Reeves puts it, for Joachim “[t]he Trinity was built into the fabric of the time-process in such a way that its very inner relations were expressed therein.”

According to Joachim, the Trinitarian relations give rise to two historical patterns (or *diffinitiones*), symbolized by the letters alpha and omega respectively. In both, the divine persons operate in common, yet each phase, and the action that corresponds to it, “pertain” to only one divine person. According to the alpha *diffinitio*, history is modeled after the processions of the Son and the Holy Spirit from the Father, and so it is divided into three “states” (*status*), one designated for each of the divine persons: the period before Christ is the *status* of the Father, the period in which Joachim lives is the *status* of the Son, and the state he prophecies is the future *status* of the Holy Spirit. The omega *diffinitio* reflects the fact that Father and Son are united as one principle relative to the Spirit. It thus divides history into two “times” (*tempora*), dispensations, or covenants. However, because the Holy Spirit

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217 Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future*, 5.

218 McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot*, 162 ff.; Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future*, 6-7. It is important to note that Joachim does not conceive of these status as strictly sequential. On the contrary, he believes that the seeds of each *status* exist in the one that precedes it. The first fruits of the third *status*, for instance, begin with St. Benedict of Nursia, and Joachim expects its full fruition around the year 1260.
proceeds from both the Father and Son together, Joachim concludes that the third status will
emerge from the two covenants as their spiritual perfection.

On de Lubac’s reading, Joachim’s innovation does not consist in his preference for
this three-fold history, nor even in his association of these periods with the members of the
Trinity. He argues instead that Joachim’s two-fold or omega definitio stands in tension with
itself. Because the Spirit proceeds from the unity of Father and Son, the two-fold pattern still
involves a grammar of progress and succession—one that undermines his commitment to
the unity of the divine persons. According to de Lubac, this logic creates a tendency to shift
where the climactic events of history occur. Whereas most early Christians locate the focal
point of history in the events of Christ’s Incarnation, Joachim appears to locate it in the
future action of the Holy Spirit. He even interprets the earthly life Christ as an anticipation
of the Spirit, describing it as a type or figure (“typum gerit”) in the same sense that John the
Baptist serves as a type for Christ.\footnote{De Lubac, La postérité I, 56-57.} For de Lubac, then, one of Joachim’s patterns denies
that Christ’s Incarnation and saving work are definitive in their own right.

So although Joachim intends the work or “reign” of the Spirit as the consummation
of Christ’s mission, and not as a separate dispensation, de Lubac suggests that this strand in
Joachim’s theology “weakens the work of Christ”\footnote{De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis III, 343.} and reduces him to a symbol of the
Spirit.\footnote{De Lubac, La postérité I, 65-66.} Joachim is unique in holding that Christ’s work had yet to be transfigured in a kind
of second Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit would be given in fullness.\footnote{Ibid., 59. Cf. de Lubac, Medieval Exegesis III, 341.} This belief gives the
impression that in the future age, Christ himself will be effaced before the Spirit, and the

\footnote{De Lubac, La postérité I, 56-57.}
\footnote{De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis III, 343.}
\footnote{De Lubac, La postérité I, 65-66.}
\footnote{Ibid., 59. Cf. de Lubac, Medieval Exegesis III, 341.}
Spirit will render obsolete essential features of Christ’s work (his \textit{status}). De Lubac concludes from this that Joachim risks attenuating Christ’s value in history: “doesn’t it call into question the full sufficiency of the salvific work accomplished once and for all in Jesus Christ?”\textsuperscript{223}

In such a system, it is difficult to see the unique place accorded to the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection…it is the whole system…that seems to exclude an adequate interpretation of the properly Christic mystery.\textsuperscript{224}

In short, de Lubac fears too great a separation between Christ’s actions and the manner in which the Holy Spirit completes them. Joachim errs, then, by allowing the Spirit to be “dangerously detached from Christ.”\textsuperscript{225}

2.1.2 Exegesis: The Spiritual Understanding

The second doctrine that shapes Joachim’s theology is the spiritual exegesis of scripture. What Joachim seeks in the biblical text is the intelligibility of salvation history; and for him this intelligibility is identical with the spiritual sense of the Old and New Testaments. Just as he identifies the meaning of history with the revelation of the Trinity, he likewise identifies this meaning with humanity’s growth in “spiritual understanding” (\textit{intellectus spiritualis}): “the meaning of world history is the history of exegesis.”\textsuperscript{226} Unsurprisingly then, de Lubac accords Joachim a place in the tradition of commentators on the scriptural senses

\textsuperscript{223} De Lubac, \textit{La postérité I}, 65-66.

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 65.

\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 66.

\textsuperscript{226} McGinn, \textit{The Calabrian Abbot}, 125.
extending from Origen through the middle ages. As McGinn acknowledges, however, Joachim distinguishes himself by the sheer number and variety of senses he enumerates, proposing lists of three, four, five, seven, twelve, and even fifteen distinct senses in his writings.\textsuperscript{227}

In his most common arrangement (in works like the \textit{Liber de Concordia}), these senses are all ordered according to the general distinction between the typic understanding and the spiritual or allegorical understanding.\textsuperscript{228} The objects of the typic understanding are what Joachim calls the concords (\textit{concordiae}) of scripture, which he claims to find in the Book of Revelation. These are exact historical parallels between events of the Old and New Testaments: “letter-to-letter” correspondences, entirely distinct from the parallels evoked by the allegorical senses. He is not dealing here with vague similarities, but with meticulously aligning characters, places, wars, etc. between the histories of Israel and the Church.

Further, Joachim’s understanding of the Trinity informs his exegesis just as it informs his division of history. On his view, the spiritual understanding derives from these concords between the Old and New Testaments, in the same way that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the unity between Father and Son together. He thus identifies the first \textit{status} of history with the Old Testament, and the second \textit{status} with the New. He therefore identifies the third \textit{status} with the spiritual understanding of scripture emerging out of the \textit{concordiae} of the two Testaments. The literal harmonies between them, in other words, demand a common spiritual transformation of their meaning—an operation that pertains to the Holy Spirit and to a new phase of history.

\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 129.

\textsuperscript{228} McGinn disagrees with de Lubac and Henry Mottu on the nature of the typic sense in Joachim’s exegesis. See McGinn, \textit{The Calabrian Abbot}, 129ff.
De Lubac rightly notes that Joachim never intends the spiritual understanding to be a third testament or a new Gospel. It does not establish a new source of revelation, but only constitutes the deeper meaning of the two testaments that together encompass salvation history. Nevertheless, de Lubac argues that the notion of literal concords marks one of Joachim’s clearest departures from the tradition. For twelve centuries before Joachim, the Church held that the promises of the Old Testament were fully realized “in spirit” by the events recorded in the New Testament. The literal meaning of the Gospel, in other words, just was the spirit (pneuma) fulfilling the letter (gramma) of Israel. The New Testament was in this regard definitive, and did not require a comparable spiritual fulfillment in any future age. De Lubac’s claim, then, is that when Joachim presents the concords as “letter-to-letter” correspondences, he creates a tendency to cast the New Testament in the mode of promise, rather than fulfillment.

This departure from the tradition has the effect, for de Lubac, of rendering the Gospel a kind of “proto-Gospel” before the intellectus spiritualis of the Holy Spirit. Following Henri Mottu, de Lubac argues that the New Testament no longer appears in this exegesis as the point around which salvation history is organized. For like the Old Testament, the Gospel is now subject to a fuller meaning supplied by a future perspective, always capable of eclipsing its centrality and determining its truth in a way its literal sense cannot. Christ and the truth revealed about him are still considered new and determinative relative to the history of Israel, but the coming spiritual fullness always in principle supersedes them. De Lubac’s concern lies once again with the measure of discontinuity in the spiritual transformation that Joachim desires. He fears that the logic of Joachim’s treats the Gospel as something temporary, a kind of place-holder for the spiritual plenitude yet to arrive.229
2.1.3 Ecclesiology: The Spiritual Church

The two preceding doctrines provide Joachim’s theology of history with its general structure. The subject of that history, however, is the Church. According to Joachim, the three *status* are three conditions of the Church, linking it first with Israel (through the *concordiae*) and then with the coming age (through the spiritual understanding). He argues that each phase of salvation history is characterized by one of three dominant modes or “states” of life within the Church: the status of the Father (the Old Testament) corresponding to the laity; the status of the Son (the New Testament), corresponding to the clergy; and the status of the Spirit (*intellectus spiritualis*) corresponding to the monastic lifestyle. Each condition of life exists within the history of the Church as a whole, and the distinct periods mark the prominence of one lifestyle over the others.

For Joachim, the third *status* does not establish a new Church in the sense of a schismatic break. On the contrary, just as Joachim envisions the spiritual understanding as the fulfillment of the Old and New Testaments, Joachim likewise envisions the third *status* as a *purification or reform* of the Church’s present condition. It marks a transformation of the Church’s guiding form of life, its ethos and character, rather than a rejection of its institutional identity. Although Joachim uses the apostles Peter and John as symbols for the clerical Church and the spiritual Church respectively, he is clear that the transition from one to the other will mean changing Peter’s “unshaken” throne into a greater glory, not its downfall.230


The question, once again, is whether such change is so discontinuous with the Church’s present structure that it breaks with what the Church essentially is. As de Lubac points out, the logic of Joachim’s position stands in tension with his commitment to the indissoluble nature of the Body of Christ. The ways in which he characterizes the transition to the third status call into question whether the “spiritual Church” (ecclesia spiritualis) is still the Church of Christ. He cites as evidence a few representative passages from Joachim’s Liber figurarum\textsuperscript{232} and Tractatus super quatuor evangelia.

So now Peter is to be bound and led whither he doth not will, so as to accomplish his course as quickly as possible, so that what pertains to the age of labor [the second status] may pass away and what pertains to rest [the third status] may remain...Let those who are signified in Peter hear this!\textsuperscript{233}

Can he who sees such fruit coming after him be pained that the particular perfection in himself [of the clerical order] ceases to be when the universal [contemplative] one follows? Far be this from the successors of Peter! Far be it that he should pine away with envy over the perfection of the spiritual order that he will see is one spirit with his God!\textsuperscript{234}

Joachim does, in short, speak of a time when the Church passes from the co-existence of Peter (the ordo clericorum) with John (the ordo monarchorum), to a state in which John alone reigns. It is in this sense that Joachim employs the rather imprudent phrase, a “new Church of religious” (nova ecclesia religiosorum) for the Church of the third age.

More specifically, the essential features of the Church which he seems to undermine include the sacraments. Joachim writes of the sacraments as “figures” (figurae), as visible signs

\textsuperscript{231} De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis III}, 348.

\textsuperscript{232} Joachim of Fiore, \textit{Liber Figurarum} (ed. Tondelli, M. Reeves, B. Hirsch-Reich, Turin, 1953).

\textsuperscript{233} De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis III}, 357-358.

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 358.
of underlying mysteries. In this sense, they are equivalent to the letter or literal sense in Joachim’s spiritual exegesis. The spiritual understanding is what the letter of scripture imperfectly signifies, meaning that it no longer serves any purpose when that understanding is present in fullness. Similarly, Joachim sees the grace of the third status as the grace that the sacraments mediate. The figurae are thus a temporary dimension of the Church’s life, conformed to its imperfect condition in the second status. When the Holy Spirit comes in fullness, however, these sacraments will be replaced by more authentic, spiritual “sacraments”: baptism with water, for instance, will be succeeded by baptism in the fire of the Holy Spirit. This fullness of grace is something most theologians believed would only come with the eschaton, leading them to hold that the sacraments would endure until the end of history. Joachim, in contrast, sees it as the promise of an historical future, leading him to affirm a state of the Church’s existence without sacramental mediation.

The same tendency exists, according to de Lubac, with Joachim’s view of the clerical hierarchy. There appears to be no purpose for the clerical hierarchy in the third status. For Joachim the clergy’s function is to administer “figures,” suggesting that the clergy itself is obsolete when the sacraments are no longer needed for mediating grace. So too with the authority of the pope and bishops. De Lubac argues that, despite Joachim’s expressions of fidelity to the “Church founded by Peter,” he seems only to uphold the authority of the hierarchy to the extent that he abandons its essential features in favor of a “new religion,” “entirely free and spiritual.”

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236 Ibid, 55-56.
clergy, even when he claims that the pontiff and all those symbolized by Peter obtain a share in the rest of the age to come.

2.1.4 Eschatology: The Spiritual Age

The final point to consider about Joachim’s doctrinal views concerns the third *status* and its relation to the eschaton. Here de Lubac examines Joachim’s claims about our knowledge, freedom, and peace—all of which were long considered part of the Church’s eschatological expectation. The perfection of human knowledge, for instance, was believed to be realized in the beatific vision; a state beyond the darkness of faith and the partiality of signs. Christians also saw perfect freedom (from sin and for our good) and perfect peace (beyond internal and external conflict) as essential aspects of the life to come. The logic of Christian hope, then, has always derived these features from its beliefs about what the human condition will be when Christ returns and ushers us into the direct presence of God. In this Joachim agrees with the tradition that the primary objects of eschatology are the Parousia, the last judgment, and our glorification.

The problem arises when Joachim inserts into history these features that were once reserved to end of history. In this sense the third *status* represents a penultimate realization of the end within time. The fullness of knowledge, freedom, and peace now occur before Christ’s Second Coming, splitting the objects of our hope between the reign of the Spirit and the eschaton. Indeed for Joachim, this must be the case if history is to reflect the threefold character of the Trinity. The third *status* must occupy an interval in salvation history between the imminent reign of the first Antichrist and that of a second Antichrist, whose
persecutions precede the Parousia. Yet according to de Lubac, this interval alters the structure of Christian hope by introducing into it an optimism about events before the end of history.

This hope for perfection within history explains, once more, why de Lubac interprets Joachim’s vision as a revival of chiliastic views (“a new millenarianism taking form”). Joachim’s third status differs from the millenarian accounts insofar they expect Christ’s thousand-year kingdom to descend from a heavenly state. Joachim, in contrast, expects the reign of the Spirit as an organic unfolding of God’s presence within history, a prolongation of our terrestrial condition. Nonetheless, de Lubac argues that sufficient commonalities exist between them to categorize Joachim’s view as a medieval version of the “millenarian utopias,” and a striking departure from the interpretation of Revelation 20 found in Origen, Augustine, Tyconius, and their followers.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Joachim’s third status is the fullness or “plenitude” of spiritual understanding given by the Holy Spirit. This gift, as I’ve noted above, is directly tied to the meaning of biblical texts. However, it also has connotations of knowledge, wisdom, and enlightenment more generally. Joachim describes the progress through the three status as a transition from scientia, to sapientia, and finally to the plenitudo intellectus. Even the unfolding of the spiritual sense involves the growth of human understanding beyond the limits of letters and figures (which serve to conceal divine

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237 See de Lubac, Medieval Exegesis III, 352.
238 Ibid., 345.
239 La postérité I, 61.
240 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis III, 344.
241 Reeves, Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future, 14.
truth). Here Joachim cites two of his preferred New Testament passages, 1 Cor 13:9-10 (“For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away”) and John 16:13 (“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”)

The third status is thus apocalyptic in the etymological sense: it is the unveiling of all mystery. Every letter is transformed into spirit, and the “spiritual men” (viri spirituales) who usher in the final age possess the fullness of truth and the meaning of all symbols.

Freedom and peace also follow from the spiritual character of the third status. In the Liber de Concordia, Joachim describes the disposition of the first status as the servitude of slavery, the disposition of the second as the servitude of sons, and the disposition of the third as perfect liberty. Similarly contemplative peace characterizes the future age, since it exists in an interregnum state. Peace only dawns, according to Joachim, after the many persecutions that fall upon the Church have passed (the trials of the first Antichrist). As de Lubac notes, this means that Joachim interprets the signs of devastation as “birth pangs” of the Church’s entry into the tranquility of the third status (the “Sabbath Age” of rest), not of its entry into eternal life.

For de Lubac, then, Joachim’s innovations combine to form a two-fold eschatological expectation. The first centers on the traditional objects of Christian hope (the

242 Cf. Reeves, Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future, 13.

243 De Lubac, La postérité I, 65ff.

244 Ibid., 67.

245 See the passage from the Joachim’s Expositio (f. 5r-v.) translated by McGinn in Visions of the End, 134.

246 De Lubac, La postérité I, 50-52.
glorious return of Christ, the consummation of time, and the renovation of the world). Far from renouncing this hope, Joachim conserves it just as his predecessors had \((in patria post finem mundi)\). He then generates a new expectation, a new object of hope: an optimism for a more imminent, more tangible historical state. This latter expectation, de Lubac warns, risks eclipsing the first—replacing it and, in consequence, transforming what is essential to it. It is the very imbalance that Joachim effects between the \(invisibilia\) and \(futura\) in the doctrine of eschatology. And it is, moreover, what encourages later thinkers to hope for a state of perfection within history, while abandoning the expectation for what lies beyond it.

2.2 The Spiritual Posterity

As I’ve argued above, in \(La postérity\) de Lubac is not concerned with Joachim’s theology for its own sake, but only insofar as later thinkers radicalize the tendencies within it. Yet even though de Lubac discusses a range of Joachimite opinions, he does not explicitly identify the criteria he uses to trace the history of these tendencies in the centuries after Joachim’s death. In fact, his judgments about which figures earn a place among Joachim’s “spiritual posterity” and which do not often seem unsystematic and, at times, arbitrary. His claims about certain symbols and images are widely agreed to be authentically Joachimite, like those of Peter and John as models for the Church’s states, and the “eternal Gospel” as a model for spiritual exegesis. However others are widely disputed, as when de Lubac excludes thinkers from Joachim’s line (like Bonaventure and Peter John Olivi) despite the prevalence of Joachimite themes in their works.

Although de Lubac does not discuss his criteria explicitly, he does consistently discuss the four doctrines listed above (Trinity, exegesis, Church, and eschaton), both in the writings of Joachim and in those of thinkers from the twelfth through the twentieth
centuries. My contention is that Joachim’s opinions on these topics function as a standard for de Lubac’s judgments about which figures to include in, and which to exclude from, Joachim’s spiritual posterity. He defines Joachimism, in other words, not by the consistent application of Joachim’s language and symbols, nor by fidelity to Joachim’s writings, but rather by the tendencies to deviate from the tradition found in those writings. If de Lubac is correct, and certain of Joachim’s positions stand in tension with others—and indeed, with the Catholic tradition—then de Lubac includes among his posterity those who reproduce these positions and embrace these conclusions.

The benefit of this framework is that it enables de Lubac to make judgments of inclusion in varying degrees. Included are those who, first, show historical evidence of being indirectly (even if remotely) tied to religious traditions inspired by Joachim; and second, those whose reasoning leads to the same “surpassing” (of Christ, of the Gospel, of the clerical Church, and of our transcendent destiny) in their treatments of the relevant doctrines. Excluded are those theologians and philosophers whose reasoning guards against these errors, even when they are indebted to Joachim in other significant ways.

Most importantly, de Lubac is interested in those who radicalize what he claims to be Joachim’s characteristic imbalance: his prioritizing of our immanent future (futura) at the expense of our transcendent relation to God (invisibilia Dei). In the following summary of de Lubac’s narrative—of the “currents” of Joachimism flowing out across the centuries—I examine evidence of each figure’s indirect connection to the Joachimite tradition, as well as how their treatments of the four doctrines radicalize the “surpassing” that Joachim seems to enable. I focus on those figures and schools of thought whose “currents” most clearly move in the direction of immanentism; those which flow “into the secularized thought of modern
times.”\textsuperscript{247} The story de Lubac tells, then, is the story of how Joachim’s thought terminates in the philosophies of history against which de Lubac writes in works like *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* and *Athéisme et sens de l’homme*: “when what Joachim conceives as the work of the Spirit is envisaged as happening through the immanent energies of the world or as being effected by the actions of man alone.”\textsuperscript{248}

2.2.1 1\textsuperscript{st}-12\textsuperscript{th} Centuries: Apocalyptic Ancestors

While much in Joachim’s theology is the product of his own religious experience, it is equally the case that his insights are made possible by, and are even the expression of, a tradition that precedes him. For instance, as I’ve argued, Joachim’s search for the meaning of history in the Book of Revelation exhibits all the token features of Christian apocalypticism. His theological style is little more than an appropriation of the categories, the texts, and the images found in ancient apocalyptic literature—all of which offered Joachim an alternative to the new Scholastic methods he found so abhorrent.\textsuperscript{249} Apocalypticism also provided the intellectual background from which his *status* of the Holy Spirit would draw its basic connotations. Joachim’s theories would never have come about had Jewish messianism not envisioned a future kingdom in history. Nor would it exist without the Jewish and Christian prophecies that translated this hope into medieval terms, like the Sibyline Oracles, upon which Joachim commented in 1184. E. R. Daniel is then correct to say that Joachim’s theology is “a synthesis of varied currents of Medieval eschatology” imbued with his own

\textsuperscript{247} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{248} Ibid., 67.

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 22.
visionary experiences. Therefore before de Lubac undertakes his account of the spiritual posterity, he begins with a consideration of the traditions and figures whom scholars typically identify as Joachim’s precedents.

As I’ve noted, in works like *Medieval Exegesis* and *The Splendor of the Church*, de Lubac links Joachimism with chiliasm, the belief in a coming reign of Christ within history. The specific kind of chiliasm he has in mind, “the only one that could possibly count with any precision as a precedent for Joachim’s innovation” is that of Montanism. Like Joachim, Montanus links the millennial kingdom of Revelation with a “Third Dispensation,” an age of the Holy Spirit succeeding the ages of Father and Son. He and his followers also use the same scripture passages (ex. 1 Cor 13:10) to justify their prophecies, believing that the Spirit marks a break with the dispensation of Christ. Also like Joachim, Tertullian (c.155-c.225), whom de Lubac names as the greatest apologist of Montanism, claims that the Old Testament (the time of infancy) and the New Testament (the time of adolescence) give way to the Paraclete (the time of maturity): “for if Christ abrogated what Moses enjoined...why couldn’t the Paraclete also abrogate an indulgence that Paul granted?” Finally, like Joachim, Tertullian opposes different states of the Church to one another, pitting the Church of bishops (*eclesia numerous episcoporum*) against the Church of the Spirit and of spiritual men (*eclesia spiritus per spiritalem hominem*). These commonalities lead scholars like Eugène Antichkov and Ernst Benz to argue that Joachim transforms Montanism into a true philosophy of history.

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Nevertheless, in *La postérité* de Lubac tempers his claim that there is a significant link between Joachim and the Montanists. He notes, for instance, that Montanus sees the new spiritual age, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, in his own person; whereas Joachim claims only to be a prophetic witness to a future reality. De Lubac also notes that the Montanists are more interested in liberating the individual in the Spirit than they are in announcing a new historical epoch. Similarly, although Tertullian suggests discontinuity between the Gospel and the Paraclete, de Lubac concedes that is a rather modest separation in the end. Tertullian acknowledges, for instance, that the Paraclete speaks what is commanded by Christ and does not introduce his own gospel. He also affirms that the rule of faith is one, immovable, and irreformable in the Church, allowing only changes of discipline and correction. “Such explanations,” de Lubac concludes, “hardly permit us to see in Tertullian a true precursor to Joachim of Fiore regarding the proclamation of an age of the Spirit.”

Other scholars suggest a long list of potential precedents for Joachim, all of whom de Lubac judges negatively. Henri Lefebvre contends that Joachim stands in a “subterranean current” with Peter Abelard (1079-1142), both of whom see the Holy Spirit in the heretics and revolutionaries of history. De Lubac argues, on the contrary, that Abelard’s account of the Spirit is “exactly the inverse” of Joachim’s, and a “revolutionary” reading of the Spirit is more influenced by the historian, Jules Michelet, than by Abelard. Alternatively, Ernest Renan points out the similarities between Joachim’s “eternal Gospel” and the doctrine of the Cathars, noting that Joachim journeyed through Greece (“the hotbed of Catharism”). However de Lubac deems this connection to be spurious, given Joachim’s hostility toward the Cathars: he refers to them as “sons of the shadows” (*filii tenebrarum*) and even as

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253 Ibid., 39-40.
representatives of the Antichrist. Still others like Carmelo Ottaviano and Emile Gebhart see anticipations of Joachim in John Scotus Eriugena (815-877). They focus on Eriugena’s notion of the “three-fold way” (triplex via) which seems to treat the priesthood of Church as an intermediary between the Jewish Law and a future life without any use for symbols. De Lubac is keen to point out, once more, that nothing in Eriugena’s theory describes this future life as a reality within time. It refers rather to eternal life, and is thus entirely consistent with traditional eschatology.254

De Lubac does agree with most scholars, however, that Joachim is the heir to a twelfth-century renaissance in the theology of history. His near contemporaries show a renewed interest in dividing the world ages (a staple of patristic exegesis) as well as in determining the meaning of history itself, as it unfolds between Christ’s ascension and his return in glory.255 Marjorie Reeves, Herbert Grundmann, and Alois Dempf all note the affinities between Joachim and a group of German theologians writing a generation earlier, including Rupert of Deutz (c.1075-c.1130), Honorius of Autun (1080-1154), Geroh of Reichersberg (1093-1169), and Anselm of Havelberg (c.1100-1158). Yet according to de Lubac, none of them can fully account for Joachim’s innovations. He describes their theologies as variations on a “classic schema” which resembles Joachim’s in appearance, but differs from it in an “essential element”:

The three successive “ages,” or “states,” or “reigns” attributed respectively to the three persons of the divine Trinity, which are commonly distinguished in salvation history following St. Paul, were the reign of the Father, which extended over the eight “days” of creation; then the reign of the Son, which was inaugurated with the promise of the Redeemer made to Adam and lasted until the day after his passion; and finally the reign of the Spirit, which covers the whole time of the Church and

254 Ibid., 30-33.
255 Reeves, Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future, 1-2.
must endure, like the Church itself, until the end of the world: “the new and everlasting covenant” (novum et aeternum testamentum).

De Lubac adds that variations were introduced into this framework, especially in its subdivisions of history. Some modeled them after the dispensations of law, grace, and glory (ante lege, sub lege, sub gratia, gloria), others after the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, and still others after the seven seals of the Apocalypse or (with Augustine) the seven days of creation. In each case, according to de Lubac, the German theologians of history remain faithful to this basic teaching.256

Like Joachim, Rupert of Deutz interprets history as the unfolding revelation of the Trinity, adding to the Augustinian schema of seven ages a three-fold pattern culminating with the Holy Spirit.257 Anselm too conceives of history in terms of three progressive stages of spiritual understanding, converging on the Spirit’s act of illumination. In addition Anselm, like Joachim, describes the Church’s transformation across various “states” (status), seeing the Holy Spirit as the principle of its new “religions” (religiones) and forms of life (forma vivendi).258 Similarly, Honorius and Geroth stress the positive character of a state between the emergence of the Antichrist and the Last Judgment.259 Together these theologians introduce ideas that appear to anticipate Joachim’s alternative to traditional Augustinian eschatology.

Yet despite these anticipations, de Lubac holds that these German thinkers are traditional on the following points. First, for each the appearance of progress given to history is more a matter of constant renewal than of continual evolution. As de Lubac notes,

256 De Lubac, La postérité I, 19.
258 De Lubac, La postérité I, 24-25.
259 Reeves, “Originality and Influence,” 286.
according to Rupert, Anselm, and Honorius, the future of salvation history remains agonistic, even in many cases regressive (as when Augustine speaks of the “declining age,” *saeculum senescenti*). Second, they stress the inseparability of the Trinity so consistently that the work ascribed to the Holy Spirit remains united to the works ascribed to Father and Son. Rupert affirms, for instance, that Christ continues to work in his Church through the Holy Spirit, until the end of time. Third, each of these theologians holds that the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New Testament, the relation between them being that of letter to spirit (*gramma* to *pneuma*). Fourth, they claim that the climax of history has already occurred in the Incarnation, and it is no longer possible to expect a more definitive stage of revelation within history.

As a result, de Lubac argues, the theme of a “coming spiritual age” in these thinkers always amounts to a datum of allegory. None of them expects this age as a future historical reality. They identify it rather with the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost, and thus as something that has already in principle begun. Consequently, this spiritual age does not involve a radical change in the form of the Church, even if, as for Anselm, the Spirit continues to inspire new devotions, rules, and modes of life. According to de Lubac, each of these thinkers remains faithful to Augustine in affirming that the only remaining historical transition is that from time into eternity. Their expectations of the Church’s consummation

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261 Ibid., 23.

262 Ibid., 45.

263 Ibid., 28-29.

refer then to an eschatological reality beyond history, rather than to a utopian interval within it. 265

De Lubac concludes that the German theologians of history do not qualify as Joachim’s legitimate predecessors because they adhere to the tradition of medieval Augustinianism on the most fundamental points. 266 Indeed, his discussion of the non-negotiables of the Patristic inheritance provides a clear indication of de Lubac’s criteria for determining what thinkers can and cannot be included among his heirs.

2.2.2 13th–15th Centuries: Spiritual Franciscans and the “Eternal Gospel”

After Joachim’s death in 1202, de Lubac charges that those who followed him were possessed of a radically different disposition. What they lacked was Joachim’s Catholic sensibility, his close ties with and obedience to the pope and the Roman hierarchy. Here the Amalricians, an early thirteenth century revival of Montanism, provide a useful example. They too professed three historical ages, believing that the time of the Spirit had dawned and the clerical Church, along with the sacraments, had been abrogated. 267 Yet while the Amalricians provoked condemnation, Pope Honorius III affirmed Joachim’s orthodoxy in 1220, and the bishops praised his many virtues at the Fourth Lateran Council. 268

In the early thirteenth century, the first Franciscans in Italy established contacts with the monasteries of Fiore. The new mendicant orders found prophetic confirmation of their

265 Ibid., 286.

266 De Lubac, La postérité I, 29.

267 Ibid., 40-41.

268 Ibid., 70. Cf. 40-41: The posterity of the Amalricians, while intertwined with Joachimism, remains, de Lubac concludes, of an entirely different sort.
existence in Joachim’s claim that the age of the Spirit would be inaugurated by the “spiritual men” (viri spirituales) of two revolutionary orders (duplex religionis ordo). By 1240, those in the Spiritual party of the Franciscans began to integrate Joachim’s prophecies into their novel brand of apocalypticism. Figures like Angelo of Clareno, Ubertino of Casale, Hugh of Digne, John of Parma, Salimbene di Adam, and Peter John Olivi adopted Joachim’s Trinitarian division of history and the promise of a new contemplative life in the third status. They also added distinctively Franciscan features, naming intentional poverty as a mark of the viri spirituales, naming their opponents (like John XXII, Boniface VIII, and Benedict XI) as Antichrists, and naming St. Francis as the Angel of the Sixth Seal (Rev 7:2) who ushers in the age of the Spirit.  

The turning point for the Spirituals centers on the “Scandal of the Eternal Gospel” (1254-1255), initiated by the Franciscan radical, Gerard of Borgo San Donnino (d.1276). In his Liber introductorius in Evangelium aeternum (a collection of and commentary on Joachim’s writings), Gerard offers the most significant radicalization of the tendencies in Joachim’s thought. He claims that by the year 1200, the status of the Son and his work in history had come to an end, and the status of the Spirit had commenced with Joachim himself. Similarly, Gerard claims that the Old and New Testaments were superseded by Joachim’s own writings (his spiritual understanding), which formed an entirely new testament, the “Eternal Gospel” mentioned in Revelation 14:6. His new status of the Spirit thus marks a break with the Church of the second status. The active life of the clergy and the Church’s sacraments were now giving way to a contemplative Church, “without enigma or sign” (sine enigmate et sine

figuris), centered in the Spiritual branch of the Franciscan order. These transformations soon produced the revolutionary connotations often associated with the “Eternal Gospel” in the Joachimite tradition.

Gerard’s “Eternal Gospel” quickly embroiled the Spirituals in controversy, especially in the theological circles of Paris. William of St. Amour (1200-1272), the secular critic of the mendicants, was the first to charge Joachimism with undermining the Gospel of Christ and evacuating the sacraments of his Church. Innocent IV and his successor, Alexander IV, responded by forming the commission of Anagni in 1255, which condemned Gerard’s writings and hastened the suppression of the Spirituals. In spite of their trials, however, this group of apocalyptic Franciscans produced the most important Pseudo-Joachimite writings—like the commentaries Super Jeremiam (1243-1248) and the Super Isaïam (c.1250)—which became models for interpreting Joachim’s prophecies in the following centuries. De Lubac also notes that the transformations which the Spiritual Franciscans make to Joachim’s theology live on in movements like Clareno’s Poor Hermits of Celestine, the Fraticelli, and the Beguines. Along the way, Joachim’s thought is further combined with a variety of superstitions, political doctrines, and apocalyptic prophecies.

2.2.3 16th-17th Centuries: Radical Reformers and Lutheran Mystics

Marjorie Reeves and Warwick Gould have shown that in the age of the Protestant Reformation, many Reformers were eager to collect “weapons of anti-Roman propaganda” from their medieval predecessors. These propagandists were thus quick to exploit Joachimism. In works like the Madgeburg Centuries, Illyricus’s Catalogus Testium Veritatis, and

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270 Reeves, Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future, 33; de Lubac, La postérité I, 87ff.
Johann Wolff’s *Lectionum Memorabilium*, Joachimite ideas are put in the service of Protestant criticism. Many viewed them as models for identifying the pope with the Antichrist and the Roman Church with the New Babylon. Others exploited Joachim’s association of the coming age with illumination and freedom.

For de Lubac, the Radical Reformers were some of the major Protestant carriers of Joachimism, emerging from a break with the opinions of Luther. Here Thomas Müntzer (1489-1525) is a representative case. His “current,” de Lubac notes, exhibits only some signs of Joachimism, mixed with concepts taken from the Taborites, Lutherans, and German mystics. Müntzer himself names Joachim as an important influence, and it is possible he had access to Joachim’s writings while in Prague between 1521 and 1522. However, there is only evidence that he read the Pseudo-Joachimite commentary, the *Super Jeremiae*: a work arguably more in line with Müntzer’s political apocalypticism than are Joachim’s authentic writings. He appears to come close to Joachim in claiming a prophetic experience of the Holy Spirit. Yet more explicitly than Joachim, he envisions himself as the subject of a continuing revelation. Indeed, Müntzer often elevates the inner voice of the Spirit above the authority of Scripture’s letter (a major point of contention with Luther). He likewise prophecies the dawning of a “new Church,” dominated by the peasant class and eventually subsuming earthly society in a final age.

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272 Ibid., 16-17.


274 Ibid., 179.
According to de Lubac, however, the more direct “current” on which Joachimism passes into the modern age is that of the Lutheran mystics and Christian Kabbalists. He cites Sebastian Franck (1499-1545) and Valentin Weigel (1531-1588) as clear examples of this tradition. Though given his expansive influence on later German thinkers, the theosophist Jacob Böhme (1575-1625) takes pride of place. For de Lubac, the first sign of Böhme’s link to Joachimism is his reference to the “time of the lilies” (*Lilienzeit*) as a symbol for the coming spiritual age. In one of its many three-fold symbols, Joachim’s *Liber de Concordia* describes the age of the Father as the time of nettles, the age of the Son as the time of roses, and the age of the Holy Spirit as the time of lilies.275

Beyond the imagery, De Lubac highlights the link between the Trinity and history in Böhme. In his *Morgenröthe* (1612), Böhme divides history into three ages, defining the third age by its movement beyond every letter: it is an age of the fully-realized knowledge of the scriptures. He also, like Joachim, claims to have experienced the Holy Spirit’s illumination (in 1600). For him the activity of this Spirit is radically free, unbound by any determined forms that precede him in time.276 Finally, Böhme prophecies that the Church of Christ will be “surpassed” in future apocalyptic events.277

De Lubac recognizes, though, that Böhme’s contemplative ideal remains entirely individual and interior. His approach is far more cosmological in nature than it is historical, and he draws his symbolism more often from the natural order than from the Jewish and Christian scriptures. In contrast to Joachim, Böhme places more emphasis on the process of the divine self-revelation in physical creation, as well as on the fundamental disharmonies or

275 Ibid., 218.
276 Ibid., 220.
277 Ibid., 222.
conflicts in the universe.\textsuperscript{278} De Lubac suggests, nevertheless, that figures like Müntzer and Böhme are important primarily as \textit{transmitters} of Joachimism to later generations of German theorists, including Schlegel, Novalis, and the Idealists.\textsuperscript{279}

2.2.4 18\textsuperscript{th} Century: Pietists and the Christianity of Reason

In the eighteenth century, the current of heterodox Lutherans finds its clearest expression in Württemberg Pietism, which was heavily influenced by apocalyptic interpretations of the Reformation and, more specifically, by Joachimite prophecies. Here Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782) serve as de Lubac’s exemplary figures. The writings of both are deeply informed by apocalyptic expectations. Bengel, for instance, views himself as the prophet of a final age when God will come to his full self-realization in history. Oetinger, reacting against the rationalism of his contemporaries, sought more esoteric concepts in the writings of Böhme and the Jewish Kabala. His apocalypticism is, moreover, explicitly chiliastic and includes a Trinity that develops through the processes of the world.\textsuperscript{280} Once more, while de Lubac affirms the indirect influence of Joachimism on Bengel and Oetinger, he values these thinkers mainly as anticipations of later German figures in Joachim’s lineage.

More so than those of the Piestists, the writings of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) mark a turning point for the transformation of Joachimism in the direction of immanence. Lessing’s is a philosophy that inherits the framework of the Württemberg

\textsuperscript{278} Reeves and Gould, \textit{The Myth of the Eternal Evangel}, 24.

\textsuperscript{279} De Lubac, \textit{La postérité I}, 275.

Lutherans, but in a decidedly secularized form. There is here, de Lubac writes, a meeting of various currents of Joachimism, “swelling up” over the course of two centuries: Lessing is heir to the visions of the Reformers and the universalist ideals of Léger Marie Deschamps and the English Deists. In this sense he is the perfect representative of the Aufklärung, and it is in the shadow of this German Enlightenment that Joachimism undergoes its “decisive turn.”

Lessing’s goal is to develop a “natural religion,” entirely devoid of appeals to dogma and mystery. This was, in some sense, the ideal of his generation, especially with its ambition to found a universal morality. As his well-known “ditch” metaphor illustrates, for Lessing, contingent facts of history can only yield truths if they are the expressions of moral and religious truths already, in principle, accessible to human understanding. Christianity then, to the extent that it can be salvaged, must be reestablished on this natural foundation. It must be made a “Christianity of reason.” And the realization of this ideal coincides, he believes, with the enlightenment of the human race. However, unlike many of his fellow rationalists, Lessing holds that such enlightenment is a datum of the philosophy of history. It is achieved through history, and only at the end of a long and dynamic process.

According to de Lubac, what separates Lessing from the conventional Aufklärung is his use of religious dogma. He is content neither with abandoning the language of the faith nor with restricting its application in the manner of John Toland, Matthew Tindal, or even Immanuel Kant. He claims rather to “strengthen, complete, and deepen” the traditions of Christian prophecy. And because of this stance, he associates his claims with a medieval

281 De Lubac, La postérité I, 266.
282 De Lubac, La postérité I, 270
283 Ibid., 272
precedent: a configuration of doctrines that he then divests of supernatural content in order to uncover their natural meaning. The tradition to which he appeals, according to de Lubac, is that of the “Joachimite dream.”

As evidence for this claim, de Lubac cites the relevant passage from Lessing’s *Education of the Human Race* (1780):

Perhaps even some enthusiasts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had caught a glimpse of a beam of this new eternal Gospel, and only erred in that they predicted its outburst as so near to their own time. Perhaps their “Three Ages of the World” were not so empty a speculation after all, and assuredly they had no contemptible views when they taught that the New Covenant must become as antiquated as the Old had been…Only they were premature. Only they believed that they could make their contemporaries, who had scarcely outgrown their childhood, without enlightenment, without preparation, men worthy of their Third Age. And it was just this which makes them enthusiasts.

De Lubac notes that it is unlikely Lessing had direct access to any of Joachim’s authentic writings. He refers only to the views of “certain enthusiastic dreamers.” But as Marjorie Reeves and Warwick Gould acknowledge, given the many symbolic resonances, there can be little doubt that Lessing is presenting himself as the rightful heir of the Joachimites. His claim is that the logic of Joachimism—the transformation it posits between the age of Christ the age of the Spirit—is the theological model for his philosophy of history. One need only relieve the Joachimite teachings of their dogmatic interpretations in order to realize their enduring value.

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284 Ibid., 268.
286 De Lubac, *La postérité I*, 270.
Lessing affirms, for instance, the Trinitarian division of history into three phases. He does not speak of divine persons, however, but only of a general “Providence” without any divine subject. He rejects the possibility of successive revelations, interventions, or effusions of the Spirit, replacing these with a process immanent to Humanity as a whole. His is a “progress of the human spirit” across the ages, culminating in a reign of the Spirit that is identical with the reign of Reason.288 Lessing also adopts the image of the “Eternal Gospel” as his own, applying a kind of rationalist version of Joachim’s exegesis. He contends that the Old and New Testaments have been superseded, and the “Eternal Gospel” that takes their place is a religion of reason; a Christianity fully-conformed to the human intellect.289

It follows that the Church of the past had its necessary place in the historical education of humanity. In this sense its mysteries contributed to the advent of reason. But now that “the house is built,” in the time of the “Eternal Gospel,” it is necessary to “remove the scaffolding.”290 Lessing applauds Martin Luther for playing a decisive role in this passage; yet even he, despite liberating religion from the yoke of tradition, was still bound by the yoke of “dogmatic mysteries” (the yoke of the “letter”). Here, Lessing suggests, discerning the “spirit” in the letter of dogma is a matter of finding in it a purely immanent interpretation.291

Finally, then, Lessing posits the ideals of the Enlightenment as the defining features of Joachim’s third age. Like Joachim, he describes his religion of reason as the Johannine Church, the form in which Christianity will endure indefinitely.292 In ways more radical than

289 Ibid., 273.
290 Ibid., 276.
291 Ibid., 267.
292 Ibid., 273.
for Joachim, however, he characterizes this state as the fullness of knowledge *as reason*, and hence the complete dissolution of mystery. He also characterizes it as the realization of freedom and peace, understood as the “maturity” of the human race devoid of the supernatural. Lastly, in light of his private declarations of atheism to F.H. Jacobi, it is clear that Lessing envisions his future age of reason as a purely historical reality. Shorn of its transcendent referent, history itself becomes revelation: rather than the unveiling of divine relations in time, it is simply the successive unfolding of powers immanent to humanity. It is therefore, according to de Lubac, in this “great educator of the human race” that we find compelling modern versions of the four doctrines central to Joachimism—versions that prove definitive for the modern Joachimites who follow.

2.2.5 19th Century: Utopian Socialists and German Idealists

Although de Lubac tells a story that spans eight centuries, more than half of the pages in *La postérité* concern developments in the nineteenth century alone. Nearly a quarter of the material is devoted to the French representatives of Joachim’s posterity. For these thinkers, the distinctive features of Joachimism are revived in the service of early socialist movements and philosophies of history struggling to come to terms with the fruits of the French Revolution. Many of them find in Joachimism a language to interpret their utopian aspirations and scientific reason as the rightful heirs of Catholic Christianity.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{293} Ibid., 269.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{294} Ibid., 278.}\]
Reeves and Gould note that Lessing’s “imaginative resurrection” of the Eternal Gospel inspired a variety of French thinkers in the nineteenth century.\(^{295}\) Victor Cousin (1792-1867), a student of Lessing and Hegel, prophesies a future age when philosophy will “clarify and fertilize” the Christian faith, elevating it from its reliance on symbols into the “great light of pure thought.”\(^{296}\) Charles Fourier (1772-1837), one of the most influential utopian theorists, claims to be the “definitive exegete” of Christ, linking his philosophy to the work of the Holy Spirit—the last in a progressive revelation of divine persons.\(^{297}\) Perhaps the most important representative of this line is Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825). Saint-Simon’s *New Christianity* describes religion as a powerful instrument for forming moral sentiments, rather than a set of truths and practices about supernatural realities. Hence, he chastises both the Catholic and Protestant Churches as outmoded and heretical, calling instead for a new model of Christianity founded on positive science and absolute moral principles. Soon this rationalized Christianity—the hope of “positivist terrestrial immortality”\(^{298}\)—is taken up and radicalized by his disciples like Olinde Rodrigues, Eugene Rodrigues, and Auguste Comte. De Lubac also investigates similar themes, though with quite radical divergences, in the works of Joseph de Maistre, Hugues Felicité Robert de Lamennais, Philippe Buchez, and Jules Michelet; all of whom exhibit features of Joachimism as Lessing determined it.


\(^{296}\) De Lubac, *La postérité II*, 7.

\(^{297}\) Ibid., 12.

In the German context, the links established between Joachimism and the great Idealist philosophers depend once more on the convergence of two existing “currents”: Lessing’s brand of the Aufklärung, which influenced Romantic authors like Herder and Novalis; and Böhme’s apocalyptic or mystical Lutheranism, which influenced German Pietism. Among the Idealists, de Lubac notes, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854) bears the clearest connection to the Joachimite tradition.\(^{299}\) Schelling was introduced to the writings of Böhme by Franz Xaver von Baader, and was likewise taken with Lessing’s philosophy of an “absolute Gospel.”\(^{300}\) There is at least some evidence of his awareness to Joachimite writings through the summaries in A. Neander’s *History of the Christian Religion and the Church* (1841), and he includes a direct reference to Joachim in his thirty-sixth lecture on *The Philosophy of Revelation* (1841):

I must point out that not only my view of the matter as a whole, but also the greatest number of the applications...has found an unexpected confirmation in the most recent part of the General History of the Christian Religion and the Church of our Dr. Neander. This scholar has found and substantiated this view of mine, and its applications, in the writings of the celebrated abbot, Joachim of Fiore...I am, on the contrary, glad that thoughts which I could not help considering with some trepidation, should have received such great confirmation—the agreement of so important and, in the history of the Church, so outstanding a man, who as early as the middle or towards the end of the twelfth century, envisaged something very similar, indeed, in part, something quite identical.\(^{301}\)

Like Lessing, then, Schelling looks upon Joachim as a medieval anticipation of his own philosophical system.

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\(^{299}\) De Lubac, *La postérité I*, 378.

\(^{300}\) Ibid., 378-379.

\(^{301}\) Cited in Reeves and Gould, *The Myth of the Eternal Evangel*, 63 (translation by Dr. G. Sweet).
De Lubac sees signs of Joachimism in Schelling’s view that a necessary relationship exists between the Trinity and the structure of history. Yet unlike Joachim, Schelling argues that God develops in and through time: history is nothing other than “the vast epic of the spirit of God.” The symbols he uses are nonetheless undeniably Joachim’s. In The Ages of the World (which he began in 1809 and never finished), he describes the stages of religion in terms of the “reigns” of the divine persons: the passage from pantheism (the reign of the Father), through dualism (the reign of the Son), into “perfect understanding” (the reign of the Spirit). This latter signifies a “new stage of consciousness” of the scriptures, a “new religion,” a scientific or philosophical religion. The transformation of the Christianity Church, then, consists in the development of this scientific knowledge, for which the work of Christ could only lay the foundation. Echoing Joachim’s concordiae, Schelling associates each historical stage with one of Christ’s apostles: Peter, the apostle of the Father (the Catholic phase of the Church); Paul, the apostle of the Son (the Protestant phase of the Church); and John, the prophet of the Spirit (the philosophical phase of the Church). Christ therefore effectively proclaims the future advent of the Spirit and of perfect knowledge, beyond both Catholic and Protestant ecclesial identities. And as de Lubac goes on to demonstrate, Schelling’s versions of these doctrines form a “current” that determines the thought of the Russian authors in Joachim’s posterity.

More important—and in many ways more tragic—than Schelling is the figure of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). According to de Lubac, nearly all of the preceding “currents” of Joachimism form a tidal wave with Hegel. Following Robert Minder,

302 De Lubac, La postérité I, 379.
he notes Hegel’s affinities with Böhme and the “Enlightened of Bavaria” in his youth. He notes too Hegel’s kinship with the disciples of Bengel and Oetinger, and the study he made of various Masonic writings. Finally, he cites the well-documented influence of Lessing, who conferred upon Hegel the expectation of a new “surg[ing] of the Spirit” into an age of the “kingdom of God.” Hegel writes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807):

> It is not difficult to see that our time is a time of gestation and of transition to a new period; the spirit has broken with the world of its being-there and of the representation that has endured until the present, it is on the point of burying this world in the past and it is in the process of its own transformation.

This hope for a great transition issues from Hegel’s blend of Lutheranism and rationalism: his Luther is, according to de Lubac, a “mythical Luther,” the prophet of a Spirit who proclaims “man free and determined by himself.” It is this philosophical reception of German Pietism that leads de Lubac to claim that “Hegel immanentizes the old illuminism of the [Franciscan] Spirituals, as Lessing had done,” rationalizing it within a system more sophisticated than the platitudes of the Aufklärung.

On de Lubac’s view, Hegel’s *Lectures (Vorlesungen)* on the history of philosophy, the philosophy of history, and the philosophy of religion accentuate his connection with the abbot of Fiore. In these works, for instance, he interprets the meaning of history in Trinitarian terms. He distinguishes the three periods as the reigns or “kingdom” of Father,

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305 Ibid., 361
308 Ibid., 361.
Son, and Spirit (a schema he also utilizes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). In truth, de Lubac claims, the whole of Hegel’s doctrine is an explication of the Trinity, concentrated in the history of Germanic Christianity.\(^{310}\) His Trinity is the hinge around which universal history turns, the principle required to understand Geist and human consciousness in an absolute manner. The Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion likewise distinguish between the kingdoms of Father, Son, and Spirit, but here it is less a matter of successive historical periods as it is of progressive states of our relation to God.\(^{311}\) De Lubac is quick to note, however, that Hegel never truly separates the internal dialectic of the Trinity from the historical process. These relationships—between the finite and the infinite—mature in and through various cultural, social, and political forms, culminating in the lifestyle of Hegel’s modern Lutheran society.\(^{312}\)

However, de Lubac argues that Hegel likewise repeats Joachim’s basic Trinitarian error. According to Hegel, the superiority of Christianity (the Absolute Religion) over other religions consists in its claim that God fully reveal himself to humanity in the Incarnation. Yet while Christ provides the objective condition for humanity’s realization, he is not himself sufficient to realize it in full.\(^{313}\) De Lubac concludes that the figure of Christ hardly holds Hegel’s attention in the end.\(^{314}\) He is far more concerned with the moment of reconciliation between God and man, and man with himself, beyond Christ’s historical intervention. Hegel defines this moment as the realm of the Spirit, or the Kingdom of God.

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\(^{309}\) Ibid., 361-362.

\(^{310}\) Ibid., 366.


\(^{312}\) De Lubac, *La postérité I*, 367.


\(^{314}\) De Lubac, *La postérité I*, 362.
His logic demands that believers subjectively appropriate the historical Christ in order for him to be fully realized. And this appropriation is a consciousness qualitatively distinct from any faith centered on the particularity of the man Jesus. To illustrate the point, de Lubac cites a passage from Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* on the Gospel of John (7:38-39):

The spiritual development of thought and of knowledge is distinguished from the pure and simple faith, the latter only becoming truth through the former…it is not the temporal personality of Christ, sensibly present, that produces this result; for this is not yet the truth as such…Nonetheless, this faith, from which the most firm certitude is not lacking, is only considered as a beginning, a foundation, a still-imperfect condition: these believers did not yet possess the Spirit but would soon receive it, the truth itself, which comes later than faith and leads into the plenitude of truth.  

The activity of the Spirit spiritualizes Christ, which Hegel identifies with a form of consciousness. This movement from simple faith to thought requires that one negate one’s relation to Christ as he was historically, personally, and sensibly present. Thus de Lubac concludes that Hegel repeats, in modern form, the Trinitarian error of Joachim: “The coming of the Spirit does not…have the firming and deepening of faith in Jesus as its end. Jesus is not the Truth; he prepares it, and must, it seems, be effaced before it, and must disappear before the Spirit.”

As the passage from the *Encyclopedia* suggests, this Trinitarian error is also accompanied by a modernized version of Joachimite exegesis. De Lubac cites Etienne Borre’s comment that Hegelianism amounts to an “intelligently rational reading of the Christian scriptures.” The pneumatic community of the third age, Hegel’s rational

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315 Cited in ibid., 370-371.
316 Ibid., 370, n. 4.
317 Ibid., 368.
Lutherans, distinguish themselves by their ability to transcend the certitude of faith. They must ultimately go beyond the “enigmas and parables,” the images and symbols of the Old and New Testaments. This point touches upon the relationship between religion and philosophy in Hegel’s system. Ultimately he believes the entire form of consciousness proper to religious symbols, representation or *Verstand*, is transcended by the perspective of speculative thought, reason or *Vernunft*; a perspective that alone provides religious symbols with their true and enduring meaning. In this de Lubac sees a clear rationalization of Joachim’s *intellectus spiritualis*.

The other characteristic features of Joachimism find parallels in Hegel as well. His account of history, for instance, leads Hegel to prophecy the effacing of the Church “in its historical and visible structure.” De Lubac stresses that Speculative thought requires a negation of the Church as a distinct institutional body. As reason (*Verstand*) transfigures the images and symbols, sacraments are relegated to the outmoded period of history associated with Roman Catholicism. More importantly, however, Hegel’s understanding of the sacred/secular divide results ultimately in the breakdown of the distinction. The identity and cultic practices of the Church are eventually absorbed in the secular State, which has the only true claim to the title of spiritual community.

In addition, Hegel’s community of the Spirit is characterized by a fullness of knowledge. The time when the Spirit “leads into all truth” is the time when everything proposed in the form of representations is elevated and seized by thought. As Chapelle notes, it is a translation of the Eternal Gospel into the categories of Absolute Knowledge.

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318 Ibid., 374.
Second, the community is likewise characterized by the fullness of freedom, since history is nothing other than the realization of freedom (Freiheit) in German Christianity. Third, this community is also characterized by peace, since Absolute Knowledge represents the end of Spirit’s development (its movement through contradiction and resolution), and thus the “end of history.”

Finally, each of these features, is realized within history. Hegel’s eschatology is, in other words, a “fully realized” eschatology. For him the Kingdom of God does not signify a transcendent after-life, but remains, like Joachim’s third status, intra-historical. In this sense he identifies the eschaton with the destiny of modern Lutheranism and with the coming “parousia of the Holy Spirit.” The Kingdom of God, he insists, is always a reality to be brought about in men. For de Lubac this confirms that Hegelian theology secularizes traditional Christian thought, and Joachimitic thought in particular. He maintains, however, a surprisingly positive estimation of Hegel’s intentions, and does not refrain from criticizing reductive and anachronistic interpretations (influenced, perhaps, by the engagements of his friends, Gaston Fessard and Albert Chapelle). Nonetheless, de Lubac suggests that, by so thoroughly rationalizing the Joachimitic pattern, Hegel paves the way for the atheist readings of Joachimism that follow him.

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2.2.6 19th-20th Centuries: Hegel’s Heirs and Esoteric Marxists

One of Hegel’s most significant, though arguably least-recognized novelties is the new meaning he gives to the Holy Spirit. As de Lubac puts it, “since Hegel, the Holy Spirit is understood as being immanence, as being the community of humankind, as being the Human Person.”\(^{322}\) This “Spirit,” he writes, is therefore no longer the Spirit of Christ or of the Father, but rather the “Spirit of the World.”\(^{323}\) This view summarizes the view of Hegel held by the Young or Left Hegelians. According to de Lubac, they read Hegel’s Joachimism as an exoteric, symbolic idiom for realities immanent to the world or to human nature. More importantly, they occupy de Lubac’s attention insofar as they lay the groundwork for the emergence of Marxism, and hence make clear how the Joachimism in Hegel’s thought finds new life among the adherents of historical materialism.

Among these students of Hegel, Ludwig Feuerbach distinguished himself as perhaps the defining voice, developing a framework according to which Hegel identifies the truth of Christianity with its own negation.\(^{324}\) Other thinkers demonstrate more directly how Feuerbach’s basic insight can be supported by features of Joachimism. Moses Hess (1812-1875) provides one such example. In his *The Holy History of Mankind* (1837), Hess adopts from Hegel a three-fold division of history corresponding to the three persons of the Trinity. However, he inflects the Hegelian model with certain communist themes: identifying the age of the Father with an unconscious social union of humanity; the age of Christ with the breakdown of this harmony in private property; and finally the age of the Holy Spirit with

\(^{322}\) De Lubac, *La postérité II*, 378.

\(^{323}\) Ibid., 372.

\(^{324}\) Ibid., 372.
the conscious return to unity.\footnote{Ibid., 344.} Reflecting the influence of the Polish philosopher, August Cieszkowski (1814-1894), who also modified Hegel in light of Joachimism, Hess conceives of his future communist age as a religion of love. It will unite all members of the social body in a “terrestrial paradise,” the “kingdom of God,” which will come in peace and supersede the need for any Church apart from the State.\footnote{Ibid., 344.}

Bruno Bauer (1809-1882) is arguably the first to employ apocalyptic categories in an atheistic interpretation of Hegel. Bauer adopts Hegel’s Trinitarian language, describing the passage from the reign of the Father to that of the Son and finally to that of the Spirit. In this de Lubac claims he is reaching back to Joachim and the Franciscan Spirituals.\footnote{Ibid., 346.} However he clearly fills this framework with atheistic content: interpreting Hegel’s Trinitarianism as “varnish,” a coded way of speaking only about humanity’s universal consciousness of itself.\footnote{De Lubac, \textit{La postérité I}, 376.} Similarly, in his \textit{The Trumpet of the Last Judgment Against Hegel} (1841), Bauer argues that humanity’s religious progress is culminating in a third and final state, leaving behind the Old and New Testaments. He interprets Christianity, then, as the dialectical negation of Judaism; and now it is necessary to negate the Christian Church and move definitively beyond it. The Church for Bauer is a system of myths, which represents only a provisional stage of human maturation.

Other Joachimite features emerge in the writings of thinkers like Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), who calls for a reign of the Spirit beyond the Christian Church, a kingdom of...
heaven on earth liberated from the letter of scripture;\(^\text{329}\) and like Georg Friedrich Daumer (1800-1875), who identifies the reign of the Spirit with atheistic German philosophy, abolishing the reign of the Son (i.e. Christian theology).\(^\text{330}\) De Lubac claims, however, that the Joachimite “current” in the writings of these figures is for the most part “subterranean.”\(^\text{331}\) They, like Hegel before them, believe that they themselves would establish the reign of the Spirit and usher in the final stage of history. In reality, de Lubac writes, “it was with Marx that the definitive reign would be inaugurated” in modern thought.\(^\text{332}\)

Karl Marx’s (1818-1883) reliance on Christian symbols, let alone those that are specifically Joachimite, are few and far between. Yet as even Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) suggests, Marx and his followers were heirs not only to the Joachimism of French Socialists like Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen, but they were also heirs to the Joachimism associated with Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.\(^\text{333}\) The basic principles of his thought, de Lubac notes, are historical, taking many centuries of to rise to the level of theory. Marx presents his insights, therefore, within a philosophy of history, understood as the history of humanity dispelling the illusion tied to its various social disorders.

Although for Marx religion constitutes one such illusion, de Lubac insists that the Jewish and Christian faiths play an important role in his theory. Judaism and Christianity mark two stages in this history of humanity affirming and engendering itself by its work,

\(^{329}\) De Lubac, \textit{La postérité II}, 351ff.

\(^{330}\) Ibid., 347ff.

\(^{331}\) Ibid., 350.

\(^{332}\) Ibid., 356.

\(^{333}\) Ibid., 364.
with the Church eventually replacing the Synagogue as its “true essence.” Both are expressions of myth for Marx, yet necessary myths because the passage from sign to reality takes time. It was essential, for instance, to pass through the stage of Christianity in order to fully perceive the significance of the Kingdom of God—which in truth signifies only a “kingdom of Man” established through revolution.

There are here then at least formal similarities between Marx and the modern Joachimites who proceed him. He endorses a three-fold pattern of history which gives a place of relative legitimacy to the dispensations of the Old and New Testaments, but also narrates their abrogation. He prophecies the coming of a classless society in a future age; the outcome of a long historical gestation rather than the construction of one man’s genius (as with the utopias of Fourier or Saint-Simon). Finally, Marx holds to a historical account of consciousness, which culminates in the practical or “scientific” analysis that supplies Jewish and Christian symbols with their immanent meaning. De Lubac concludes that in Marx “we find the constant schema of the Joachimite line, having traversed many metamorphoses and undergone radical degradations.”

Yet the decisive sign of Marx’s Joachimism concerns his relationship with Hegel. Marx famously criticized Hegel’s “mysticism” and theology, describing his own view as an inversion of Hegel’s (the turning of Hegelianism right-side-up). Despite the fact that many saw “a subtle atheism” in Hegel, the structure of his system remains undeniably Christian. De Lubac is claiming then that by inverting Hegel’s reasoning, Marx retains “in an essential part, the structure of Christian dogmatics...” It is in act because Marx believes he can only

334 Ibid., 362.
335 Ibid., 362.
336 Ibid., 358.
construct the new world by critiquing the old that he appropriates, by also reversing, the framework of Hegel’s Speculative theology. In this sense de Lubac gives his qualified approval of the readings (like Raymond Aron’s) which define Marxism as a secularized Christianity; and more specifically as a secularization of messianic and apocalyptic elements.  

Here de Lubac relies heavily on the interpretations of his Jesuit confrere, Gaston Fessard, and the French socialist, Jean Jaurés. Both argue that, for each of the doctrines in question, Marx maintains the Christian framework while replacing the contents: the role of redeemer, for instance, is transferred to the Proletariat, and the eschatological finality is transferred to the classless society and the dynamics of class struggle. The narrative of the historical Christ thereby signifies the dialectic of the Proletariat, enduring the cross of Capitalism until the final revolutionary resurrection. De Lubac affirms then that the analogy between Christ and the Proletariat holds not merely in virtue of a formal similarity, but in virtue of the necessary passage from one to the other, i.e. by the logic of Marx’s dialectic. The movement through and beyond Christian faith is the necessary movement from the letter of the New Testament to its materialistic “spirit,” and from the Christian Church to the communist community. And an essential part of this movement requires passage through the Christianity found within the “Hegelian dream.” Does this not permit us, de Lubac asks, to refer to Marxism as the “definitive religion of the Third Age?”

337 Ibid., 359.
338 Ibid., 361.
339 Ibid., 363.
340 Ibid., 359.
The claims of Joachimite posterity from Marx’s own disciples, in fact, lend credence to this conclusion. Engels is undoubtedly the first to find precedents for Marx’s theories in revolutionary religious movements. For him, the affinity between Marx and Joachim owes more to a distinctive tradition of German revolutionaries than it does to the Hegelian dialectic. In his *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850) Engels chronicles the anticipations of Marxism in the theology of Müntzer. He claims to find in Müntzer a hidden atheism with the following familiar qualities: an identification between the Holy Spirit and human reason; the raising of this reason over the letter of scripture “which kills”; and a Kingdom of God in a proto-communist society. More importantly, Engels stresses that Müntzer likely derived many of these anticipations from his study of “the chiliastic writings of Joachim of Calabria.” 341 Though most of these claims collapse under scrutiny, de Lubac concludes that for many of Marx’s followers, the established links between Müntzer and Marx justify linking Joachim and Marx. 342

No thinker contributes more to this line of reasoning than the “esoteric Marxist,” Ernst Bloch (1885-1977). Bloch follows Engels by attempting to the pre-history of Marxist theory in the religious traditions that anticipate it. He is especially known for reviving the utopian dimensions of Marxism—a project that emerged from his investigation of traditional Jewish and Christian categories. Also like Engels, Bloch completed a major study of Müntzer (*Thomas Müntzer as Theologian of Revolution*); however he is even more direct in his appropriation of Joachim. His *The Heritage of Our Time* (1935), Bloch highlights Joachim’s image of the third age as a utopian symbol used to inspire revolutionary impulses in the

341 Ibid., 364.
342 Ibid., 364.

According to de Lubac, Bloch, like his predecessors, repeats Joachim’s Trinitarian imagery, but now interpreted in an atheistic manner. He describes the event of Pentecost as signaling the coming of the Kingdom, with “God the Holy Spirit” resolving the contradictions of the preceding ages. This new age of the Spirit, however, marks a break with the conceptions of God proper to the first and second periods: the “Third Gospel” now deals entirely with human aspirations. The same principle applies to Bloch’s exegesis. Especially in his \emph{Atheism in Christianity} (1968), his version of the spiritual sense is his attempt to draw out the atheist “core” latent within the Old and New Testaments (giving rise to his now infamous maxim: “only an atheist can be a good Christian; only a Christian can be a good atheist”).\footnote{Ernst Bloch, \emph{Atheism in Christianity}, trans. J. T. Swann (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972),}

Assigning value to religious symbolism coincides with overcoming all recourse to a transcendent God, who for Bloch represents only the inhibited potentialities of mankind. It is the very logic of Christianity, he claims, that atheism is the final truth of biblical revelation. Religious concepts must be exposed as mythic signs for what is occurring in the history of humanity. In this, Bloch acknowledges, he is developing the hermeneutic of Feuerbach and Marx. He merely does so with a more direct appeal to the tradition of Joachimism. According to de Lubac, this makes Bloch perhaps the clearest example of a modern Joachimite. He does, however, see Bloch as unfaithful to Joachimism in important ways, and even careless in his eagerness to find in Joachim a Marx \emph{avant le lettre}. 
A final “current” warrants attention, and here two examples will suffice. The “final act” of de Lubac’s genealogy includes a small number of Hegelians whose lineage often intertwines with that of Marx’s progeny. These are the radical Christians or “death of God” theologians; thinkers who read Hegel’s Trinitarian dialectic as the process by which God empties himself of his transcendence in the Incarnation and identifies himself entirely with the immanence of the world. More specifically, the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit, Hegel’s pneumatic community, is seen as the moment when God gives up his transcendence and the visible form of Christ in order to persist as the unity of a human community—a community now liberated from alienation and free to pursue its own ends apart from God. De Lubac cites Thomas Altizer’s *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* as the standard-bearer of this movement in the 1960s, especially since Altizer directly ties this reading of Hegel to his interpretation of Joachim:

The radical Christian also inherits both the ancient prophetic belief that revelation continues in history and the eschatological belief of the tradition following Joachim of Floria. This tradition maintains that we are now living in the third and final age of the Spirit, that a new revelation is breaking into this age, and that this revelation will differ as much from the New Testament as the New Testament itself does from its Old Testament counterpart. 345

True, the traditional deposit of Christian dogma is transformed in Hegel, and now it appears as no more than the portal to true understanding. But this is exactly the case with all radical Christians, who invariably believe that the final age of the Spirit effects a negation and transcendence of the dogma of the Church. 346

For de Lubac the “death of God” theology is a particularly clear testament to the fate of Joachimism in the modern period. It reinterprets Joachimite themes in a framework of

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346 Ibid., 63-64.
explicit atheism and immanentism. Joachim’s prophecy has undergone so many transformations, in other words, that it has come to function as a language for denying the very God Joachim worshipped. The Holy Spirit, having been separated from Christ, finally takes the form of the “death of God” and the unity underlying an atheistic humanity. De Lubac cites a line written by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) as a succinct declaration of this tragedy:

Pentecost signifies that the religion of the Father and the religion of the Son are to be fulfilled in the religion of the Spirit, that God no longer exists in Heaven, but rather in human society and communication, wherever men assemble in His name.347

2.3 On the Category “Spiritual Posterity”

From this overview of de Lubac’s narrative, the arguments of the previous chapter can now be seen in a new light. It is possible, in other words, to see how tendencies in Joachim’s theology are taken up in support of a wide variety of views across eight centuries. In particular it is possible to see how, on de Lubac’s reading, these tendencies foreground more and more radical refusals of mystery. Joachimism then functions as a kind of theological pattern for philosophies of history that seek to justify their passage beyond Christ and the Church. And in this judgment de Lubac is joined by scholars like Karl Löwith, who argues that the secular versions of Joachim’s ideas are “plausible consequences of his general scheme.”348 He is joined as well by Eric Voegelin, who presents Joachim as the figure who


348 Löwith, Meaning in History, 154
“immanentizes the eschaton”; and by Jacob Taubes, who sees Joachim as the natural forerunner to the likes of Lessing, Schelling, and Hegel.

However, more so than any of these historians of ideas, de Lubac is careful to balance his claims of affinity with claims about the profound differences between Joachim and his modern posterity. He is pointed, for instance, when he criticizes Engels and Bloch for drawing too direct a link between Marx and Joachim and for illicitly reading Marxist principles back into the middle ages. The same charge can be made of Voegelin and Taubes, both of whom acknowledge little daylight between Joachim and Hegel. In contrast, de Lubac resists the temptation to hold Joachim directly responsible for the “trail of metamorphoses” that follow in his wake. He holds Joachim accountable only for destabilizing the theology of history in ways that make more drastic distortions of the tradition intelligible—even if these distortions were hardly imaginable in the absence of countless sociological and theoretical factors. He describes Joachim’s error, then, as a kind of theological imprudence. To use de Lubac’s own phrasing, he criticizes Joachim as an enduring “inspiration” for the prophets, philosophers, and revolutionaries who betray some of his own most cherished principles.

Nevertheless, other scholars of Joachimism like Marjorie Reeves and Bernard McGinn have challenged the propriety of a category like “spiritual posterity.” Reeves, for instance, notes that from the eighteenth century onwards, there is little evidence that any figure in de Lubac’s narrative had direct access to Joachim’s authentic writings. This makes

349 Voegelin, New Science of Politics, 117ff.
350 Taubes, Occidental Eschatology, 86-98.
351 De Lubac, La postérité II, 364ff.
352 De Lubac, La postérité I, 66.
the claim of Joachim’s direct influence nearly impossible to substantiate. And according to Reeves, the category of “posterity” ought to signal “some direct relationship…some recognizable debt to Joachimist works or distinctive ideas.” On these grounds, the presence of a mere “three-fold pattern” of history, or a new age to come in the works of later thinkers is too broad a criterion to justify any association with Joachimism. McGinn too claims that de Lubac’s criterion of a three-fold history admits too wide a range of theorists among Joachim’s descendants. It also overlooks the positive potential in Joachim’s ideas. De Lubac’s reading, he believes, exhibits a theological bias in this regard: he judges Joachim in light of Thomas Aquinas’ debate with later Joachimites, much the same way that de Lubac’s confreres, Chenu and Congar, do.

Both Reeves and McGinn argue that without such a bias, it is possible to acknowledge resources in Joachim’s writings that safeguard against the negative connotations to which de Lubac draws attention—resources which are even consistent with the Patristic consensus on each of the doctrines de Lubac discusses. For instance, on the topic of the Trinity, Reeves argues that Joachim’s position is more complex than a simple succession of the three divine persons in history. Rather, history for Joachim is the work of the one God (ad extra), involving a subtle inter-weaving of the three persons in their operations throughout each age. Reeves also points to a variety of passages in Joachim’s writings that describe the continuing operation of Christ in the third status, as well as passages that describe the third status as “pertaining” to the Son as well as to the Spirit.


354 Reeves, Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future, 6.
There are, in short, elements of Joachim’s theology that resist what de Lubac suggests is his first distinctive error: the sundering of the Spirit from Christ.

Similarly, Reeves and McGinn stress that Joachim’s two-fold pattern of history (the omega *diffinitio*) guards against any tendency to annul the New Testament in his three-fold pattern of history (the alpha *diffinitio*). Just as the alpha *diffinitio* requires that history be divided into three, the omega *diffinitio* requires that history be divided into two, reflecting how the Father and Son are united in relation to the Spirit. According to this pattern, then, there are two—and only two—dispensations (*tempora*). And since this model appears to entail that the New Testament alone fulfills Old Testament prophecies, it calls into question the ideal of the “Eternal Gospel” found in later generations of Joachimism. Reeves and McGinn conclude that the work of Christ and the Gospel are definitive and insuperable for Joachim, rather than incomplete and transitory.

According to Reeves, the same approach can be taken with respect to the Church. Although it is a common translation of the Latin “*status,*” the English term “age” is often misleading when discussing the technicalities of Joachim’s thought. She notes that Joachim only uses the terms “*aetas*” (age) and “*tempus*” (time) in reference to his two-fold pattern (i.e. to the Old and New Covenants), and never in reference to the “age” of the Holy Spirit. *Status* in this sense denotes a form of life within the Church, rather than a definite quantity of time. On these terms Joachim does not expect the dissolution of the Roman Church, nor the dissolution of its clergy, sacraments, or magisterial authority. Its institutional identity corresponds to the two-fold pattern, according to which the Church of Rome stands firm until the Second Coming. All that changes within this Church is the dominant character of its spiritual life (*ecclesia spiritualis*). 

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As I’ve noted, de Lubac’s rhetoric is often inconsistent, and can easily give the impression that his condemnation of Joachim is single-minded and without qualification. A careful reading of *La postérité* reveals, however, that while de Lubac condemns Joachimism decisively, he interprets Joachim himself as a deeply ambivalent figure. He nowhere condemns Joachim as heretical, and even affirms his orthodoxy, his Catholic sensibility, his faithfulness to Bernard of Clairvaux, and his fidelity to the papacy. De Lubac also acknowledges his personal fascination with and sympathy for the abbot. His judgment, then, is not that Joachim’s thought is determined toward the errors that emerge in later years, but rather that certain aspects of his thought have negative implications in excess of his own intentions.

Secondly, it is misleading to suggest that de Lubac’s sole criteria for inclusion in Joachim’s posterity are the presence of a three-fold historical pattern, or the impulse for a this-worldly utopia. De Lubac clearly identifies each of these beliefs with other theological movements (like the Montanists, Amalricians, and early chiliasts), suggesting that he deems neither criterion to be sufficient on its own. If de Lubac were claiming either belief as his sole criterion, and further if he were attempting to link later thinkers directly to Joachim, as faithful representatives of his thought, then his arguments would surely fail under too great a burden. Drawing from judgments he makes throughout *La postérité*, however, I argue that de Lubac is arguing for a “weaker” claim: that the tendencies with respect to four doctrines in Joachim’s theology form a broad but identifiable pattern, of which the three-fold history and utopian future are merely parts. Figures in radically different contexts are deemed “Joachimite” to the extent that they exhibit this pattern—exploit these tendencies—and not necessarily because of their direct relationship with Joachim’s texts. Joachim is significant

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355 Ibid., 7.
therefore for his innovations or imbalances, and not for the aspects of his thought de Lubac
deems traditional and balanced.

More importantly, such criticisms overlook a central feature of de Lubac's method.
As I've suggested, in his use of the “posterity” metaphor (as well as its companion
metaphors), de Lubac is not concerned with tracing each of the modern views bearing his
name directly to Joachim himself. He is, as in his other works of theological history,
concerned with the spirit or form of thought of an author, whose range of meanings greatly
exceed that author's intentions. For such an approach, de Lubac insists that a purely
objective method is always inadequate:

To reach the heart of a vigorous thought, nothing is as inadequate as a certain
pretension to pure objectivity. If we want to have any chance of understanding it,
even as a mere historian …it is necessary to translate, to interpret…It must lay open
hidden categories, determine lines of force. It must penetrate beneath the
particularities of time and place to what is eternal. This is, without doubt, a task that
is always incomplete, an interpretation necessarily partial. Every epoch, every
historian, returning to the great works of the past, illuminates one aspect of them
while leaving others in shadow. In that sense, too, subjectivity is unavoidable. Yet the
work is indispensable, all the more indispensable as the thought being studied is
more actually thought. Thought is not rediscovered in the same way as a fact is
reconstructed. 356

The application of a particular thought-form to new settings is, in other words, part of an
authentically historical understanding. In the context of this quote (from his History and
Spirit), de Lubac highlights the conditions for a positive retrieval of categories from the
tradition. Yet there is good reason to hold that the same conditions apply when diagnosing
the negative consequences of theories from the past, especially when the patterns of thought
they inspire are contemporary with us.

When de Lubac uses the category “posterity,” then, he is using it in a sense quite different from the one Reeves prescribes. As she herself recognizes, for de Lubac the term is meant to determine how widespread the Joachimite form of thought is across the centuries.\textsuperscript{357} De Lubac’s approach is, in this sense, a matter of effective history rather than of historiography:

We do not want to suggest, moreover, that the emphasis on an origin must provide a major element for the explication of a thought. The origins are always complex, and they are never sufficient to account for the novelty that arises. It is not however without interest to follow, through the texts, the trace of an influence which, even when its source has fallen into obscurity, is perpetuated through diverse channels from century to century.\textsuperscript{358}

In sum, then, de Lubac is concerned with problematic tendencies in the writings of Joachim which are arguably moderated by other aspects of his thought. In the absence of these restraints, however, the tendencies are exploited, in a variety of contexts, to justify the dissolution of Christ, the Gospel, the Church, and the eschaton. Joachim functions as a source of ongoing “inspiration,” a figurehead around which these tendencies can be organized and identified. Here even McGinn and Reeves admit that Joachim’s theology contains “revolutionary possibilities” and “dangerous, even heretical implications which could be drawn” from them.\textsuperscript{359} For de Lubac these implications explain how modern thinkers like Lessing and Schelling, Comte and Engels, Bloch and Alitzer, etc. could recognize themselves in the Joachimite tradition.

\textsuperscript{357} Reeves, “Review,” 294.

\textsuperscript{358} De Lubac, \textit{La postérité II}, 337.

\textsuperscript{359} Reeves, \textit{Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future}, 27; McGinn, \textit{The Calabrian Abbot}, 207-235.
2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I’ve attempted to expand upon my claims about de Lubac’s understanding of Joachimism. De Lubac’s diagnosis of Joachimism involves, in other words, a series of judgments about how Joachim’s views are appropriated by later intellectual traditions. De Lubac makes these judgments by examining Joachim’s opinions on a set of theological doctrines, identifying in each case a feature of de Lubac’s account that stands in tension with what de Lubac deems to be the doctrinal consensus of the Church. According to de Lubac, such tendencies in Joachim’s thought form an expectation that some essential aspect of the Christian faith is separated from another, or rendered obsolete by a more perfect reality in an age to come. And because Joachim expects this fulfillment to arrive within history, de Lubac argues that he destabilizes the balance between our relation to history and our transcendent relation to God.

On the topic of the Trinity, de Lubac sees in Joachim the tendency to separate the activity of the Holy Spirit from the activity of the Father and (especially) of Christ. On the topic of exegesis, he sees in Joachim the tendency to separate the spiritual understanding of scripture from the literal meaning of the Old and New Testaments. On the topic of the Church, he sees in Joachim the tendency to separate its future state (eclesia spiritualis) from the Church of Christ (its sacraments, priesthood, and authority). Finally, on the topic of eschatology, de Lubac sees in Joachim the tendency to separate features of our eschatological condition (knowledge, freedom, and peace) from their proper place beyond history.

I then examined de Lubac’s account of how these tendencies are taken up by some of the most important “currents” in Joachim’s spiritual posterity. De Lubac’s claim is that
these later thinkers, in spite of their many differences, reproduce the pattern of separation or “surpassing” that Joachim’s thought suggests when they discuss the relevant doctrines. My summary of de Lubac’s narrative—which represents only a portion of the material he includes—follows the “trail of metamorphoses” of this pattern across eight centuries: including Spiritual Franciscans, Radical Reformers, Lutheran mystics, Pietists and Rationalists, Utopians and Idealists, Marxists and “Christian atheists.” For each I examined, first, evidence of indirect links to the Joachimite tradition; and secondly, how the thinkers radicalize Joachim’s doctrinal tendencies. I then concluded with a brief discussion of de Lubac’s method in response to concerns raised by scholars of Joachim like Marjorie Reeves and Bernard McGinn.

The above account enables us to see, more specifically, how the modern representatives of Joachim’s posterity exploit his tendencies not merely to overcome important features of Christianity, but to re-interpret the whole of Christianity in accord with immanentism. It’s therefore possible to see La postérité as de Lubac’s explanation of how Joachimism came to function as an intermediary on the path leading to secularization and an “atheistic hermeneutic of Christianity. What the modern Joachimites have in common is a proclivity to interpret Joachim’s teachings dialectically: their version of Joachim’s third status is seen as the resolution of what remains imperfect and unfulfilled in Judaism and Christianity. And what they deem to be imperfect and unfulfilled includes, above all, the existence of mystery or the supernatural.

So it is that with the Trinity, the modern Joachimites reinterpret the Holy Spirit as a principle immanent to the world or human nature. On the topic of spiritual exegesis, they reinterpret the spiritual understanding as a rationalist method for finding purely human truths in the symbols of the Old and New Testaments. On the topic of the Church,
moreover, they reinterpret the spiritual Church as an enlightened human community (whether of philosophers or socialists). And finally, on the topic of eschatology, they reinterpret the knowledge, freedom, and peace of the third *status* as a state of human perfection realized within time, and without any reference to eternity. In each case, their interpretations are dialectical in the sense that religious content (Judaism and Christianity) represents an imperfect, unresolved, even contradictory stage in the development of human history. What the pattern articulates is the explanation, resolution, and movement beyond this religious content in a third moment: a synthesis of its terms in an immanent reality. Dialectic, in short, is another way in which de Lubac describes the atheistic hermeneutic.

This overview of the spiritual posterity, finally, makes the terms of de Lubac’s confrontation with Joachimism clear. When he opposes Joachimism, he is opposing a dialectical reading of Christianity from within; one which claims to resolve and surpass the Christian faith itself. It thus makes clear the terms of de Lubac’s alternative. In a number of his works (*Paradoxes of Faith*, *Further Paradoxes*, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, etc.), de Lubac defines his own hermeneutic as the antithesis of dialectic: *paradox* defines our immanence as an imperfect and unresolved stage, insofar as it denies any resolution of Christian mysteries here below. On the contrary, it directs what is contradictory in our existence to a synthesis beyond our capacities, and thus to the mysteries that Judaism and Christianity reveal. In the following two chapters, then, I go on to argue in more detail how the confrontation between dialectic and paradox (between the atheist hermeneutic and the Christian hermeneutic) unfolds in relation to each of the major doctrines summarized thus far.
CHAPTER 3:

THE SPIRIT OF HISTORY: TRINITY AND
EXEGESIS IN DE LUBAC AND THE SPIRITUAL POSTERITY

In the preceding chapters, I argued that what is principally at stake for de Lubac in his confrontation with Joachimism is the problem of what he calls historical immanentism. When one examines the occasion of *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore*, the general structure of de Lubac’s approach to Joachimism (Chapter One), and the historical narrative he recounts (Chapter Two), it becomes clear that de Lubac’s attention is directed neither at Joachim himself, nor at the many spiritualist movements he inspired. Rather de Lubac is concerned with how modern thinkers reinterpret Joachim’s doctrines as symbols for purely immanent realities. This suggests that although he only realized it late in his career, de Lubac’s confrontation with Joachimism is a dispute that shaped his theology from its inception, long before he wrote about Joachimism directly. For a proper interpretation of de Lubac’s theology, then, and to fully understand why he takes the positions he does, it is necessary to read his writings in light of this engagement.

I also argued that based on what de Lubac writes on the topics of history and apologetics, it is necessary to interpret his theology as always both a theology of history as well as an *apologia*, a defense of the faith (Chapter One). My claim is that because his thought
is necessarily historical and apologetic, de Lubac’s confrontation with Joachimism prompts him to re-present his positions from earlier works as always having constituted first, an alternative theology of history to Joachim’s, and second, a compelling refutation of immanenticism. In his memoir, *At the Service of the Church*, de Lubac acknowledges that he had outlined his “doctrinal conclusion” to *La postérité* (which he never completed) nearly thirty years earlier in his 1952 work, *The Splendor of the Church*. In the present (Chapter Three) and following chapters (Chapter Four), I explore what this dogmatic conclusion might have looked like both by showing the ways in which de Lubac’s claims in *La postérité* reproduce the claims he makes in earlier works, and by demonstrating how each stands opposed to Joachimism doctrinally and apologetically.

The two doctrines that most determine the structure of Joachim’s theology of history, and thus factor prominently in de Lubac’s confrontation, are the Trinity (especially the relationship between Christ and Holy Spirit) and the spiritual exegesis of scripture. According to de Lubac, Joachim’s opinions on these topics mark two of his clearest breaks with the tradition of the Church. They also represent two of the teachings which modern Joachimites most often exploit in the name of immanence. In the present chapter, therefore, I examine these two doctrines considered foundational to medieval and modern Joachimism, while analyzing de Lubac’s position on each of them in turn. As I show in the following pages, while de Lubac puts them in the service of very different conclusions, the Trinity and spiritual exegesis turn out to be as central to his theology of history as they are to Joachim’s.

In the first half of the chapter, I determine in more detail how Joachim relates the Trinity to history, before determining how de Lubac relates the Trinity to history in his own

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De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 156.
thought. I then survey some of the ways in which modern Joachimites secularize Joachim’s account, before assessing the role that the Trinity plays in de Lubac’s apologetic challenge to the Joachimites. The second half of the chapter mirrors the structure of the first. I begin by considering the notion of spiritual exegesis in Joachim’s thought, as well as de Lubac’s alternative interpretation. I then survey the ways in which modern Joachimites enact a secularized version of Joachim’s exegesis before assessing the apologetic value of de Lubac’s spiritual exegesis.

3.1 Trinitarian Histories

3.1.1 Joachim on the Trinity and History

Although many have echoed the claim, Joachim of Fiore was not the first theologian to derive the structure of history from God’s triunity. Rupert of Deutz had done the same nearly a century before, and it is plausible that early Christian creeds made use of a similar Trinitarian model. De Lubac insists then that the mere presence of a Trinitarian conception of history is not sufficient evidence to determine the nature of Joachim’s innovation. As Bernard McGinn notes, what is most distinctive about Joachim’s understanding of the Trinity was inspired by his reading of scripture and his personal experience of this mystery in the Church’s life and liturgy.361

More specifically, Joachim’s understanding is informed by the vision he claims to have received on the feast of Pentecost in 1183: “I was very frightened and was moved to call on the Holy Spirit whose feast day it was to deign to show me the holy mystery of the

361 McGinn, The Calabrian Abbot, 162.
Trinity. The Lord has promised us that the whole understanding of truth is to be found in
the Trinity.” As he recounts in his Psalterium decem chordarum and Expositio in Apocalypsim,
Joachim was compelled to view the Trinity as the hermeneutical key for understanding the
structure of all things, including history as perhaps the premier imago trinitatis. The nature of
history itself, in other words, is structured the way it is not only because a Triune God
created it, but also because it is constituted by the ongoing involvement of the divine
persons within it. History is and can be nothing other than the unfolding disclosure of God’s
own relations in the fabric of time.

3.1.1.1 Alpha and Omega

As Marjorie Reeves, Beatrice Hirsch-Reich, and E. Randolph Daniel have shown, for
Joachim to decipher the Trinitarian shape of history means that he perceives in it at least two
patterns, each reflecting the procession of the Holy Spirit in a different way. The first
pattern, the prima diffinitio (symbolized by the letter A) divides history into three states of life
within the Church (status), reflecting how the Son and the Holy Spirit both proceed from the
Father. Thus, the first status (associated with the laity) is associated with the distinctive action
or reign of the Father; the second (associated with the clergy), with the reign of the Son; the
third (associated with monks), with the reign of the Spirit.

The second pattern or secunda diffinitio (symbolized by the lowercase Greek ω) divides
history into two ages or times (tempora), reflecting the way in which the Holy Spirit proceeds
not only from the Father, but from the Son as well. This schema configures history not in
terms of states of life, but rather in terms of two peoples: Jews and Gentiles, the Old and

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362 Ibid., 22.
New Covenants. Here, rather than require a distinct phase of history, the action of the Spirit proceeds from the relationship these covenants bear to each other, illuminating their depths and their mutual significance. In both schemata, the role of the Holy Spirit proves to be the determining factor.\textsuperscript{363}

Within these patterns, history possesses unity and coherence, because the God it images is perfectly one and the three divine persons act inseparably from one another. Yet history is likewise divisible because the divine persons are distinct from one another through their processions and relations. According to Joachim, then, both \textit{diffinitiones} are Trinitarian insofar as they presuppose an underlying unity over time, while embodying the relations that distinguish the divine persons from each other: the first pattern (A) signifying that two proceed from one (Son and Spirit proceed from the Father); the second pattern (ω) signifying that one proceeds from two (Spirit proceeds from Father and Son).\textsuperscript{364} In neither case for Joachim do these processions give rise to separate and measurable periods of time. Rather, the oneness and threeness of the Trinity lead Joachim to conceive of history as “a set of interwoven relationships” between the three states of the Church and the two peoples with their two testaments.\textsuperscript{365} Insofar as the Son and Spirit both proceed from the Father, the \textit{diffinitiones} coincide: the first \textit{tempus} with the first \textit{status}, the second \textit{tempus} with the second


\textsuperscript{364} Cf. McGinn, \textit{The Calabrian Abbot}, 171.

\textsuperscript{365} Daniel, “The Double Procession of the Holy Spirit,” 482. It should be noted, however, that Joachim does attempt to pinpoint the actual periods in history that correspond to these \textit{status} and \textit{tempora}, even if this is not his primary concern. He is committed, moreover, to projecting the \textit{status} of the Holy Spirit in the temporal future relative to those of the Father and the Son.
status. Insofar as the Spirit proceeds both from the Father and Son, the third status coincides with the deeper spiritual meaning of the two peoples taken together, the Old and New Testaments.366

These arrangements become concentrated in the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit, as the sending of these two persons establishes salvation history. Joachim’s belief in the inseparability of divine actions ad extra ensures a close link between the status “pertaining to” Christ and the status “pertaining to” the Spirit. It is even possible to ascribe the second status to Christ and the Spirit together, although the visible action of Christ in his Incarnation clearly predominates. Joachim argues in his Liber de Concordia that these cooperative missions are meant to perfect the three orders within the Church (laity, clergy, and contemplatives) so that the communion they share will eventually form a perfect image and likeness of the Trinity.367 He describes this as the plenitudo Christi, the fullness of the body of Christ, which he argues can only be achieved in the third status, the reign of the Spirit.

This way of characterizing the purpose of the divine missions has led the majority of scholars to conclude that Joachim did not envision the Spirit’s mission as replacing Christ’s. The secunda diffinitio, for instance, ensures that in one sense, Joachim saw the time of Christ and his work as the definitive fulfillment of history (consistent with his Augustinian forerunners). Yet for Joachim, the fact that the Spirit proceeds from and is sent by the Son and the Father together requires that the Spirit bring Christ’s work to fulfillment. This explains why he envisions a fuller outpouring of the Spirit—another Pentecost—in a third status meant to draw out the spiritual meaning in the visible signs of Christ’s life.

366 Ibid., 481.

3.1.1.2 The Centrality of the Spirit

However, as de Lubac is careful to note, it would be imprecise to characterize Joachim as a systematic thinker. His thought unfolds through a network of symbolic patterns that converge around certain overarching themes and vary in their explication of these themes. There is no guarantee, in other words, that one pattern will prove consistent with others, and they provide little guidance for weighing the implications some symbols have against others. Thus scholars supporting the “radical view” on Joachim, like Henry Mottu, argue that his position on the centrality of Christ is far from clear or consistent. A number of passages in his works suggest that the components of the diffinitiones are ordered in ways that risk attenuating Christ and the sufficiency of his historical mission. Joachim’s description of the Spirit’s action, for instance—unveiling the true spiritual meaning of Christ’s work beyond its visible figure—makes it at least a plausible interpretation to see Christ in his humanity as a mere type (typus) of the Spirit. Rather than constituting the very center of salvation history, on this reading Christ’s significance consists in symbolizing the action of the person who proceeds from him. Joachim even suggests that what Christ symbolizes will only be fully realized in the spiritual men (viri spirituales), the contemplatives of the third status. On this reading, then, Christ’s place in salvation history would seem to

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368 Daniel, “The Double Procession of the Holy Spirit,” 470, n.2. By the term “radical view,” Daniel refers to the interpretation that Joachim’s pneumatology replaces his Christology, and that the latter serves in the end as a limited symbol for the former. According to Daniel, Mottu represents this position with perhaps the highest degree of qualification. De Lubac, who follows Mottu closely, would also fall into this camp (once more, with important qualifications). Cf. de Lubac’s review of Mottu, “L’enigmatique actualité de Joachim de Flore,” originally published in the Revue de théologie et de philosophie 3 (1979), 35-46, republished as Appendice F to vol.2 of La postérité II, 468-480.

369 See Mottu, La manifestation de l’Esprit.
be rendered incomplete and dispensable, as it derives its value solely from his Spirit and the
viri spirituales Christ prefigures.

What is at issue, then, is the question of Christocentrism. McGinn admits that even
as Joachim strives to preserve the importance of Christ through the use of certain symbols, it
would be difficult to characterize his theology as consistently Christocentric.\textsuperscript{371} Indeed, for
de Lubac it is Joachim’s imprecision on this question that gives rise to tendencies at odds
with his commitment to the Incarnation. Mottu highlights examples of this imprecision in
Joachim’s late work, the \textit{Tractatus super Quatuor Evangelia}, especially in his reading of the
wedding at Cana. Here Joachim depicts Christ’s miracle as the visible sign of what the Spirit
of Truth will accomplish in the coming \textit{status}, transforming the \textit{scientia litterae} into the
\textit{intellectus spiritualis}.\textsuperscript{372} The purpose of Christ’s miracle is that it “announces” the Spirit, such
that the relationship between Christology and pneumatology becomes one of “image to
essence, promise to fulfillment.” “Jesus is no longer the Person, around which everything is
organized; he himself becomes the symbol, the figure of the action of another subject, \textit{Homo
Christus Ihesus Spiritum veritatis, quo docet omnem veritatem, designat}.” Likewise, on Joachim’s
reading of John 16, the teaching of Christ is seen as, at best, only partially true, requiring the
Paraclete to transfigure it into its authentic spiritual form.\textsuperscript{373}

\textsuperscript{370} De Lubac, \textit{La Postérité I}, 57-58.

Survey of His Canon, Teachings, Sources, Biography, and Influences,” in \textit{Joachim of Fiore in Christian Thought}, ed.
Delno C. West (New York: B. Franklin, 1975), 307: “He was not Christocentric.”

296.

\textsuperscript{373} Mottu, \textit{La manifestation de l’Esprit}, 185, 193ff.
For de Lubac this apparent devaluing of Christ results from the sense of progress in Joachim’s theology of history. Unlike his predecessors, Joachim interprets the unveiling of the Trinity in history as a progressive movement, such that the passage of time corresponds to a more and more perfect degree of revelation (de claritate in claritatem).\(^{374}\) He alone, moreover, believes that the procession of the Holy Spirit requires of history a distinct status, in a time following that of Christ and his clerical Church.\(^{375}\) The work of the Holy Spirit on this view—last in the order of processions and of missions—is the work of history’s culmination. It is understandably difficult then to avoid the implication that the actions “proper” to the Father and Son are ordered to the action of the Spirit and derive their ultimate significance from it. Indeed, Reeves acknowledges that in spite of his strong sense of the equality and coeternity of the divine persons, it was Joachim’s “tremendous sense of that progressive evolution” that “endangered the fullness of his own Trinitarian doctrine.”\(^{376}\)

This sense of progress, embodied in the many concords (concordiae) Joachim uses to describe the reigns of Father, Son, and Spirit, had the effect of rendering the historical Christ “just another element of comparison rather than the primary analogate, the middle point that explains all.”\(^{377}\) Soon Joachim’s earliest followers were reading him in precisely this way, so as to undermine the Christocentrism in traditional theologies of history and to replace it with what we might call pneumatocentrism. The early Joachimites like Hugh of Digne, John of

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\(^{374}\) On Joachim’s use of this phrase and similar phrases, see Reeves, “The Originality and Influence,” 297.

\(^{375}\) The question of whether and to what extent Joachim envisioned the third status as surpassing the institutional Church is one I discuss in Chapter Four.

\(^{376}\) Reeves, “The Originality and Influence,” 297. Cf. McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot*, 175: “…the progressive nature of the Spirit’s communication of Christ’s work does give a special character to the abbot’s conception of the divine missions.”

Parma, and Gerard of Borgo San Donnino quickly radicalized the status of pneumatology in Joachim’s vision, even to the point of viewing everything attributed to the Son “in the heart of the Trinity” as a type for the Spirit’s procession.\textsuperscript{378} Gerard especially would become infamous for making explicit the Spirit’s supersession of the historical Christ, relegating the latter to a time of imperfect and now dispensable signs. According to de Lubac then, Joachim’s first and fundamental error is perhaps more Christological than it is Trinitarian, and the tendency he inspired among his posterity is the tendency to separate the Spirit from Christ.\textsuperscript{379}

3.1.2 De Lubac on the Trinity and History

3.1.2.1 The Classic Schema

In \textit{La postérité}, de Lubac catalogs the available theologies of history in the tradition which divide its stages according to the seven days of creation, the four states of the law, or the two testaments. He even identifies an alternative schema that is, like Joachim’s, modeled on the Trinity. He designates this Trinitarian pattern as the “classic schema.” In one sense, it developed as a supplement to the Augustinian pattern of seven days (as in the works of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century German theologians). In a more original sense, he believes, it is simply the vision of history enshrined in the Apostle’s Creed. What the creed recounts is a vision of history informed by the unity of God and the actions of the three divine persons: an age of the Father associated with creation, an age of the Son associated with redemption, and an

\textsuperscript{378} Mottu, \textit{La manifestation de l’Esprit}, 185.

\textsuperscript{379} De Lubac, \textit{La postérité I}, 65-67.
age of the Holy spirit associated with sanctification. This history is one just as the three persons are one and act inseparably, yet three periods emerge in connection with the actions “appropriate” to each.\textsuperscript{380}

While De Lubac never published a work devoted solely to Trinitarian theology, he nonetheless refers to this classic schema not only in \textit{La postérité}, but also in a number of other writings from the 1950s through the 1980s, including \textit{Medieval Exegesis}, \textit{The Christian Faith}, and \textit{Dieu se dit dans l’histoire}. So while it is true that de Lubac proves to be a loyal follower of Augustine in much of his understanding of history, he saw the need for a \textit{ressourcement} of an explicitly Trinitarian framework as well. It is a framework in which God’s actions necessarily unfold in three successive phases named for the three divine persons, “cover[ing] together the entire range of history, from creation to the final consummation.” And as precedents for this framework, he cites not only the Apostles’ Creed, but also Origen’s \textit{Peri archôn}, Athanasius’ \textit{On the Incarnation}, and Rupert of Deutz’s \textit{De Trinitate et operibus eius}.\textsuperscript{381} For de Lubac, then, an authentic retrieval of the theology of history requires a return not only to Augustine, but also to a more authentic version of the very approach that Joachim himself represents.

In this regard, de Lubac shares more in common with Joachim than a superficial reading of his works suggests. In \textit{The Christian Faith}, for instance, he presents the Trinitarian model as a necessary feature of the Church’s proclamation. History results, he claims, from the fact that the Christian God is a God who lays bare his inner life and who creates with the intention of calling us to share in this life—“an unheard of exigency” for the creature. For de

\textsuperscript{380} Ibid., 20-21.

Lubac God’s design, in all its phases of creation, providence, nature, and grace, constitutes the economy (oikonomia) or economic Trinity. All revelation is thus a revelation of the Trinity, and the economy serves as the necessary medium through which we come to know God in himself (theologia). On this point de Lubac is in agreement with Joachim: the economic Trinity is revealed through distinct phases of history, as the Word and Spirit are at work in the world “transforming the history of mankind into salvation history.”

Our knowledge of and faith in God is therefore always tied to the economy, because God only reveals his inner relations by redeeming and sanctifying us in this history. De Lubac affirms, in other words, not only that history takes the shape of a sacrament between God and humanity (as he argues in Catholicism), but that it does so precisely as it reveals the Trinity.

3.1.2.2 Sources of de Lubac’s Christocentrism

Yet even as de Lubac endorses a Trinitarian schema formally similar to Joachim’s, the ways in which they differ are more informative. In this regard, Rupert of Deutz serves as a particularly important source. De Lubac cites Rupert in several of his writings as the clearest proponent of the classic model and the clearest alternative to Joachim’s distortion of it. In Rupert we find a view similar to Joachim’s in structure: a vision of history constituted by the works and revelation of the divine persons. However according to de Lubac, Rupert was far more careful to explain how appropriating a certain act to each divine person

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382 De Lubac, The Christian Faith, 88: “If every act of revelation is in the last analysis a revelation of the Trinity, the entire revelation of the Trinity is a revelation through action, and all this action is directly concerned with man.”

383 Ibid., 88.

384 De Lubac, La postérité I, 22-23: “Rupert and Joachim differ from beginning to end…their doctrines are opposed.” Cf. de Lubac, Dieu se dit dans l’histoire, 38, 48.
(creation, redemption, sanctification) does not prevent the Trinity from acting inseparably.\textsuperscript{385} Moreover, Rupert provides de Lubac with a theology that integrates important features of Augustinianism which Joachim seems to have abandoned. For instance, Rupert includes Augustine’s model of the seven ages within his three-fold schema, identifying the Incarnation as the climax of history. This means that Rupert does not conceive of the Spirit’s work as the culmination of a progressive movement. For him it does not correspond to a terrestrial age of perfection, but rather operates in the midst of moral regression and the Church’s apocalyptic struggle with the Antichrist. Rupert insists, moreover, that Christ’s work does not cease in the time of the Spirit, but continues to operate in history through the Spirit’s power.\textsuperscript{386}

Perhaps most telling are the ways in which de Lubac departs from Joachim and the early Joachimites on the issue of Christocentrism. For de Lubac, it is not merely the case that the divine relations are manifest in three stages of history. They are especially manifest in the Incarnation, in the work that pertains to Christ. The dogma of Christ, he writes, is what leads us immediately to the dogma of the Trinity: the economy, as the means by which God accomplishes our redemption and sanctification, finds its center of gravity in the person of Christ, “the economy par excellence.”\textsuperscript{387} Here the relations between Father, Son, and Spirit are most visible when God’s Word becomes flesh and lives his relations with Father and Spirit as a human being. The implication then is that God is not in principle more perfectly revealed through the work of the Spirit, when the flesh of Christ is ostensibly relegated to the past. On de Lubac’s view, if our knowledge of God always remains tied to the economy,

\textsuperscript{385} De Lubac, \textit{The Christian Faith}, 129.

\textsuperscript{386} De Lubac, \textit{La postérité I}, 22-23.

it remains especially tied to the mediation of Christ’s life: “the history of revelation is the Christological fact deployed in time.”

With regard to Christocentrism, then, de Lubac turns to those he regards as the most successful critics of Joachimism in the medieval period: Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas. In his 1976 essay, “Joachim de Flore jugé par saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas,” de Lubac first discusses how both thinkers oppose Joachimite doctrines by upholding Augustine’s commitment to Christocentrism.389 Both encountered extreme versions of Joachim’s teachings when Gerard of Borgo San Donnino provoked the controversy of the “Eternal Gospel” in Paris throughout the 1250s and 1260s. Both were compelled to write against what they perceived as a grave threat to the Church and to the fledgling mendicant orders. However as de Lubac notes, Bonaventure’s strategy differed significantly from Thomas’. As the minister general of the Franciscan order, Bonaventure had the unenviable task of suppressing Joachimite errors while simultaneously appeasing the Spiritualist party in his order. He therefore offers an “indirect” refutation that adopts many of Joachim’s ideas. Thomas’ approach, on the other hand, is direct and uncompromising, as he saw in Joachimism little more than the resurgence of an “ancient error.”390 With different emphases, then, Bonaventure and Thomas serve as models for de Lubac’s ressourcement on the question of Christocentrism.

Even a summary reading of his works reveals evidence of Joachim’s influence on Bonaventure. De Lubac notes, for instance, that Bonaventure’s Collationes in Hexaemeron contains common Joachimite notions like the concords between the Old and New

388 De Lubac, Dieu se dit dans l’histoire, 33.


390 De Lubac, La postérité I, 143.
Testaments, a third age of peace within the life of the Church, and a prophesied order of contemplatives. Bonaventure even appears to share Joachim’s penchant for a progressive theology of history. However de Lubac stresses that “Bonaventurian Christocentrism” governs all such borrowings. In other words, Bonaventure resists the temptation to see the Spirit as the bearer of a new gospel or a definitively new era with his age of contemplatives. For him the Spirit’s work is rather the same as it has been since Pentecost: the Spirit is always the Spirit of Christ, and the age of contemplatives is equally the age of Christ. Moreover Bonaventure upholds the traditional claim that the Incarnation fulfills the letter of the Old Law, such that all of its promises are consummated in Christ. Rather than serving as a sign for the coming Spirit, Christ, the “tree of life,” contains in himself all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, around which the Spirit gathers us. Christ is in this sense truly the center of history as well as its only conceivable end.

Alternatively, Thomas was only able to read the major Joachimite writings, and even likely those of Joachim himself, during his stay at Paris in 1250. Unlike Bonaventure, Thomas follows Augustine by denying the plausibility of literal concords between the two testaments, judging such speculations to be a “dangerous vanity.” He is likewise disinclined toward Trinitarian schemata that appropriate historical ages to the divine persons: the time of the Old Testament, he argues, was as much the age of the Son as of the Father, and similarly, the New Testament is indivisibly tied to the works of Son and Spirit. Thomas’ opposition to the Joachimites is therefore, as de Lubac notes, “simpler and more radical.” In his *Summa Theologiae* (Prima Secundae, Q.106) he suggests that Joachimism represents a revival

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391 Ibid., 128.

392 Ibid., 136-138.
of Montanist principles, expecting as it does a fuller outpouring of the Spirit in place of the economy of Christ. In contrast, Thomas reaffirms that Christ embodies the fullness of the New Testament, and all the figures of the Old Testament are fulfilled in him. In his Incarnation, Christ is the plenitude of revelation, and thus an indispensable medium between God and humanity. Likewise the Holy Spirit does not introduce a new law in addition to Christ’s: he simply is the law of Christ written in the heart. Consequently this law of Christ governs the final age of the Church’s life, lasting until the end of time. The Spirit never leads the faithful beyond Christ, but always leads them more deeply into his inexhaustible riches.  

3.1.2.3 The Christological Concentration

Similarly, evidence of this kind of Christocentrism pervades de Lubac’s earlier writings. In *Splendor of the Church* (1953), he derives Christ’s centrality from his character as the true sacrament between God and creation. He describes a sacrament as a visible bond between worlds, with two defining characteristics. In the first place its function is to mediate: it is something one must pass through, a translucent sign of something else. In this sense it is not an intermediary, standing between two realities, but rather unites them by making present what it signifies. In the second case, a sacrament’s mediation is not something provisional; as if, having succeeded in uniting two realities, it could no longer serve any purpose. It is a necessary medium without which we cannot access the reality it signifies. De Lubac then shows that both of these characteristics apply to Christ in his divine person as well as in his humanity. Christ is “the way,” apart from whom no one comes to the Father (Jn 14:6-9); he is the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), in whom alone the Father is visible. De Lubac

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393 Ibid., 149-156.
concludes that Christ mediates God as the divine person he is, in a manner that cannot be dispensed with.\textsuperscript{394}

This sacramental character that Christ possesses then helps define his relation to history. According to de Lubac, history exhibits the same two features of a sacrament that Christ exemplifies: the translucence and corresponding necessity of its mediation. He makes this connection in his \textit{History and Spirit} (1950), endorsing the “sacramental rhythm” in Origen’s account of history against the philosophical allegory in Philo of Alexandria’s.\textsuperscript{395}

History for Origen fulfills its purpose by putting us in contact with eternity. It does not direct us toward itself, nor “weigh us down” to its own horizon. It directs us to “pass on” to what always lies outside the order of time, yet becomes manifest within it. Similarly, this mediating role is not something with which we can dispense, as if to attain eternity by escaping history. The historical plane is the only “ladder” by which we can spiritually ascend. De Lubac suggests, then, that insofar as it is a sacrament, history imitates Christ, the true sacrament: it points beyond itself, just as it is the Son’s whole being to direct us to the Father; and it is an indispensable medium, just as the incarnate Logos is the indispensable medium between God and humanity.\textsuperscript{396} The sacramentality of history, in other words, becomes concentrated in and fulfilled by the sacramentality of Christ.

If history does indeed derive its sacramental character from Christ, and is perfected in the instance of his Incarnation, then de Lubac’s claim that Christ is the focal point of history becomes a plausible position within the theology of history. Commenting on texts like Hebrews 1 and the Dogmatic Constitution, \textit{Dei Verbum}, de Lubac argues that the

\textsuperscript{394} De Lubac, \textit{The Splendor of the Church}, 202-203.

\textsuperscript{395} See de Lubac, \textit{History and Spirit}, 322.

\textsuperscript{396} Ibid., 322.
economy of salvation exhibits a “Christological concentration.” This concentration ensures that Christ is not merely one revelation among others in the history of God’s dealings with humanity. As God’s Word, he is the fullness of revelation, the one whose very being is to mediate God from all eternity. Every subsequent mediator of God is then derivative of this Mediator par excellence. This includes history itself, which makes God present because the Word deigned to enter history, unite it to himself, and enfold its mediation within his—the mediation that he enacts eternally. What de Lubac offers then is a rationale for the Augustinian view that Christ’s earthly life is the central and determining event of history. All of God’s revelations—events, gestures, and words—culminate in and are recapitulated by the Fact of Christ: “The Summit of history, the Fact of Christ presupposed history, and its radiance transfigured history.”

De Lubac’s Christocentrism is also supported by his arguments that Christ is the unity of revelation. If Christ is, as he claims, the fullness or plenitude of revelation, it follows that the many revelations of the Old Testament are fragmentary and incomplete by comparison. In the Incarnation, then, the Old Testament prophecies find their fulfillment as well as their principle of unity. De Lubac once more has recourse to language of transformation or sublimation, something that is completed and unified by what nonetheless surpasses it. The two Covenants, which for Joachim constitute the two great tempora of history, are thus bound together in Christ. He is what ensures that God’s revelation across the two Covenants remains fundamentally one in the midst of its many instantiations.

397 De Lubac, *Dieu se dit dans l’histoire*, 36.
399 De Lubac, *Dieu se dit dans l’histoire*, 61.
Finally, this unity helps to explain why Christ is not merely history’s center, but also its end. If Christ is the plenitude and summit of revelation, de Lubac argues, it follows that he alone qualifies as the term of history. Because Christ is the necessary sacrament of God in his very being, and because the Old Testament culminates in him, the revelation of Christ cannot occupy the place of an old testament with regard to further revelations. It is not something awaiting its fullness and its unity, something that will yield to a third or fourth covenant. Given once, de Lubac writes, the revelation of Christ is given in its entirety. History then cannot look forward to a more definitive time and a more definitive revelation. He concludes that Christ’s Incarnation inaugurates the eschatological era: “with him, the last times have arrived.”

3.1.2.4 The Spirit of Christ

Presented with only this summary, one might suspect de Lubac of overemphasizing the role of Christ. Does he not, in his critique of Joachimism, give rise to an equally erroneous tendency: that of making Christ’s work so comprehensive as to occlude the work of the Holy Spirit? This is a view, however, which de Lubac explicitly rejects, insisting that a Christological concentration is not a “pure Christocentrism” or “christomonism.” In an early passage from Catholicism (1938), for instance, he describes history in terms that are primarily pneumatic rather than Christological. Invoking a broad consensus of the Church Fathers, he claims that historical realities can only be said to possess meaning when they are understood “in a spiritual manner” (historica pneumatikos), just as spiritual realities must be

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400 Ibid., 49.
401 Ibid., 36.
understood historically (pneumatika historikos).\textsuperscript{402} This meaning, he argues, is history’s depth dimension—the depth dimension of Christ—which is conditioned by the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s role is not to add to the revelation of Christ, in other words, but rather to introduce us more deeply into the same revelation. It follows that history only constitutes a sacrament in virtue of the Spirit translating Christ’s work “pneumatically.”

Here once more de Lubac appears formally at one with Joachim in his description of the Spirit’s contribution. For Joachim, the Spirit’s task is to spiritualize what Christ reveals \textit{in figura}. For de Lubac, the Spirit’s act of sanctification is best understood as the act of making spiritual and accessible what Christ accomplished for our redemption: he is, as Irenaeus says, the “communication of Christ”:\textsuperscript{403} “History and the Holy Ghost had met at last, and with the abandonment of an outworn literalism Scripture was made new in the everlasting newness of the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{404}

Yet just as before, the points on which de Lubac takes exception to Joachimism are more telling. According to de Lubac, for the Spirit to communicate the fruits of Christ’s mission pneumatikos is not for him to offer a fuller revelation beyond Christ’s \textit{figurae}. On the contrary, the Spirit reinforces the centrality of the Incarnation. His place in salvation history does not represent a progression beyond Christ’s. It always orders us “back” toward the mediation of Christ’s humanity. In the end this work of the Spirit is inseparable from the Incarnation: the Spirit of history is the Spirit of Christ.\textsuperscript{405}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[402] De Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 165.
\item[404] De Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 177.
\item[405] De Lubac, \textit{Splendor of the Church}, 207. Cf. 1 Cor 12:3; Acts 16:7.
\end{footnotes}
In support of this view of the Spirit, de Lubac refers to his exegesis of John’s Farewell Discourse. Here the Advocate Christ promises is not associated with a new dispensation or alternative focal point in history. He does not speak of himself or proclaim his own gospel. Rather, he is sent into the world to continually bring Christ’s words to memory (Jn 14:26), to bear witness to him (Jn 15:26), to guide the disciples into the fullness of his truth (Jn 16:13) and to make known everything that Christ revealed (Jn 16:15). The Spirit, de Lubac concludes, can never lead us beyond Christ himself. He leads us rather ever deeper into the truth that Christ mediates. His operation (sanctification) is therefore always ordered to and dependent upon Christ, just as Christ’s redemptive work is dependent upon the Spirit to interpret, communicate, and render it ever new for Christ’s disciples. The divine missions that structure history are in this sense shown to be interdependent, and hence inseparable from one another.

Much like Joachim, then, de Lubac affirms the existence of an age of the Spirit, a phase of history defined by the Spirit’s peculiar reign or dominion, as a traditional feature of the theology of history. Yet because of his chrisocentrism, this phase of history never leaves the mediation of Christ behind: it is “the age of the Spirit of Christ.”

The Spirit who dwells in the Church, and who animates it as its soul, is the Spirit of the Son…Just as the sanctifying role of the Spirit should not lead us to misunderstand the absolute objective sufficiency, the unique and definitive character of the Redemption… neither should his role as illuminator lead us to imagine a continuation of divine revelation in the world, as if the revelation received in Jesus Christ were only a step in a continual unfolding.

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406 De Lubac, Splendor of the Church, 206-207.
407 De Lubac, Dieu se dit dans l’histoire, 49.
This age of the Spirit is, moreover, not an age still to come in history. It is, on the contrary, inaugurated when Christ sends the Spirit at Pentecost, and lasts until the end of time. In this sense it “coincides exactly with the age of Christ,” or more properly, with the history of the Church.\textsuperscript{409} To envision a future Kingdom of the Spirit, de Lubac notes, “following the actual Kingdom of Christ and the discipline of his Church,” leads only to “disastrous schisms.”\textsuperscript{410}

This third age is therefore marked by the operations of both Christ \textit{and} the Spirit: Christ serving as the objective principle and the Spirit as the inner or subjective principle of history.

3.1.3 “Detached From Christ, the Spirit Can Become Anything”: Modern Joachmites

A significant part of de Lubac’s project in \textit{La postérité} centers on the claim that problematic tendencies in Joachim’s writings become more than mere tendencies in the writings of those he influences. Like Joachim, many of these theologians and philosophers identify the possibility—and in some cases, the necessity—of interpreting history in Trinitarian terms. Yet, according to de Lubac, Joachim’s belief that the missions of Son and Spirit are progressively ordered, and the resulting impression that the Incarnation is a mere sign (\textit{typus}) of what the Spirit has yet to reveal, leads inexorably to a separation of Christ and the Spirit in these later thinkers. Beginning with the “Eternal Gospel” controversy and extending through the modern period, the work of the Spirit comes to represent a “surpassing” (\textit{dépassement}) of Christ:

\begin{quote}
In a way its author [Joachim] was not able to understand, the Spirit would come to be set in opposition to the Church of Christ—and, by a fatal consequence, in
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{409} De Lubac, \textit{Dieu se dit dans l'histoire}, 48-49.

\textsuperscript{410} De Lubac, \textit{The Splendor of the Church}, 204-205.
opposition to Christ himself—for the sake of a “surpassing” of Christ and his Church…From then on, this Spirit, whose coming reign Joachim celebrated, would no longer be the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{411}

As de Lubac notes, summarizing in a single line the entire argument of his study: the Spirit becomes detached from Christ, and “detached from Christ, the Spirit can become anything.”\textsuperscript{412} The narrative he recounts, particularly in the chapters devoted to the modern Joachimites, is one in which the Spirit not only supersedes Christ with a new revelation. It is one in which the Spirit is also progressively immanentized. No longer determined by his relationship with Christ, the Spirit is gradually reinterpreted as wholly immanent either to human nature, society, or the world. This explains why de Lubac is principally concerned with historical immanentism when he writes about Joachim’s posterity in the 1970s and 1980s. It functions as a “catalyst” or “intermediary” for secularization both by interpreting Christ’s work as ordered to something more definitive, and by seeing the Spirit’s work as a purely philosophical consummation of Christianity.

3.1.3.1 The History of God: Schelling and Hegel

Relatively few of Joachim’s followers faithfully reproduce his view that history is constituted by the revelation and operations of the divine persons. He was more widely-known in the medieval period for his dispute with Peter Lombard, his claims about the \textit{intellectus spiritualis}, and his prophecies of a coming Angelic Pope. There is, moreover, little evidence that his Trinitarian views were even read between the late eighteenth and early

\textsuperscript{411} De Lubac, \textit{La postérité I}, 18.

\textsuperscript{412} De Lubac, \textit{La postérité II}, 439.
nineteenth centuries. G.E. Lessing (1729-1781), for instance, was instrumental in rediscovering the Joachimite division of three status, as he was for setting the terms of their use among subsequent European thinkers. His reflections on the Trinity, however, have little to do with his philosophy of history and his reliance on Joachimite themes. Lessing’s reinterpretation of Father, Son, and Spirit within a “Christianity of Reason” seems to have developed independently of his vision of progress and the dynamic of revelation associated with it.

A close connection between the being of God and the structure of history only emerges with those thinkers inspired as much by the apocalyptic Lutheranism of Boehme, Bengel, and Oetinger, as by the German Aufklärung. De Lubac notes that F. W. J. Schelling (1775-1854) is arguably the first in the modern period to draw upon Joachim’s Trinitarianism in support of such a connection, even though his understanding of Joachim remains significantly limited. For Schelling, the history of being coincides with the history of God, and the doctrine of the Trinity, properly interpreted, is what articulates this “higher history.” In his lectures on the Philosophy of Revelation, Schelling cites Joachim as a thinker who anticipated his theogonic view, “when he represented the three persons, so to speak, as the exponents or potencies of three successive times:”

The time before Creation is in a special sense the time of the Father, since being is still exclusively in his hand. The present time is in a particular sense the time of the Son…The third time, which during the whole creation is future and to which everything is supposed to arrive, is the time of the Spirit.


Schelling thus offers a version of the Trinitarian schema, distinguishing the ages of the Father, Son, and Spirit by their acts of creation, redemption, and consummation respectively. However these ages do not merely reflect the being of God, as they do for Joachim. Schelling interprets Joachim’s model in line with the themes of German mysticism and Pietist theosophy. The Trinity, on his view, is as much a doctrine of God’s development as it is a doctrine of history. It expresses, as he says, the unfolding of the “higher causes” governing the three “great world ages.”

According to de Lubac, Schelling’s use of the Joachimite scheme leaves him vulnerable to the very errors he associates with Joachim himself. Schelling describes the ages of the world—and the historicity of God—as progressively ordered: the Father, Son, and Spirit are named “successive rulers” of three “successive times.” He also makes it possible to conceive of the Spirit as little more than an immanent principle, insofar as he views the divine persons as eternal “potencies” of being, identified with the causes of Nature. Nonetheless, De Lubac acknowledges that in Schelling the errors of Joachimism remain largely nascent and, in most cases, ambivalent. For instance, according to Schelling the divine persons are still characterized as personalities, whose revelation in history is a result of the divine will, rather than the result of impersonal necessity. Likewise Schelling’s vision is highly Christocentric, with the Incarnation forming not only the central event of history, but also the fulfillment of pagan mythology and Old Testament revelation. De Lubac concludes,

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416 Ibid., 235.

therefore, that Schelling does not conceive of Christ as a dispensable “type” of the coming
Spirit. He emphasizes rather the common sovereignty of the divine persons over history.

G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), on the other hand, presents a more decisive case. Although Hegel never cites Joachim directly, he does conceive of history in terms formally
similar to Joachim’s; a similarity brought to his attention in 1810 by K.J. H.

Windischmann. Like Schelling—his former schoolmate and rival—Hegel was intent on
reviving the doctrine of the Trinity from its demise at the hands of Kant, and to do so
precisely as a key to understanding history. History on his view is the medium through which
God realizes himself and ultimately overcomes his separation from the world. The doctrine
of the Trinity names the historical moments of this self-realization, when God is constituted
by his act of revelation and becomes Spirit (Geist): “God is thus recognized as Spirit, only
when known as the Triune. This new principle is the axis on which the History of the World
turns. This is the goal and the starting point of History.”

As De Lubac observes, then, Hegel presents his entire system as an explication of
the Trinity. Like Joachim, he sees the religious and intellectual maturity of the human race
as something developing across three historical stages. For Hegel, however, these stages
culminate in the German Protestantism and modern State of his Lectures on the Philosophy of
History (1822). Here he distinguishes three reigns or “kingdoms” of the Father, Son, and
Spirit; the Latin equivalent of which—regnum—is a term favored by Joachim’s followers.

418 De Lubac, La postérité I, 392.

419 Magee, Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition, 238.

Lubac, La postérité I, 366. See also Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, 392-394; O’Regan, The Heterodox
Hegel, 64-65.

421 De Lubac, La postérité I, 365-66.
We may distinguish these periods as Kingdoms of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Kingdom of the Father is the consolidated, undistinguished mass, presenting a self-repeating cycle, mere change—like that sovereignty of Chronos engulfing his offspring. The Kingdom of the Son is the manifestation of God merely in a relation to secular existence—shining upon it as upon an alien object. The Kingdom of the Spirit is the harmonizing of the antithesis.\textsuperscript{422}

Such explicitly Trinitarian symbols play an important role in many of Hegel’s other major works. In his \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit} (1807), he makes use of the Trinity to signify stages in the development of consciousness (the abstraction, negation, and reconciliation of the Concept) rather than successive historical periods. As de Lubac observes, however, even these stages of knowledge unfold in and through the history of human beings.\textsuperscript{423} Hegel’s Trinity is therefore inseparable from the structure of time, and consequently approximates Joachim’s view by affirming a fundamental connection between the being of God and its revelation in history.

3.1.3.2 Surpassing Christ in the Spirit

Yet it is in the progression through these stages that de Lubac discerns the first problematic tendency of Joachimism in Hegel: the “effacing” of Christ before the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{424} In his \textit{Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion} (1827), Hegel refers once more to the Trinitarian kingdoms, describing in greater detail the Christian symbols which pertain to each: the kingdom of the Father encompasses the immanent Trinity; the kingdom of the Son encompasses the creation of the world, the fall, Christ’s Incarnation and redemption; and the

\textsuperscript{422} Hegel, \textit{The Philosophy of History}, 345.

\textsuperscript{423} Ibid., 367.

\textsuperscript{424} Ibid., 370.
kingdom of the Spirit encompasses sanctification and the life of the Christian community. Of particular importance for Hegel is the kingdom of the Son—and within it, the Incarnation. The unity between God and humanity, he argues, must take the form of an individual man to render finitude, weakness, and individuality a moment within God’s self-understanding, rather than its contradiction. It is essential, in other words, that Christ become personally and sensibly present within history.

However, this reconciliation that Christ embodies is only complete when it is appropriated subjectively—“spiritually”—by believers: that is, when the Holy Spirit succeeds Christ’s sensible presence. Citing Hegel’s commentary on John 7:38-39 in the Encyclopedia, de Lubac notes that what the believer transcends on this view is faith in Christ as an historical individual. His incarnate life does not represent the fullness of truth, nor the definitive revelation of God, but only “a beginning, a foundation, a still imperfect condition.” For Hegel, even if Christ remains a necessary foundation for the stage that follows, he must nonetheless die as a distinct and immediate object of our faith. Christ is then “resurrected” only in the sense that his accomplishment comes to exist in the consciousness of his disciples, i.e. in the Holy Spirit. In de Lubac’s estimation, then, Hegel’s manner of characterizing the transition beyond Christ’s incarnate life is equivalent to endorsing “the surpassing of Christ in the Spirit.”

Additionally, de Lubac suggests that Hegel falls victim to the second error characteristic of modern Joachimism. Not only is Christ surpassed by the Holy Spirit, but

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426 De Lubac, La postérité I, 370.

427 Ibid., 371.
the Holy Spirit is conceived of as an immanent and impersonal force, devoid of the transcendence ascribed to him within orthodox Christianity. Like Joachim, Hegel calls for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to transfigure what is “merely historical” in Christ. However, since Christ’s humanity is something transitory, the overcoming of his otherness as a particular man is simultaneously the overcoming of God’s otherness from the community Christ founds (Gemeinde). It follows that the third kingdom is not an age defined by the operation of a distinct divine person. Rather, Hegel equates the Holy Spirit with the “history and truth” of the community: “Thus the community itself is the existing Spirit, the Spirit in existence, God existing as community.” The Holy Spirit is, on this view, the result of a breakdown in any absolute distinction between God and a human collective.

On de Lubac’s reading, then, Hegel makes it possible to conceive of the Holy Spirit as nothing more than a human community. Because his speculative reason (Vernunft) is the final interpreter of religious symbolism (Vorstellung), in the end the term “Holy Spirit” signifies a moment in the self-realization of what Hegel calls the Concept (Begriff). He describes this moment as the elevation of finite knowers—a community of philosophers—into the infinite, as part of God’s self-understanding. It is clear, however, that this elevation requires that God’s transcendence over humanity be relativized, and that both be included in a more encompassing whole. The Holy Spirit signals, then, a kind of ontological identity between God and this community, something Hegel deems necessary for consciousness to become Spirit (Geist). De Lubac concludes that although the structure of his thought is

428 Ibid., 466-467.
429 Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, 471.
430 Ibid., 473.
incontestably Christian, Hegel’s Holy Spirit is no longer unambiguously the Spirit of Jesus or of the Father, but resembles instead a “Spirit of the world.”

3.1.3.3 Spirit and Socialism

As Cyril O’Regan suggests, it is likely this aspect of Hegel’s thought that emboldened his followers to see in the Trinity nothing more than the “dream” human consciousness makes of itself. De Lubac therefore includes many of the Young Hegelians in the “current” of modern Joachimism, to the extent that they replicate Hegel’s Trinitarian understanding of history. Like Hegel, they interpret the Trinitarian schema of history dialectically. Unlike Hegel, however, they explicitly reject any transcendent God, identifying the divine persons and their distinctive actions with the “progress of human reason.”

Bruno Bauer (1809-1882), for instance, interprets Hegel’s kingdom language as a mythical expression for the development of our self-understanding: a dialectic which eventually negates Christ and the Church so that humanity can recognize itself as its one true god (*homo hominis Deus*). Moses Hess (1812-1875) likewise divides history into three ages of the Father, Son, and Spirit in his *The Holy History of Mankind* (1837). Yet for Hess these ages refer to the progressive realization of human society. The age of the Holy Spirit, he argues, is the age of Spinoza’s philosophy, the French Revolution, and a socialism of love.

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432 See de Lubac, *La postérité I*, 376.

433 De Lubac, *La postérité II*, 337.

434 Ibid., 345.

435 Ibid., 344.
A similar dynamic emerges in the writings of those who adopt Marx’s interpretation of Hegelian theology. De Lubac observes that these thinkers retain vestiges of Hegel’s Trinitarian history, but now figure the dialectic as definitively overcoming divine transcendence (God the Father) and the temporary function that Christian faith plays in this process (God the Son). Most importantly, they accept Marx’s judgment that overcoming our alienation is a matter of re-structuring social relations. The Holy Spirit then, the moment of reconciliation in the dialectic, is configured as precisely this kind of human community, now devoid of belief in God and organized on socialist principles.

De Lubac names Francis Jeanson (1922-2009), the French existentialist and political activist, as one such thinker who “Hegelianizes Joachim,” and “Marxizes Hegel.” According to Jeanson, in our religious understanding, Jesus forms the antithesis of YHWH; and Christianity the antithesis of Judaism. Yet it would not be in keeping with the nature of dialectic to hinder its progress in the name of only one of its moments. Any religious dependence upon the figure of Jesus (i.e. Christianity) must be negated in the name of a greater synthesis. Here he presents the Holy Spirit as “nothing more than immanence,” as the community of human beings, or alternatively, as Man. The personality of Christ thus falls away, representing as it does only a phase in the development of human society—in much the same way that Christ functions as a “type” for the Holy Spirit in Joachim’s writings.

Moreso than Jeanson, Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) and Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) distinguish themselves as thinkers in the Marxist tradition who look to “heretical movements” in Church history as precedents for their immanentism and their claims about the Holy Spirit. Lebevbvre, for instance, uses Joachim’s Trinitarian schema as a framework

\[436\] Ibid., 370.
for describing history’s movement toward communist revolution. In doing so, he draws upon the associations Joachim himself makes between the status of Father, Son, and Spirit on the one hand, and the rule of law, faith, and joy on the other. For Lefebvre, the reign of the Spirit is a utopia of joy ushered in by revolutionary action, beyond the rule of faith, and more specifically, beyond the religiosity of the Catholic Church. He presents himself, in short, as a heretical prophet of the Holy Spirit, and his intention is to foster a cult of the Spirit within the present Church capable of drawing humanity beyond the influence of religious institutions and into a society akin to Nietzsche’s Dionysian community.437

Bloch, the theorist best known for reviving a “millenarian hope of immanence,” argues that Joachim’s Trinitarian history is, at its core, a “history of humanity in progress.”438 Like other Marxists, his reading of Joachim betrays the influence of Hegel: he credits Joachim with historicizing the Trinity, with translating a belief about divine persons into a belief about the threefold structure of history.439 According to Bloch, Joachim prophesies that the ages of the Father (law) and of the Son (faith) are passing away before an age of the Spirit marked by “mental perfection and love.” “Two persons of the Trinity have shown themselves; the third, the Holy Spirit, may be expected at an Absolute Pentecost.”440 Joachim deposes the reign of God the Father (an age of fear and servitude) and, like Hegel, subsumes Christ into the community that follows him. For Bloch, however, Marxist principles are necessary to disclose the atheist kernel within these theological pronouncements.

437 Ibid., 376ff.
438 Ibid., 367.
439 Ernst Bloch, Man on His Own; Essays in the Philosophy of Religion (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 135.
440 Ibid., 133-134.
Accordingly he interprets the Holy Spirit as this community: a “mystical democracy” beyond
dependence on God and without faith in the individual Christ. It is a kind of commune or
revolutionary utopia, a perfect illumination of Humanity, an Absolute Pentecost.

On the whole, then, de Lubac reads each of these thinkers as developing the
problematic tendencies he identifies in Joachim’s theology into a set of distinctively modern
errors which undermine Joachim’s own faith in a Trinity of divine persons. The
interpretations made by the Idealists thinkers (Schelling and Hegel) lead those who follow
them to read the three ages of history as a dialectic: one which eventually overcomes divine
transcendence (the Father) and faith in the incarnate Christ (the Son) in the name of the
Holy Spirit. In addition, these thinkers interpret the Holy Spirit as a principle immanent to
human nature or the world—ultimately identifying it with a revolutionary and atheistic form
of human community. On this reading, the account of the Trinity among the modern
Joachimites exhibits what de Lubac calls the “atheist hermeneutic of Christianity”: in it,
Joachim’s understanding of the Trinity serves as a pattern for overcoming transcendence and
any religion centered on Christ, and moreover it values this overcoming as the condition for
human flourishing. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty summarizes it, the religion of the Father and
the religion of the Son are only fulfilled in the religion of the Spirit—in a new Pentecost.
What this Pentecost signifies, however, is that God no longer exists apart from us, but only
in (or as) a form of human society.^[441]

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3.1.4 “The Unfathomable Brightness of Trinitarian Life”: De Lubac’s Response

De Lubac’s writings on Joachim and his spiritual posterity reveal the extent to which his teachings on the Trinity and the structure of history contrast with those of the Joachimite tradition. If, as I’ve argued, de Lubac directs his criticisms primarily against Joachim’s modern lineage, and the defining mark of this lineage is its historical immanence, then it follows that the positions de Lubac takes in his theology also contain a response to the interpretations of these modern Joachimites. This is, moreover, precisely what one should expect given de Lubac’s proposals about the apologetic function of Christian doctrines. Truths revealed by God, he argues, are never extrinsic to the “inner viscera of man.”442 Rather, the Church presents humanity with the supernatural truths that alone hold the promise of fulfilling its deepest aspirations. De Lubac demonstrates that dogma contains more than a set of truth-claims about divine things in themselves. It constitutes “a source of universal light” for all things, and especially for the paradoxical state of the human person.

3.1.4.1 Theology and Anthropology Inseparably

Following Pierre Rousselot, de Lubac holds that because the desire for the supernatural underlies even acts of knowledge, our reason is bound to run up against antinomies, from which we derive its need for additional “light.”443 If humans are created by God to find fulfillment in an end beyond our natural capacities, then our deepest aspirations will remain frustrated in the pursuit of ends we can attain by the exercise of our natural powers. In addition, human beings will exhibit characteristics that cannot be adequately

442 De Lubac, At the Service of the Church, 185
443 De Lubac, “Apologetics and Theology,” 103.
explained in terms of our nature, tensions that resist comprehension and synthesis. The human condition, de Lubac concludes, is one of paradox: we exist within what John McDermott calls a “recurring structure of diversity in unity on various levels,” a “paradoxical oscillation” between dimensions of reality held in an unstable balance. Humans are neither body nor soul, matter nor spirit, essence nor existence, immanence nor transcendence, necessity nor freedom, history nor interiority, individual nor universal, etc. They are rather the very tension between these realities.

When we attempt to resolve these tensions without recourse to the supernatural—that is, when we subject them to a dialectic—de Lubac argues that we are doomed to compromise their balance. In this case, we would achieve only a false synthesis at the expense of reducing the human being to one pole of an antinomy. For de Lubac, however, these tensions are only antinomies in appearance, because they can be and ultimately are resolved in God. In him, our supernatural end, we find perfectly united what can only remain in tension from the perspective of our nature. It follows then that when this God opens his life to creatures and reveals himself in history, he comes and reveals himself as the absolute synthesis of our paradoxes. His mysteries, and the doctrines that express them, shed light on the human condition by offering it a coherence it would otherwise lack. Moreover they shed this light without compromising their status as supernatural truths—without, in other words, reducing the “obscurity” and “darkness” of mystery to something reason can fully grasp: “all the mystery survives.” This dynamic provides de Lubac’s theology with its two-fold task: first, to demonstrate that purely immanent attempts at resolution necessarily


fail, thereby dehumanizing their subject; and, second, to describe how God’s self-revelation in history offers coherence to the human condition and resolves the apparent antinomies of nature:

And, if one is careful to explain the nature of human aspirations—what there is in them that comes from the divine source and, hence, what there is in them that is of a supernatural and urgent character—then it does not seem erroneous or even imprudent to state that Catholicism is the true religion because it alone brings the adequate response to the aspirations of humanity, and, thus, its supreme guarantee of its own perfection.446

De Lubac affirms, in other words, a profound correspondence between the structures of human nature and of Christian mystery. The notions of paradox and the supernatural together make intelligible an account of the human being as more perfectly human to the extent that it transcends itself in pursuit of a supernatural end: “Christian revelation…bears inseparably on God and on man…it is at the same time and inseparably theology and anthropology.”447 Yet as de Lubac recognizes, to speak of this dynamic in the categories of nature and the supernatural is as yet “still too abstract” a manner of speaking.448 What de Lubac calls the mystery of the supernatural is simply the Christian mystery most devoid of content: it appears to us as the framework “within which all the other mysteries of Revelation have their place.”449 These terms are not themselves sufficient to express the personal and historical relationships that constitute the mysteries of our salvation.450

446 Ibid., 101.
447 De Lubac, The Motherhood of the Church, 153.
450 De Lubac, A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace, 40.
“fill out” the supernatural—and hold the promise of resolving human paradoxes—are those doctrines that express the \emph{concrete} personal and historical dimensions of God’s self-communication.

This is especially the case with the doctrines that most inform de Lubac’s confrontation with Joachimism. It is, in other words, through the mystery of the economic Trinity—through the missions of Christ and the Spirit—that the human comes face-to-face with its supernatural end. The doctrines that express these mysteries simultaneously express truths about the nature and destiny of human beings. If “every act of revelation is in the last analysis a revelation of the Trinity,” then the doctrine of the Trinity “is directly concerned with man.”\footnote{De Lubac, \textit{The Christian Faith}, 88.} What remains to be seen, then, is how de Lubac’s position on the Trinity and its relation to history contains a solution to the antinomies of human nature and thus constitutes a “higher, richer, more coherent conception of the world and a more comprehensive and fruitful doctrine of life” than those of his adversaries. The task is, in short, to determine how “the deepest part of man will never be understood if it is not illuminated by a ray coming from the unfathomable brightness of Trinitarian life.”\footnote{De Lubac, “Apologetics and Theology,” 98, 100.}

3.1.4.2 The “Paradox of Man”

In order to see how de Lubac’s positions hold the promise of resolving human paradoxes, it is necessary first to examine in more detail what de Lubac takes these paradoxes to be. One such paradox he identifies in \textit{The Discovery of God} is that of the absolute and the relative, or alternatively, that of transcendence and immanence. For de Lubac it is

\footnote{De Lubac, \textit{The Christian Faith}, 88.}
\footnote{De Lubac, “Apologetics and Theology,” 98, 100.}
clear that the human is a being marked by its relativity: a being called out of nothing, shaped from the dust and clay of the earth, circumscribed by time and space. Yet even the most revolutionary advocates of atheist humanism affirm that there is something of absolute value in the human, which elevates it over other forms of life. For de Lubac, these affirmations stand in tension with one another. As relative, the human is made of the same elements, exhibits the same limitations, and is subject to the same rhythms as the created world (it is a microcosm). Yet the human is unique in that it is not fully determined by its nature and possesses a dignity which is irreducible to the determinations of that nature.

A second and related paradox is that between human historicity and interiority. “Man,” de Lubac writes, “has a twofold character; there is the historical aspect and the inward aspect, and the one cannot be dissociated from the other.” Because the human being is not exhaustively determined by its nature, it must determine itself through free actions within history. This historical aspect gives concrete shape to its interiority, preventing it from becoming a timeless abstraction. Yet there is also something about the human that is not subject to the vicissitudes of history. De Lubac insists as strongly that, were there no “unalterable inwardness” to humanity, time would reduce his historicity “to dust.” His development would be devoid of any enduring meaning. Humans, he concludes, possess one aspect in virtue of the other.

A third paradox, which de Lubac discusses extensively in Catholicism, is that between the personal and the universal. Here de Lubac is attempting to determine the social character

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454 De Lubac, The Drama of Atheist Humanism, 20.

455 De Lubac, Catholicism, 357ff.

456 De Lubac, The Discovery of God, 181.
of the human race, and he identifies the danger of imagining this unity in a way that obscures the value of individual persons. He thus acknowledges a “natural paradox”: humans are intrinsically social, sharing their nature and goods with other individuals, and yet as persons they possess a dignity that is wholly incommunicable. Denying the universal aspect is equivalent to claiming that each human person can in principle find its perfection only in what it does not share with other members of the species; while denying the personal aspect is equivalent to denying that there is anything that meaningfully differentiates one human from another (or from the species as a whole). Consequently, de Lubac compares this paradox to the distinction and unity of parts within an organism. The distinctions between the parts of a being stand out the more they are united; the greater individuality of the parts contributes to the unity of the whole. Similarly, then, the perfection of the human’s personhood coincides with the perfection of its universal aspect.

3.1.4.3 “The Supreme Paradox”: Christ as Synthesis

How then does de Lubac’s position on the Trinity—on the missions of the Son and the Spirit in history—resolve these paradoxes in a way that the position of the modern Joachimites cannot? First, de Lubac insists that a strong doctrine of divine transcendence is necessary to make sense of humanity’s relative and absolute aspects. What de Lubac is arguing for is a concept of transcendence that isn’t opposed to immanence, but is the very foundation of immanence.457 He argues that one cannot establish the absolute value of the human without affirming the existence of an Absolute in itself, capable of rendering the

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457 De Lubac, Catholicism, 359; cf. The Discovery of God, 181.
value of humanity absolute. The tension between the relative and the absolute thus expresses a movement towards transcendence at the very heart of immanence: toward a Beyond in which transcendence and immanence coincide. Only this can prevent everything in the human from collapsing into relativity, and only this can free the human being from “the doctrines that incarcerate him in a nature.” A God who is transcendent, and remains so, in this way unites transcendence and immanence in himself.

Secondly, de Lubac’s understanding of history as a sacrament follows from this point. The Absolute whose transcendence infuses man’s immanence with value is what reconciles the human being’s historicity and interiority. Only when history is seen, in other words, as making present and pointing toward Eternity can time itself possess any real value. Humanity’s interiority can only prevent it from being absorbed into the flux of becoming if there is an Eternity existing in its own right, drawing us to a definitive end and conferring on us an inwardness that isn’t subject to the whims of time. This needn’t entail, however, that man’s historicity is abandoned. Rather, “it is its relation to eternity which gives the world its consistency and makes time a real becoming.” When history is seen as mediating an “eschatological Beyond,” present and active in the “womb” of history, time is no longer something from which the human must free itself. De Lubac insists that humans must rather liberate themselves through the temporal world: only when history becomes the “stuff of the world to come, the matter of our eternity” is the antinomy resolved.

458 De Lubac, The Discovery of God, 181.

459 Ibid., 184.

460 Ibid., 187.

461 Ibid., 182.
More specifically, for de Lubac to view history as mediating Eternity is to see history in light of the economic Trinity; to see it, in other words, in light of the missions of the Son and Spirit. This is especially the case with the Incarnation. History’s sacramental mediation becomes “concentrated” in the sacrament of Christ—the image of the invisible God and the mystery which contains in itself the mystery of the entire Trinity. De Lubac’s commitment to a “Christological concentration” plays a role in resolving human paradoxes. The Incarnation, he writes, is the “supreme paradox,” the “paradox of paradoxes.” In Christ, all of the tensions which the desiderium naturale exhibits in us are held together in one person without confusion: absolute and relative, historicity and interiority, personal and universal, etc. This unity explains why de Lubac prizes the Incarnation as a point of reference whose sacramental role cannot be dispensed with in favor of another revelation. It also explains how the Incarnation uniquely sheds “light” on humanity. For as the Fathers of Vatican II (Gaudium et Spes) recognize, “In revealing himself to man, not only by Christ but in Christ, God reveals man to himself.”

For de Lubac, then, it is principally Christ who grounds, transfigures, and eternalizes the human being and its values. Susan Wood is correct to note that the hypostatic union serves as the archetype for the synthesis of human antinomies in de Lubac’s writings. In Christ, the transcendent and the immanent are not opposed, but exist as a single person: “in Jesus Christ the transcendent made itself (partially) immanent…for the two elements which we deal with here, nature and the supernatural, have not become an intermixture or

463 De Lubac, Athéisme et sens de l’homme, 42.
464 Ibid., 45.
465 Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 123-126.
confusion but have been joined in intimate union in dependence on and in the image of the
two natures in Christ.”⁴⁶⁶ So too with the historical and the interior: as man, Christ’s actions
are genuine human actions, “set in history”; but being the acts of a divine person, Eternity
“becomes humanly visible and tangible” in them. Thus to grasp the meaning of Christ’s
incarnate life is to penetrate into the divine, the expression of the inexpressible: “in Christ,
God has become the Being who in his inner life as in his free designs has consented to
come an object of our knowledge.”⁴⁶⁷

As a mystery—indeed, according to De Lubac, the mystery—made visible, the
Incarnation does more than simply reveal this model of our union to us.⁴⁶⁸ The hypostatic
union is the very means by which the “paradox of man” receives its salvation and achieves
its perfection. Our minds are never able to fully comprehend the union of these aspects in
Christ. It is not a truth only provisionally beyond our comprehension, becoming accessible
as our minds reach fuller states of maturity. It is a synthesis which remains always
inaccessible to our vision and whose full meaning we will only comprehend in the
eschaton.⁴⁶⁹ Nevertheless, for this reason, de Lubac believes our proper response to this
condition is to plunge more deeply into this mystery, of which we only possess a fleeting
anticipation.⁴⁷⁰ What Christ makes accessible to us presently is a share in this union he
accomplishes, and this above all constitutes the way to our final resolution—a way that is
therefore indispensable and inexhaustible.

⁴⁶⁶ De Lubac, A Brief Catechesis, 85.
⁴⁶⁷ De Lubac, Church: Paradox and Mystery, 14.
⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 14.
⁴⁶⁹ De Lubac, A Brief Catechesis, 76.
⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 76.
Whether humanity knows it or not, it needs Christ. Emerging with difficulty from the cosmos that gave it birth, the human spirit, an irreversible force, needs the irreversible victory of Christ to achieve its divine destiny…thus allowing humanity to enter into God. Humanity has been adopted by the Father in the person of Jesus, the Son. Its purification and transfiguration must be accomplished by modelling itself on him and receiving his life. It must ‘take the form of Christ.’

The need to take the “form of Christ” reveals further how the hypostatic union resolves the tension between the personal and the universal. The central thesis of de Lubac’s *Catholicism* is that Christ does not come to save us as individual persons; nor are his saving acts merely the acts of an individual person. On the contrary, Christ’s redemptive action consists in uniting himself with humanity as a whole: “He assumed in himself the nature of all flesh. Whole and entire he will raise it up from the dead, whole and entire he will save it.” Wood rightly notes that for de Lubac, the mystery of Christ is the mystery of a Whole, of a distinction-in-unity wherein the values of the personal and the universal are no longer antitheses. Christ is a “concrete universal,” a person become universal: “it is the personal which becomes universal, to the degree to which…it realizes more profoundly its own specific character. Universality is the prerogative of the strongest personality.” Christ is himself a concrete individual as well as a universal Whole (the *totus Christus* or Mystical Body). Consequently, de Lubac affirms that it is by incorporation into Christ’s Body that we possess a share in Christ’s hypostatic union, which perfects us as persons and as an entire race. We become members of one organism, whose distinction is preserved the more these members are united: “we are fully persons only within the Person of the Son…”

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3.1.4.4 Spirit and Trinitarian Life

According to de Lubac, incorporating us into Christ’s Person and enabling us to share in his hypostatic union, is the work of the Holy Spirit. Here then we see the value in de Lubac’s insistence that the Spirit is a divine person with a distinct mission in history. The Spirit is the one who unites the natural desire underlying all human paradoxes with its resolution in Christ, conditioning one for the other. He universalizes what Christ accomplishes as an individual, and prepares the human soul to internalize it: he renders the soul capable of appropriating the resolution it recognizes in Christ. De Lubac describes the Spirit as creating in humanity new depths which harmonize it with the “depths of God.”

This is essentially how de Lubac interprets John 16:13 on the Spirit of Truth leading us into all truth: he acts by “communicating” Christ, internalizing and universalizing him; and alternatively by integrating the human more deeply into the union Christ reveals and realizes—introducing us, in short, to the sacrament of Christ. Hence, de Lubac agrees with his friend Jules Monchanin that...

[T]he age of the Spirit is not an age but a state of interiority…This state, far from diminishing that of Christ, fulfills it: the Spirit given by Christ allows Christ to be known in his essence, allows us to make the transition from his mortal humanity to his glorious humanity, and from there to his Trinitarian Life…a mysticism of the Holy Spirit is not a mysticism of the Holy Spirit alone, but the mysticism of Christ par excellence.

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474 De Lubac, Catholicism, 342.

475 Ibid., 339

De Lubac concludes: the Spirit alone “makes universal and spiritualizes, he personalizes and unifies,” operations without which the human could not appropriate the synthesis of its many antinomies.477

Ultimately what Christ and the Spirit (the oikonomia) offer us is participation in the mystery of the Trinity itself (the theologia). The supernatural end that fulfills humanity’s deepest aspirations is, in the end, a real sharing in the life of the Trinity. The image of God in the human spirit is an image of the Trinity.478 Here above all, de Lubac finds the paradigm of human perfection and the final resolution of its paradoxes. In the mystery of the Trinity, we discover on the one hand the “complete expression of Personality,” since the distinctions of the divine Persons constitute them entirely. Yet on the other hand we find here the “consecration of the highest unity,” as all three persons exist in one nature and dwell within one another through love. Hence when the Spirit incorporates us into the Body of Christ, the circumincession of the divine persons is revealed as the complete resolution of our personal and the universal aspects.479 Our union with Christ is our share in the life of the Trinity, and our consummation of this union—the beatific vision—is our sharing in Christ’s eternal vision of the Father.480

In sum, then, our supernatural end and the resolution of our paradoxes is mediated to us when God opens his inner life to us and communicates himself historically. In this sense history as a whole functions as a sacrament: as the “necessary interpreter” making God

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477 De Lubac, Catholicism, 339.
478 De Lubac, “Apologetics and Theology,” 100.
479 De Lubac, A Brief Catechesis, 43.
480 De Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 228.
present and directing humanity beyond the limits of its nature.\textsuperscript{481} In addition history’s sacramental character is concentrated in the missions of Christ and the Holy Spirit; concentrated, that is, in the sacrament of the Incarnation, by means of the Spirit incorporating us into Christ. From these points, it follows that the “classic schema,” according to which each age of history pertains to the activity of a divine person, is simultaneously an account of the stages through which humanity is revealed to itself, restored to itself, and comes to its supernatural end. Humanity’s only hope of resolving the tensions that define its condition is by encountering the form in which this resolution comes to meet him. And if we live now in an age of the Spirit, then we can only hope to be made whole insofar as this Spirit carries us deeper into Christ, who is himself the “center” in which our history finds meaning.

3.1.4.5 The De-humanizing Trinity

On de Lubac’s reading, then, the interpretations of these doctrines offered by those in the “current” of modern Joachimism fail to resolve human antinomies and hence cannot provide a more humanizing vision. They can never achieve an authentic synthesis of the “paradox of man” by reinterpreting the Trinity and the progressive quality of Joachim’s teaching on the model of an immanent dialectic. On the contrary, this strategy can only reduce the human to one term of its paradox at the expense of another, thereby betraying its humanist intentions. In the first instance, when these thinkers relegate divine transcendence to a primitive stage of reason’s development, a past age of the Father, de Lubac argues that they abandon the necessary condition for upholding the absolute value of humanity. A

\textsuperscript{481} De Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 166.
process that envisions the ages of history terminating in pure immanence condemns the
human to an exclusively relative dignity. Consequently, the more man abandons the
Absolute to a distant past, the more he is “estranged from himself, dispersed, separated from
himself,” in an alienation more damning than that described by Feuerbach or Marx.

Similarly, the errors most characteristic of modern Joachimism merely disrupt the
fragile balance of human tensions rather than provide their synthesis. To render the
mediation of Christ obsolete, as a provisional condition of our self-understanding, is to
render obsolete the only medium through which our coherence is made accessible to us.
Apart from the mediation of Christ, the historical and interior aspects of our being remain
perpetually opposed to one another. To reject Christ as the enduring center of history is in
the end to reduce history to a directionless “becoming,” for which there would be nothing
apart from history to constitute its term and fulfillment.\footnote{Ibid., 354-355.}

Lastly, when the modern Joachimites envision the Holy Spirit as a symbol for a
purely human community, and no longer as a distinct divine person, they likewise deprive
humanity of the only principle capable of resolving the contradictions endemic to such a
community. If there is no agency that transcends the human collective, then there is no
longer anything capable of conforming it to the communion in which humanity’s personal
and universal values are perfectly reconciled. We would have no means of internalizing this
kind of inter-personal relationship—Christ as a concrete universal and the circumincession
of the Trinity—and consequently the societies we form would oscillate endlessly between
excessive individualism and the sacrificing of the person at the altar of an impersonal
collective. Here de Lubac echoes the protests of Dostoyevsky and Rikachov: such a vision
“is certainly the most absurd thing one can imagine.”483 “I have no wish to sacrifice myself to that terrible God called future society.”484 Such examples reveal why de Lubac associates Joachimism with the inevitable degradation of the human race.

3.2 Eternal Gospels

3.2.1 Joachim on the Spiritual Understanding of Scripture

The second doctrine which structures Joachim’s entire theology—and informs de Lubac’s confrontation with Joachimism—is the doctrine of the spiritual understanding of scripture (intellectus spiritualis). As McGinn notes, Joachim’s thought is fundamentally scriptural in outlook. He sees a theology rooted in exegesis as a theology more faithful to the Fathers of the Church than the rationalism of the emerging schools—an opinion that mirrors de Lubac’s own judgment of Neo-Scholasticism centuries later. Like the theologians of history who precede him, Joachim views scripture as the privileged source for our knowledge about the “fullness of history” (plenitude historiae) and he sees the gift of spiritual understanding as the key to discerning God’s revelation in this history.485 Joachim is thus part of the tradition of spiritual exegesis that begins with Origen and develops through the medieval Church (the subject of de Lubac’s Medieval Exegesis). However, as was the case with his Trinitarianism, de Lubac argues that Joachim’s spiritual exegesis exhibits tendencies which set him in opposition to this tradition. To fully understand why de Lubac’s theology

483 See Ibid., 352, n.2.
484 Ibid., 354.
takes the form it does, then, it is necessary to determine how Joachim’s account of spiritual understanding shapes their confrontation.

3.2.1.1 The Two Letters

Just as Joachim’s teachings on the Trinity were inspired by the vision he received on the feast of Pentecost, his views on exegesis were inspired by a second vision he received on Easter in 1183. He recounts in his *Expositio in Apocalypsim* that while he was reading from the Book of Revelation (1:10)…

About the middle of the night’s silence, as I think, the hour when it is thought that our Lion of the tribe of Judah rose from the dead, as I was meditating, suddenly something of the fullness of this book and of the entire harmony of the Old and New Testaments was perceived with clarity of understanding in my mind’s eye.\(^{486}\)

Joachim is referring here to his understanding of the biblical concords (*concordiae*) which are the subject of his *Liber de Concordia* and his distinctive contribution to the history of exegesis. These concords refer to harmonies between literal events of the Old Testament and literal events of the New. The letters of the Old and New Testaments, he believes, communicate truths about God through an elaborate series of parallels across their many genres and contexts: “each person corresponding to a person, each war corresponding to a war, etc.”\(^{487}\)

However while these corresponding histories communicate the mysteries of Revelation, insofar as they signify literal events, they do so in ways that are still largely veiled and incomplete: “the greater mysteries were still hidden.”\(^{488}\) Together they point toward a

\(^{486}\) Cited in Ibid, 22.

\(^{487}\) De Lubac, *La postérité I*, 44.

greater fullness (*plenitudo*) of Revelation which they cannot themselves communicate.

Consequently Joachim identifies the spiritual meaning with a deeper and more comprehensive interpretation of the two testaments: it is the product of his variation on the division of spiritual senses. Although Joachim’s framework varies both within and between his writings, his most consistent pattern divides the senses of scripture into twelve: the literal understanding (*intelligentia historica*), the moral understanding (*intelligentia moralis*), the typical understanding (*intelligentia typica*), which admits of seven distinct forms, and the allegorical understanding (*intelligentia allegorica*), which admits of three distinct forms (the tropological, contemplative, and anagogical senses).

All of these senses can be reduced to the fundamental distinction between *concordia* and *allegoria*. Determining the historical parallels is the exclusive operation of the literal understanding, as it prepares the soil from which the spiritual understanding can arise.

As with the third *status* in his schema of history, this spiritual understanding takes its shape from the procession of the Holy Spirit in the *taxis* of the Trinity:

> Therefore, because there are two divine Persons of whom one is ungenerated, the other generated, two Testaments have been set up, the first of which, as we have said above, pertains especially to the Father, the second to the Son, because the latter is from the former. In addition, the spiritual understanding, proceeding from both Testaments, is one that pertains especially to the Holy Spirit.

Just as the Spirit proceeds from Father and Son together, so too the spiritual understanding of the Old and New Testaments proceeds from the harmony (*concordia*) of their literal senses. McGinn is therefore correct to claim that the division of history into three *status*, and the

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489 Ibid., 129.

490 Ibid., 125.
intellectus spiritualis of the two Testaments, are two aspects of the same magnum mysterium (“the meaning of world history is the history of exegesis”). It is also clear that Joachim does not intend his spiritual understanding to supersede the literal meanings of the Old and New Testaments. Rather, he sees it as the transfiguration of these literal senses. He stresses in his Tractatus super Quatuor Evangelia that the Old and New Testaments are the water which the Spirit transforms into the wine of spiritual truth.

3.2.1.2 The Gospel of the Holy Spirit

De Lubac acknowledges, in other words, that for Joachim the spiritual understanding is meant to be inseparable from the concords of the literal sense. It does not constitute a third testament, added to the Old and New (testamenta non tria, sed duo). Nonetheless, Joachim still judges the spiritual understanding as superior to and more complete than the literal sense. The reason for this superiority stems from the connotations of knowledge it bears. As I’ve indicated, Joachim interprets history as an unfolding revelation of the Trinity, and as a progression from less to more perfect degrees of illumination. He deems the intellectus spiritualis a higher degree of illumination than the literal meaning because it provides knowledge beyond the veil of the letter, which is a limited and transitory feature of God’s Revelation. The relation between literal sign and spiritual meaning thus corresponds to that between shadow and light, as Joachim glosses 1 Corinthians 13:12: “For now we see in a

491 Ibid., 125.
492 De Lubac, La postérité I, 49.
493 Ibid., 49-50; Mottu, La manifestation de l’Esprit, 180-185.
mirror dimly, but then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.”

According to de Lubac, then, Joachim’s use of the concords and the spiritual understanding breaks with the traditional exegesis of the Church. Far from perceiving the Gospel as a separate and unprecedented revelation, the early Christians based their exegesis on a reading of the Old Testament in light of the Incarnation. They viewed the mission of Christ, and the accompanying mission of the Holy Spirit, as the single historical fact in which the scriptures find their fulfillment and consistency.\textsuperscript{494} For the Church Fathers, in other words, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments was that between letter and spirit (\textit{gramma} and \textit{pneuma}). The New Testament itself simply is the spiritual meaning of the historical events recorded in the Old Testament.

By altering this framework and comparing the Old and New Testaments as two corresponding letters (\textit{concordiae}), together ordered to a common spiritual understanding, Joachim introduces an entirely new hermeneutic of biblical Revelation. It is a hermeneutic, de Lubac argues, which reverses the interpretive lens of the Fathers and “Judaizes” the Gospel. In effect, it treats the New Testament as though it were merely an additional Old Testament alongside the first, a set of veiled revelations and unfulfilled prophecies, ordered to a further revelation of its depth and consistency.\textsuperscript{495} This point explains how Joachim’s hermeneutic risks undermining the sufficiency of the New Testament, when the events of the Incarnation are no longer taken as the fullness of the Old Testament prophecies, but as themselves requiring resolution in something beyond the events of Christ’s life.

\textsuperscript{494} De Lubac, \textit{La postérité I}, 45.

\textsuperscript{495} De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis III}, 367.
De Lubac thus identifies an imbalance in Joachim’s exegesis which lends itself to exploitation by more heterodox thinkers. His hermeneutic mischaracterizes the extent to which the New Testament constitutes the fullness of Revelation and brings history to completion. It likewise exaggerates the extent to which the New Testament requires further resolution. De Lubac then agrees with Henry Mottu that the error in Joachim’s account of exegesis mirrors the error which they identify in his account of history: the separation of the Holy Spirit from Christ. Joachim’s reading of scripture, Mottu concludes, abandons a Christocentric interpretation in favor of a pneumatocentric reading:

For Joachim, on the contrary, the liberation effected by Christ was only the beginning of a still more dependent freedom…Thus Christ is not the Lord of time, but the initiator of a an age; it is not he, in fact, who frees us, it is the Spirit…In short, it is first in his hermeneutic that Joachim is no longer Christocentric.\footnote{Mottu, \textit{La manifestation de l’Esprit}, 96; McGinn, \textit{The Calabrian Abbot}, 137.}

Accordingly, even as Joachim affirms the dependence of the spiritual understanding upon the Old and New Testaments, de Lubac argues that he nonetheless opens himself to readings which \textit{dissociate} the spiritual understanding from their literal senses—especially from the historical events of Christ’s life. Even the language Joachim uses to describe the spiritual understanding compounds this tendency and lends credibility to the charge of dissociation: he refers to it as a “new Gospel” (\textit{evangelium novum}), a “Gospel of the Holy Spirit” flowing from the Gospel of Christ, and the “Eternal Gospel” (\textit{evangelium aeternum}) mentioned in Revelation 14:6.\footnote{McGinn, \textit{The Calabrian Abbot}, 127.}

Indeed, de Lubac concludes that this possible separation from the Gospel of Christ, which Joachim makes intelligible, becomes a real separation as early as 1250 in Gerard of
Borgo San Donnino’s *Introductorius in Evangelium Aeternum*. Seeing Joachim’s prophecies as a foretaste of the spiritual understanding, Gerard concludes that Joachim’s own writings comprise the Eternal Gospel promised in Revelation 14. Moreover, drawing inspiration from Joachim’s descriptions of the *evangelium aeternum*, Gerard presents Joachim’s corpus as a third testament: a new dispensation which abrogates the authority of the Old and New Testaments. For de Lubac, then, the controversy surrounding Gerard’s *Introductorius* defines the course that Joachim’s exegesis will take in the generations following his death. Before long, he argues, scripture’s spiritual meaning, having been separated from the letters of the Old and New Testaments, comes to be seen as their antithesis.

3.2.2 De Lubac on the Spiritual Understanding of Scripture

Throughout the 1940s, many of de Lubac’s first contributions to the *ressourcement* project and to the *Sources chrétiennes* series in particular were his reflections on the spiritual sense of scripture. Along with prefatory remarks to Origen’s commentaries, de Lubac published essays on the topic including “Typologie” et “allégorisme” (1947), *Mélanges Cavallera: Sur un vieux distique. La doctrine du quadruple sens* (1948) and “Sens spirituel” (1949); all of which laid the groundwork for his magisterial work in the following decade, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture* (1959-1964).⁴⁹⁸ He intended these works as a response to the developing crisis over the sufficiency of the historical-critical method. Fellow French scholars like Bouyer, Charlier, Dubarle, and Danielou had begun debating the importance of spiritual interpretation for supplying what the historical methods lacked; a debate whose tensions were even reflected in Pius XII’s *Humani Generis* (1950). However de Lubac also judged the

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spiritual understanding to be an essential component in his recovery of a traditional theology of history. As I will show, the version of spiritual exegesis de Lubac recovers during these years is one which he later opposes to the exegesis of Joachim and his posterity.

3.2.2.1 From History to Spirit

What then does de Lubac mean by the spiritual understanding (intelligence spirituelle)? In *Catholicism*, he acknowledges the resemblance that early Christian exegesis bears to the allegories of Greek philosophers. Both are strategies for spiritualizing historical events recorded in texts. However de Lubac argues that while the “philosophical allegorists” treat history as a set of symbols for timeless metaphysical truths, the Church Fathers view history as an indispensable medium of God’s revelation: a divine language. Far from diminishing its significance, Christian exegesis is distinguished by its attention to the historical. It deepens the historical character of the Jewish texts it inherits. The Christian spiritual understanding, in short, addresses itself to the very meaning of history.\(^499\)

According to de Lubac, this concern with the deeper truth of history follows from Christianity’s inner logic. One of the most important fruits of de Lubac’s work in *Catholicism* is the recognition that Christians profess a mystery which enters into history and accomplishes its purpose both socially and historically through the ages. The fact that this mystery is not merely spiritual, but incarnate in time and space gives the “letter” of the historical events a sacramental character: one can only understand the mystery by first understanding the events themselves in which it is expressed (the literal sense).\(^500\) Yet the

\(^{499}\) De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 165-167

\(^{500}\) Ibid., 167-169.
spiritual reality always exceeds the limitations of the letter that mediates it, giving it a depth and meaning to which the literal events are ordered. It follows that to access the mystery, spiritual things must be read historically (pneumatika historikos), and to understand the true meaning of history, historical things must be judged spiritually (historika pneumatikos). 501

3.2.2.2 Sources of de Lubac’s Exegesis: Origen

De Lubac argues further that the “essential doctrine” of the Church, “upheld across the deepest historical disruptions,” identifies this relationship between the letter (gramma) and spirit (pneuma) of history with the relationship between the Old and New Testaments: “no one can understand the Old Testament without the teaching of the New, since the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament is nothing else than the New.”502 On this view the Old Testament is prophetic in nature, a shadow of a fuller reality yet to come. What distinguishes the Christian reception of it is the conviction that all the prophecies of the Old Testament find their fulfillment in the incarnate life of Jesus. The Law thus bears witness to the Gospel, and the Gospel in turn determines the telos and absolute meaning of the Law (Novum testamentum in Vetere latebat; Vetus nunc in Novo patet).503 In this way, the Old Testament finds its coherence in the historical events of Christ’s life, the one Word of God to whom all words of revelation ultimately attest: “Late in historic time, but prior in priority to all time, Christ appears to us preceded by the shadows and the figures which he himself had cast on Jewish history.”504

501 Ibid., 165.
502 De Lubac, La postérité I, 45; Catholicism, 178.
503 De Lubac, Catholicism, 177; cf. Scripture in the Tradition, 81.
De Lubac’s principal source for these claims is clearly Origen of Alexandria, the figure whose whole thought amounts, he says, to a theological meditation on sacred history.\textsuperscript{505} In his study devoted to Origen’s exegesis (\textit{History and Spirit}, 1950) de Lubac argues that Origen’s notion of spiritual understanding consists in interpreting the Old Testament from the perspective of the New. The New Testament does not establish an entirely separate letter, nor a separate history or dispensation. Rather it effects a sublimation of the Old Testament, the introduction of a fullness which it prepared and foretold, but could never itself initiate.\textsuperscript{506} The Gospel then always appears against the backdrop of the faith of Israel (its images, allusions, connotations), yet it is only intelligible as a spiritualization of that faith: a continuous reinterpretation or “spiritual transposition” of its letter. “Even though it is, in its own way, or at least in one respect, an interpretation of the Jewish past, it interprets the Jewish past solely from the viewpoint of the Christian present.”\textsuperscript{507}

De Lubac agrees, then, that the spiritual meaning of scripture simply is the transfiguring of the Old Testament in the New Testament, and the spiritual understanding the operation that renders this meaning accessible to us.\textsuperscript{508} It is the interpretation that sees the Gospel as itself a spiritualization of the Old Testament, and thus its fuller meaning (\textit{sensus plenior}). He describes it as an inner, deeper, more exalted understanding and the very “truth of history,” as it sublates the literal sense of the Old Testament, absorbs it, and brings

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{504} De Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 174.
\item \textsuperscript{505} De Lubac, \textit{Scripture in the Tradition}, 47.
\item \textsuperscript{506} Ibid., 36.
\item \textsuperscript{507} Ibid., 27.
\item \textsuperscript{508} Ibid., 19; 151.
\end{itemize}
unity to its components. In the movement from letter (gramma) to spirit (pneuma) then, de Lubac’s position on the spiritual understanding mirrors the relationship between the natural and supernatural: the disparate parts of the literal finally cohere in something more than an inevitable consequence of its categories, allusions, and images; a meaning that really comes from beyond them (the “newness” of Christ). The relationship between these senses will therefore always take the form of a paradox—of a balance between continuity and discontinuity, prophecy and fulfillment, etc.—since the synthesis of the testaments exists with God, and not within the scope of human comprehension.

3.2.2.3 Essential Object and Interior Principle

With this point in mind, it is clear how de Lubac’s spiritual understanding depends upon what he writes about Christ and the Spirit in salvation history. Claiming that the New Testament is the spirit of the Old Testament letter is equivalent to claiming that Christ himself is the spirit of the Old Testament letter (Spiritus ipsius litterae, Christus). Christ actually effects the transposition of meanings by his historical actions. The actions by which he fulfills his mission (his passion, death, and resurrection) are the actions which confirm his authority over scripture (cf. Revelation 5). He thereby reveals in himself the unity of the Testaments: the passage from letter to spirit is the passage from the Old Testament to

509 Ibid., 86-88
510 Ibid., 100-103.
511 Ibid., 36.
512 Ibid., 105.
513 Ibid., 103-109.
Christ, and through Christ to the Father. Consequently de Lubac designates Christ as the “essential object” of the spiritual sense: he is the “sole end of all biblical history and of all biblical reality,” the one Word communicated in all words of scripture.\(^{514}\) “Our spiritual exegesis…will, of course, remain Christological, purely Christological—and it will neglect none of the dimensions of Christ, just as before.”\(^{515}\)

If de Lubac views Christ as the “essential object” of the spiritual understanding, then it is equally important to view the Holy Spirit as its “interior principle.” The spiritual exegete is aware that Christ can only be recognized in the Spirit, and likewise this Spirit is always the Spirit of Christ.\(^ {516}\) Spiritual understanding thus owes its name to the Spirit who is its author. He is the one who confers this meaning on scripture, rendering the Old Testament letter transparent to the object and center in which it achieves its unity: Christ. This understanding is therefore irreducible to a technical science or intellectual skill. It is a gift of the Spirit: “we cannot succeed in understanding Scripture without the help of the Holy Spirit who inspired it.”\(^ {517}\) Hence spiritual exegesis is rooted in the mission of the Spirit as it is rooted in the mission of Christ. The Spirit creates the internal condition necessary to pass from letter to spirit, just as he creates the internal condition required for our incorporation into Christ.

However de Lubac’s reading of Joachim and other medieval exegetes raises an additional question: does the spiritual understanding consist entirely in the literal meaning of the New Testament? Or, as Joachim argues, does the New Testament itself admit of a spiritual understanding relative to its own letter? De Lubac explains that for Origen, even the

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\(^{514}\) Ibid., 105; 182.

\(^{515}\) Ibid., 67.

\(^{516}\) Ibid., 148.

\(^{517}\) Ibid., 156.
entirety of the New Testament is ordered to a more comprehensive and definitive reality—a reality for which it acts as an intermediary: an “Eternal Gospel.” Here one can see why Joachimite exegesis is so often thought to have its source in Origen’s reading of the Eternal Gospel—a contention de Lubac goes to great lengths to refute in History and Spirit and Medieval Exegesis. Yet even de Lubac admits that because salvation unfolds through history, and won’t be consummated until the end of time, neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament have the fullness of meaning in their literal senses.\footnote{De Lubac, Catholicism, 170.} Just as each object of the Old Testament is a sign announcing the New, so too each object of the New Testament is a sign of a greater fullness. For Origen, he notes, the Gospel is still darkness relative to the light of the coming Kingdom.\footnote{De Lubac, History and Spirit, 248.} If the Old Testament amounts to a shadow of what Christ reveals, the Gospel nevertheless amounts to an image of the truth that still awaits us.

If this description is correct, then both Origen’s and de Lubac’s exegesis would seem to fall victim to the same destabilizing tendency of which Joachim stands accused. However, de Lubac claims that far from abandoning the Gospel of Christ, Origen’s Eternal Gospel remains closely bound to it. It constitutes another state of Christ’s Gospel rather than an addition to it (a Gospel of the Spirit). What Origen means by the Eternal Gospel is simply heaven itself: what Joachim expects to characterize a third age within history, Origen attributes to the eschatological fulfillment in eternity. The reality for which the New Testament serves as a letter is, in other words, the reality Christ will inaugurate at his Second Coming—the only reality before which all signs pass away. The distinction between the Gospel of Christ and the Eternal Gospel is thus simply a distinction in our ways of relating to
the same Gospel: the distinction between time and eternity, between what we perceive in the
shadow of faith and in a vision face-to-face. In this sense, the passage from letter to spirit
eventually leads us beyond signs, but never beyond Christ himself. On the contrary, the
Spirit of Christ who authors this meaning can only lead us deeper into Christ.\textsuperscript{520} As a result,
de Lubac concludes that all Origen and Joachim share in common on this point is a name.
The two completely disagree, he says, on the nature and time of this interpretation.\textsuperscript{521}
“Nothing is more contrary to the ideas of Origen. His Eternal Gospel is the antithesis and
anticipated antidote to that of the Calabrian monk.”\textsuperscript{522}

In the end, De Lubac acknowledges that the language of harmony, consonance, and
even “concord” (\textit{concordiae consensus}) is proper for describing the relationship between the
two testaments.\textsuperscript{523} However he insists that to see in the New Testament only an additional
literal meaning alongside the literal meaning of the Old would constitute a denial of the
Christian mystery.\textsuperscript{524} In truth, the fabric of the New Testament can only be woven with the
thread of the Old, intelligible only as its fulfillment, transfiguration, and definitive
meaning.\textsuperscript{525} Indeed, de Lubac’s notion of the spiritual understanding is the logical
consequence of what he affirms about the missions of Christ and the Spirit. If the spiritual
understanding is the meaning, the end, and the depth of Israel’s history, and if Christ alone is
the concentrated center and end of history, then Christ himself is the object of spiritual

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\textsuperscript{520} De Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 171.
\textsuperscript{521} De Lubac, \textit{History and Spirit}, 252-253.
\textsuperscript{522} Ibid., 252.
\textsuperscript{523} De Lubac, \textit{Scripture in the Tradition}, 115.
\textsuperscript{524} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{525} Ibid., 120; 158.
understanding. Similarly, the Spirit proves to be the interior principle of this understanding, as he alone creates the subjective condition for our encounter with Christ: spiritualizing the many literal meanings of the Old Testament and unifying them in Christ. Finally, for de Lubac, to the extent to which the New Testament admits of its own spiritual meaning (the Eternal Gospel), it does not do so by dispensing with the Gospel of Christ. The true Eternal Gospel signifies only our deepening understanding of Christ’s Gospel in the eschatological state, when faith will give way to sight. It is no exaggeration, then, to state that de Lubac presents his spiritual exegesis as the very antithesis of Joachimite exegesis.

3.2.3 Atheist Allegories: Modern Joachimites

As I’ve shown with regard to the Trinitarian vision of history, de Lubac argues that in spite of his orthodox intentions, Joachim’s exegesis exhibits a tendency to destabilize the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church. Once more, de Lubac’s basic interpretive claim is that this tendency comes to negate the faith in the writings of Joachim’s modern posterity. If Joachim errs by reducing the New Testament to an additional letter relative to the Old Testament, by downplaying the sufficiency of New Testament history, and by creating the impression that the intellectus spiritualis surpasses the New Testament; these errors, de Lubac argues, are exacerbated by the modern thinkers he inspires. Like Joachim himself, they anticipate a coming fullness of spiritual understanding which will sublimate the revelation of the Old and New Testaments. What distinguishes these successors, however, is their conviction that this spiritual understanding consists in the knowledge of human nature.

As I’ve indicated, de Lubac takes great pains to distinguish the spiritualizing of history practiced by the early Christians from the spiritualizing of history practiced by
ancient philosophers. His central charge against Joachim’s posterity is that they transform Joachim’s *intellectus spiritualis* into a modern version of philosophical allegory: just as the Greeks saw in the stories of their gods an allegory for natural forces or the powers of the soul, so too do the advocates of historical immanentism see in the Old and New Testaments an allegory for the workings of Reason and the self-understanding of human nature. In his *History and Spirit* and *Scripture in the Tradition* (1967), de Lubac describes this transformation as “terreneness” and a “frightful inversion” of Christian exegesis that threatens to “carry off all biblical allegory, and faith itself, in a single stroke.”\(^526\) In *Splendor of the Church*, he notes that, like spiritual exegesis, immanentism attempts to interiorize the literal meanings of the Gospel. However it does so only by turning them inside out, figuring God as an objectified symbol of Humanity.\(^527\) Georges Chantraine is therefore right to note that for de Lubac, modern Joachimism relies upon a perversion of the spiritual understanding.\(^528\)

Arguably the most influential appeal to spiritual understanding in this vein is Lessing’s use of the Eternal Gospel: “It will certainly come, the time of the New Gospel, of the Eternal Gospel, which, even in the books of the New Testament, is promised to men!”\(^529\) Like Joachim, Lessing proclaims his Eternal Gospel as a deepening, transfiguring fulfillment of the Old and New Testaments; yet more like Gerard of Borgo San Donnino, he holds that it abrogates the New Testament, just as the New abrogates the Old.\(^530\) What he offers then is

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526 Ibid., 69.


529 Cited in de Lubac, *La postérité I*, 269.

530 Ibid., 269.
an “entirely different gospel” in place of Christ’s: one that frees humanity from the
“intolerable yoke of the letter”—that is, from dogmatic mysteries—and reveals that such
mysteries signify rational truths, immanent to the human spirit. While the figures of the Old
and New Testaments played an important pedagogical role in the maturation of
understanding, they no longer serve any purpose when reason comes of age. Lessing’s
Eternal Gospel is eternal then insofar as it treats the letters of scripture as symbols for
timeless truths already in principle accessible to human thought. It heralds a “perfected
Christianity,” conformed to the exigencies of reason.\footnote{531}

Lessing’s ideal of a “Christianity of Reason” soon defined the value that a variety of
German thinkers attributed to the Old and New Testaments, as well as how the image of the
Eternal Gospel functioned. De Lubac traces this Joachimite theme through the works of
Schleiermacher, Hölderlin, Novalis, and Schelgel. However the German Idealists exemplify
this line of interpretation most directly. De Lubac worries, for instance, that Schelling’s
exegesis too closely associates the image of the Eternal Gospel with a dawning
“philosophical religion” which will bring all “unintelligible mysteries” into the light of
understanding.\footnote{532} He also sees Hegel’s speculative reason as a rationalized version of
Joachim’s spiritual understanding. He cites Hegel’s insistence that reading scripture in the
Spirit requires that all of its literal content be elevated and seized by reason (\textit{Vernunft}).\footnote{533} The
passage from letter to spirit here becomes the passage from the limited perspective of
religious symbols (\textit{Vorstellung}) to the more comprehensive perspective of speculative reason,
which unveils their meaning as a dialectic of self-consciousness. The reign of the Spirit in

\footnote{531} Ibid., 273.
\footnote{532} Ibid., 384, 386.
\footnote{533} Ibid., 368.
Hegel thus includes a kind of spiritual understanding beyond “the time of enigmas and parables, of image and of symbols,” leading to an “integally rational reading of the Christian scriptures.”

Among the Young Hegelians, once again, the theme of the Eternal Gospel is rendered explicitly atheistic. The spiritual understanding of scripture no longer consists in the knowledge of a divine Spirit (Geist), but now reflects only the self-consciousness of humanity and human social arrangements. De Lubac cites utopian socialists like Baron Colins de Ham, Robert Own, and Wilhelm Weitling. De Lubac cites utopian socialists like Baron Colins de Ham, Robert Own, and Wilhelm Weitling who, like the Saint-Simonians, base their systems on a “New Gospel” of reason realized in a communitarian society. Alternatively, he cites Bruno Bauer’s critiques of religion as developing “the great principle” of Lessing. For him New Testament myths represent only a provisional stage in the evolution of human consciousness, and to negate them is to reveal “the gospel history in its perfection.” Lastly, he cites Heinrich Heine’s attempt to radicalize Lessing’s Eternal Gospel in accord with a purely human reality: “Lessing was the only prophet who, comprehending the second testament, announced the third…the letter, he said, is the last veil of Christianity; when the veil falls away, the Spirit appears.”

Following Gaston Fessard, De Lubac argues that a similar dynamic is at work in Marxist critiques of religion, since Marx retains certain features of Hegelian theology when he inverts its structure. Just as Feuerbach transfers theological attributes from a divine subject to the human species, Marx makes the Proletariat, class struggle, and communist

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534 Ibid., 368.


536 Ibid., 352.
society the authentic subjects of scriptural symbols.\textsuperscript{537} According to de Lubac, Marx thereby acknowledges the relative contribution of the Jewish and Christian religions in the development of communist revolution. Yet his “criticism of heaven,” and its subsequent science of social relations, provide the true meaning of their scriptural letters. Indeed, this exegetical strategy has only grown more sophisticated in the hands of Marx’s twentieth-century heirs, especially in the “esoteric Marxism” of Ernst Bloch. For Bloch, who is more conversant with the Old and New Testaments than Marx himself was, true exegesis consists in exposing the atheist “core” at the heart of the scriptural symbols, and revealing the ideal of Man which these symbols mythologize.\textsuperscript{538} Bloch, in de Lubac’s judgment, brings the Eternal Gospel of modern Joachimism to its most radical conclusions. Every letter of the scriptural heritage is fully comprehended within an immanent process of human self-realization.

De Lubac concludes that Joachim’s expectation of an Eternal Gospel and spiritual understanding to fulfill the letter of the Old and New Testaments is rationalized within his modern posterity, eventually signifying nothing more than “a transcendental condition of man’s understanding of himself”: here “the gospel vanishes in favor of man’s existentialized self-understanding: the very reality of God is reduced to what he signifies for me.”\textsuperscript{539} Joachimism gives to New Testament revelation a literal meaning alongside that of the Old, thereby judging it to be in need of fulfillment, as the Old is in need of the Gospel. The Gospel is thus judged to be dispensable, having only a temporary and pedagogical value of the kind Paul grants to the Law. The promised spiritual understanding is, moreover, a

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\textsuperscript{537} Ibid., 359.  
\textsuperscript{538} Ibid., 370-373.  
species of purely human knowledge, ensuring that the ultimate truth of the Gospel letter is immanent to a humanity devoid of God. De Lubac is faced here with a more challenging form of the same hermeneutic with which the early Christians were faced: an “anti-symbolism,” a philosophical allegory of myth, and ultimately an atheist hermeneutic of Christianity. However, as I will demonstrate below, de Lubac holds that this allegory succeeds only in de-humanizing those whose dignity it intends to found.

3.2.4 Scripture and Soul: De Lubac’s Response

How then does de Lubac intend his own account of spiritual exegesis as part of a higher, richer, and more coherent worldview than the exegesis he attributes to the modern Joachimites? The importance of properly relating the Old and New Testaments may seem unrelated to the question of human flourishing. Yet Ignace de la Potterie is correct that de Lubac sees a profound link between the two themes. It is no coincidence that he published his essays “Sens spirituel” and “Le Mystère du surnaturel” in the same year (1949). Even Humani Generis acknowledges that the two themes are intertwined. Indeed, de Lubac explains that the spiritualization which the Gospel effects also necessarily involves an interiorization. The intellectus spiritualis is a meaning we discover and penetrate only to the extent that we realize it in our souls. According to de Lubac, the foundation of Origen’s faith is the belief that Christ intended to make his historical actions (recorded in the New Testament) symbols for the spiritual operations he performs in our souls. The principle

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540 De Lubac, Scripture in the Tradition, 71.

541 Potterie, “The Spiritual Sense of Scripture,” 747.

542 De Lubac, Scripture in the Tradition, 21.
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governing Origen’s spiritual understanding is thus the same principle governing his spirituality. The literal events of salvation history are meant to signify a continuation of the redemptive drama within us.543

De Lubac therefore recognizes the importance of claiming, with the Church Fathers, that the spiritual understanding of the Old Testament simply is the New Testament (i.e., the historical events of Christ’s life). He also recognizes the importance of claiming that the spiritual meaning of the New Testament consists in the deepening of one’s relation to Christ in eternal life, when the beatific vision will replace the mediation of signs and figures (though never that of Christ himself). However, neither of these claims is a sufficient explanation of the spiritual understanding if it excludes the interiorizing of Christ’s actions as the pattern of our sanctification here below (in the age of the Spirit, between Christ’s Ascension and Parousia).544 Consequently, de Lubac argues in Scripture in the Tradition that the spiritual understanding is only truly fulfilled because of the transformation it brings about in the one who receives it. It is the new law written on our hearts rather than on tablets of stone (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 10:16; Romans 2:15); the unfolding of which coincides with our progress in the spiritual life. It is for this reason identical with conversion, with the passage from the old man to the new man.545 Our movement toward our end in God must, in short, bear the same structure as the literal events of Christ’s life, upon which it depends and from which it derives.546

543 De Lubac, History and Spirit, 243.
544 Hollon, Everything is Sacred, 168ff.
545 De Lubac, Scripture in the Tradition, 21-22.
546 De Lubac, History and Spirit, 243.
This characteristic helps to explain what makes the spiritual understanding more than another form of technical knowledge, like that associated with the historical-critical methods. Following Origen, de Lubac affirms that a connaturality exists between scripture and the human soul. Both are temples of the one divine Word: they are constituted by him and only discover their meaning in him. Just as the disparate Old Testament witnesses are unified in Christ, humanity itself is unified in Christ, the one in whom all things hold together (Col 1:17). As a result, scripture and the soul symbolize and inform one another, such that to penetrate the meaning of scripture is to penetrate the innermost depths of our own being. De Lubac concludes that the spiritual understanding doesn’t merely or even primarily concern the biblical text. It signifies the same phenomenon as the divine image in the human soul, only under a different form: “what we call the spiritual sense in Scripture we name the image of God in the soul.”

If the spiritual understanding describes the same reality as the imago Dei, it follows that de Lubac identifies the spiritual understanding with the mystery of the supernatural (or the desiderium naturale). Because it orders historical events (the literal sense) to recapitulating Christ’s redemption in us (the allegorical sense) as well as to our eschatological destiny (the anagogical sense), the spiritual understanding describes the orientation of human nature to its supernatural end in God. The passage from letter to spirit (gramma to pneuma), which defines the meaning of history, gives way to a “perpetual movement of transcendence”; a movement revealed as the natural desire’s transcendence toward God through history. It expresses, in other words, not only the mystery of the supernatural, but how that mystery

547 Ibid., 398.
548 Ibid., 397.
549 Ibid., 323.
takes shape through the “sacramental rhythm” of history: the letter is the sacrament of the spirit just as history itself is the medium through which humanity encounters the resolution of its deepest tensions in God.

One can say then that for de Lubac, as for Joachim, the spiritual understanding and the Trinitarian structure of history are two dimensions of the same profound mystery (magnum mysterium). If for de Lubac the Gospel is the spirit of the Old Testament, and if “[t]he Gospel is Jesus Himself,”—the “essential object” of spiritual understanding—then the interiorization which this understanding realizes is identical to interiorizing Christ; our being ever more deeply incorporated into Christ’s sacramental mediation.\(^\text{550}\) As Brian Hollon rightly notes, the spiritual understanding (in the allegorical sense) is simply the means through which the historical Jesus is transformed into the totus Christus, and we into his members: “the mystery of the spiritual life, which, in the final analysis, the mystery of Scripture translates, is revealed to be identical to the mystery of what would long afterward be called the ‘Mystical Body.’”\(^\text{551}\) Likewise, the internalization which occurs by passing through the four senses of scripture is identical to the Spirit universalizing, internalizing, personalizing, and unifying Christ’s individual existence (his letter), and creating in us the capacity to experience Christ as the sacrament of God. This point explains why we can only discover the true meaning of scripture by reading it “in the light of the same Spirit who authored it.” It also explains why the age of the Spirit is not a separate time, but a state of interiority.\(^\text{552}\) Spiritual understanding does not then describe a knowledge given in a future


\(^{551}\) Hollon, Everything is Sacred, 168. Cf. De Lubac, History and Spirit, 244.

\(^{552}\) Potterie, “The Spiritual Sense of Scripture,” 750.
age, beyond the mediation of Christ’s humanity. It is the work of the Spirit incorporating us into Christ here and now.

Finally, if de Lubac’s doctrine of the spiritual understanding expresses our relation to Christ and the Spirit in the idiom of scripture, then de Lubac is presenting his as the only account of exegesis that corresponds to the “paradox of man,” that is, to what alone secures humanity’s coherence. Only a vision of the spiritual understanding in which the Holy Spirit enfolds history into Christ can connect us with the resolution of our antinomies. It is an exegesis that confirms the necessity and character of our supernatural destiny, as well as the concrete way in which God opens this destiny to us in the missions of Christ and the Spirit, and in the sacramental rhythm of history. De Lubac’s implied claim, then, is that an account of spiritual understanding which abandons the mediation of Christ as a transitory stage of our self-realization abandons the only means of attaining the coherence for which it longs. It is doomed, in short, to an ultimately dehumanizing vision of history.

In the final analysis, the difference between the spiritual understanding which emerges in Joachim’s modern posterity and de Lubac’s own account of the doctrine is the difference between a modern version of philosophical allegory and an authentically Christian view of history. It is reducible, in other words, to the difference between two competing valuations of scriptural symbols: what de Lubac describes in the The Drama of Atheist Humanism as the values of myth and mystery.\footnote{De Lubac, The Drama of Atheist Humanism, 47; cf. Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 139.} For the modern Joachimites, the literal or historical truths function as myths; as often necessary though illusory projections of truths immanent to the world and human nature. As a result their spiritual meaning consists in an act of overcoming the function of the symbol in order to realize a more comprehensive
understanding of reality in its immanence. However if the condition of that reality is paradoxical, such that its ultimate end lies beyond its innate capacities, then the myths humanity projects will likewise project the antinomies which characterize its immanence, rather than resolve them.

Alternatively, for de Lubac “mystery” names that reality beyond our limitations which alone is capable of fulfilling us. The symbolic value of mystery then is that of something descending from on high, communicating to us the dignity we cannot account for within the confines of our immanence. It envisions the letters of scripture and the events of history sacramentally. Through them, our divine destiny becomes present, and we are ordered to it. Only symbols of this kind are ultimately capable of presenting us with the synthesis of our antinomies, and thus our coherence. De Lubac’s claim, in short, is that traditional Christian exegesis is an integral part of a more coherent, convincing, and humanizing worldview than the myths of his Joachimite adversaries.
CHAPTER 4:

ECCLESIA SPIRITUALIS: CHURCH AND ESCHATON
IN DE LUBAC AND THE SPIRITUAL POSTERITY

In the preceding chapters, I examined the occasion and structure (Chapter One) of de Lubac’s confrontation with Joachimism. The structure, I argued, includes de Lubac’s historical thesis, which *La postérité* is intended to address: his diagnosis of what Joachimism becomes in the modern age. I elaborated on this part of his argument (Chapter Two), examining how later thinkers transform Joachim’s ideas in support of historical immanentism. I also argued that the structure of de Lubac’s confrontation includes his doctrinal thesis, which he intended to develop in his “doctrinal conclusion” to the two volumes: his own response to the errors he identifies in Joachimism. I thus began to formulate (Chapter Three) the alternative de Lubac intended regarding two of the four most important doctrines for the Joachimite tradition (the Trinity and spiritual exegesis).

The present chapter continues this discussion of the positions that Joachim, de Lubac, and the modern Joachimites take on the relevant doctrines. The first teaching I analyze concerns the Church as the subject of history. The second and final teaching I analyze concerns the eschaton, and more specifically the relationship between the final age of the Church’s pilgrimage on earth and its consummation in eternity. For both topics, I examine the tendencies in Joachim’s theology of history and how the modern Joachimites
transform them. The chapter contributes to the argument of the dissertation by
demonstrating that de Lubac’s alternative, expressed indirectly in *La postérité*, can be found in
the positions he develops in works from different periods of his theological career. It also
demonstrates once again that his teaching is structurally opposed to the imbalance in
Joachim’s theology, and, more importantly, to the atheistic hermeneutic he finds in the
modern posterity.

In the first half of the chapter, I present an overview of Joachim’s understanding of
the Church and its transformation in the third *status*. I then examine de Lubac’s own account
of the Church, emphasizing the ways in which his ecclesiology safeguards against the errors
he associates with Joachim. Next, I survey some of the ways in which modern Joachimites
secularize Joachim’s spiritual Church (*ecclesia spiritualis*), before examining how de Lubac’s
account contains an apologetic response to immanentism. As in the previous chapter, the
second half mirrors the structure of the first. I begin by considering the features of Joachim’s
third age, its connotations of temporal progress, and its relationship with the end of history.
I then consider de Lubac’s eschatology and his arguments that Joachim’s third age is
inconsistent with the theological tradition. Finally, I survey the ways in which modern
Joachimites re-interpret Joachim’s third *status* as a model for secular utopias, before assessing
the apologetic value of de Lubac’s eschatology.
4.1 Ecclesiology

4.1.1 Joachim on the Church

As Bernard McGinn notes, the history about which Joachim of Fiore writes is fundamentally a history of the Church. The theological patterns he discerns in the Book of Revelation are “ecclesial first and last.” The “states” (\textit{status}) which divide history in his most common “pattern of threes” (the \textit{prima} or alpha \textit{diffinitio}) are distinct forms of life in the Church. Each signifies the predominance of one of the three orders (\textit{ordines}) over the others. The first \textit{status}, which begins with Adam and ends with Christ, corresponds to the laity (\textit{ordo coniugatorum}); the second \textit{status}, which begins with Uzziah, the King of Judah, and ends with Joachim’s own day, corresponds to the clergy (\textit{ordo clericorum}); and the third \textit{status}, which begins with St. Benedict of Nursia and ends with the consummation of the world, corresponds to the monks (\textit{ordo monachorum}).

E.R. Daniel is correct, then, to claim that the progress through these states signifies a growing spiritualization of the Church as it more perfectly represents the Trinity. Just as history reflects the progressive revelation of the Trinity for Joachim, so too do the relationships between the orders reflect the activities of the divine persons:

Similarly, the order of the married [laity] which flourished in the first time seems to pertain to the Father by a property of likeness, the order of preachers [clergy] in the

\footnote{McGinn, \textit{The Calabrian Abbot}, 156.}
\footnote{Reeves, \textit{Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future}, 6.}
\footnote{Joachim, \textit{Liber de Concordia}, IV, 2, 1. Cf. McGinn, \textit{The Calabrian Abbot}, 187. Note here that, as can be seen, the beginning of each status occurs within the previous, and each “fructifies” as well (reaches a climax) before its consummation (in Abraham, Zachariah, and those who live twenty-two generations from Benedict’s lifetime). Note also Reeves, \textit{Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future}, 13, where she notes that the laity are typified by the twelve Patriarchs, the clergy in the twelve Apostles, and the monks in the twelve religious (perhaps great Abbots) to follow (twelve tribes, twelve churches, twelve monasteries).}
second time to the Son, and so the order of monks to whom the last great times are given pertains to the Holy Spirit. According to this, the first *status* is ascribed to the Father, the second to the Son, and the third to the Holy Spirit, although in another way of speaking the *status* of the world should be said to be one, the people of the elect one, and all things at the same time belonging to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.\(^{557}\)

According to Joachim, each order in the Church has a function reflective of the divine person with whom it is associated. And as with the divine persons themselves, the predominance of one order does not imply that the others cease to exist. Joachim argues, for example, that the laity (*ordo coniungatorum*) manifests the Father’s personal character in history because it exists “for the purpose of bearing sons.” The predominance of the clergy (*ordo clericorum*) is the Church as it is commonly understood (the Church of Christ). According to Joachim, the mission of God the Son, “who is the Word of the Father,” is to become visible in his Incarnation and reveal the Father in a manner accommodated to our limitations. Consequently, the function of the clergy is to continue this mission after Christ’s resurrection and ascension; to “preach and teach the way of the Lord to the people and show them continuously the legitimate rules of their God.”\(^{558}\)

Because of this association with the Word, the second *status* is the form of life that corresponds to the visibility of the Incarnation and its continuation in history. It is the time of sacraments, of the veiled mediation of grace, and thus Joachim defines the clergy by their administration of the *figurae* (the sacramental signs). He also characterizes them using the image of the Apostle Peter. The Church of Peter is an active Church (*ecclesia activa*), a Church in which the clergy not only preach and administer sacraments, but exercise ecclesial


\(^{558}\) Daniel, *Double Procession*, 473.
authority. In one sense, then, Joachim identifies the Church of the second \textit{status} with the Roman Catholic Church, to which he remained faithful all his life. According to Reeves, on Joachim’s “pattern of twos” (his \textit{secunda} or omega \textit{diffinitio}), the Roman Church is definitive and insuperable. There will not be another “Church” to replace the Church of Christ and the Church of Peter, united visibly in the authority of the pope and bishops. Rather, as an \textit{institution}, the Church of the second \textit{status} fulfills what is promised in the Israel of the Old Testament. There are only Synagogue and \textit{Ecclesia Romana}; the old Jerusalem and the New.

Even de Lubac acknowledges that, for Joachim, the authority (\textit{auctoritas}) of the Catholic Church and the throne of Peter endure until the end of time.

Yet even as Joachim affirms the endurance of the Roman Church, he envisions a radically new form of spiritual life for this Church. As the omega (\(\omega\)) of his second pattern symbolizes, the Spirit proceeds from Father and Son together. Similarly the unity of the Synagogue and the Roman Church gives rise not to a “third set of institutions,” but to “a quasimystical state” within the existing institution.

Joachim expects this state in part because, like many monastic leaders of his day, he believes the Church of the second \textit{status} is in dire need of reform. As de Lubac notes, he not only refers to Rome as the New Jerusalem, but also as the “new Babylon,” a Church held captive by a corrupt and avaricious clergy.

\begin{quote}
\ldots the Church of Peter, or rather the Church of Christ\ldots in the days of Constantine was made empress of the entire world. But alas that which was once full is now empty, because, even if now it seems to be full of people, they are not its people but aliens, not its sons who are citizens of the celestial Jerusalem but sons of Babylon.
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
559 Reeves, \textit{Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future}, 6-8.


\end{footnotes}
Here Joachim has a precedent in early chiliastic movements: in the condemnation of a present “fleshly” Church (psychici), and its purification in a “spiritual” state (spiritales) to follow.  

What distinguishes Joachim is his ability to blend these chiliastic themes with monastic reform.

However, unlike the reforms of Gregory VII and his successor, Urban II, Joachim’s vision is part of an inevitable progress, rather than a return to an earlier apostolic way of life. For Joachim, the second status pertains to the Holy Spirit as well as to Christ; yet it is especially the Church of Christ because the “little ones” of this status cannot yet receive the fullness of revelation given by the Spirit. Reform is then part of the Church’s transformation into a state more perfect than that of the apostolic age. Hence Joachim prophecies that a reformed papacy—an “Angelic Pope” (pastor angelicus)—and a new group of “spiritual men” (viri spirituales) will arise to oppose the Antichrist and mark the transition to the ordo monarchorum.

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563 De Lubac, La postérité I, 38-40.


566 McGinn, The Calabrian Abbot, 112-113. McGinn argues that the myth of the Angelic Pope, as with the Last World Emperor, were the result of a long evolution in Medieval apocalypticism, but Joachim is clearly their origin.
The monks, he writes, bear the image of the Holy Spirit, “who is the love of God,” because they are compelled to walk according to the Spirit and not the flesh. The spiritual Church (ecclesia spiritualis), symbolized by the Apostle John, is a Church with a monastic organization: suffused with the love and contemplative understanding that current monastic orders prefigure. Joachim’s intention then is not to dissolve the laity or clergy, but rather to subject them to a new guiding principle. The three status together are meant to culminate in the fullness of the Body of Christ (plenitudo Christi), and thus to perfectly reflect the Trinity in history. They become “the image and likeness of the Trinity so that at last all shall come together in the unity of the faith, into mature manhood according to the measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Because he sees the three orders of the Church as the growing realization of Christ’s Body, Joachim insists that the ecclesia spiritualis perfects the Roman Church rather than replaces it: “So the Church of Peter, which is the throne of Christ, will—far be it from that!—not be missing, but, having been changed into a greater glory, she will remain stable forever.” De Lubac notes however that Joachim’s writings lack consistency, and his claims are often “fluctuating and variable.” Once more, he questions whether certain aspects of Joachim’s position stand in tension with others; whether, for instance, his language and categories have more revolutionary implications than he intends.


568 De Lubac, La postérité I, 56-57.


570 Joachim, Liber de Concordia, f. 95v; cited in Reeves, Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future, 14, n.34. cf. De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis III, 357.

571 De Lubac, La postérité I, 56-57.
In particular, de Lubac voices concern that many of Joachim’s descriptions suggest a radical break between the clerical Church and the spiritual Church. He notes, for instance, Joachim’s use of the phrase “a new Church of religious” (nova ecclesia religiosorum) and his claim that both Peter and John have a place in the Church of the second status, while only John reigns in the third.\(^\text{572}\) Joachim writes in his *Tractatus super Quatuor Evangelia* of the passing away of certain “institutiones” which are only valid for a time.\(^\text{573}\) In addition, Henry Mottu notes that in the same text Joachim uses terms of succession (*succeedere, successio, successor*) ten times, often with connotations of transferring power, as when Solomon (a symbol for the monks) assumes rule from David (a symbol for the clergy).\(^\text{574}\) In addition to other terms, like “dissolution” (*dissolutio*), “transformation” (*mutatio*), “change” (*commutantur*),\(^\text{575}\) and “surpassing” (*transitorium*),\(^\text{576}\) de Lubac also highlights Joachim’s use of language for the clerical Church. It is becoming decrepit, growing cold, and being led (sometimes forcibly) beyond itself:

David’s…old age, in the letter of the Gospel designates the old age of this second state and order of the Church Militant…But since in preserving its ancient order the Roman pontiff will begin to grow cold owing to old age, some of them are still being extolled who will seem to be ready for a fight, so as to stand in the kingdom of the Church…; but they will not prevail, since it will not still be necessary to pursue the order of war in a day of peace; but it will rather be necessary for the religious to transfer into the order which is designated in Solomon.\(^\text{578}\)

\(^{572}\) Ibid., 52-53, 55-56.


\(^{578}\) See de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis III*, 357, n.280.
According to de Lubac, then, Joachim’s claim that the Church of Christ is perfected in the spiritual Church is equivalent to the claim that the Church of Christ no longer performs the actions distinctive of it (activa ecclesia), when the labor of Christ gives way to the repose of the Spirit.  

De Lubac contends therefore that if the “particular perfection” of the second status “ceases to be,” as Joachim argues, then it is difficult to determine how the Church’s transformation into greater glory differs from its dissolution.  

It appears that the very conditions justifying the existence of the sacraments, the priesthood, and the papacy are entirely eclipsed in the ecclesia spiritualis. For example, Joachim describes the worship of the third status as “entirely spiritual and free.” Delno West notes that Figure XII from Joachim’s Liber Figurarum, and its accompanying text (“Dispositio novi ordinis pertinens ad tercium status ad instar superne Jerusalen”) suggest that the society of the third age functions as its own liturgical setting. All religious practice becomes internalized, with each member of the Church worshipping intuitively in his own place. This follows, according to de Lubac, because the Church of the Spirit no longer requires the mediation of the sacraments. The third age is a “time of greater grace” (tempus maioris gratiae), a time when the divine mysteries are experienced in their fullness, ad veritatem, and not in part, ad figuram. The Liber Concordia claims that the sacraments are destined to be replaced just as the rituals of the Law were replaced.  

579 De Lubac, La postérité I, 57.  
580 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis III, 358.  
581 De Lubac, La postérité I, 55-56.  
582 West, “Millenarian Earthly Paradise,” 271.  
583 De Lubac, La postérité I, 55-56.
replaced by the sacraments. In their stead, the Church contains spiritual sacraments
\textit{(spiritualia sacramenta)} which do not rely on the visible species of the \textit{figurae}.\textsuperscript{584}

Because the Church is no longer structured by the sacraments, the very function of
the priesthood (the administration of the \textit{figurae}) appears to be eclipsed.\textsuperscript{585} The “labor” of
those signified by Peter has passed, and even the desire to continue one’s priestly duties
becomes an expression of envy: “Far be this from the successors of Peter! Far be it that he
should pine away with envy over the perfection of the spiritual order that he will see is one
spirit with his God!”\textsuperscript{586} The same attitude extends to the pope, who, according to the
\textit{Tractatus}, will also experience a “dissolution of his own power.”\textsuperscript{587} Even as Joachim claims
that the “substance” of the papacy endures, de Lubac argues on the contrary that the third
\textit{status} is so concentrated in the monastery that it leaves virtually no room for the present
hierarchy. Those who govern the clergy and laity in \textit{Figura} XII are the monastic priors, the
summit of a “new hierarchy.” In fact, de Lubac notes that the authority once exercised by
the pope is granted to a leader Joachim calls the “spiritual father” (\textit{pater spiritualis}), a supreme
abbot in the community.\textsuperscript{588}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{584} Ibid., 52; cf. Mottu, \textit{La manifestation de l’Esprit}, 188-189. Mottu notes that it is often difficult to
determine what Joachim intends by the spiritual sacraments in the concrete (de Lubac mentions the example of
baptism by water being replaced by a “baptism by fire in the Holy Spirit”). Regardless, it is clear that Joachim
does not envision these “sacraments” to be dependent upon the activity of the clergy.

\textsuperscript{585} West argues that according to Figure XII, the clergy still function in a limited capacity by aiding the
laity, who still require formal liturgy and the sacraments. However, in \textit{Liber de Concordia} f. 130r, Joachim appears
to argue that the sacraments will be replaced in the third status, in the same way that observances of the Law
were replaced by the sacraments. Cf. West, “Millenarian Earthly Paradise,” 271-272, n.30.

\textsuperscript{586} De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis III}, 358.

\textsuperscript{587} Ibid., 358.

\textsuperscript{588} Ibid., 348. Cf. McGinn, \textit{The Calabrian Abbot}, 113. McGinn notes that it is unclear whether or not
Joachim intends the \textit{pater spiritualis} as the pope of the third status. Reeves appears to support this view, which is
evidence that Joachim is consistent in arguing for the continued dominance of the Roman Church. Joachim,
however, never identifies explicitly him as such.
\end{flushright}
De Lubac concludes that alongside the affirmations of continuity between the Roman Church and the spiritual Church, there is in Joachim a grammar of radical discontinuity. This line of reasoning appears only to undermine the features most essential to the Church which Christ founded. Joachim thus gives rise to a problematic tendency in his ecclesiology. The Church of the Spirit “surpasses” (transire; dépassement) the Church of Christ, in a way that mirrors the tendencies in his Trinitarian thought (the Spirit surpasses Christ) and in his exegesis (the spiritual understanding surpasses the Gospel). Even though de Lubac admits that there are resources in Joachim’s writings to moderate this tendency, he still sees Joachim as the “origin of grave disruptions in Christian society.”

De Lubac cites examples of such grave disruptions taking shape in the years following Joachim’s death; disruptions which lack Joachim’s own moderating influences. He mentions Salimbene di Adam, who writes in his *Chronicle* (c.1283-1288) that Joachim’s “new, contemplative, completely free and spiritual religion” will “succeed the order of the bishops” and “the aging Roman pontiff,” just as Christ succeeded John the Baptist. He also mentions the pseudo-Joachimite commentary, the *Super Hieremiam* (1241-1243), which he says hardens Joachim’s position, but does not betray it: “The end of the aging Church of the clerics” is approaching, “and not for all that the end of the world, since celebrating the Sabbath still remains for the people of God.” Finally, he cites the words of the Commission of Anagni (1255), which determined that Joachimism “tends finally to the subversion of the clergy, i.e., of the Roman church and those obedient to her.” So it is that those who claim

591 Ibid., 352.
his name, and even deform his thought, continue to find in Joachim an “animating force” for their causes.

4.1.2 De Lubac on the Church

The Church is a topic to which de Lubac devotes a number of his most important works, including Catholicism, The Splendor of the Church, The Motherhood of the Church, and Church: Paradox and Mystery. What are not always apparent in these writings, however, are the formal similarities between his ecclesiology and Joachim’s. As I argued in Chapter One, for de Lubac the Church has an intrinsically historical dimension. He describes it as a reality that lives and develops through history, building itself up to its fullness. As for Joachim, then, for de Lubac the Church is the subject of salvation history. He too speaks of the Church as an extension of the Trinity in history (an Ecclesia de Trinitate). Its unity expresses and derives from the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit acting in the economy; and the diversity of its forms reflect the diversity of the divine persons. Lastly, this connection with the Trinity leads de Lubac to categorize the Church as a mystery. It partakes of God’s mystery—a reality impregnated by the presence of God—and is the means by which God realizes his design for history. The Church is thus, like other mysteries, something reason cannot master, but which nonetheless “touches us, acts in us, and reveals us to ourselves.”

592 De Lubac, The Splendor of the Church, 123.
593 Ibid., 237.
Similarly, just as Joachim sees the goal of the Church as the full realization of Christ’s body (*plenitudo Christi*), de Lubac conceives of the Church principally in terms of Christ’s Mystical Body. It serves as a medium of God’s designs because of its “organic” relationship with the divine nature, which Christ establishes in himself. According to de Lubac, in his Incarnation, Christ’s physical body is the principal instrument of salvation, through which the divine becomes “humanly visible and tangible,” the “efficacious sign to realize the plan of salvation.” Yet, drawing from his studies on Origen and the Eucharist (*Corpus Mysticum*), de Lubac argues that Christ’s hypostatic union with his individual human nature prefigures and is ordered to his mystical union with humanity as a whole. The Church, then is this mystery of Christ forming a single entity with his members. It is a continuation of the Incarnation (“Jesus Christ diffused and communicated”), as it progressively realizes the union of the whole human race with God (*totus Christus*).

De Lubac’s ecclesiology diverges from Joachim’s, however, on the question of the Church’s sacramentality. In Chapter Three, I argued that for de Lubac, Christ is the one true sacrament of God. It is his character as a divine person to be the image of the Father, mediating his presence in a way that is exclusive and indispensable. As human, he becomes a “sensible bond between two worlds,” and an effective sign of his relation with the Father.

596 De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 125. Cf. de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 67: de Lubac distinguishes the Church from the Kingdom and from the Mystical Body “insofar as it is visible” (it is not the former and is not yet the latter). But de Lubac cites with approval the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*: “To describe this Church of Christ—which is the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman church—there is no name more noble, none more excellent, none more divine than the “Mystical Body of Jesus Christ.”” Cf. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 83.


The same holds true for the Church. It is the sacrament of Christ just as Christ is the sacrament of God.⁶⁰¹ Insofar as it becomes a single entity with Christ, it likewise becomes one with his exclusive mediation (i.e. it becomes part of Christ’s mediation of the Father, expressed in history).⁶⁰² United in this way to Christ, it derives from his physical body its instrumentality and its visibility. Like Christ himself, the Church makes present what it signifies and “can never be discarded as something that has outlived its usefulness.” The reason for the Church’s existence is to reveal Christ and communicate his grace to us, just as Christ’s whole being is to reveal the Father. And, de Lubac affirms, only the Church can effect this: “If the world lost the Church, it would lose Redemption too.”⁶⁰³

For de Lubac this notion of sacrament is what secures the doctrinal balance that Joachim upsets (between our transcendent relation to God and our relation to the historical future). The sacramental structure of the Church is necessary because it corresponds to an “interim” in salvation history, between Christ’s earthly life and the consummation of history at his second coming.⁶⁰⁴ In one sense, then, the Church continues the Incarnation, making Christ present to us now, and thus mediating what Christ has definitively accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection. Yet, like Christ’s physical body, the Church does not only mediate something transcendent, but prefigures something in the future. According to de Lubac, Joachim errs by making this interim Church an anticipation of a more perfect state within history, inadvertently downplaying what Christ has already accomplished.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 156.
In contrast, de Lubac argues that the Catholic tradition only warrants a view of the Church anticipating the Kingdom, the fullness of Christ’s body at the end of time (*totus Christus*). The Church Joachim associates with the second *status* (the visible or Roman Catholic Church) therefore has its sacramental character as a necessary condition of its identity. It is the effective sign of the perfect union that the human race finds in Christ, and thus in the Trinity. As a result the time of the Church and its sacramentality is the “last Testament.” It is not a “pedagogue” as the Law was for St. Paul, “necessary to the growing young but rightly dispensed with by maturity.” It is coterminous with the duration of history itself.\(^605\)

If then de Lubac judges the sacramental character of the Church to be indispensable, equally indispensable are the diverse sacraments in and through which this character is expressed. He describes the Church as the “total locus” containing and vitalizing the individual sacraments which Christ instituted during his ministry.\(^606\) These are, like the events of his life and death, the concrete means of salvation, the “instruments of unity,” since it is through them that the “saving life-stream” of Christ’s redemption flows to us.\(^607\) De Lubac’s contention is that these sacraments embody the doctrinal balance for which he argues. They communicate what Christ has already fulfilled, and they progressively realize what they prefigure (the fullness of the Mystical Body). For instance, he notes that baptism incorporates us into this union, thereby giving us access to the grace “concentrated” in Christ.\(^608\) The Eucharist then completes this work because it is the way in which the present


\(^{607}\) De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 82.

\(^{608}\) Ibid., 83-84.
Church (the Church of the interim) is transformed into the Mystical Body: “it is really Christ who assimilates it to himself, so that the Church is then truly the ‘Corpus Christi effecta.’”

By “the mystical body” they mean neither an invisible body nor a ghostly image of a real one; they mean the *corpus in mysterio*, the body mystically signified and realized by the Eucharist—in other words, the unity of the Christian community that is made real by the “holy mysteries” in an effective symbol...In different terms, it is “the union, indissolubly both spiritual and corporate, of the Church’s members with Christ present in the sacrament.”

He concludes that Christ’s aim in instituting the sacraments was to make one Church of the whole human race, and this union is what they anticipate figuratively. Yet because they share in the medium of grace which cannot be dispensed with, de Lubac argues that these effective signs structure the Church’s life until the end of time.

Similarly, if it is impossible to abolish the sacraments, it follows that it is impossible to abolish the clergy and the other features which distinguish the Church of Peter. For although the Church itself brings Christ to life in us (and is in this sense “maternal”), de Lubac argues that it will always require a distinct mode of life to actively ensure this result (a mode that is “paternal”). Here he justifies the existence of a ministerial or “hierarchic” Church (the *ordo sacerdotalis, ordo ecclesiasticus*), distinct from the laity and religious, which reflects the paternity of God the Father in a unique way. It entails no higher dignity than the other forms of life possess, but rather a *service* of administering the sacraments, and thus making the Church’s sacramentality concrete. Just as for Joachim, then, for de Lubac, the

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610 Ibid., 153.

611 Ibid., 143-145.

612 Ibid., 139.
raison d’être of the clergy consists in its functional relationship with the sacraments, and especially with the Eucharist.\(^{613}\)

As long as the sacraments remain valid, therefore, the active life (\textit{ecclesia activa}) of the bishops and priests remains valid as well. In this sense the clergy also participates in the Church’s sacramental mediation, insofar as they make Christ present in a particular way. According to de Lubac, bishops and priests mediate Christ \textit{as be acts} in the sacraments to sanctify us; for example, in the sacrifice of the Mass (“Jesus Christ alone can do in the priest what the priest does every day in the Church.”).\(^{614}\) The powers conferred on the clergy facilitate Christ’s activity in the Church, as he brings us into union with himself. And this includes the teaching and governing authority that the clergy exercises, unified visibly in the office of Peter. For de Lubac, the “sacramental essence” of the Church requires that the unity Christ is establishing invisibly must also be expressed \textit{visibly}. This justifies the role of the bishops, and especially the role of the pope, as a function of the Church’s visible unity. It is all a consequence, de Lubac claims, of what it means for the Church to be sacramental. As long as the Church is the sacrament of Christ, it will be the Church of Peter.\(^{615}\)

One of de Lubac’s earliest occasions for arguing these points comes in \textit{The Splendor of the Church} (1953), when criticizing Montanist ecclesiologies. Although he is careful to distinguish Joachim from the Montanists, and even gives the former the benefit of the doubt, he nonetheless anticipates the reasoning he later opposes to Joachim’s ecclesiology. Because de Lubac determines that the features of the second \textit{status} (sacraments, clergy, and authority) are as indispensable as the Church itself, he concludes that any process of

\(^{613}\) Ibid., 141, 148.

\(^{614}\) Ibid., 141.

\(^{615}\) See De Lubac, \textit{The Motherhood of the Church}, 275-305.
spiritualization which “wants to shake off the Church as a burdensome yoke or set her aside as a cumbersome intermediary” will soon find itself “embracing the void” or “worshipping false gods.”\footnote{De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 204.} Any theory which divides the Church into different states and seeks to progress beyond what Christ “figures,” is in effect attempting to bypass the mediation of Christ, and thus tending toward a false mysticism. Those who envision a “complete triumph of the spiritual”—a contemplative Church of John succeeding the clerical Church of Peter—envision nothing more than “a diseased and pride-ridden dream.”\footnote{Ibid., 204.} On the contrary, the effects of grace vary from age to age, and so the Church will remain a mixed body (both holy and unholy) until the final judgment.\footnote{Ibid., 112.}

It is little wonder then that de Lubac identifies the true “state” of the Holy Spirit with the Church’s current condition (the sacramental Church). He concludes from his reading of the Church Fathers, and especially of John’s Gospel, that from the moment of Christ’s ascension, he gives the Spirit fully to his disciples and fully constitutes the Church. From the perspective of history, the events of Pentecost, and not a future age, establish the Church in its final, liberated, and spiritual condition.\footnote{Ibid., 207.} The reign of the Spirit cannot coincide with a radically new and non-sacramental Church, since this would go against the nature of the Spirit’s mission. According to de Lubac, the Spirit never speaks of himself, nor brings the fullness of what Christ merely signifies. He seeks always to glorify Christ: to bring him to mind, to bear witness to him, and to direct the Church to his mediation.\footnote{Ibid., 207. Cf. John 12:49-50, 14:26, 15:26, 16:13-14.}
Once more, the Holy Spirit is always the Spirit of Christ, and because the sacramental Church is united with Christ in one entity, it follows that the Spirit is intrinsically related to the Church. It is in the Church that the Spirit glorifies Christ, bears witness to him, and interiorizes the effects of his Passion within us. Similarly, it is only in the Church that we receive the Spirit and are prepared for union with Christ by him.\(^{621}\) Thus the Church enjoys a union with the Spirit analogous to the union it enjoys with Christ. It is the “house” of the Spirit, and “where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God”; while alternatively, “to sever ourselves from the Church is to reject the Spirit.”\(^{622}\) As de Lubac reiterates, the Church is spiritualized through its sacraments and clergy, not apart from them. The hierarchical Church simply is the pneumatic Church.\(^{623}\)

In sum, de Lubac argues that the doctrine of the Church must strike a balance of terms in order to guard against the tendency he finds so problematic in Joachim’s ecclesiology. What secures this balance is the Church’s sacramental character, which derives from the sacramental character of Christ. For de Lubac, many of the features which Joachim restricts to the second status (sacraments, clergy, authority, etc.) actually share in Christ’s sacramentality. Consequently, they become indispensable parts of how the Church mediates grace. De Lubac believes that this understanding of sacramentality strikes the desired balance between our transcendent relation to God in the present and our relation to the historical future. It both mediates what Christ has already fulfilled in his Incarnation, while it also prefigures a future consummation. Unlike Joachim, however, de Lubac envisions this consummation as strictly eschatological. He sees no justification in the theological tradition

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\(^{621}\) De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 208.

\(^{622}\) Ibid., 211; cf. de Lubac, *Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 10-11.

for any expectation of a new condition in the Church, beyond the need for sacraments. It is Joachim’s peculiar error, he believes, to interpret the Church of Peter as signifying such a state, in light of which its activity is eclipsed. To do so is to emphasize the historical future to the point of rendering the Incarnation insufficient and bypassing the exclusivity of Christ’s mediation.624

4.1.3 Dialectic Ecclesiology: Modern Joachimites on the Church

In the sixth chapter of his *The Splendor of the Church*, de Lubac writes that the words of Joachim are always finding new lips to repeat them and new hearers to be thrilled by them. Among these “more daring disciples” of Joachim, he mentions thinkers like Lessing, Hegel, and Comte, all of whom he associates with historical immanentism.625 On the topic of the Church, de Lubac argues that what unites these thinkers is a “sacramentalism turned inside out”: their claim to deepen the Church by interiorizing it, while in truth only undermining it from within. “Thus,” he writes “the Church becomes that great being whose cult prepares peoples formerly monothesistic for the cult of the one and only true Supreme Being; she is the sacrament of Humanity…”626 In Joachim’s ecclesiology, then, these thinkers find a pattern for relegating the Church of sacraments, priests, and popes to a provisional and imperfect state. And in his prophecy of a coming spiritual Church, they find a pattern for identifying their own immanent principles with what the Church unconsciously symbolizes. They read Joachim’s status of the Church, in short, as a dialectical pattern.


625 Ibid., 205, 224.

626 Ibid, 224-225.
In de Lubac’s account, those who most determine the dialectical reading of Joachim are the German Idealists. In the case of Schelling, for instance, Joachim’s ecclesiology leaves its mark through the interpretation offered by August Neander (General History of the Christian Religion and Church, 1841). Neander recalls Joachim’s three status and the symbolism of the apostles associated with them. On his reading, the fact that John outlives Peter is a sign that the order of the clergy will perish in the conflict with the Antichrist, and the “succession” of Peter will pass into the Church of contemplatives.⁶²⁷

He [Joachim] expected from religious societies…a new and more glorious epoch of the church in the latter days. Hence the latter days of the church, when it should come forth glorified out of the refining process, appeared to him as a time of all-satisfying contemplation, taking the place of that learning which dwells on the letter and finite conceptions of the understanding…⁶²⁸

In his Lectures on the Philosophy of Revelation, then, Schelling casts himself in Joachim’s place as the herald of this new Johannine Church. However his is a Post-Reformation version of the three states, identifying the Church of Peter with Catholicism, the Church of Paul with Protestantism, and the Church of John with a religion of perfected humanity. Schelling’s spiritual Church is therefore a universal religion, a “philosophical Christianity,” which the common Christian churches anticipate.⁶²⁹

Similarly, as I noted in Chapter Three, Hegel speaks of the Church as the kingdom of the Spirit, or the Christian community (Gemeinde). In ways reminiscent of Joachim, his Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion divide this community into three phases with different

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⁶²⁷ Reeves and Gould, The Myth of the Eternal Evangel, 64.


⁶²⁹ De Lubac, La postérité I, 387-393.
degrees of religious perfection. The foundation of the community is Christ’s Incarnation, the purpose of which is to constitute the Mystical Body, the kingdom of the Spirit, among Christ’s followers. In both the 1824 and 1827 versions of the Lectures, Hegel speaks of the community as it subsists (bestehende), that is, as the “determinative historical existence of the Christian churches constituted by faith… cultic observance and sacrament.” Here, like Schelling, Hegel gives the Catholic Church an authentic but provisional role. However he judges that the Catholic sacraments, cult, and authority are fundamentally external and incapable of integrating their antitheses. The Catholic view of the sacred and the secular remains one of opposition. Only in the pneumatic Lutheran Church are its antitheses overcome.

Yet as de Lubac points out, Hegel places this account of the Church’s progress within a broader dialectic of self-consciousness. The ecclesial communities—with their sacraments, cults, and doctrines—still express humanity’s relationship with God in a symbolic way (“representation,” Vorstellung). According to Hegel, only conceptual knowledge (Vernunft) perfectly corresponds to religion’s content. De Lubac concludes that the “exigencies of speculative thought” in Hegel transcend any distinction between the sacred and the secular, relativizing them as parts of a greater whole. And this understanding requires that the visible structures of the Church, like Christ’s humanity, are effaced and even “absorbed” by the State. Hegel’s third status then is not confessional Lutheranism, but

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630 See O'Regan, The Heterodox Hegel, 240.

631 Ibid., 241.

632 Ibid., 245.

633 De Lubac, La postérité I, 374.
rather a community ordered by philosopher “priests,” who possess the conceptual knowledge that sacraments merely prefigure.\textsuperscript{634}

A similar interpretation of the Church can be found among the early Utopian Socialists. According to Frank E. Manuel, Saint-Simon employs a tactic with a long history among utopians and revolutionaries: that of invoking the spirit of Catholicism against its own institutions.\textsuperscript{635} He presents his “terrestrial morality” as the third and final phase in the Church’s life and the rightful heir to the “Antichrist,” the outworn Church of Rome. His “New Christianity” is then a system that alone comprehends the moral sentiments at the heart of the Christian religion. Its cult consists in the preaching of this moral principle, the philanthropic concern for the poor:

Today worship should be envisaged only as a means, during days of rest, of calling the attention of men to philanthropic considerations and sentiments, and the dogma should be conceived only as a collection of commentaries having as their object general applications of these considerations and sentiments to the great political events which may arise, or having as their object to facilitate among the faithful the applications of morality in the daily relations which exist among them.\textsuperscript{636}

Additionally Saint-Simon determines that the clergies of the European churches have failed to clarify these moral sentiments, and are therefore divested of their power and authority. In the New Christianity, they are succeeded by a “scientific priesthood,” a class of teachers, scientists, and artists. Saint-Simon even condemns the papacy as a regressive institution, ceding its place to the progress of scientific inquiry.\textsuperscript{637}

\textsuperscript{634} Ibid., 374-375.

\textsuperscript{635} Manuel, The New World of Henri Saint-Simon, 349.

Many of Saint-Simon’s followers like Eugène and Olinde Rodrigues understood his New Christianity as a form of dialectic, and even added their own variations to it. But for de Lubac, the greatest representative of this trend is undoubtedly Auguste Comte. Like Lessing and Schelling, Comte recognizes semblances of his own thought among the Joachimites, citing them in a single passage from his *System of Positive Polity* (1853):

A more decisive step was taken in the thirteenth century, initiated by the pious dreamer [Joachim of Fiore] represented in Dante’s Paradise as endowed with the prophetic spirit, and carried out by the worthy predecessor of St. Bonaventura in the generalship of the Franciscans [John of Parma]. The aim of his book, which, though now unappreciated, was then the organ of the noblest aspirations, was to bring prominently forward the third person of the Trinity, and thus to inaugurate the reign of the Heart, eliminating a provisional law which represented the reign of the Mind.  

In his famous law of three states, Comte describes the human race evolving from the primitive condition of belief in God, through metaphysical reasoning, to the ‘definitive religion’ of positivism, which comprehends natural laws. The Catholic Church is thus given its own sphere of legitimacy, but in order to realize a truly coherent society, Comte argues that we must abandon its forms and redirect “our feelings, our thoughts, and our actions around Humanity,” the “new Supreme Being.” Roman Catholicism represents an imperfect condition of the human spirit, and its antitheses are only resolved in Comte’s third state: the “true Catholicism” of Paris replacing the primitive Catholicism of Rome.

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639 De Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, 140-41.

640 Ibid., 175.

641 Ibid., 215.
new Church is a religion of Humanity, meant to integrate the individual into a greater whole. It replaces the Catholic sacraments with “social sacraments” of its own, each of which is meant to forge a bond between private existence and the collective organism. It also has a “positivist papacy” and a “positivist priesthood” meant to unite humanity in a way that the Roman Church never could.

De Lubac also considers Charles Péguy’s claim that Marxism constitutes a “new religion” with “new churches.” Because Marx inverts the structure of Hegel’s theology, de Lubac argues that his social thought retains certain elements of Hegel’s ecclesiology (and thus, of his Joachimism). For instance, Marx divides history into three progressive states, spanning primitive, class, and communist societies. He also grants the Christian Church a limited place in this history, corresponding to a particular mode of production and certain social relations. However it is clear for Marx that the social arrangement to which the Church corresponds is one of alienation. The Church is not the instrument for resolving this condition, but only a symptom of an unjust order. Of its very nature it directs us toward the revolution that is meant to succeed it: the classless society which alone reconciles humanity with itself. It is unsurprising then that Engels would later describe Marx’s “reign of Man” as the fulfillment of Thomas Münzer’s revolutionary Church.

642 Ibid., 219.
643 Ibid., 231.
644 De Lubac, La postérité II, 363.
645 Ibid., 358.
646 Ibid., 364-365.
A final example of a figure who reads Joachim dialectically is Thomas Altizer. According to Altizer, the moment in Hegel’s thought when Christ’s visible presence passes into the community signals the negation of Christianity’s ecclesial forms:

[T]here is no intrinsic reason why Christianity should be identified with its ecclesiastical expressions…and even fewer theologians are willing to negate all those ecclesiastical norms and traditions which are incompatible with the contemporary life of faith. But there lies no way to a contemporary epiphany of Christ apart from a consistent and thoroughgoing transformation of the language and forms of all ecclesiastical Christianity.  

Like Joachim, Altizer assigns the institutional forms of the Church to a period within salvation history. Yet since Christ’s death, the Spirit of God no longer dwells within those forms, nor is it the locus of Revelation. Altizer thus sees his own radical Christianity as the fulfillment of Joachim’s spiritual Church: a Church in which the Spirit is fully present, but identical with the immanence of the world. The third and final state of Christianity is therefore one for which God is no longer transcendent to human society, the perfection of which consists in this atheism.

De Lubac concludes that the ecclesiology these thinkers exhibit is Joachimite and dialectical. It is Joachimite in the sense that they appropriate Joachim’s ecclesiological error (replacing the clerical Church with a new spiritual Church). They each develop an understanding of history that views the Church of sacraments, priests, and popes as a provisional state eclipsed by a more perfect successor. Each account is dialectical in the

648 Ibid., 26.
649 Ibid., 27.
650 Ibid., 81.
sense that the antagonisms of the institutional Church are thought to be synthesized in a third state which is immanent to the world or to human nature. Unlike Joachim, then, the modern Joachimites depict the Church of Christ replaced not by a more perfect communion between God and the human race, but by a form of community devoid of God. So it is, de Lubac claims, that Joachim’s vision of a renewed Mystical Body becomes little more than a symbolic tool of atheist humanism.

4.1.4 Paradoxical Ecclesiology: De Lubac’s Response

How then does de Lubac’s position on the Church provide an alternative not only to Joachim, but to the modern Joachimites as well? I’ve noted that de Lubac categorizes the Church as a mystery—the mystery of our union with God through our union with Christ, and thus the mystery of salvation itself. The Church’s status as a mystery means that it is always beyond the scope of reason’s comprehension; a sign of which is our inability to synthesize all of its terms. The revelation of this mystery always involves a “rich profusion” of images, qualities, and descriptions which appear to the mind in a fragile tension, precisely because their unity lies beyond the capacities of our nature.651

I am told that she [the Church] is holy, and yet I see her full of sinners. I am told of her mission to raise men above earthly cares, to remind him of his heavenly vocation, yet I see her endlessly busy with the temporal things of this earth, almost as if she wished to install us permanently here…The Church is at once human and divine, at once a gift from above and a product of this earth.652

651 De Lubac, *Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 3.

652 Ibid., 2-3.
It follows that the Church is a paradox for de Lubac, in the same sense that the Incarnation is said to be a paradox. It is a complex of seemingly irreconcilable terms (*complexio oppositorum*), which are nonetheless synthesized in God. And like the paradox of Christ, de Lubac argues that the paradox of the Church is “for paradoxical mankind.” It corresponds to the paradox that the human being is, and, as he endeavors to show, holds the key to resolving its antinomies.653

I have also noted that for de Lubac the paradox of the human being is a consequence of the image of God in us (the *desiderium naturale* or natural desire for the supernatural). This image or desire is the source of some of our most essential perfections. Yet it also ensures that our natures will never be fulfilled by anything within the created order. These fundamental aspects of our being always appear to us then as antinomies, opposed to one another the more they share a common principle.654 In *Catholicism*, for example, de Lubac argues that the image of God is the source of the “natural unity” we share with other human beings: “the divine image does not differ from one individual to another: it is all the same image. The same mysterious participation in God which causes the soul to exist effects at one and the same time the unity of spirits among themselves.”655 On the other hand, de Lubac argues that the same image is the foundation of our dignity as individual persons.656 Humanity is a paradox, therefore, because this same principle grounds

653 Ibid., 2.

654 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 328.


656 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 25, 343ff. See also De Lubac, *The Discovery of God*. 
both aspects of our nature, while ensuring that they appear to be in tension with one another.

In this sense, de Lubac claims that the doctrine of the Church, like other revealed doctrines, reveals more than truths about God. It also reveals truths about the human condition and destiny. Its “dogmatic paradox,” he says, heightens and intensifies this “natural paradox,” making its resolution intelligible to us. The unity that the Church claims to realize perfects the unity which the image of God establishes, i.e. the unity of the human race. Similarly the dignity of the individual person realized in the Church perfects the natural “dignity of man,” just as grace perfects nature. This is why De Lubac insists that renewal in ecclesiology means seeing the Church in its openness to all that is human, its true catholicity:

[The Church can play on this organ [human nature] because, like Christ, she ‘knows what is in man,’ because there is an intimate relationship between the dogma to which she adheres in all its mystery and human nature, infinitely mysterious in its turn. Now by the very fact that she goes to the very foundation of man the Church attains to all men and can ‘play her chords’ upon them.]

The Church professes to recover our supernatural unity with God, but it equally professes to redeem our communion with other human beings. It entails, in other words, that whatever their origin and ethnicity, all are called by the same desire to the same unity which the Church signifies.

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657 De Lubac, Catholicism, 328.
658 De Lubac, Motherhood of the Church, 141.
659 Ibid., 49-50.
660 Ibid., 50-53.
In the previous chapter I also demonstrated that Christ’s sacramentality is central to de Lubac’s apologetic claims against Joachimism. On his view, all of salvation history is “concentrated” in Christ. Christ’s hypostatic union both exemplifies and causes the perfect resolution of our human antinomies. Yet just as importantly, the mystery of Christ is the mystery of a whole. Christ is a concrete universal, who unites himself to human nature in its entirety and redeems it as such. The Church therefore is the mystery of this synthesis Christ reveals, to the extent that it forms a single entity with Christ (*totus Christus*): “‘Without the Church, Christ evaporates or is fragmented or cancels himself out.’ And without Christ what would man be?" So just as history is “concentrated” in Christ, and is reconciled with God through his mediation, so too is history concentrated in the Church. The Church simply names the way in which we are concentrated in Christ; the way in which we appropriate the synthesis he reveals (“it is through his union with the community that the Christian is united to Christ”; “it is through her that God re-creates and re-forms the human race.”).

A consequence of this reasoning is that the features of the Church which facilitate and share in this sacramentality also facilitate the synthesis of our natural tensions in God. The sacraments, for instance, are the instruments by which Christ restores and consummates the unity of the human race. They bring about, in an inchoate form, the communion that reconciles our sociality with our personal dignity. By mediating what Christ has accomplished, they bring our supernatural end into the midst of history, just as Christ did when he became flesh. Moreover, by prefiguring the consummation of this union, they direct us to the final coherence of our being in the direct presence of God. The sacraments

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662 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 82; *The Splendor of the Church*, 168.
like baptism and the Eucharist are thus humanizing just as they are unifying. Baptism becomes more than the introduction to a life without consequence for our natural exigencies. It is our regeneration and incorporation into the kind of union for which our nature most longs, the corporate reality of Christ. The Eucharist (the sacrament of unity) likewise acclimates us more completely to this reality, and serves above all as the effective sign of our perfection as a race.

Similar conclusions follows with regard to the clergy, the papacy, and the Spirit’s relationship with the Church. The activity of the clergy, de Lubac argues, is ordered entirely to reconstituting the human being as a “new creature.” If the sacraments are the principal means by which this restoration is effected, and the priests and bishops exist to administer the sacraments, then the ministerial priesthood exists to actively facilitate the perfection of human nature. In addition the authority that the clergy exercises, “which is a participation in the divine Fatherhood,” is only justified insofar as it is necessary to render Christ’s activity through them (“The faithful need pastors in order to be engendered and nourished in Christ”). The unity that the pope and bishops embody signifies, and thus communicates, the unity of human nature redeemed and glorified. Similarly it is in the Church and through these features that the Spirit accomplishes his distinctive action in bringing humanity to its consummation. De Lubac affirms that what the Spirit does in the individual soul, he does in the Church. His task is to condition the image of God in us to receive its resolution in Christ. Yet because the Spirit does not act apart from the Church, the Spirit constitutes it

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when he universalizes Christ’s individual nature and when he opens new depths within us to become members of Christ.

So it is that de Lubac’s Church “extends…to all that is human, for it extends to all that is spiritual in every human affair in which it is engaged”; “nothing human can be outside of her concern.” He supports this claim by elaborating on what it means for the Church to be a mystery: one that forms an “organic whole” with other mysteries that hold the promise of resolving our antinomies. Just like the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the Church has an anthropological as well as a theological dimension. The fulfillment of our natural aspirations is what the Church is a sacrament of, and thus what it communicates to us even now. If de Lubac is correct, then to abolish the Church with these characteristics, in the name of an immanent human community, is in reality to abandon the only means of constituting such a community. On this reading, the forms of community proposed by the modern Joachimites, because they see the sacramental Church as something provisional, can never fulfill the aspirations they claim to fulfill. Theirs can only be a false synthesis: one that privileges the individual at the expense of the whole, or alternatively, dissolves the individual within the whole. De Lubac concludes therefore that the spiritual church of the modern Joachimites betrays not only the memory of Joachim, but also their own humanist intentions.

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665 Ibid., 198.
4.2 Eschatology

4.2.1 Joachim: The Third Age and the End of History

The final doctrine relevant for de Lubac’s engagement with Joachimism is the doctrine of last things (eschatology). When he first describes Joachim’s error as a “dissociation of the *invisibilia* and the *futura,*” he claims that it is primarily an error in eschatology. It is to “conceive an eschatology upon earth and thereby transform hope—at least a primary phase of hope—into utopia;” and to transform “the search for the kingdom of God into social utopias.” As Delno West acknowledges, while Joachim often distinguishes his *status* from measurable periods of time (like age/*aetas* or time/*tempus*), his prophecies clearly characterize the third *status* as an idyllic age for the Church on earth. It is a “new order” (*novus ordo*) in a special community “designed to fulfill scriptural and historical destiny.” And since Joachim is optimistic about the renewal of human society in a future age, a number of scholars see in his vision the inspiration for later utopian thinkers. Thus Morton Bloomfield has called Joachim “our first futurologist, even if not our first

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utopianist.” Bernard McGinn has called his account a “monastic utopia”; and Janet Coleman refers to Joachim’s as a heretical utopian ideal.

This utopian character results from Joachim’s modification of existing theologies of history. On Augustine’s pattern of the days of creation, the present Church exists in the sixth age, the age of Christ. It is an age that terminates with Christ’s return and our entrance into eternity (the eighth day), leading Augustine to posit the seventh age as a state existing alongside the sixth. This seventh or Sabbath age is only a state of rest for those who have died and await the general resurrection with those still living. Yet as I’ve noted, Joachim has Trinitarian reasons for holding that history includes a distinct age in which the Holy Spirit will be fully manifest. He thus transforms Augustine’s Sabbath age into a separate period of history, prior to the Parousia and the last judgment.

Because Joachim identifies his third status with Augustine’s seventh age, it acquires the characteristics of an interregnum; an interval between the downfall of the present order and the dawning of the Kingdom of God. As Marjorie Reeves notes, similar intermediary ages appear in the Jewish Zwischenreichen and even in Joachim’s near contemporaries like Honorius of Autun. Yet according to de Lubac, Joachim’s version leads him to reinterpret

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671 Bernard McGinn, Apocalyptic Spirituality, 111.


the apocalyptic events of Revelation—the persecutions, conflicts, and trials to befall the Church—not as the death throes of the old world, but as the birth pangs of the third age.\footnote{De Lubac, \textit{La postérité I}, 50-52.} Just as the Hebrews bore “seven special persecutions,” the Church, he argues, will experience seven persecutions, signified by the seven heads of the great red dragon (Revelation 12:3). Like other commentators, Joachim envisions two distinct Antichrists: one represented by the dragon’s seventh head, who signals the end of the second \textit{status}; and a “remaining Antichrist signified by the tail of the dragon.”\footnote{Joachim of Fiore, \textit{Liber Figurarum} XIV, lines 9-55, trans. Bernard McGinn, \textit{Visions of the End}, 138. Note that one of Joachim’s major justifications for the “double Antichrist” reading comes from exegesis of 1 John 2:18.} The age of the Spirit, then, corresponds to the thousand-year kingdom described in Revelation 20:4-6, which exists between the defeat of the first Antichrist (Revelation 19) and the arrival of the “last Antichrist” (Revelation 20:7-8). In this sense, Joachim revives chiliastic principles and blends them with elements from Augustinian eschatology. Contrary to Augustine’s sympathies, however, he is able to interpret the chaos of history as subordinate to the Church’s forward progress, culminating in a “wondrous period of justice, peace, and spiritual insight” on earth.\footnote{Robert E. Lerner, “Antichrists and Antichrist in Joachim of Fiore,” \textit{Speculum} 60 (1985): 557. Cf. De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis III}, 334-335; \textit{La postérité I}, 215: de Lubac cites Ratzinger’s description that Joachimism is the confluence of monastic utopia and a chiliastic eschatology.}

Further, because Joachim places the third \textit{status} after the seven persecutions and the first Antichrist, one of its defining characteristics is peace for the spiritual Church:

\begin{quote}

After the destruction of this Antichrist there will be justice on earth and an abundance of peace. “The Lord will rule from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth” (Ps. 71:8). Men will turn their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles. One nation will not lift up sword against another; there will be no more
\end{quote}
war (Isa. 2:4)…and the whole people will rejoice in the beauty of peace because the heads of the great dragon will be crushed.678

The new order (novus ordo) is a post-war existence for the Church, devoid of the threats that once oppressed it and devoid even of the toil that once sustained it. The Church of laborers (eclesia laborantium) gives way to the peace of the resting Church (eclesia quiescentium).679 The gifts poured out by the Holy Spirit create a deeper harmony among Christ’s members, which Joachim identifies with the harmony of the New Jerusalem.680 It is a peace modeled on the monastic ideal of charity (“in that time the life of the monks will be like rain watering the face of the earth in all perfection and in the justice of brotherly love.”)681; as well as on the monastic ideal of communal property.682 It even includes, he writes, the final reunion of Gentile and Jew.683

A second feature of this new order is the fullness of knowledge. I’ve examined already Joachim’s view of history as the progressive illumination of the human mind, and how in his exegesis he foresees an age when the understanding of biblical Revelation will no longer rely on the mediation of letters or figures. His notion of the spiritual understanding, however, has epistemic connotations in addition to exegetical ones. In his Liber de Concordia, Joachim defines each of the three status according to the degree of cognition possible within

678 Joachim, Liber Figurarum XIV, 138.
682 Lerner, “Antichrist and Antichrists,” 70.
The first *status* is the age of knowledge (*scientia*), the second the age of wisdom (*sapientia*), and the third the age of the fullness of understanding (*plenitudo intellectus*). Further, in his *Expositio in Apocalypsim*, he applies two of his favorite New Testament passages to the *status* of the Spirit: 1 Corinthians 13:12 ("For now we see in a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.") and John 16:13 ("But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth."). As de Lubac notes, Joachim interprets the "then" in the first passage and the "when" in the second as referring not to the eschaton, but to his future utopian society, such that the fullness of vision and truth coincide with the Spirit’s reign on earth.\(^{684}\) Even the organizing principle of Joachim’s new order is the fostering of contemplation among the monks, which remains the historical destiny of humankind.\(^{685}\)

A third feature of the *status* is the fullness of freedom. Just as he defines each age according to its degree of knowledge, he also determines each according to the degree of freedom that pertains to it. The first *status* involves the servitude of slaves, the second the servitude of sons, and the third the fullness of liberty.\(^{686}\) In the *Expositio* he claims that the people of God were first subject to the Law and to “the elements of the world” before they were able to attain the freedom of the Spirit initiated by Christ. They were then subject to the Gospel, which is freedom compared to the Law, but not compared to what lies ahead. When they “come toward the End of the world, no longer under the veil of the letter,” the

\(^{684}\) McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 133-134

\(^{685}\) West, “Millenarian Earthly Paradise,” 271.

Church will experience the full freedom of the Spirit, for “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17).687

In his Figura XII, Joachim offers one of his only detailed descriptions of how these features are united in the ecclesia spiritualis and organized around new social relationships. As Matthias Riedl notes, Joachim repeats the Cistercian trope that the monastery itself is meant to prefigure the heavenly city. The new order he envisions is a visible arrangement in concrete communities: a fully monasticized Church modeled on the Heavenly Jerusalem as it is described in the Book of Revelation. At its center is a network of oratories, each designated by the characteristics of a particular biblical figure. The laity and clergy, having passed from their primacy in the first two status, are fully integrated into the theocracy of the spiritual Church. All three states of life thus reside in this society, but only the monks constitute the citizenry proper. Joachim even goes so far as to identify the spiritual Church with the heavenly society; the former needing only to be transferred into its eternal condition.688 What he claims to represent in this order is the Body of Christ in its final eschatological form (plenitudo Christi): a “collective messiah,” in whom the Spirit dwells fully.689

In both Medieval Exegesis and La postérité, de Lubac acknowledges that, in one important respect, Joachim preserves the traditional teaching of the Church’s eschatology. He retains the “fundamental transcendence” of its eschatological hope, the expectation of Christ’s return at the end of time and the renovation of the world. For Joachim, this

687 Joachim, Expositio in Apocalypsim, f. 5r-v; trans. in McGinn, Visions of the End, 134..


689 Ibid., 60, 65.
transcendence— an “eternal age” (\textit{in patria post finem}) in the presence of God —follows swiftly after the defeat and judgment of the last Antichrist (Gog and Magog).\textsuperscript{690} De Lubac holds, nonetheless, that Joachim’s “various explanations from one work to another are perhaps difficult to reconcile.”\textsuperscript{691} The error in Joachim’s eschatology, he argues, is not that he denies the Church’s hope, but that he “doubles it.” He distributes the “eschatological facts predicted by Scripture into two separate and distinct phases.” As a result, the New Jerusalem becomes more than a reality that arrives from beyond history. It is also something that emerges within history, as a prolonging of terrestrial existence. And this doubling, de Lubac believes, lays the foundation for later utopian visions.

For de Lubac, then, the utopian quality of Joachim’s eschatology stands in tension with his commitment to transcendence. By introducing a new dimension of hope (an optimism about this-worldly perfection) Joachim risks eclipsing the first and more foundational expectation, “and in consequence changing its very nature.”\textsuperscript{692} This tension explains how he de-stabilizes what de Lubac sees as the paradoxical balance between the \textit{invisibilia Dei} (transcendence) and the \textit{futura} (immanence). He transfers features once considered exclusively part of our final state to an age that precedes our entrance into eternity. Regardless of his intentions, his reasoning seems to entail that our aspirations for qualities like peace, knowledge, and freedom can be fulfilled in the temporal order, and not only in the face-to-face vision of God. Consequently de Lubac believes that this shift makes it possible to see the eschaton as simply an extrinsic addition to the perfection achieved in the \textit{status} of the Spirit. And part of his argument in \textit{La postérité} is that the thinkers in

\textsuperscript{690} De Lubac, \textit{La postérité} I, 61.

\textsuperscript{691} De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis III}, 408.

\textsuperscript{692} De Lubac, \textit{La postérité} I, 61.
Joachim’s posterity come to retain the second hope (for a state of perfect peace, knowledge, and freedom on earth), while abandoning the first hope (for a heavenly state beyond history). It becomes the foundational tendency of all immanentism: that history is self-contained, and we attain our perfection within it.

4.2.2  De Lubac on the Eschaton

If it is true that Joachim errs by overemphasizing the temporal future, then de Lubac’s alternative in the area of eschatology will involve re-emphasizing the importance of our final end. As I’ve noted, for de Lubac, the value of history derives not from a penultimate age within history, but from an “eschatological Beyond”: “it is its relation to eternity which gives the world its consistency and makes time a real becoming.” 693 This “beyond” enters into history with Christ, who is this eschaton in visible form; and with his continuation in the Church and its sacraments. In this sense, de Lubac stresses that we have access to our eschatological fulfillment in the present, and not merely in a future age. Yet at the same time, Christ and his Church direct us to a future consummation beyond the mediation of signs. De Lubac therefore envisions the Church as primarily an eschatological community—the Mystical Body, the “heavenly Church,” and the Church Triumphant. 694 The limited share of eternity we experience sacramentally also comes to us from the future. It is what compels us toward a consummation beyond the limitations of the present. Our end is thus neither only above us nor only before us; it is both the foundation of history and the term of its movement. 695

694 De Lubac, Church: Paradox and Mystery, 47-48.
Since de Lubac sees the eschaton as the source of meaning for the present, he holds as well that this meaning cannot be found in a coming age within history. On this point he follows the reasoning of Augustine’s *City of God*, arguing that “no human potentiality could ever reach its fulfillment within time.”

Augustine exhibits no optimism about a state of human perfection in history, but expects instead history’s decay as it approaches its end. He thus interprets the millennium of Revelation 20:4-6 allegorically: first, as the beginning of the Kingdom of God in Christ’s Incarnation; and second, as the in-breaking of the Kingdom through Christ’s sacramental presence in his Church. Yet de Lubac notes that Augustine never confuses the Church with the heavenly Kingdom. The former is the true Church (vera ecclesia), but it is an effective sign, the sacrament of the “celestial Church.” It both mediates the eschaton and impels us toward its consummation.

This link between the Church and the eschaton is reinforced by the anagogical sense in the tradition of Origen, which de Lubac chronicles in *History and Spirit* and *Medieval Exegesis*. Like Augustine, Origen interprets Revelation 20:4-6 allegorically and thus rejects a literal thousand-year kingdom on earth. In addition, Origen’s *anagogia* allows him to connect the events of Christ’s life and of his Church with the consummation they prefigure (Christ’s return and the vision of God beyond history). In Origen and his followers, then, de Lubac finds an eschatology that can balance our transcendent relation to God and our relation to

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699 De Lubac, *La postérité I*, 63-64.
history. Our end is both present mysteriously under the visible signs of the Incarnation and Church and lies before us as the reality to which these visible signs direct us. As Susan Wood notes, anagogy is neither a purely vertical symbolism, nor does it point to an end within history. ⁷⁰⁰ What the Incarnation, the Church, and its sacraments signify in the future is eternity itself, which “charges” history with significance.

Additionally de Lubac argues that the majority of medieval Augustinians affirm these principles in opposition to Joachimism. In La postérité and his earlier essay, “Joachim de Flore jugé par saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas,” de Lubac claims that Thomas Aquinas’ is the most consistent objection to Joachimite eschatology. He cites, for instance, the De commenatione et partitione sacrae Scripturae (1256), which treats the Book of Revelation as an account of the Church at the end of its terrestrial state and entering into glory with Christ, its Bridegroom. De Lubac also cites his Quodlibetum (1256-1259), which describes the state of the present Church as the sole intermediary between the Jewish Synagogue and the Church Triumphant. Like Augustine, then, Aquinas denies the possibility of any additional age of fulfillment before the eschaton: the Gospel and the Church prefigure only “celestial things.” ⁷⁰¹

Alternatively, de Lubac argues that Bonaventure’s eschatology draws more positively from Joachim’s. He notes that Bonaventure departs from Augustine with his optimism about the progress of history and his expectation of a future contemplative peace before history’s consummation. Nevertheless, de Lubac calls his vision “entirely classical.” His Collationes in Hexaemeron (1273) retain Augustine’s teaching that the seventh age runs

⁷⁰⁰ Susan Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 44-45.

⁷⁰¹ De Lubac, La Postérité I, 144, 147.
alongside the current sixth age, referring to the rest of the faithful departed. He also argues that the consummation of history begins with Christ, and even the contemplative state to come will not surpass him. Bonaventure therefore rejects Joachim's utopianism even as he draws inspiration from it.\textsuperscript{702}

In short, de Lubac finds in these sources the means of recovering what he sees as the paradox of Catholicism’s “collective eschatology.” The Body of Christ exists simultaneously as immanent (the sacramental Church) and transcendent (the Kingdom of God).\textsuperscript{703} He sees this framework revived in the seventh chapter of the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (\textit{Lumen Gentium}), against views which threaten to “dissolve” the Church into the world.\textsuperscript{704} Citing Augustine, the Council Fathers note that the Church is our common end, the heavenly Jerusalem, already present “\textit{in mysterio}.”\textsuperscript{705} Yet this “already” never obscures the movement propelling the Church toward its eternal destiny. The Church may be the sign and instrument of our union with God and with one another, he writes, but these affirmations “receive completeness in the direct evocation of the last end.”\textsuperscript{706} As sign and instrument, the Church is destined to be absorbed into the reality it signifies, the final unity in Christ and the consummation of the universe. De Lubac therefore affirms Augustine’s interpretation of the millennium. The Kingdom of Christ within history exists first in Christ’s earthly life, since he himself is the Kingdom (the \textit{“autobasileia”} of Origen); and second, in the sacramental Church, which is Christ’s Body:

\begin{footnotes}
\item[703] De Lubac, \textit{Church: Paradox and Mystery}, 27, 51.
\item[704] Ibid., 28.
\item[705] Ibid., 48.
\item[706] Ibid., 50.
\end{footnotes}
Now this view corresponds to the deepest logic of Christian eschatology and to depart from it could lead to many abuses of both thought and action. The reign of God is yet to come; but “without waiting for history to run its course, it has already, in a mysterious anticipation, made its appearance in the inner marrow of history.” Since the fact of Christ and his resurrection, “‘time-after’ is already present in the interior of time.”

The Church’s most mysterious aspect, he concludes, is that if Christ himself is the Kingdom, and the terrestrial Church is united to Christ, then the Church is likewise united to the Kingdom.

De Lubac’s denial of any fulfillment prior to the end of history, in fact, follows from these identifications. For him, the Mystical Body is so integral to our salvation that no individual member can attain it apart from the salvation of this Body as a whole. If the Mystical Body is simultaneously one with the eschaton (in the risen Christ and Church Triumphant) and one with those still in via (the terrestrial Church), de Lubac argues that it cannot attain perfection as long as any of its members remain imperfect. It was the teaching of Origen, he notes, that the union between Christ and his Body is so binding that Christ himself could not enjoy beatitude as long as even one of his members still struggles and suffers; “For it is one single body that awaits its redemption.”

While he notes that the teaching requires adjustments to remain valid in a modern context, de Lubac holds that the underlying point is consistent with traditional eschatology, since the salvation of the individual is derivative of the salvation of the community:

[I]f this resurrection can only take place at the end of time it is because the penalty which is the result of original sin, extending as it does to the whole of that nature in

707 Ibid., 52.
708 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 126.
which all men are one, cannot be finally lifted from one without being lifted also from all the others.\textsuperscript{709}

Consequently, de Lubac reasons that the kinds of fulfillment which Joachim expects in the coming age are features of our final, and not our historical condition. On the one hand, he holds that the contemplative peace Joachim prizes pertains solely to the Heavenly Jerusalem, the “blessed vision of peace” and “place of repose.”\textsuperscript{710} In its current state, the Church is truly the “haven of peace” and the community in which it is progressively being realized. Yet this Church will remain the Church Militant until the end. Its life on earth is, he writes, “a constant and truceless war waged with the forces of light against ever-recurring evil.”\textsuperscript{711} The same holds for the perfection of knowledge. De Lubac argues at length that the intellect of every spiritual creature finds its fulfillment in the beatific vision of God, and short of attaining this end (which is always a gift from God) the desire of the intellect can never be satisfied.\textsuperscript{712} “The end of a reasonable creature,” then, “is to attain beatitude”; and as no individual can attain this vision apart from the Mystical Body, this illumination “can consist only in the kingdom of God, which in its turn is nothing else than the well-ordered society of those who enjoy the vision of God.”\textsuperscript{713} This explains de Lubac’s opposition to Joachim’s reading of 1 Corinthians 13:12, and his preference for Origen’s claim that our vision face-to-face is exclusively an eschatological knowledge.\textsuperscript{714}

\textsuperscript{709} Ibid., 130.

\textsuperscript{710} Ibid., 121; \textit{Church: Paradox and Mystery}, 29.

\textsuperscript{711} De Lubac, \textit{Church: Paradox and Mystery}, 29.

\textsuperscript{712} De Lubac, \textit{Mystery of the Supernatural}, 196.

\textsuperscript{713} De Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 130.

\textsuperscript{714} De Lubac, \textit{History and Spirit}, 250.
The same conditions hold with regard to freedom. For de Lubac, we derive our natural freedom from the divine image in us. Yet unlike Joachim, de Lubac does not see the restrictions imposed on our freedom as part of our divine pedagogy through the ages. Rather he views them as the result of our slavery to sin: “Freedom, that prerogative of man created in God’s image, was wounded, but not destroyed, so that grace in its triumph will not reign over a helpless enemy; it will not have to displace man, but free him from slavery.”

Freedom can only be perfected when sin is conquered in us, and sin is only conquered in us when we are integrated into the Church, and thus into the sacramentality of Christ. Once again, however, this means that prior to the perfection of the Mystical Body at the end of time, no individual member can realize the fullness of freedom for which it longs. De Lubac therefore concludes that the Church’s eschatology does not warrant any expectation of a pre-eschatological utopia. Rather, following Augustine, he holds that the structure of history remains ambivalent, dramatic, and conflicted with sin until Christ’s return. Our experience of these fulfillments is still, and until the end, only in mysterio.

4.2.3 Immanentizing the Eschaton: The Modern Joachimites

As with the other doctrines de Lubac examines, the distinctive gesture of Joachim’s heirs is their radicalizing of a tendency in Joachim’s writings. In the area of eschatology, they distinguish themselves from Joachim by exploiting his doubling of the Church’s expectation: retaining his hope for a time of fulfillment within history, while discarding his hope for a transcendent end beyond it. This decision represents arguably the clearest link between Joachimism and the tradition of “pure nature” (natura pura) which de Lubac criticizes in

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Surnaturel, Augustinianism and Modern Theology, and The Mystery of the Supernatural. In these works, de Lubac contends that the idea of an end attainable through the exercise of our natural powers contributed to the perception that human nature is sufficient and any supernatural end is unrelated to the question of nature’s perfection. In La postérité, de Lubac reasons that a comparable dynamic is at work in Joachim’s spiritual posterity, only now in the categories of eschatology. If the aspirations of humanity are thought to be fulfilled in a future historical age, then an eschaton beyond history appears to be devoid of meaning or value for it. This explains why de Lubac sees the roots of modern utopianism in Joachim’s thought. Here he has in mind not the fictional societies envisioned by Thomas More, Tommaso Companella, or Francis Bacon, but the social theories that derive from the secularization of Christian eschatology. They are visions, in other words, which immanentize the eschaton, and bring the Kingdom of God down to earth. In this way, “[a]lthough the cost of profound denaturations,” and “through the exploitations of an incontestable slant in his writings, [Joachim] inhabits sectors of thought less and less marginal, under forms more and more secular.”

Each representative of the modern posterity, then, identifies the Kingdom with a purely intra-historical state. In Hegel’s Lectures on the Philosophy of History, for instance, the Incarnation and Christian community are meant to bring the Kingdom of God into existence (the perfected relationship between humanity and God). Yet it is an essential consequence Hegel’s system that this reconciliation between humanity and God remains within history: “the history of the world, …the process of development and realization of Spirit, is the true theodicy, the justification of God in history.” God for Hegel reveals and

716 De Lubac, La postérité I, 214-215.
constitutes himself in history, and as a result, “the reconciliation of God with Himself is accomplished in the world, and not as a heavenly kingdom that is beyond.”\textsuperscript{718} The eschaton can therefore never arrive from outside of time. It is always “a realm of Spirit to be realized and brought about in men.”

While this Kingdom remains within history, it nevertheless has the character of an end for Hegel (an “absolute end of history”).\textsuperscript{719} Since his view of history is dialectical, it involves the movement of consciousness through a seemingly endless series of limitations, negations, and syntheses. The purpose of this history however is to demonstrate that human knowledge can “wrest itself out of this process to infinity and free itself absolutely from limitation,”\textsuperscript{720} “resolving the infinite progress into the end.”\textsuperscript{721} What Hegel’s eschatology represents, therefore, is a condition of consciousness at peace with itself; a “final concord” of humanity with itself, its world, and its God.\textsuperscript{722} Moreover, as for Joachim, this end is accompanied by the realization of freedom and the complete knowledge of the whole. It is “absolute knowledge” and “absolute truth,” as humanity finally comprehends all of the historical forms through which Spirit is achieved. All of history is also a progressive development of the “principle of absolute freedom in God,” which only comes to full expression in the Christian community, and is only perfected in a final age.\textsuperscript{723}

\textsuperscript{717} Hegel, \textit{Lectures on the Philosophy of History}, 457.


\textsuperscript{719} Hegel, \textit{Lectures on the Philosophy of History}, 103.


\textsuperscript{722} Ibid., 24.
As was the case with the doctrine of the Church, the notion of a Kingdom of God immanent within history also appears in the writings of the Utopian Socialists and Young Hegelians. Thinkers like Saint-Simon, Robert Owen, and Charles Fourier sought, like Joachim, to construct ideal societies characterized by perfect social harmony and the satisfaction of all human needs. As Keith Taylor notes, many of them were influenced by a revival of chiliasm, “with its consequent consolidation of peace, justice, and fraternity,” which was underway on both sides of the Atlantic in the early 19th century. Thus Saint-Simon proposes to “realize on earth the reign of God, the reign of peace and of liberty, which the Christians placed solely in the heavens”; and Owen proposes his “new moral world” as the true second coming of Christ. Similarly Wilhelm Weitling depicts his future communitarian republic as the true “kingdom of heaven,” and Moses Hess describes his “terrestrial paradise” as the realization of the Kingdom of God. Finally de Lubac cites Bruno Bauer’s claim that humanity’s third state will emerge from its final conflict with the Antichrist (its own self-alienation), and Heinrich Heine’s claim to establish a kingdom of heaven on earth with a new religion of joy. Each of these thinkers effectively appropriates portions of Joachim’s eschatology, while restricting his hope to a future society within history.

725 Ibid., 13.
726 De Lubac, La postérité II, 24; Taylor, The Political Ideas, 12.
727 De Lubac, La postérité II, 340, 344.
728 Ibid., 346, 353.
Alternatively, the tradition of Marxism diverges significantly from the methods of the Utopian Socialists and Young Hegelians. Marx often criticizes his predecessors for failing to address the material conditions necessary for their ideal societies and for remaining too dependent on speculative categories. He especially blames the Hegelians for making “the religious illusion the moving force of history” and for seeking “how exactly to pass from the kingdom of God to the kingdom of man, as if this kingdom of God ever existed outside of the imagination of men.” Marx is thus typically portrayed as rejecting Hegelianism, Utopian Socialism, and thus the Joachimite eschatology behind them, in favor of a scientific method of social analysis. However, in his *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch seeks to restore the importance of utopianism for Marxist theory, arguing that Marx’s conclusions reject only an abstract utopia, and in fact support a concrete utopia. Marx’s achievement, he argues, was to show how the utopian impulse could be realized by means of specific social mechanisms. Consequently, Marxism fulfills the Joachimite dream, rather than rejects it: “The very power and truth of Marxism consists in the fact that it has driven the cloud in our dreams further forward, but has not extinguished the pillar of fire in those dreams, rather strengthened it with concreteness,” making it “transcendent without transcendence.”

Bloch therefore explicitly invokes Joachimite eschatology as an early instance of the utopian socialism that Marx perfects. He categorizes Joachim’s “Third Kingdom” as the greatest social utopia of the middle ages, and he credits Joachim with transforming the Kingdom of heaven into a Terrestrial Kingdom. With Joachim, he writes, the Christian

729 Ibid., 358.
community finally descends from heaven to earth, forming “a communist brotherhood and realm of peace.” It is an age of love and illumination, a “total Pentecost,” the symbols of which reflect the aspirations for freedom and happiness on the part of a people deprived of justice.733 “And Joachim was cogently the spirit of revolutionary Christian social utopianism…He was the first to set a date for the kingdom of God, for the communist kingdom, and to demand its observance.”734

This is the actual boldness of Joachim: he directed the glances fixed on the other world towards a future period on earth, and expected his ideal not in heaven, but on earth. He proclaimed the freedom of the new viri spirituales not as freedom from the world, but for a new world…so that the other world should be consumed and the word of love should already become flesh here below: the kingdom of Christ is of this world, as soon as this world has become a new one.735

Curiously, Bloch ignores any hope for an end beyond history in Joachim’s writings, since any such hope remains incompatible with the resolution of human alienation. Even the affirmation of God’s existence is a sign that Joachim never fully grasped the revolutionary implications of his utopia. So it is that Bloch deems Joachim the forerunner of a vision that only becomes scientific in the hands of Marx: when, that is, Marx explains Joachim’s earthly hope, and explains away his transcendent hope.736


735 Bloch, The Heritage of Our Times, 125.

736 Ibid., 127.
4.2.4 Meaning and Eternity: De Lubac’s Response

As de Lubac argues in his early writings, the apologetic value that Revealed doctrines possess has to do with their claim to communicate the final synthesis of our antinomies. The importance of eschatology results from the fact that this synthesis has the character of a final end in Christian teaching. In the Incarnation, Christ reveals and embodies this synthesis, and his Spirit introduces us to it by incorporating us into his Body (the Church), through its bishops, priests, and sacraments. Yet the sacramental nature of Christ and his Church not only communicates this synthesis to us (in mysterio). It also points us to the full realization of what they reveal and initiate. The eschaton, therefore—the gathering-up of the human race into the Heavenly Jerusalem—is simply the state in which we attain our final coherence beyond the limitations of our nature.

The purpose of salvation history is to reveal this resolution of the human paradox (the image of God) to us, and to draw us into the reality that alone brings it about. The fact that this eschaton transcends history ensures that “time must ultimately lead to what no longer belongs to time.”\(^{737}\) Even as eternity is present in the marrow of history, the natural desire which generates our antinomies can only be satisfied by experiencing what Christ reveals in itself, beyond sacraments and history. If then de Lubac argues that no human aspirations can be fulfilled within time, he also argues that our orientation to eternity is more humanizing than the visions which deny it. In this way he affirms that a transcendent eschatology upholds the value of humanity because it alone upholds “the reality of [its] total vocation.”\(^{738}\)

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The argument of de Lubac’s *Suraturel* and *Mystery of the Supernatural*, which builds on the insights of other Augustinian Thomists like de Broglie, Sestili, and Rousselot, is that the natural desire which underlies our paradoxes can only be quieted by the direct vision of God’s essence. On this view, God created the human spirit so that it might receive him as he is and anything apart from God would be “as nothing for it.” De Lubac cites the position of Giles of Rome and the Augustinian school that “the rational creature is so good that there is nothing by which it may be happy but God alone…This nature that is capable of God cannot be ordered to be quieted by enjoyment [*fructione*] in anything below God…” De Lubac goes even further in denying even the possibility of a natural beatitude commensurate with the desire: it is an absolute exigence, something inscribed upon the very being of the human person, identical with its spirit. The Kingdom of God thus involves humanity as a whole experiencing the unmediated vision of God. To possess a truly coherent human nature is to be transfigured in the image and likeness of Christ, who embodies this coherence in himself; and this means sharing in Christ’s eternal vision of the Father. This perfection of God’s “image” in us is what illumines our humanity and alone reveals its true value.

When de Lubac writes *La postérité* in the early 1980s, he is especially concerned to distinguish this eschaton from the utopian impulses in modern philosophy and theology. The problem that is traditionally expressed in the “still too abstract terms of nature and grace” now addresses us as the distinction between the earthly expectation and the eschatological Kingdom. And just as he argues that grace is distinct from and irreducible


to nature, he holds likewise that the eschaton must always remain distinct from the temporal order. Like Augustine, he holds that any progress immanent to history is ambivalent, because, left to itself, such progress is subject to the defects of sin and the fallenness of the world. The Gospels promise that all our temporal pursuits will be mixed with “trials, torments, evils and temptations”:

Still, we must make no mistake about it, and here the insistence is not superfluous: “All man’s works, and among them his most ambitious achievement, civilization, are necessarily condemned to failure; there is no perfect success found within earthly history.” And so many of his successes bear within themselves the seeds of their opposites!

Because it is “going to its death,” the world cannot in itself serve as an immanent reflection or anticipation of the Kingdom, nor can the fulfillment it promises ever qualify as the perfection that the Kingdom brings. Christians neither worship the idols of history nor seek the “impossible contradiction” of an earthly end. They know that the temporal bears the eternal within it, but they know too that these orders never coincide. The first creation, de Lubac writes, must pass through the fire of death before it can come to life as the second creation.

Nevertheless even as the world and the eschaton are two different orders of reality, de Lubac affirms that “no theology of history can turn its back” on establishing “a positive relationship between the progress of the modern world and the coming of the Kingdom.”

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744 Ibid., 103-104.
746 Ibid., 105.
747 Ibid., 102.
And it is possible to accomplish this, he adds, without being seduced by utopias. In fact, it is only by appreciating the value of the Kingdom that we are able to understand the human condition and its needs in their totality.\footnote{De Lubac, “Total Meaning of Man and the World”, 622.} In *Athéisme et sens de l’homme*, de Lubac returns to a point he argued originally in the 1950s: that even if the world is not the Kingdom, and it is subject to sin and decay, the biblical authors never abandon an optimism about the fundamental goodness of creation.\footnote{Ibid., 631.} Our character as the image of God grounds our positive attitude toward temporal activity, just as it grounds our orientation to eternity. De Lubac cites the mandate of Genesis 1 that God’s image entails our stewardship over the earth, our acting upon the material of creation, and our governing the world with justice and holiness.\footnote{Ibid., 633.} We recall, he says, that we have a different fatherland, and we know our nature and the world are corrupted by sin. But this truth never undermines the goodness of creation and our positive connection with the temporal order.\footnote{Ibid., 634.}

So although temporal progress cannot in itself become the Kingdom and satisfy our natural desire, de Lubac does suggest that it is possible—even necessary—that \textit{Christian involvement} in the temporal order makes the world a more and more perfect sacrament of the coming Kingdom. Unlike the way in which utopians value temporal activity, de Lubac believes that the way in which Christians value temporal activity reflects what he calls the “historicized version” of a Thomist axiom: \textit{Gratia supponit naturam, gratia perficit naturam.}\footnote{Ibid., 635-637.} The difference of course is the fact that the Church mediates grace, the inchoate form of our
destiny and the world’s consummation. And so to the extent that it mediates grace, the Church’s engagement with the world is an expression of its conforming to the “new creation” here and now. Just as the structure of nature and grace underlying de Lubac’s eschatology is the key to distinguishing the world and the Kingdom, so too is it the key to uniting them. He affirms in *Athéisme* that since grace penetrates and transfigures nature, the Kingdom penetrates and transfigure everything that is human: “it is incommensurable with the human order, but it is from this order that it draws, so to speak, its material.”

Our acts of justice and mercy in the world, while not directly ordered to the New Jerusalem, can nonetheless become sacramental insofar as it is only through such acts that we progress toward our heavenly state. This kind of commitment to the world clarifies what it is for the Church to be the sacrament of the Kingdom for the human race. The good of the temporal order becomes the “stuff of the world to come, the matter of our eternity.”

Finally, de Lubac finds confirmation of this point in the Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*): the council fathers state repeatedly that worldly progress has significance for our final end, and that when Christians “contribute to a better organization of human society,” the world becomes “a certain sketch of the age to come.” Nevertheless, like de Lubac, the council fathers reiterate that such progress is only ever a reflection and a medium, since the grace that penetrates history will only be complete when the world passes away. This ensures that the Church’s view of temporal progress is opposed to the utopian ideal. The entire rhythm of

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753 Ibid., 636.


salvation history ensures that the paradoxes characterizing our existence are resolved in a supernatural state, and this state comes to us as an end beyond the limitations of this history. According to de Lubac, we are faced then with a fundamental decision: endless becoming in time or the vision of God by grace. Yet “endless becoming,” he argues, “is repugnant (répugne)... one must come to some term where one would be finally completed in act.” Because our antinomies—between the absolute and the relative, historicity and interiority, the personal and the universal, etc.—are resolved beyond our innate capacities, and Christian doctrine presents this resolution as an end beyond history, de Lubac reasons that our orientation to eternity is something humanizing. It is the orientation to our ultimate coherence and fulfillment; whereas an orientation only to a future age in history proves incapable of ordering us to this coherence and fulfillment. All attempts by the modern Joachimites to realize the Kingdom on earth, in a form of community immanent to history and unrelated to eternity, prove to be illusory and dehumanizing. To abandon the transcendence of our end is, de Lubac concludes, to abandon the very thing that guarantees our humanity.

CHAPTER 5:

DE LUBAC’S DOCTRINAL CONCLUSION: THE CHALLENGE AND PROMISE OF NEO-JOACHIMISM

In the two preceding chapters, I examined de Lubac’s theological alternative to Joachimism (his doctrinal thesis). I supported my claims about this alternative both from the arguments he makes indirectly in La postérité and from the theology of history he develops throughout his career. Since Joachimism errs by enabling the Holy Spirit to surpass the work of Christ, I’ve argued that de Lubac offers a Trinitarian history concentrated in Christ. Since Joachimism’s spiritual exegesis abrogates the Old and New Testaments, I’ve argued that de Lubac’s exegesis views the Gospel itself as the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament. Further, since Joachimism’s spiritual Church surpasses the clerical Church, I’ve argued that de Lubac’s ecclesiology views the Church as the indispensable sacrament of Christ. Finally, since Joachimism abandons a final end beyond history in favor of a utopian age on earth, I’ve argued that de Lubac’s eschatology upholds a transcendent end and the impossibility of fulfillment within history. In addition, I’ve demonstrated how modern Joachimites interpret these tendencies as part of an immanent dialectic (the atheistic hermeneutic). I’ve thus attempted to show how de Lubac’s alternative position on each doctrine guards against the imbalance in Joachim, and contains a more compelling view of humanity than modern atheism. It is central to de Lubac’s theology that his accounts of the Trinity, scripture, the
Church, and the eschaton together form a more humanizing vision than those of historical immanence.

However de Lubac intended his doctrinal conclusion to provide more than his alternative to Joachimism. He also meant to return to the concerns that inspired his study of Joachimism in the first place, namely, the ways in which Joachimism informs postconciliar theology and conflates nature with the supernatural. The closing pages of La postérité were also meant to include analysis of what de Lubac calls “contemporary neo-Joachimisms”: Joachimite themes which reappear in theological writings from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Yet the conclusion which de Lubac actually wrote in the spring of 1980, he says, could only be called a conclusion by “a literary artifice,” and it could never substitute for the more detailed exposition of his views that I’ve endeavored to reconstruct.\(^{757}\) Just as he was not able to fully develop his doctrinal opinions, he was not able to develop systematically his arguments about these contemporary Joachimite theologies. In order to complete my account of de Lubac’s confrontation, then, I devote the following chapter to examining more systematically de Lubac’s interpretations of these thinkers, to determine why they serve as examples of the problems that concern him. This includes, as de Lubac acknowledges, reckoning with the ways in which Joachim’s theology can have a positive effect on contemporary theology and help correct the opposite imbalance (that of exiling the supernatural from the natural altogether).

In this final chapter of the dissertation, I examine what de Lubac’s position suggests about the challenge and the promise of certain neo-Joachimite theologies. I first address the challenge posed by the appropriation of Joachimism in Jürgen Moltmann’s “theology of

\(^{757}\) De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 156.
hope.” I then address the challenge posed by the Joachimite features in Latin American liberation theology, especially in José Comblin’s “theology of revolution.” Both thinkers represent a challenge for de Lubac because he suggests that they generate problematic tendencies just as Joachim does: even as they demonstrate the value of Joachim’s thought, they uncritically adopt the categories of Joachim’s modern heirs and compromise their ability to offer compelling alternatives to the atheistic hermeneutic. Next I examine the assessment of Joachimism in the writings of de Lubac’s friend and student, Hans Urs von Balthasar. For de Lubac, Balthasar represents a model for a successful confrontation with Joachimism. He shares many of de Lubac’s own criticisms and more thoroughly develops the doctrinal positions that de Lubac endorses. Finally, I address what de Lubac’s account implies about the promise of Joachimism for the future of theology. Here I focus on his use of the category, “semi-Joachimism,” which describes figures in the spiritual posterity who avoid the four doctrinal errors, yet retain significant affinities with Joachimism (thinkers like Philippe Buchez and Vladimir Soloviev). I then conclude by recalling how de Lubac’s theology draws positively from the Joachimite tradition and exhibits a semi-Joachimism of its own.

5.1 Joachimism and the Theology of Hope: Jürgen Moltmann

De Lubac opens *La postérité* with the words of the German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, in a letter to Karl Barth from 1965: “In recent times the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has come to have a wholly enthusiastic and chiliastic stamp. Joachim is more alive today than Augustine. Thus some depict direct knowledge as a transcending of faith and others depict faith as a transcending of the Christ event.” A professor on the faculty at
Tübingen from 1967 to 1994, Moltmann has proven one of the most influential Protestant theologians since the publication of his *Theology of Hope* (1964). His task in this work is to recover the future-oriented eschatology of the bible in order to reconcile Christian faith with the modern experience of history. Standing in the way of this *rapprochement* are forms of what he calls “transcendental” or “presentative eschatology,” which conceive of the future entirely in terms of our present subjectivity. Building upon the research of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer, however, Moltmann argues that recovering a future orientation enables Christians to promote change within the world and thereby preserve the credibility of the Gospel in a modern context. Future eschatology therefore comes to structure theology as a whole:

From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of faith as such…There is therefore only one real problem in Christian theology, which its own object forces upon it and which it in turn forces on mankind and on human thought: the problem of the future.

More than correcting Christian eschatology, Moltmann is also concerned with correcting secular versions of eschatology. Christianity’s forgetfulness of the future, he argues, allowed non-Christian philosophies to claim the rhetoric of hope; resulting in a faith without hope and a hope for the future without faith in God. And like de Lubac,

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760 Ibid., 46-47. Cf. Moltmann’s association of this perspective with Rudolf Bultmann, 65ff.

Moltmann sees Joachimism as instrumental for modern thinkers transforming eschatology into secular utopias. He makes the same diagnosis of the modern Joachimites that de Lubac makes:

Modern philosophy of history has in fact the character of a philosophic, enlightened millenarianism…Joachim di Fiore’s historico-theological idea of a third empire of the spirit has haunted and inspired the nineteenth-century view of history since Lessing…The idea that a third age of the—scientific—spirit will clear up the crises of history and in this way resolve enigmatic history into understood history, constituted for Lessing and Kant, for Comte and Hegel and their followers, the hidden basis for a new orientation of the world, and one that was fundamentally no longer “metaphysical,” but “historical.”

Unlike de Lubac, however, Moltmann is not concerned to correct Joachim’s imbalance by reaffirming our transcendent relation to God in the present. Rather, his strategy is to reclaim a hope for the future of the world within the Christian faith. And to do so, he endeavors first, to make Jewish promise a structural principle for Christian theory and practice; and second, to recover the chiliastic dimensions of the New Testament. In Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, he concludes, God communicates his promise of a new creation and ordains us to radically new possibilities for the world.

In his later work, The Trinity and the Kingdom (1980), Moltmann appeals to Joachim’s theology as a model for the kind of messianic eschatology he favors. His intention here is to reexamine the doctrine of the Trinity in line with the future orientation he develops in the Theology of Hope. More importantly, The Trinity and the Kingdom is Moltmann’s attempt to answer the atheist’s charge that divine sovereignty and human freedom are incompatible.

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763 Moltmann, Theology of Hope, 264.

764 Ibid., 202-203.
He criticizes views of God's monarchy which support systems of domination in the Church and society, and as a remedy he proposes a social trinitarianism. This social trinitarianism, he argues, first considers how the divine persons relate to one another in salvation history (what he calls God's Trinitarian history with the world). What unites the persons is not the monarchy of the Father but the fellowship of love between them—a view similar to the one Joachim supports against Peter Lombard. For Moltmann, this unity of love opens to the world and ultimately includes it. The Trinity can therefore serve as the paradigm for how humans should relate to one another: a form of God’s unity which enables freedom and prevents domination and subordination.

This perspective allows Moltmann to place Joachim in the service of a “Trinitarian doctrine of the Kingdom.” The divine unity that he argues for ensures that the divine persons bear distinct relations to the world, and thus bear distinct relations to the freedom realized within it. He argues that the different modes of freedom pertain in unique ways to the Father, Son, and Spirit. Here Moltmann appropriates Joachim’s division of history and the degrees of freedom he associates with the reign of each divine person.

We shall...interpret the history of the kingdom in Trinitarian terms: the kingdoms of the Father, the Son and the Spirit mean continually present strata and transitions in the kingdom’s history. Just as the kingdom of the Son presupposes and absorbs the kingdom of the Father, so the kingdom of the Spirit presupposes the kingdom of the Son and absorbs that. In developing a doctrine of the kingdom of God which is

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767 Ibid., 178.

768 Ibid., 197.

769 Ibid., 209-212.

770 Ibid., 212-222.
differentiated in a Trinitarian sense, we are also searching for a theology of the history of human freedom.\textsuperscript{771}

According to Moltmann, the kingdom of the Father is determined by God’s creation and preservation of the world, and thus the freedom of being subject to the Father’s providence.\textsuperscript{772} Alternatively, the kingdom of the Son corresponds to Christ’s liberation of humanity from bondage to sin, and thus to the freedom of being God’s sons and daughters.\textsuperscript{773} Finally, the kingdom of the Spirit corresponds to the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. We thus experience the freedom of being friends with God, when the Spirit transforms us into a new creation.\textsuperscript{774} Each experience of freedom is a more complete realization of God’s Kingdom on earth, culminating in the glory of the Trinity beyond history.

In the years following the publication of The Trinity and the Kingdom, Moltmann deepens his engagement with Joachim. His most substantial discussion takes place in his essay, “Christian Hope—Messianic or Transcendent? A Theological Conversation with Joachim of Fiore and Thomas Aquinas”\textsuperscript{(1982)}, which he intended as a partial response to de Lubac’s comments in La postérité. Here Moltmann structures the essay as a disputatio between Joachim and Aquinas, representing two opposing frameworks for eschatology: messianic and transcendental. Moltmann poses the question that sets the terms of the debate: “Is Christian hope a forward-looking historical power which overcomes the old and creates the new, because it seeks its historical fulfillment in the future? Or is the hope of Christians directed

\textsuperscript{771} Ibid., 209.
\textsuperscript{772} Ibid., 209, 219.
\textsuperscript{773} Ibid., 210, 219-220.
\textsuperscript{774} Ibid., 211, 220.
‘above’ to the transcendent God in whom alone they find bliss and in whom alone the human heart can find rest…?”

For Moltmann, Aquinas’s answer commits the transcendental error he criticizes in *Theology of Hope*. He summarizes the argument from Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae (Prima Secundae, Q. 106)* that humanity’s end is the beatific vision, which transcends history. The mediation of this end occurs in the present new law (the Church), and as this new law leads directly to our eternal end, there cannot be a more perfect state interposed between them. However according to Moltmann, Aquinas effectively eclipses all future expectation and “replaces the biblical history of promise with a finalistic metaphysics.” His God is an “unmoved Mover” rather than the “coming God” (*ho erchomenos, deus adventurus*) of biblical promise, and his hope is a natural desire for a metaphysical Good rather than the hope for a new heaven and new earth. Moltmann even goes so far as to charge Aquinas with “liquidating” eschatology altogether.

Alternatively, Joachim’s position errs by translating biblical history into world history, confusing eschatology’s concept of time with the historian’s concept of time. Yet Moltmann is surprisingly quick to forgive this shortcoming. Unlike Aquinas, Joachim thinks in terms of biblical promise, which allows for an authentic hope that God will fulfill his promises. Joachim therefore demonstrates for Moltmann the importance of chiliasm in eschatology. He does not deny that the future is hidden in Christ and his Church (the present), yet he resists the temptation to restrict hope to this present. He argues on the contrary for a sense of promise and of the Spirit’s activity that impels us to greater


776 Ibid., 94.

777 Ibid., 95.
realizations of the Kingdom beyond our present; “in the Holy Spirit the transition from the
gospel of Christ to the parousia of Christ takes place historically.”778 And in this Joachim also
successfully recovers the importance of Christianity’s Jewish roots. It is because he interprets
Christ in light of the promises made to Israel (the concordiae) that he retains a hope for the
future Christ represents.779

For Moltmann, then, the goal of this dialogue is to “critically assimilate” Joachim as a
way of restoring biblical eschatology and avoiding its replacement with metaphysics.780 We
must think of the eschaton, he argues, as an advent (adventus), a promised future that comes
to the present rather than results from it.781 Such a future allows us to reinterpret the present
as the Kingdom’s arrival in distinct occurrences, determining the ages of history:

The eschatological future of history arrives in a series of particular presents (or
states, as Joachim and Thomas call them) which have different contents: in the
historical age determined by the promise; in the messianic age determined by the
messiah; in the spiritual age determined by the Spirit of the new creation; in the
chiliastic age determined by the kingdom of Christ; in the eschatological age
determined by the judgment and kingdom of God; and finally by the eternal age of
the new creation in the feast of Glory.782

Moltmann concludes that Joachim aids contemporary theologians by helping to recover the
“chiliastic features” of the New Testament which the Church suppressed when it assimilated
the Roman empire. Thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas, he suggests, condone the injustices

778 Ibid., 101.
779 Ibid., 107.
780 Ibid., 101, 95.
781 Ibid., 95.
(SCM Press and Harper and Row, 1977), IV.5, 189ff.
of the present world order when they reduce the meaning of chiliasm to the reign of Christ in the Church. By contrast, Joachim defines the present condition of the Church and society in light of a radically different hope. “Chiliasm,” Moltman writes, “is the immanent side of eschatology. Eschatology is the transcendent side of chiliasm...there may be no eschatology without chiliasm.”

In addition, because Moltmann’s retrieval is critical, he is careful to avoid many of the problematic tendencies that de Lubac identifies in Joachim’s writings. In both The Trinity and the Kingdom and “Christian Hope,” for instance, Moltmann criticizes Joachim for proposing his three status as chronological history, and he adopts the Trinitarian schema only to designate what he calls different “strata” in the concept of freedom. Moreover, he does not endorse a progressive revelation with the Spirit surpassing Christ. On the contrary, Moltmann’s theology remains heavily Christocentric: like de Lubac, he sees Christ himself as the Kingdom, and he grounds his vision of the future in Christ’s resurrection, rather than in the Spirit. The adventus is the future of Christ and of humanity in Christ.

Similarly, Moltmann’s ecclesiology, while messianic and pneumatic in character, aligns with de Lubac’s when he describes the Church as the extension of the Trinity in the interim between Christ’s life and second coming. And even though Moltmann desires to recover features of chiliasm, he does not expect a utopian age as Joachim does. Fulfillment in Moltmann’s eschatology is focused entirely upon Christ’s parousia from beyond the present, not on an extension of the present into an age of the Spirit. Like de Lubac therefore, Moltmann attempts to appropriate Joachim not to radicalize his tendencies, but to

strike a balance between chiliastic and transcendent values in the theology of history (between the *invisibilia Dei* and the *futura*).

In spite of these commonalities, de Lubac judges that Moltmann exhibits other problematic tendencies which mirror Joachim’s own. One such tendency involves Moltmann’s effort to reassert the importance of Judaism, which he describes as a commendable result of Joachim’s exegesis. For Moltmann, the perspective of Israel is what makes it possible for Christians to see YHWH as “the future.” Without it, Christianity is helpless to prevent its fall into “epiphanic religion”: “the abiding foundation of the natural theology of Greek philosophy of religion.”

De Lubac notes that this perspective requires that the category of promise be determinative for both the Old and the New Testaments. His concern then is that interpreting Christ in this category risks making him “a prophet and renovator of the ancient promise” rather than its fulfillment. It thereby risks devaluing the novelty of the Gospel and potentially undermines the sufficiency of Christ’s work. It is, de Lubac says, the “tendency to underestimate the characteristic trait that distinguishes Christian eschatology from Jewish hope: knowing the proclamation of the Kingdom of God already present in Jesus.”

Alternatively, de Lubac suggests that Moltmann mischaracterizes the future’s *continuity* with the present. Moltmann stresses the irreducible difference of the future from the present, since this difference is what enables us to criticize and change the injustices of the present. Yet Moltmann associates the present with the “vertical” or transcendent relation to God, so if he dissociates his conception of the future from the present, he likewise risks

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787 De Lubac, *La postérité II*, 442.
dissociating it from transcendence as such. Moltmann’s weakness here lies in his judgment that any transcendent eschatology is both the product of a non-Christian metaphysics and the primary cause of the Church’s accommodation to the world. As a result, he interprets the emphasis on eternity in Augustine and Aquinas as a philosophical contamination, rather than the product of an alternative exegesis. Similarly, as Cyril O’Regan notes, Moltmann discourages the liturgical and sacramental in his eschatology, as the space of the Kingdom’s subjection to control and abuse.\footnote{De Lubac holds, however, that God’s transcendence is a necessary condition of his status as our future, and not merely an extension of our own nature or powers. And he suggests that in downplaying eternity, Moltmann’s criticisms stand in tension with his own theological values.}

De Lubac also implies that Moltmann himself is vulnerable to the charge of philosophical contamination. He notes that at the center of Moltmann’s project is his attempt to “Christianize” the categories of modern philosophers—philosophers who number among Joachim’s spiritual posterity. As a result of these borrowings, Moltmann weakens his ability to guard against the immanentism these philosophers advocate. For example, he consciously adopts the structure of Hegel’s dialectic in his Trinitarian theology. In\textit{ The Crucified God} (1972), he presents the cross as the event in which God identifies himself with our negativity, overcomes his opposite, and reconciles with himself in a greater whole (the Holy Spirit). He even suggests that God constitutes himself in the crucifixion, since by it he incorporates the history of the world and adapts in response to it.\footnote{As de Lubac puts it, Moltmann tries “to divine the transformations of God in the liberations of man,” while .}

judging the immanent Trinity as “a circle closed in upon itself.” So although Moltmann qualifies Hegel’s influence in works like *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, he retains Hegel’s dialectic when he argues that human history and human suffering provide conditions for God’s self-realization. The danger that de Lubac identifies in Hegel—his tendency to reduce God to a more inclusive whole with creation—represents a similar danger for Moltmann’s theology.

Above all, however, it is from Ernst Bloch and the “mystical-social current” of Marxism that Moltmann draws some of his most important concepts. De Lubac acknowledges that Moltmann criticizes Bloch’s atheism, “for which the future of God and of Christ are nothing other than the hidden future of humanity and the world.” Yet de Lubac questions whether this criticism is sufficient. For having so thoroughly reduced the import of God’s transcendence in the present, Moltmann relies on Bloch’s notion of the *futurum* (the radically discontinuous future) in order to characterize God’s otherness. The eschatological God transcends us only in the sense that he remains before us as an unattainable future. For Bloch, however, the otherness of the future never qualifies as an enduring ontological difference, but is more nearly a distinct mode of immanence for us. It constitutes, he says, a transcending without transcendence. De Lubac questions then whether Moltmann’s reliance on Bloch can adequately prevent him from resolving the supernatural into a purely immanent whole. And if it cannot, then Moltmann’s eschatology results in a less compelling vision of humanity and society than one that emphasizes our relation to God.

On de Lubac’s reading, then, important aspects of Moltmann’s thought stand in tension with others, just as they do for Joachim. Moltmann appears to emphasize the future

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790 De Lubac, *La postérité II*, 444.


792 De Lubac, *La postérité II*, 443.
to the detriment of transcendence and our relation to God in the present. He demonstrates how Joachim helps to correct an eschatology that is powerless to critique the injustices of the present. Yet Moltmann’s appeal to modern Joachimites like Hegel and Bloch leave him unable to argue convincingly against the atheistic hermeneutic they employ. De Lubac judges, in short, that Moltmann’s theology of hope offers a less compelling apologetic than a theology of history like his own, since it is not clear that Moltmann’s doctrinal opinions adequately communicate the supernatural resolution of our paradoxes. And if de Lubac is correct, then Moltmann exhibits a similar tendency to that of other modern Joachimites: one that cannot uphold the value of the human being because it restricts our destiny to the confines of immanence.

5.2 Joachimism and Liberation Theology: José Comblin

A second form of neo-Joachimism that de Lubac discusses is that of liberation theology. Liberation theology refers to the works of theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, Juan Luis Segundo and others which developed in response to the social realities of Latin America in the 1950s and 60s. The goal of these theologies is to interpret the claims of scripture and Christian doctrine from the perspective of the poor. Radical commitment to the poor then serves as the necessary context for theological reflection, so that our understanding of God is illuminated by the struggle to alleviate their wretched conditions. As Gutiérrez notes, theology testifies to the importance of these efforts in our understanding of salvation:

I emphasize that the work of building the earth is not a preceding stage, not a stepping stone, but already the work of salvation. The creation of a just and fraternal society is the salvation of human beings, if by salvation we mean the passage from the less human to the more human. Salvation, therefore, is not purely ‘religious.’

Of particular interest to de Lubac is Brazilian theologian, José Comblin (1923-2011). Born and educated in Belgium, Comblin relocated to Brazil in the late 1950s to minister in remote rural communities. He then served as professor at the Dominican School of Theology in Sao Paulo, and later at the Theological Institute of Recife. Beginning in the 1960s, he was targeted by the Brazilian military and Pinochet’s regime in Chile for his advocacy on behalf of the poor, and for his support of Bishop Hélder Câmara.

Comblin’s distinctive contribution to liberation theology has been to systematize what he calls the “theology of revolution.” The theology of revolution is not, he claims, a set of guidelines for determining the legitimacy of revolutions; nor is it an attempt to provide theological support for political parties and revolutionary movements. Rather it is “a convergence of several streams of Christian thought connected to a number of practical present-day movements in the Church,” all intending to determine what the relationship between Christianity and modern revolutions ought to be. Classical theologies, by contrast, were unable to address this question because they presuppose a fixed society and cannot envision theological reasons for altering society as a whole. Yet the ideologies operating


795 José Comblin, The Church and the National Security State (New York: Maryknoll, 1979), 28-29. Cf. José Comblin, Théologie de la Révolution: Théorie (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1970). It is important to note that Comblin distinguishes his theology of revolution from liberation theology in general, noting that he found no works associated with the latter movement sufficient for a comprehensive theological account of revolutions. He does discuss the theology of revolution, however, as overlapping significantly with theologies of liberation and even as contributing to its subject matter.
within a given society often instill patterns of domination and social sin, exposing them as idols opposed to the practices of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{796} In the midst of these conditions, the purpose of theology must be to examine the present situation of world and clarify what the love of God means in these concrete circumstances: “The world is in a revolutionary period. The Spirit has to tell human beings what Jesus’ words mean for those who have to act in this revolutionary world. That is theology now.”\textsuperscript{797}

For Comblin, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is especially important for understanding revolutions theologically, and this above all leads him to identify Joachimism as a revolutionary form of theology. Just as Moltmann draws from Joachim to correct the loss of the future in modern eschatology, Comblin draws from Joachim to correct the forgetfulness of the Holy Spirit in western theology. In his \textit{Théologie de la Revolution: Théorie} (1970), he notes that the Holy Spirit is often restricted to “the administration of sacraments and the ecclesiastical institution,” and historically this restriction coincides with the suppression of Joachimism by the Church hierarchy.\textsuperscript{798} He argues, however, that these “official theologians” were blind to the fateful changes that had already befallen the Church and require revolutionary action. The Constantinian structure of the clergy was arguably its greatest accommodation to pagan influence, similar to the “Babylonian exile” of the Church against which Joachim prophesied. Joachim, on the other hand, successfully theorizes a new age for the Church, “open to its future renewal,” and in this even anticipates the program of the Second Vatican Council. The reign of the Spirit thus represents for Comblin a concrete example of the Holy Spirit’s action in history: “Joachimism has uncovered the fundamental

\textsuperscript{796} Comblin, \textit{The Church and the National Security State}, 26-27.
\textsuperscript{797} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{798} Comblin, \textit{Théologie de la Révolution}, 225.
law of history after Christ: the reign of the Spirit as the succession of stages or leaps by which Christian society, in searching for itself, strives to adopt a mode of being which corresponds to the intention of its founder.” The Spirit’s principal action, then, is to liberate Christian society from the accretions of worldly power. And most importantly, this action cannot be restricted to the reforming of ecclesiastical structures. It extends, he says, to the economic, social, and political structures in which Christians live.799

Comblin makes the Holy Spirit’s influence on social structures the focus of his *The Holy Spirit and Liberation* (1987). Here he aims to demonstrate how experiences of liberation in Latin American communities are experiences of the Holy Spirit.800 He argues, first, by identifying changing sociological trends among the poor, and second, by citing scripture and Church history to claim that each change is enabled by the Spirit’s activity. With regard to the theme of action, for instance, he notes that a people once reduced to passivity by colonial powers are beginning to discover themselves as the subjects of their own acts, seeking their own goals and achieving their own objectives. Regarding the theme of life, those who have long been the victims of unnatural death from systemic poverty are now securing the conditions of life for themselves and others. And perhaps most importantly, those who have experienced so little freedom under the yoke of repressive political regimes are taking concrete steps toward self-liberation. For a theology of revolution, Comblin’s claim is that these comprehensive changes in the lives of the poor are only explained by the Holy Spirit’s influence.

799 Ibid., 226.

Just as he concludes in *Théologie de la Révolution*, then, Comblin holds that scripture and tradition entail that the Spirit’s liberation from sin affects more than the state of our souls. The Spirit’s mission is to usher in the Kingdom and to form the new creation within history itself. And he ushers in this Kingdom especially among the poor, empowering them to alter the social, political, and material conditions of our lives. From the days of the Old Testament patriarchs, he notes, the Spirit has always been a power bestowed by God to inspire action among God’s people. The Church also proclaims the Spirit as the “Lord and Giver of Life”: not only of eternal life (Rom 8:11), but of a dignified and meaningful life in this world. The Spirit’s work, then, inspires everything that promotes the fullness of life and opposes everything that means to degrade it. Finally, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor 3:17). The Spirit liberates us not only from personal sin, but from all of the structures and ideologies in the world which facilitate our bondage to sin. For Comblin, therefore, we can discern the Spirit’s activity in history when he enables humanity “to progress beyond the structures it has built up until now.” No effort to improve the world can ever be separated from him.801

As he does in earlier works, Comblin portrays Joachim and the Joachimites as early advocates of the Spirit’s activity among the poor. Before Joachim, he argues, the struggles between the papacy and the Holy Roman empire led the clerical Church to define itself in terms of power (*potestas*), especially over against temporal rulers. Joachim’s spiritual Church was thus a product of the Spirit’s opposition to the forces of empire. Here Comblin describes Joachim’s Trinitarian history as one of the greatest alternatives to imperial theology: the age of the Spirit signals a complete renewal of the Church and of society,

801 Ibid., 59-64, 75-76.
liberated from the religion of fear, law, and oppression. It is even strengthened among the Spiritual Franciscans, who saw more clearly the connection between the Spirit and the counsel of poverty. They too called for a spiritual Church that would radically restructure society and liberate the Church from its collusion with worldly power. Joachim, he concludes, and the movements of poverty he inspired in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, are direct precedents for the movements of the poor in present day Latin America: “The ideas of Joachim of Flora on the age of the Spirit fermented and inspired all movements to poverty...When the poor succeed in becoming agents in history, then the Spirit of God is at work.”

Comblin’s appropriation of Joachim is not without qualification however. Like Moltmann, he takes exception to many of Joachimism’s characteristic tendencies. First, Comblin acknowledges Joachimism’s historical ties to modern atheism:

At first the revolutionaries believed themselves to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. But as time went on they gradually shifted to a purely secular interpretation of the content and dynamism of their revolutions, as if these movements had sprung from the human being alone—from matter without the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Finally they evolved into the altogether atheistic, antireligious revolutions of the twentieth century.

Second, even as Comblin stresses the Spirit’s role in revolutionary movements, he rejects utopianism. He criticizes the utopianism espoused by leftist Christians as the dream of social elites who fail to truly engage political realities. Most importantly then, he rejects Joachim’s hope for a perfected human society. He finds no support in the New Testament for such a

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802 Ibid., 36-38, 52-54.


society in the coming age, but argues on the contrary that Christ sent the Spirit to operate within the period of trials before the arrival of the Kingdom. The Spirit therefore remains active among the poor until the end of time: “There will be no reign of the Spirit outside of history or beyond the history of this world. Because of this, the Spirit will always be in tension and conflict within history…There is no stable state beyond struggle on this earth.”

In addition, Comblin is sensitive to some of de Lubac’s alternative theological commitments. Because he rejects Joachim’s utopianism, the emphases of Comblin’s eschatology align in significant ways with de Lubac’s: the Spirit’s liberating activity remains a matter of continual renewal amidst conflict—conflict between human beings and nature, freedom and necessity, one social class and another—rather than a matter of inevitable progress. This suggests as well that Comblin sees our efforts to perfect the temporal order as an always limited prefiguring of the Kingdom, rather than the substance of the Kingdom itself. In fact, Comblin and other liberation theologians owe one of their most characteristic insights to de Lubac and his fellow nouveaux théologiens. Gutiérrez, for instance, sees an anticipation of liberation theology in de Lubac’s theology of the supernatural. If the supernatural and the natural form an integral unity, and all are oriented to a supernatural end, then one cannot separate social and political concerns from religious concerns. On the contrary, “the building of a just society has worth in terms of the Kingdom,” and “to participate in the process of liberation is already, in a certain sense, a salvific work.”

805 Comblin, The Holy Spirit and Liberation, 55, 57.

De Lubac himself argues that because salvation is intrinsically social, social realities are always relevant to the question of salvation:

> If in the upward direction a discontinuity between the natural and the supernatural is fundamental, there must be an influence in the downward direction. Charity has not to become inhuman in order to remain supernatural; like the supernatural itself it can only be understood as incarnate. He who yields to its rule ... contributes to those societies of which he is naturally a member. ... The service of his brethren is for him the only form of apprenticeship to the charity which will in very truth unite him with them...  

De Lubac’s integralism therefore undermines the very separation of “planes” that rendered theology incapable of dealing with political realities. And what Comblin claims to discover in Joachimism are the resources needed to resolve the very same problem.

Yet despite their similarities and Comblin’s positive retrieval of Joachimism, de Lubac suggest that certain of Comblin’s commitments are ultimately inconsistent with his aims. Most importantly, he questions whether Comblin can uphold the Spirit’s distinction from the revolutionary actions he inspires in the social order. As with Moltmann, de Lubac suggests that this tendency results from his unexamined debt to figures in Joachim’s posterity—figures who identify the Spirit with processes immanent in history. In Comblin’s case, Marx and his heirs are the responsible parties. While Comblin is critical of the Christian forms of Marxism emerging in Latin America, he acknowledges that Marx nonetheless sets the terms of any theology of revolution. He speculates moreover that perhaps today historical materialism embodies a new “stage” of Joachim’s prophecy, and even represents an expression of the Spirit’s liberating work: “But does this materialism mean an absolute

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807 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 365.

negation of the Spirit? Doesn’t the matter of historical materialism resemble the Spirit in its present strength within temporal history?" De Lubac suggests, in short, that Comblin so closely identifies Marx’s dialectic with the “advent of the Spirit” that he is unable to articulate how the Spirit’s activity in the Church differs from the progress of a changing social order.

For de Lubac, this feature of Comblin’s theology coincides with a tendency among liberation theologians in general. When one too closely identifies social liberation with the salvific work of God, it is a sign that nature and the supernatural are improperly united in one’s theology. And this improper union weakens theology’s ability to refute positions which confuse the Church with the world. In *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, de Lubac suggests that liberation theologians inadvertently “naturalize the supernatural:” for many, what liberation means is overdetermined by a natural or secular ideology, and the supernatural conforms to this determination rather than transform and perfect it. It is then difficult to justify how and why the supernatural is necessary for and contributes to the social order. As a result, it risks rendering the subject matter of theology an improper grammar for a natural process, ultimately devoid of meaning for it.

This worry explains why de Lubac insists that, even as grace incarnates itself in concrete acts of charity and justice, only a strong distinction between liberation and salvation can offer an alternative to the atheistic hermeneutic. When nature and the supernatural are properly united with one another, this distinction will necessarily follow (unite in order to distinguish). Liberation within history is ultimately a human endeavor, subject to the hazards

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of sin and human frailty. “‘Salvation in Jesus Christ,’ on the contrary, is essentially a divine undertaking which comes about in the depths of hearts and is inscribed in eternity.” The Church’s direct responsibility is to mediate salvation and to testify to its irreducible distinction from the temporal order, even as the salvation it mediates transforms the world in the image of the Kingdom. To neglect this task, he continues, is to create the impression that the Gospel is itself subject to the vicissitudes of temporal progress, imprisoning us within the confines of our worldly existence: “Without the perspective that Christian faith opens of a ‘way out’, leading to divine transcendence and a personalizing union with God in Christ, humanity will not only always remain far from the goal it seeks; it will condemn itself to despair.”

As Susan Wood and Hans Boersma have noted, de Lubac criticizes the same problem when he discusses Edward Schillebeeckx’s use of the phrase, “the sacrament of the world” (sacramentum mundi). According to Schillebeeckx, the Church is sacrament of the world in the sense that it is a visible sign of history’s movement toward salvation. Implicitly, this movement can be discerned in our efforts to improve the temporal order, and the Church is the community in which this process is made explicit. Yet de Lubac charges that this terminology is imprudent, and it fails to express what distinguishes the salvation of the world from the progress it exhibits. “Does the ‘eschatological kingdom’ not,” he asks, “appear…as the culmination of our ‘earthly expectations,’ as their supreme fulfillment and consummation?” Does it not suggest then that the Church simply indicates a process occurring in history, rather than mediate something beyond it? The problem for de Lubac is

811 De Lubac, A Brief Catechesis, 159.
812 Ibid., 163.
813 Ibid., 225.
that Schillebeeckx risks replacing the Church as sacrament of Christ with the Church as a sacrament of secular progress.

In sum, de Lubac questions whether the appropriation of Joachimism in liberation theology avoids the connotation of immanence that became its legacy in the modern era. Comblin rejects many of Joachim’s doctrinal errors as well as the atheistic conclusions of the modern Joachimites. In addition, he demonstrates that aspects of Joachim’s theology can be used to criticize other imbalances, especially forms of clerical power that reinforce dehumanizing societies. Nonetheless, de Lubac concludes that Comblin’s theology is overdetermined by its association with the Marxist dialectic. It thus risks identifying the Holy Spirit with the processes of social liberation and fails to adequately clarify that salvation is irreducible to liberation. Comblin thereby weakens theology’s ability to distinguish itself from immanentism, and to explain why humanity’s fulfillment transcends all endeavors for social change.

5.3 Joachimism and Johannine Eschatology: Hans Urs von Balthasar

In an essay published in his *Church: Paradox and Mystery*, de Lubac describes Hans Urs von Balthasar as the most cultivated man of his time. Between 1934 and 1937, he served as Balthasar’s teacher, when the young Jesuit was sent to Lyon for his theological formation, and until Balthasar’s death in 1988, the two men maintained a close friendship and appreciation for each other’s work. Balthasar, for instance, translated a number of de Lubac’s works into German and saw it as his responsibility to spread his influence in

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814 De Lubac, *Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 105.
German speaking countries. He refers to *La postérité* in particular as de Lubac’s most significant book, and he encouraged de Lubac to complete the second volume when his energy began to wane: “The public has yet to realize the greatness of the gift it received in the two giant volumes of *La Postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore* and to grasp fully how many doors it can open…there is no other subject that is theologically more exciting or decisive than this.”

De Lubac returned Balthasar’s praise, claiming that the entire Church would profit from the treasury of his scholarship for many years to come. More importantly, as Michael Sutton notes, de Lubac cites Balthasar approvingly throughout *La postérité*, and includes a collection of quotations from Balthasar’s writings as an appendix to the second volume. These citations, along with his references in other publications, suggest that de Lubac sees in Balthasar a model for a non-Joachimite style of theology: one that safeguards against Joachim’s errors without compromising apologetically. Balthasar not only shares de Lubac’s criticisms of the Joachimite tradition, but he also develops more systematically many of de Lubac’s doctrinal claims.

Like de Lubac, Balthasar draws connections between Joachimism and modern European thought. As I note in Chapter One, he first discusses Joachim in the opening volume of his doctoral dissertation, *Die Apokalypse der Deutschen Seele* (1937). Here Balthasar attempts to explain the causes of a fundamental shift in German culture between the Middle

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817 De Lubac, *Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 103.

Ages and the 19th century—a culture which becomes increasingly alienated from its Christian foundations. The primary causes, he claims, are changes in the theological speculation about history, and he credits Joachim with initiating one of the most important changes needed to make modernity intelligible. By locating our perfection in a “fixed, datable, and near future,” Joachim eliminates the wall separating the temporal from the celestial and establishes heaven on earth.\textsuperscript{819} He thus revives a chiliastic theology (\textit{chiliastische Theologie}) in European thought that would later inform German Pietism and Idealism. Balthasar affirms, in other words, de Lubac’s general diagnosis that Joachim disrupts a balance in eschatology with consequences for modern philosophy.

In his later writings, Balthasar occasionally repeats this diagnosis of Joachimism with greater attention to Joachim’s theology. In his essay “Improvisation on Spirit and Future” (1967), he argues that Joachim’s Trinitarian thought gives rise to an entirely original theory about the structure of time. According to Balthasar, what captured Joachim’s imagination was the way in which the Holy Spirit proceeds from the reciprocal love of Father and Son. This love between the two persons appears to be self-contained, yet the Holy Spirit proceeds from them as a pure gift, embodying and attesting to the love between Father and Son. As Balthasar notes this makes the Spirit something entirely unexpected and unfathomable. Seen in temporal terms, the communion of Father and Son forms the Trinity’s “present tense,” while the Spirit emerges from this present as an always-new “future.”\textsuperscript{820} The procession of the Spirit is therefore the divine condition for the future dimension of history. However


according to Balthasar, Joachim errs by claiming that this openness toward the future involves the Trinity in a temporal sequence. He immanentizes the Spirit’s procession by seeing is as the ground of an eschatological age within history, and ultimately apart from the shape given by Christ. Like de Lubac, then, Balthasar sees this pattern reemerge “in idealist, positivist and sophiological triadic systems of the philosophy of history.”

Balthasar also makes critical judgments of Joachim in two other works, some of which align with de Lubac’s judgments, and others of which diverge. In his A Theological Anthropology (1963), Balthasar notes the debt Joachim owes to Tertullian’s “pneumatic millennialism” and other monastic reform movements. Here he praises Joachim for seeing that the sacramental elements of the Gospel demand to be understood spiritually (“Joachim is not far from the truth”). Yet like de Lubac, he criticizes Joachim for positing literal concords between the Old and New Testaments. This leads Joachim to project the historical expectations of the Old Testament into the New, and thereby undermine his own Christocentric commitments. When Balthasar returns to Joachim in the final volumes of his Theo-Drama, he classifies Joachim in ways de Lubac explicitly resists: referring to Joachimism as the “Arch-enemy of the Christian faith” and as a “Jewish-Gentile” form of Gnosticism. According to Balthasar, Joachim’s thought is Jewish not only because Joachim himself may have been of Jewish ancestry, but also because Jewish hope involves a messianic and unrealized eschatology projected into the temporal future. Similarly, his thought is

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821 Ibid., 147-148.
Gnostic in the sense that his third status is an age of illumination rather than of faith, and he comes close to equating the distance between God and history with the “distance” between the divine persons themselves.  

In each of his works, however, Balthasar affirms de Lubac’s critical judgments about some of the major figures in Joachim’s spiritual posterity. In his *Theo-Logic III* he echoes de Lubac’s criticism of the kingdom of Spirit in Hegel. In his essay, “Zu einer christlichen Theologie der Hoffnung,” (1981), he likewise identifies Marx, Bloch, and Moltmann as Joachim’s heirs, all of whom exhibit a “radically secularized Messianism.” For Bloch, he notes, this messianism alone reveals that God is nothing more than humanity’s self-transcendence: a symbol for our inevitable movement toward a future that arrives within history. Balthasar also agrees with de Lubac that the weakness in Moltmann’s “theology of hope” results from his attempt to integrate Bloch’s utopianism while purging it of its atheism. Like Joachim, he argues, Moltmann’s reliance on the category of promise effectively undermines the distinction between Christian hope and Jewish hope. He calls into question the sufficiency of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, “since his kingdom has not established its dominion in a continuing world history: his divine mission is as yet unfulfilled.” So too does Moltmann’s Trinitarian history risk “pure Hegelianism” by importing the historical process into God. Balthasar raises doubts, in other words, that

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829 Ibid., 173-174.
Moltmann’s eschatology is capable of upholding the transcendence needed to elevate Christian hope above forms of secular progress.

Not only is this transcendence necessary for Christian hope, according to Balthasar, but it is necessary even for a coherent understanding of the future. Reflection on the question of the future, he notes, has been dominated in the past century by Marxists. Yet Balthasar questions whether thinkers like Bloch can account for a future that is qualitatively distinct from the present condition of the world. He follows Josef Pieper’s claim that “the concept of hope is falsified in materialistic Marxism” since it replaces a “description and interpretation of what is to be hoped” with “the planned program of making, changing and producing.”830 Secondly, Balthasar argues that Marxist conceptions of the future have never been able to resolve the fundamental tension between our personal and our communal destinies. A state of perfection within time for humanity as a whole never coincides with a state of perfection for the individual person. Marxism can only deny this tension “in favor of an innerworldly optimism,” which dissolves the human person and reduces it to something material and impersonal.831 Yet even in accepting this sacrifice the Marxist remains without a coherent concept of the future:

[S]uch an innerworldly optimum would mean even for the species itself the renunciation of its own future and the renunciation of any openness to what is promised and is not at one’s own disposal. It would be the locking of the being into itself, the ‘identity of the man who has come to himself with his world that has been successfully achieved for him’ (E. Bloch), and this would be all too close to the terrifying image of damnation…832

831 Ibid., 139.
832 Ibid., 139-140.
For Balthasar, the immanence of Bloch’s hope contradicts what an authentically open future requires. Only in Christianity then does humanity’s openness to the future receive its proper interpretation. First, what is impossible with materialism becomes possible with spirit. Christian doctrine reveals the human spirit to be the image and likeness of another reality. It is intrinsically ordered to an archetype, such that the human “solves his own puzzle in God.”  

Second, this orientation becomes concrete in the encounter with a personal God, the climax of which is the Incarnation. This encounter is “an identity that lay utterly beyond all possibility of hope; not the identity Bloch demands of man with himself, but the identity of God with man in Jesus Christ, where the great transposition has already taken place archetypically.” Christ walks the path of redemption and thereby opens up for us a future beyond all of our innate capacities.

In this way the Incarnation provides history with its definitive shape. Balthasar thus argues that history is concentrated in Christ. In him, the Word of God that gives history meaning takes on its historical form. The defining characteristic of this Word is his obedience to the will of the Father, and he expresses this obedience through his human nature. He thereby “includes in his task the whole historical dimension, conferring upon it its ultimate meaning.” His hypostatic union creates a bond between the world and the inner life of the Trinity, and history’s meaning is now informed by the events of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. These not only serve as the central medium of our relationship with God, but they also reveal to us the pattern of true humanity in God’s eyes. Christ is

833 Ibid., 141.
835 Ibid., 24, 71.
therefore the norm of history—“the Son’s action is what history is for”—and he fulfills all of its expectations and aspirations in himself.

If all of history’s expectations are fulfilled in Christ, then the eschatology that follows is a realized eschatology. According to Balthasar, Christ experienced in himself all eschatological events. He is therefore the “unity in synthesis” of the “last things:”

...in him, man dies, since he has experienced the archetypical death for all; in him, every individual and the collective are judged, because he has anticipated the judgment on the Cross for all and for each individual; the final destinies for the person and for humanity, heaven and hell, are in his hands as judge, so that man and humanity can make their way to him in hope and in fear—naturally, with a preponderance of hope...⁸³⁶

Balthasar concludes that only this Johannine eschatology retains its validity. When the New Testament authors speak of the Last Day, they interpret it within the sphere of what Christ has already undergone. The one for whom we wait is the one who has already arrived, and the state for which we wait is a state that is already real in Christ. Balthasar therefore claims that references to Jewish expectation in the New Testament are only vestiges. What matters for Christians is the “vertical theo-drama,” in which every moment of time is directly related to the exalted Lord. The realities for which we hope are not unfulfilled promises, but only variations on the theme of Christ’s experience.⁸³⁷

This realized eschatology also has consequences for pneumatology. Here Balthasar affirms both de Lubac’s claims about the Spirit and a positive feature of Joachim’s theology. Since Christ is the fulfillment of history, no eschatology can countenance a greater fulfillment in a coming reign of the Spirit. Once more, the Gospel of John proves to be

⁸³⁶ Ibid., 142.

Balthasar’s decisive scriptural influence: the Spirit is always the Spirit of Christ. He is given at Pentecost as the interpreter of what Christ’s life makes visible and prefigures (the union of humanity with God). When he guides us “into all truth” (Jn 16:13), he introduces us not to “a given number of individual truths,” but rather to “the milieu of love between Father and Son.” Since he has his entire being in the unity between these divine persons, the Spirit mediates their unity as it appears in the hypostatic union. And because the Spirit always refers back to this love between Father and Son, the Spirit’s action in salvation history can never be separated from the Father or the Son. Throughout Christ’s life, the Spirit is always performing his act of interpretation, and that interpretation can never be thought apart from the form that Christ determines.

However, if the Spirit simply interprets Christ’s form, and that form consists in the events Christ has already experienced, how can the content of eschatology be genuinely new? Does realized eschatology then entail that history is too determined by Christ, and therefore closed off from the future? Here Balthasar returns to Joachim’s insight that the Spirit’s procession from Father and Son is the condition for the future dimension of time. Indeed, Balthasar believes this to be Joachim’s enduring contribution to the theological tradition: “When the circle of the Son’s mission completes itself and he comes to the Father, Father and Son open up a new future in the Spirit.”

[The Spirit] is that which is proper to love, that which is bestowed on love, always more than what seemed capable of being hoped for in the pure mutual indwelling, that in God which is always newer, always younger, always more fruitful. And there is no doubt that, when created time begins, the fact that the future stands open beyond the present is a particular parable of the Holy Spirit.

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840 Ibid., 146.
As the Spirit of Christ, he therefore directs us to what Christ has already fulfilled. Yet the Spirit also directs us to something more, because within the Trinity he is always more than what we know of the Father and the Son. The love between Father and Son is eternal and inexhaustible, and thus capable of the Spirit’s infinitely new exposition. And realized, Johannine eschatology can therefore never foreclose the novelty of our future. As the “future” of God, the Spirit acts by guiding us into the new creation: “That which is new is always the working of the Spirit.”

Finally, Balthasar’s Johannine eschatology leads to a view of the clerical Church and its sacramentality that strikes a balance between what Christ has fulfilled and what awaits us in the eschaton. For him, Christ is the “the primal sacrament” because the events of his human life are the indispensable form of God’s presence. All other Christian forms derive their legitimacy from him. Consequently, the Church for Balthasar is the continuation of Christ’s presence on earth. It does not determine itself, nor does it constitute a separate avenue of grace. Rather, it is “the imprint of Christ’s form in the medium of those who have followed after him and whom he has called his own.” The ideal of the Church then is pure transparency to the figure of Christ and a new modality of Christ’s tangible presence. The same principle applies to the individual sacraments administered by bishops and priests.

841 Ibid., 153.
842 Ibid, 169.
843 Ibid., p.576.
845 Ibid., p.562.
According to Balthasar, the sacraments are the means by which God impresses the form of Christ on us: they are saving acts that God performs in Christ Jesus for the believer, since they apply to us the salvation God achieved in the Incarnation. Yet they are also the means by which the Spirit interprets the form of Christ in new and unforeseen ways. It is through the sacraments that the Holy Spirit guides us to the eschatological fullness Christ prefigures.

On de Lubac’s terms, then, Balthasar engages in a successful confrontation with Joachimism—one that develops many of his own criticisms and alternative positions. Balthasar echoes de Lubac’s historical thesis by identifying errors in Joachim’s theology and tracing their influence to later thinkers like Hegel, Marx, Bloch, and Moltmann. He also echoes de Lubac’s doctrinal thesis by arguing for a Johannine eschatology that guards against Joachim’s errors and demonstrates the importance of our transcendent relation to God in the present. On the other hand, Balthasar avoids an overly-realized eschatology by affirming the Holy Spirit’s relationship with our future. Most importantly, Balthasar does not compromise the apologetic power of his theology in the way that Moltmann and Comblin appear to. He stresses the necessity of transcendence for Christian hope and for a future that fulfills our deepest aspirations. And in this regard his final word on Joachim’s legacy is severe: “for all the ferment that it caused…there is no room for it in the thinking of the Church.”

5.4 Joachimism and Semi-Joachimism

Eight years after the publication of *La postérité* (volume II), when he reflects on the climate that inspired the work, de Lubac still retains his conviction that Joachimism exercises a destructive influence on the Church and on humanity as a whole. He recalls in his memoir, however, that the lineage he traces in *La postérité* is “far from always being legitimate,” and
for some of the figures who appear in it, a closer examination proves their innocence.\textsuperscript{846} In such cases, de Lubac notes that he is “not far from admitting” the existence of a “semi-Joachimism”—a term to name those theologians, philosophers, and revolutionaries who are “perhaps less unfaithful to the aims of Joachim himself.” De Lubac acknowledges, in short, the possibility of guarding against the negative tendencies in Joachim’s theology (surpassing Christ, the Gospel, the Church, and the eschaton) while exploiting the positive tendencies. More specifically, he suggests that being faithful to Joachim’s aims includes recovering a legitimate form of progress in the Church—“the normal development of Catholic tradition.” In spite of his denunciations of Joachim’s heirs, then, de Lubac clearly sees value in the kind of ressourcement that thinkers like Moltmann and Comblin attempt. He even suggests that in order to sufficiently refute modern Joachimism, it is necessary to do more than propose a competing doctrinal vision. One must in some sense redeem Joachimism itself.

De Lubac first uses the term “semi-Joachimism” in the chapter of \textit{La postérité} devoted to Phillep Buchez (1796–1865), the French philosopher of history and forefather of social Catholicism. In his appeals to Christian principles, Buchez shares much with Saint-Simon. He is fascinated with Catholicism’s social teaching and critical of the clergy’s resistance to the French Revolution. Unlike Saint-Simon, however, Buchez “opposes every form of immanentism with faith in the personal, free, creator God of the bible.”\textsuperscript{847} The progressive Catholicism professed by Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais was still compatible, de Lubac says, with a politically conservative and static conception of the Church. Yet Buchez exhibits “a certain dynamic element… which undoubtedly does not

\textsuperscript{846} De Lubac, \textit{At the Service of the Church}, 156.

\textsuperscript{847} De Lubac, \textit{La postérité II}, 132.
undermine any dogma.” In this, de Lubac writes, he is in accord with the Russian philosopher, Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900), who sees in Catholicism a principle of progress within its ecclesiastical life. This sense of progress is not restricted to preserving the Church’s fundamentals, since it also exercises an active influence on the world. Both Buchez and Soloviev are “semi-Joachimites,” then, because both recognize, first, that the Church is destined to penetrate and transfigure the surrounding culture; and second, that this principle of progress “at the heart of the new faith” is what renders Christianity new and vital before the world.848

The problems which semi-Joachimism means to address, according to de Lubac, are those which the fathers of the Second Vatican Council describe in Gaudium et Spes: those of the more dynamic and evolutionary conception of the world characteristic of modernity. More specifically, what de Lubac has in mind is “a new notion of dogmatic development”; one that prevents the atrophy of the Church’s doctrine and applies the Gospel to social realities.849 Semi-Joachimism therefore never judges the Church’s teaching irrelevant for humanity, nor does it admit of any interpretation that dissolves or deforms the mystery of its proclamations. On the contrary, it unfolds the depths of what Christ’s Incarnation proposes for our belief. De Lubac summarizes in At the Service of the Church:

[S]emi-Joachimism…was, on the contrary, the tentative search for what was to be the normal development of Catholic tradition…the discovery by the Church herself, all along her pilgrimage, of the perpetual fruitfulness of the Gospel, from which she draws, with each new situation, in a global view at times difficult to grasp at first in its authentic tenor, nova et vetera. This is what seems to me to be the kind of development at work in the Church’s consciousness today, as in many periods of the past.850

848 Ibid., 132.
849 Ibid., 133.
850 De Lubac, At the Service of the Church, 157.
De Lubac suggests that what Joachim may have intended with his dynamic conception of historical revelation is just such a vision of our deepening understanding of revelation in Christ.

Opposed to this principle of progress is what de Lubac often criticizes as false traditionalism: “that cancerous proliferation of abstract deductions within an ever more rarified atmosphere, as the unconscious excesses of a certain modern Scholasticism have succeeded in making us fear…”\footnote{Ibid., 157.} It is well-known that de Lubac charged the Neo-Scholastics with exiling the supernatural from the natural and separating Catholic doctrine from human life. He argues too that their mistake on the nature of doctrine leads inevitably to a false conception of doctrinal development. He notes how the problem with these “highly regarded theologians” and “experienced guardians” is not their insensitivity to the problems of the age, but on the contrary, their lack of a \textit{properly traditional} mind. What makes them truly modern is their implicit denial of any dynamic element in the truths they regard as traditional, thinking of them rather as abstract and timeless propositions. De Lubac compares their attitude to that of Roman citizens who remain uninspired by the Christian antiquities that surround them.\footnote{Ibid, 145.} They act as though the faith itself belongs in a museum.

This point explains why reasserting transcendence, eternity, and the value of tradition is not enough to refute Joachimism. Indeed, according to de Lubac, this false traditionalism is what spawns the false progressivism he criticizes in the postconciliar Church. Neo-Scholasticism had so closely aligned the value of tradition with a \textit{théologie séparée} that its defeat
at the council seemed “to entail the defeat of Tradition as well.” Just as the separation of the supernatural from the natural led others to conflate the principles, the static view of the Church’s teaching led to a sense of progress beyond that teaching altogether. In contrast, de Lubac argues, true progress in the Church never abandons the definitive form impressed upon it by Christ and his Church. It is a matter of continual renewal in a living tradition, the “ever new” quality of doctrine as it is proposed to new generations and new cultures. Semi-Joachimism therefore opposes both the narrow conservatism of the Neo-Scholastics and the radical progressivism of the modern Joachimies: “that ‘opening,’ or rather that servile adaption to the world and its changing idols, sometimes presented as the necessary route of progress.”

De Lubac’s own writings on the development of dogma further illuminate what semi-Joachimism entails. In 1948, de Lubac first published a survey of the leading theories of development at the time (“The Problem of the Development of Dogma”). As the basis of his judgments he takes John Henry Newman’s Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, and he acknowledges the formative influence of Blondel’s History and Dogma and the articles of Léonce de Grandmaison. Undoubtedly he owes his greatest debt to Rousselot. Rousselot had presented his theory of development to de Lubac and the Jesuit scholastics at Ore Place in 1909, and later de Lubac wrote the preface to his “Petite théorie du développement du dogme,” which he published on the fiftieth anniversary of Rousselot’s death (1965). For de Lubac, Rousselot provides the true alternative to those who conceive of progress solely in terms of logical inference. He proposes instead a vision in which Christ

853 Ibid., 145.
854 Ibid., 157.
himself is the content of dogma, “the kingdom of God in person.” In order to accommodate
the person of Christ, the transmission of dogma must have the character of a personal
encounter, which exceeds the limitations of syllogistic reasoning:

The whole tradition, the whole development of dogma and of Christian doctrine in
general, has to do solely with faithfully representing and communicating Jesus—
Jesus and not the teaching of Jesus…He is the object of his own preaching, not
merely as one object among others, or even as the primary object. Rather, he is the
privileged object, who gathers all other objects in himself, everything summed up in
the knowledge of the only, necessary mediator.856

As de Lubac acknowledges in his La Révélation divine, this notion of development is a logical
consequence of his view that Christ is the fullness of Revelation.

Rational formulations of the mystery of Christ, he notes, are good and necessary, but
they are always explications of a personal reality. De Lubac concludes that the nature of their
development cannot progress solely by means of analysis and deduction. On the contrary,
the mystery of Christ is communicated through the whole “universe of human thoughts,”
and thus reflects all the operations used to penetrate, organize, and defend its beliefs. Instead
of a linear movement, mysteries revealed through our continuous reaction to surrounding
assumptions. Development means “a new way of considering certain eternal givens, which
the human glance cannot embrace at once in all their aspects.”857 So the kind of progress de
Lubac sees exemplified in semi-Joachimism is that of ressourcement: the perpetual return to
sources, to see them again in a new light. In this revealed truths are simultaneously eternal
and dynamic, striking a paradoxical balance between two extremes.

856 Pierre Rousselot, “Petite théorie du développement du dogma” (1909), in Recherches de Science
“Dogma and History,” 655-656.

Doctrine, de Lubac writes, is therefore the slow integration of what existed in its entirety when it was first revealed to the Apostles. The mystery is presented to our faith as a whole, but it is never presented to our intellects as a whole. It rather requires the action of the Holy Spirit on our minds to draw particular truths from its fullness. The “total Object,” the “Whole of Dogma,” is the infinitely rich gift that God makes of himself in Christ, “the definitive accomplishment of that great design hidden in himself since the beginning and now revealed.” However our appropriation of it occurs first and foremost in our “conversion,” the inner transformation by which the Spirit makes us a new creation. This transformation is what opens up unsuspected depths of the mystery for us, giving us new eyes to see and a new life in Christ. De Lubac’s view of development, then, follows not only from his Christology, but also from his claims about the Holy Spirit. It is identical with the Spirit’s act of universalizing Christ and incorporating us into him.858

Christopher Walsh has shown that de Lubac reiterates his position in a series of unpublished lectures delivered at Regina Laudis Abbey in Connecticut, 1969. Here too he describes the activity of the Spirit in dynamic terms. The Spirit is the Spirit of discovery and life; a fertile Spirit who drives us forward and enlightens us in the face of new challenges. He is always the Spirit of Christ, and never leads beyond what Christ has determined. Yet his mission is not merely to direct us backward to Christ’s life in the past. Precisely in this orientation to Christ, the Spirit is the “perpetual principle of progress and fulfillment in the Church.” His is an inventive movement, enabling us to penetrate the unfathomable riches of Christ. And only a few years after the close of council, de Lubac describes this view as a mean between two false extremes. There are those who focus so exclusively on Christ that

858 Ibid., 274-277.
they suppress the other divine persons; and there are those who “develop a doctrine of the Holy Spirit against, so to speak, the Son, the Christ.” Both views lead only “to the abyss.”

Like doctrines themselves, then, the development of doctrine has two seemingly irreconcilable qualities. On the one hand, it is a living truth that progresses in time. De Lubac notes that new problems regarding revelation will always arise for the human mind and for human society. It is incumbent upon the Christian to address these questions by appealing to revelation in new ways, since God reveals himself not only for the benefit of one people at one time, but for all people in all times. So one cannot remain immobile, but must “update” his understanding of the faith. On the other hand, God has revealed himself in a unique and definitive way in Christ. We cannot seek a new revelation apart from Christ, because in Christ God has revealed everything to us. Ressourcement then is always a return to Christ in order to draw from him anew, to make explicit what has always been implicit in him. “We have only to make use indefinitely of this infinite treasure, which is given to us once and for all and beyond which one cannot go.”

For de Lubac, then, semi-Joachimism consists primarily in the redemption of an important aspect of Joachim’s theology: a principle of progress in the Church under the influence of the Holy Spirit (a New Pentecost). The semi-Joachimite is one who acknowledges the necessity of this principle for maintaining the Church’s vitality and its ability to address the problems of the age. It is opposed, moreover, to the false traditionalism of the Neo-Scholastics and to the false progressivism of modern Joachimism, both of which undermine the paradoxical balance of the Church’s teaching. Authentic development, de

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860 Ibid., 795.
Lubac concludes, is an essential feature of any theology that correctly determines the relationship between nature and the supernatural. It is the progress of an integral theology, and without it, one is poised to fall either into extrinsicism or historical immanentism. On these terms, then, de Lubac’s theology is itself a form of semi-Joachimism. And this fact is arguably the greatest testament that de Lubac’s theology benefitted in positive ways from his confrontation with Joachimism.
CONCLUSION

My task in this dissertation has been to develop a line of reasoning de Lubac began in the pages of *La postérité*, but was unable to complete. My thesis is that the confrontation with Joachimism provided de Lubac with the occasion to re-present the themes of his theology as a compelling refutation of Joachimism. By examining the claims he makes in *La postérité*, as well as indications he gives in other writings, my method has been to offer a creative reconstruction of de Lubac’s refutation.

In Chapter One, I began by arguing that this method is supported by the occasion and the general structure of de Lubac’s engagement with Joachimism. The occasion of his engagement revealed that de Lubac identifies the features of a postconciliar crisis in the Church with Joachimism, especially its propensity to reduce the Church to the world (immanentism). Closer attention to de Lubac’s preconciliar writings revealed that he sees this immanentism as a more perilous version of the problem that haunted his theology for nearly eighty years: a false relationship between nature and the supernatural. In this sense, Joachimism has a claim to being the foremost adversary of de Lubac’s intellectual life.

I then argued that the structure of de Lubac’s confrontation is twofold. First, it involves de Lubac’s diagnosis of Joachimism, what I have called his historical thesis. *La postérité* is first and foremost an argument about the history of theological ideas. De Lubac’s approach to Joachimism therefore revolves around the ways in which Joachim’s
apocalypticism provides a pattern that later thinkers exploit in the name of atheism (what he calls the atheistic hermeneutic of Christianity).

Second, de Lubac’s confrontation includes his own theological alternative to Joachimism, which he intended to develop in the book’s unfinished conclusion; what I have called his doctrinal thesis. Here I laid a foundation for my claims about this alternative in later chapters by justifying my approach in principle. I demonstrated that the importance of history for de Lubac’s theological method means that, formally, his theology qualifies as a theology of history. This conclusion ensures that de Lubac’s positions developed outside of La postérité offer an alternative theology of history to Joachimism. I then demonstrate that de Lubac’s insights about fundamental theology means that, formally, his theology always includes an apologetic dimension (the Christian hermeneutic of atheism). This conclusion ensures that the positions he develops outside of La postérité contain a more convincing account of the human person and community than the atheism of the modern Joachimites.

In Chapter Two, I expanded upon de Lubac’s historical thesis with an overview of the genealogical claims he makes: the “currents” of thought that lead from Joachim to the advocates of modern atheism. Here I clarified de Lubac’s criteria for his judgments about Joachim’s posterity, drawing together from references in La postérité and Medieval Exegesis what he takes to be the four most important doctrines for the Joachimite tradition (Trinity, spiritual exegesis, Church, and eschaton). I provided a brief account of Joachim’s position and what de Lubac sees as his error regarding each doctrine. Joachim’s theology, he argues, exhibits tendencies that undermine some of his own commitments; tendencies that form a pattern of “surpassing” (dépassement)—surpassing Christ, the Gospel, the clerical Church, and the eschaton beyond history. I then examined how this pattern is progressively secularized by some of the major thinkers in Joachim’s spiritual posterity. I concluded from this
examination that de Lubac’s criticism of Joachim is moderate, since he faults Joachim for imprudently upsetting a doctrinal balance. What de Lubac primarily means when he invokes Joachimism, on the other hand, are those “currents” of thought which find in Joachim a pattern for surpassing the Christian faith altogether.

In Chapter Three, I began to construct de Lubac’s doctrinal thesis by synthesizing his positions on two of the four doctrines in question (Trinity and exegesis). Here I supported the thesis of the dissertation first by demonstrating how de Lubac attempts to correct Joachim’s errors. While Joachim’s Trinitarian model of history suggests that Christ is a type or figure for the Spirit, de Lubac advocates a Trinitarian view of history that is Christocentric in character. History for him is concentrated in Christ (the sacrament of God), and the Holy Spirit’s mission is to direct us to Christ’s mediation. I also supported my thesis by demonstrating how de Lubac’s doctrinal opinions contain an apologetic challenge to the immanentism of the modern Joachimites. While these figures interpret the Holy Spirit as a process immanent to nature or human society, de Lubac argues that such a view is dehumanizing and fails to resolve the antinomies of the human condition. A vision of history concentrated in Christ, on the other hand, reveals that we achieve the resolution of our being when the Holy Spirit incorporates us into Christ.

The same reasoning applies on the topic of spiritual exegesis. While Joachim errs by offering an account of spiritual understanding that appears to abrogate the literal meaning of the Old and New Testaments (the “Eternal Gospel”), de Lubac argues that the Gospel provides the deeper and more exalted understanding of Old Testament history, as it sublimes the literal sense, absorbs it, and brings unity to its components. Christ himself effects this relationship. He is the essential object of spiritual understanding, while the Holy Spirit is its inner principle. And while the modern Joachimites interpret Joachim’s exegesis as
a form of philosophical allegory, de Lubac argues that the spiritual understanding signifies
the same phenomenon as the divine image in the human soul, only under a different form. It
is therefore the way in which we access the resolution of our nature revealed in Christ.

In Chapter Four, I continued my account of de Lubac’s doctrinal thesis by
examining his position on the Church and the eschaton. According to de Lubac, Joachim’s
prophecy of a coming spiritual Church (ecclesia spiritualis) includes a tendency to dissolve the
central features of the clerical Church (its sacraments, priesthood, and papacy). In contrast,
de Lubac develops a view of the Church as the sacrament of Christ, the features of which
share in the indispensability of his mediation. The clerical Church is thus the effective sign
that unites us with Christ and prefigures the mystery of our final union with him (the
Mystical Body). Likewise while the modern Joachimites argue that the spiritual Church is a
purely secular form of community, de Lubac argues that the Church and its sacraments are
the means by which we are progressively united with our supernatural fullness.

Regarding the eschaton, de Lubac argues that Joachim errs not by denying our
eternal end, but by transferring essential features of that end (the fullness of peace,
knowledge, and freedom) to a utopian age within history. This generates the tendency to
expect fulfillment for our deepest aspirations within time, and to view any end beyond
history as unrelated to our fulfillment. By contrast, de Lubac argues that we are the image
and likeness of God, whose fullness abides in eternity. Consequently there can be no
fulfillment of human nature within time and no hope for fullness in a utopian age. With the
whole Body of Christ, we will one day experience perfect peace, knowledge, and freedom in
the Kingdom, but within history we only have access to the eschaton in mysterio, i.e. in Christ
and his sacramental Church. Once more, as the modern Joachimites expect an age of human
fulfillment devoid of God, de Lubac argues that such utopias are incapable of achieving the
synthesis they desire. An eschatology that proclaims our end beyond history is in fact more humanizing, since it proclaims our attainment of the synthesis which eludes us in time.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I completed my account of de Lubac’s doctrinal conclusion by developing his arguments about neo-Joachimism in contemporary theology. More specifically, I examined these theologies in terms of the challenges and the promise they represent. I first addressed the challenge posed by the Joachimite features in Jürgen Moltmann’s “theology of hope.” While Moltmann shows that Joachim can correct eschatologies that overemphasize the present, de Lubac suggests that his reliance on modern Joachimites like Hegel and Bloch leave him ill-equipped to avoid their immanentism. De Lubac makes a similar judgment of José Comblin’s “theology of revolution.” While Comblin demonstrates that Joachim can aid us in criticizing systems of domination in the Church and in society, de Lubac suggests that Comblin’s thought is overdetermined by his association with Marxism. He thereby weakens the force of his alternative to historical materialism.

I also examined Balthasar’s Johannine eschatology as an example of what de Lubac deems to be a successful confrontation with Joachimism. Balthasar echoes de Lubac’s criticisms of Joachim’s errors and the traces of those errors in modern thinkers like Hegel, Marx, Bloch, and Moltmann. He also provides arguments for de Lubac’s doctrinal positions, including a realized eschatology that safeguard’s against Joachim’s errors and stresses our transcendent relation to God in the present. Lastly, I examine the way in which de Lubac attempts to redeem the positive tendencies in Joachim’s thought with his category, “semi-Joachimism.” Here de Lubac has in mind the Spirit’s revitalizing activity in the Church, rendering the mystery of Christ perpetually new. He thus refers to a principle of doctrinal development necessary for maintaining the vitality of the Church’s teaching and its ability to provide answers for the problems that arise in new generations and social settings. In this
regard, I concluded, de Lubac’s own writings on the concept of renewal in the tradition are perhaps the most compelling example of semi-Joachimism.

How then does this project help us to better understand de Lubac’s thought? First, it provides a window into the often neglected period of his postconciliar writings. A deeper understanding of his attitudes and motivations during this long and prolific period (from 1965 to 1991) is necessary to fully appreciate his contributions to Catholic theology.  

Secondly, the theology of history allows for a synthetic account of de Lubac’s positions on important doctrines—positions which de Lubac himself neither presents nor develops systematically. Third, my argument shows that de Lubac’s confrontation with Joachimism contains his “final word” on the topic of atheist humanism. To fully understand his arguments against thinkers like Hegel, Marx, and Comte, then, it is necessary to read them in light of his writings on Joachimism. Fourth, my argument develops the principles of de Lubac’s fundamental theology (his affrontement mystique). By demonstrating how each of his opinions contains a more coherent account of the human being than those of his atheist interlocutors, I show how his formal claims in works like “Apologetics and Theology” apply to specific Church teachings. Finally, if what truly concerns de Lubac about Joachimism is its historical immanentism or atheism, and if these represent the enduring problem that his theology faces in a new form (the disorder of nature and the supernatural), then de Lubac’s confrontation with Joachimism is indispensable for evaluating the significance of his theology as a whole. Neither his writings on the supernatural, on exegesis, on the Church, nor on the Church Fathers can ultimately be judged apart from this context. In light of this,

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861 The division of periods in de Lubac’s career is made by Walsh, “Henri de Lubac in Connecticut,” 787.
de Lubac’s writings on Joachimism have a strong claim to providing us with the “organic unity” and the “true conclusion” of his theology.


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