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## The soul and the reading of scripture: a note on Henri De Lubac

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### Abstract

Henri DeLubac's work on multi-sense scriptural reading has become a major resource for Catholic and Protestant theologians seeking a new integration of biblical studies and theology. Rarely, however, is it noticed that De Lubac's account of scriptural interpretation involves a robust notion of the soul and its transformation in the Christian life – and that in linking these themes De Lubac accurately reflects a central theme of pre-modern exegesis. This article thus suggests, first, that defending a notion of soul is important for those seeking to appropriate pre-modern exegesis. The article then argues that such a project is only possible if we move beyond Harnackian notions of early Christianity's 'hellenisation' and see the soul as a theological doctrine. The soul is the fundamental locus of a transformation in which Christians act in and through the Spirit as members of the body of Christ. Once the status of the soul is acknowledged, we are then best able to follow De Lubac's call for the reintegration of moral-practical aspects of Christianity and the discipline of theology. The article finally argues that Christian accounts of scriptural interpretation should find their core in an understanding of scripture as a graced resource for the formation of Christians, and that these accounts should be ever attentive to the place of scripture within the drama of salvation.

O Jésus . . . donnez-moi à boire; je vous demand à boire des sources de vos Écritures . . . Seigneur, donnez-moi de cette eau, . . . qui devienne en moi une fontaine d'eau qui jaillisse jusque dans la vie éternelle.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years pre-modern interpretation has become increasingly popular. Both Protestants interested in recovering an exegesis normed by the rule of faith and post-modern interpreters devoted to the idea of a plurivocal

<sup>1</sup> Sister Bonaventure Theresa of St John, quoted in Henri De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, *The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E. M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 366, n. 108.

scripture have turned to pre-moderns as a fundamental resource.<sup>2</sup> Catholic biblical scholars, concerned that their field has been overly shaped by a cross-denominational professional agenda which renders difficult any distinctively Catholic exegesis, have also turned to the pre-modern heritage. Catholic theologians concerned about the divide between biblical studies and systematic theology have shown a similar interest.

For all of these scholars the work of Henri De Lubac has been a constant point of appeal and his *Medieval Exegesis* is frequently indicated as a major scholarly resource. I suspect, however, that something essential to De Lubac's theology frequently goes unnoticed in this appeal to his work, something that has become unfortunately unpalatable to many theologians in virtually all communions. To state the problem directly: De Lubac's understanding of Christian attention to the various senses united under the label 'spiritual' depends on a robust notion of the soul, its transformation and purification. Throughout *Medieval Exegesis* De Lubac frequently returns to the church as the locus of reading and as the source of the teaching which guides the exploration of the spiritual senses.<sup>3</sup> Yet, amid all the focus on the church, De Lubac's account of the soul plays a fundamental role in articulating the links between God, Christ, redemption and church.

One can, of course, justify the plurivocity of the scriptures in a variety of ways. But if De Lubac and the patristic and medieval heritage he mediates are cited as even partial authorities, it is problematic that one of the key doctrinal underpinnings and implications of the plurivocity of scripture in those 'authorities' is ignored or denied. I suggest that, if we are to make good use of the resources De Lubac offers, we must develop for ourselves something like the deep connections between a doctrine of the soul and an account of exegetical practice that we find in his writing.

<sup>2</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented to the 'Bible and Christian Theology' Group at the 2004 SBL meeting in San Antonio. I am grateful for comments and discussion by Andy Gallwitz, Luke Timothy Johnson, Ian McFarland, Brent Strawn, Trent Pomplun and Medi Ann Volpe. Some of the work lying behind this piece was conducted within a study group, 'Toward Christian Reading(s) of the Old Testament', sponsored by the Candler School of Theology at Emory University: I thank my fellow participants, Brent Strawn, Carol Miles and Ross Wagner for their discussion and stimulation.

<sup>3</sup> The interrelationships here are sketched very helpfully by Susan Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri De Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), esp. chs 3 and 4.

### Part I: the theological soul

In the second volume of *Medieval Exegesis* we find a short section entitled 'Quotidie' ('daily').<sup>4</sup> This section forms the heart of his discussion of tropology or the 'moral' sense of scripture. Throughout the chapter De Lubac emphasises the interrelationship between allegory and tropology: reading allegorically involves discerning the manner in which texts throughout scripture reveal the core doctrinal matrix of Christian faith; reading tropologically involves discerning the moral sense of the same passages.<sup>5</sup> Reworking his frequent observation that we must beware of projecting medieval fourfold divisions onto the more chaotic distinctions of an earlier period, De Lubac emphasises that, even for those who do hold to a highly stratified account of senses, the Christian reader moves from one sense to another, not by leaving behind the previous sense but by seeing with more intensity and complexity the mystery of God's action in Christ. Thus, tropology discloses not simply the moral implications of Christian belief, but the shape of the life of one who lives within Christ, within the *ecclesia*. This disclosure is only possible when one has discovered the doctrinal matrix disclosed by allegorical reading. The two reading practices are thus part of one whole: the deeper one penetrates the mystery of God's action in Christ the more one comes to see how the action of Christ as and on the church is an action which shapes each Christian.

Concerning this action De Lubac writes:

Saint Gregory . . . says, 'what we have said in general about the Church as a whole, let us now feel specifically about each and every soul' . . . In the one case and in the other, declares Saint Bernard, it is basically a question of the same reality, 'except that what is designated by the name "Church" is not one soul [anima] but a unity or rather a unanimity of many'. With a professor's precision Adam Scotus insists on: 'The Holy Church, or, with respect to the moral sense, the devoted soul' . . . in this Christian soul, it is each day, it is today, that the mystery, by being interiorized, is accomplished . . . Everything is consummated in the inner man. This ought to be said of all the external facts related in the books of the two

<sup>4</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, pp. 134–43.

<sup>5</sup> Some readers will, no doubt, be concerned that allegorical and tropological reading involves ignoring the text itself in favour of a meaning established elsewhere. I do not think this is a good interpretation of multi-sense reading, but a defence of this position is beyond the scope of this article. Any discussion that I would offer on this point would be related to aspects of David Dawson's *Figural Reading, the Fashioning of Identity and the Suppression of Origen* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002) and to aspects of Stephen Fowl's *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

Testaments, it ought equally to be said of the Mystery of the Christ. History, allegory, tropology, draw an unbroken line from the unique redemptive action: 'Whatever is taught either under history or under allegory or else under tropology, is thoroughly taught for the sake of this covenant, namely, our restoration'.<sup>6</sup>

For De Lubac the teaching of scripture on all 'levels' exists to aid the restoration of the inner person, the soul, and learning to meditate on the scriptures (as far as is possible for each person) is one of the fundamental practices of the Christian life. But let us note how deeply a notion of soul is interwoven through these arguments. The unity of the testaments is grasped not merely by seeing Christ present through both, but by seeing how both point to and describe the mystery of the soul's restoration effected in Christ. For De Lubac it is the existence of an inner spiritual core to the human person that is both the source of moral action and the location of Christ's restoring grace which draws together the various senses of scripture. In the pages that follow this quotation, De Lubac speaks in a little more detail about the relationship between Christ and the soul. The 'birth' of Christ within the soul does not refer primarily to the Christian's imitation of Christ, but to the action of the Spirit and Christ within the soul, forming human lives into lives that exhibit the charity which is God's essence. De Lubac emphasises that this transformation is mysterious because it is we who act and yet our acting here is experienced as the work of the Spirit. Thus the Church is a union of souls because the same Spirit draws each into the one body of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Although this passage offers no definition of the soul, it does show one of its most important theological functions: the language of soul enables De Lubac's account of Christ's restorative action and it provides a site for exploring the mystery of human action and the presence of Christ and Spirit. In the next few sections of this article I want to explore De Lubac's account of the soul by drawing further attention to these theological functions. This will then enable us to return, in Part II, to the relationship between exegesis and the soul.

### *The scriptural soul*

Any attempt to advocate for a doctrine of soul today is likely to run up against widely held assumptions that notions of soul are fundamentally unbiblical

<sup>6</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, pp. 137–8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 140. Cf. Henri De Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. L. C. Shephard and E. Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 341: 'And how can one here speak "unequivocally" of a "solidarity of the personal and the universal" since in fact both these terms are abolished?'

and promote a dualism which denies the place accorded to the ethical within post-Enlightenment Christianity. Accordingly, I want to begin by taking a step back from De Lubac and consider ways in which modern scholarship on Christian origins and recent work on the recovery of pre-modern styles of reading scripture's 'plain sense' come together to open a space for a move beyond such assumptions, and thus a space within which we may consider more seriously De Lubac's account.

I suggest, first, that we must move beyond summary accounts which present the notion of soul as adopted by Christians from Greek thought for its explanatory power within ancient philosophical contexts, but as being fundamentally extrinsic to Christian belief.<sup>8</sup> Recent scholarship on early Christianity has seen a number of attempts to move beyond simple oppositions between the 'Hellenistic' and the 'biblical' or 'Jewish'. Once the complexity of cultural interchange here is recognised, intellectual strategies which depend on isolating a core Hebraic conception of the person – or on ignoring the complexities of the literature and period which form the context for the New Testament writings – should appear to the theologian to be unsustainable. It is time this intellectual strategy was extended to the story of Jewish and Christian discussions of the soul – both within and beyond the New Testament writings. Notions of soul seem to be deeply embedded in Hellenised Jewish thought and in many of the New Testament texts themselves.<sup>9</sup> A better historical narrative about 'soul' in early Christian

<sup>8</sup> E.g. see Nancey Murphy, *Religion and Science: God, Evolution and the Soul*, ed. Carl S. Helrich (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002), p. 20: 'the concept of soul was originally introduced into Western thought as an explanation for capacities that appeared not to be explainable in bodily terms'. The statement is not made about Christianity alone, but sets the stage for assumptions about why Christians increasingly became 'dualists'. Murphy nods towards scholarship which questions simple Hebrew/Greek divisions but ultimately gestures towards Cullman's insistence on the bodily resurrection as a doctrine which reveals the flaw in the Christian tradition's use of soul language. Such 'nodding' misses the point of that scholarship because it fails to see that, if correct, such scholarship would render inadequate the idea that Christians adopted the language of soul purely for its ultimately illusory explanatory power.

<sup>9</sup> Deep engagement with notions of soul in Hellenised Judaism around or just before the time of Christ is demonstrated by texts such as 2 Macc. 6:20, 2 Enoch 23:5, Test. Job 20:3. Within the New Testament James 1:21 and 5:20 demonstrate the non-controversial use of such language (cf. 1 Pet. 1:22). An excellent example of the tendency of modern scholars to write this language out of the New Testament is revealed in the contrast between translations of Matt. 10:28 which continue to use 'soul' for *psuche*, and Matt 16:26 where 'life' is usually substituted for no good reason (no such qualms troubled the KJV translators). The opposition between 'Judaism' and 'Hellenism' as a recent scholarly trope is excellently discussed in Dale Martin, 'Paul and the Judaism/Hellenism Dichotomy: Toward a Social History of the Question',

thought would thus begin by noting that the earliest Christian traditions were already familiar with a notion of soul as the inner spiritual core of the human being and gradually adopted and adapted themes from a wide variety of possibilities to shape their own argument about how best to speak of the soul, given their particular theological concerns.

Two aspects of this last sentence need to be drawn out further. First, the earliest generations of Christians adopted and adapted notions of soul from within the context of late Hellenistic and early Imperial philosophical and religious writing: this context sustained a highly diverse discussion about the sort of reality the soul is (material or immaterial), the many ways in which it may be understood to be divided (or not), the many ways in which it may be understood to relate to the body and the many ways in which one can conceive of the relationship between the rational power of the soul and the ‘passions’.<sup>10</sup> These debates continued among non-Christian authors throughout the first few centuries of our era and were continuously overheard – and in some cases actively engaged – by Christian authors. Many modern summary accounts of the soul assume that the terms ‘Platonic’ and ‘Aristotelian’ offer a sufficiently broad typology to encompass the important distinctions through the early and medieval periods: a brief glance at most early Christian or non-Christian attempts to categorise psychologies will betray the inadequacy of such assumptions. Thus, if we are to get some sense of the ways in which early Christians – from biblical times through late antiquity and beyond – developed their use of soul language we shall need to recover a set of terms and distinctions now very deeply buried in the church’s memory.

Second, when we see that early Christian engagement with notions of soul was a process of adapting as much as adopting, we see also that from the beginning the discussion of the soul in Christian thought is as much ‘theological’ as it is ‘philosophical’. When I say that the doctrine is as much

in Troels Engberg-Pedersen (ed.), *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), pp. 29–61. For further literature on the notion of soul in biblical writings see Joel B. Green, “‘Bodies – that is, Human Lives’: A Re-Examination of Human Nature in the Bible”, in Warren S. Brown (ed.), *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 151–2, nn. 6–8. Green’s account of the diversity of biblical terminologies is helpful and yet he assumes unnecessarily that deployment of a notion of soul involves a non-‘integrated’ view of the person, implying the principles that soul is separable from body and that the material body must be understood as prison.

<sup>10</sup> e.g. Marius Victorinus, *Against the Arians* IB.61–2 (Eng. trans. Fathers of the Church, vol. 69, pp. 188–91) and Galen, *The Soul’s Dependence on the Body* (Eng. trans. P. N. Singer in *Galen: Selected Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 150–76).



theological as philosophical I do not mean that the doctrine thereby ceases to be 'philosophical'. A theologian's development of the notion of soul will inevitably draw on a variety of non-Christian traditions and arguments and those arguments will be expected to have explanatory force beyond the Christian community. I do, however, mean that key aspects of a doctrine of the soul will be shaped by theological concerns and needs. In any subtle theologian Christian concerns will form a context for engagement with ancient discussions about the nature and structure of the soul. In such a context the significance and usefulness of soul language can best be assessed by exploring how well such language fits (and has been adapted to fit) the broad theological dynamics of particular thinkers: there can be no easy judgement in advance that soul language *per se* is inappropriate.

My argument has been so far that an attempt to separate the language of soul from the New Testament and from developing early Christian thought on the grounds that it is not truly part of earliest Christianity is unsustainable. I suggest that this argument should seem particularly persuasive to those concerned to found theological argument on the plain sense of scripture. By 'plain sense' here I understand 'way the words [of scripture] run' for a Christian community skilled in reading and committed to the creeds of the church.<sup>11</sup> Such a definition reflects the interests of a range of broadly post-liberal Protestant and Catholic theologians, some of whom may also be interested in promoting the recovery of figural reading. I suggest that such theologians recognise not only that the language of the soul is embedded within that plain sense, but also that the debates over the soul within early Christianity reflect just the sort of complex engagement with the plain sense that current proponents of such engagement seek to foster.<sup>12</sup> If some form of a doctrine of soul should demand the faith of Christians, this does not

<sup>11</sup> For this terminology see Kathryn Tanner, 'Theology and the Plain Sense', in Garret Green (ed.), *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 59–87. The phrase 'the way the words run' I copy from Eugene Rogers's essay 'How the Virtues of an Interpreter Presuppose and Perfect Hermeneutics: The Case of Thomas Aquinas', *Journal of Religion* 76 (1996), pp. 64–81, where he uses the phrase as a trans. of Aquinas' *circumstantia litterae* at *De Potentia*, q. 4, a.1, c. For examples of how this understanding of scripture's basic sense may function see n. 13 below and Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), chs 4 and 5. It is important to note that within this emerging tradition the 'plain sense' is understood to be inherently flexible.

<sup>12</sup> One of the best examples of a piece offering a historical model of such engagement for modern emulation is Bruce D. Marshall, 'Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths', in Bruce Marshall (ed.), *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1990), pp. 69–102. I suggest my own account in *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth Century Trinitarian*

mean that philosophical articulation is foregone but that theologians must struggle to define what is held by faith (which is in part to define exactly what remains mysterious and beyond proof because of its relationship to God's action in Christ), and struggle to see how the philosophically persuasive can be engaged, used and adapted in its defence and in rendering it plausible.<sup>13</sup>

*Soul as the 'well' of the divine life*

Opening up a space within which the idea of the soul can no longer be dismissed as fundamentally unbiblical now enables us to consider De Lubac's account as one example of this complex negotiation between philosophical and theological traditions. In this section of this article I sketch some of the most important contours of his account by focusing further on the soul's theological function in his work. One of the great difficulties in reading De Lubac is his method: the piling up of quotation and allusion along with the very dense footnoting means that isolating his own cast on the material he offers is more likely to involve isolating strategies of quotation, adaptation and compilation than it is a simple process of distinguishing statements which are his from those that are not. At times, however, he also captures with remarkable precision the key common themes of the pre-modern traditions for which he is trying to create a voice within modern Catholic debate. His assumptions about the function of the soul reflect, I suggest, an excellent example (with the reservations noted below).

For De Lubac, and for the tradition whose common themes he attempts to mediate, the soul is that in us which lies at the core of our status as *imago Dei*. The soul is the seat of our activities of attention, imagination, judgement and contemplation. The soul's activity constitutes the fundamental desire in and with which we image the divine life of rational, creative and productive love. De Lubac presents the soul as the spiritual core of human existence, enabling the human being's dual-focus attention.<sup>14</sup> The soul should both attend to and through the creation and simultaneously do so as it attends to the divine informing light. In other words, true human temporal and material existence is rendered possible because we may,

*Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), ch. 16, and in the earlier sketch, 'On the Practice and Teaching of Christian Doctrine', *Gregorianum* 80/1 (1999), pp. 33–94.

<sup>13</sup> It is important also to note that a doctrine which may have seemed plausible on external philosophical grounds as well as on theological grounds may at times lose that philosophical plausibility but retain its theological necessity. One might argue that this is the fate of the soul in our own time.

<sup>14</sup> I have the term 'dual-focus' on lend-lease from Michel Barnes. I offer a more extensive discussion of 'dual-focus' purification specifically in late-fourth-century pro-Nicene theology in *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, ch. 13.

as embodied soul, image in time God's own care and love. Thus the character of human desire and the process of imagination (understood as an activity interwoven with the character of human desire) are inseparable from the fundamental orientation or attention of the soul. The distinction between this picture and the fact that our intended patterns of dual-focus attention have been radically distorted, such that we often act in ignorance of our existence *coram Deo*, is the space in which the restoration and sanctification of the person occurs. It should also be clear from this paragraph that for De Lubac – and for the tradition which he attempts to mediate – the soul and person are not identical. Not only is this so because the human person is constituted as soul and body, but also because the soul's life is inherently mediatorial and poetic. It is 'poetic' in the sense both that the soul's complex attention is a life constantly articulating the form of each human being's existence, and that through the restoration of its dual-focus attention the soul enables the creation of the church from and within human and embodied cultures.

De Lubac's posthumously published and unfinished work on the threefold terminology of body–soul–spirit in Christian tradition provides a great deal of material with which to fill out this summary. The work begins by analysing Paul's use of the triad at 1 Thess. 5:23 ('may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless'). De Lubac chastises commentators who see this terminology as an aberration and/or as an isolated repetition of a Greek philosophical commonplace. He sees virtue in those who have argued that 'spirit' designates 'the human soul insofar as it is informed by grace . . . united to the very essence of God by the coming of the divine Spirit into it'.<sup>15</sup> At the same time he notes Festugière's insistence that the grammatical form of Paul's sentence must mean that 'spirit' is a part of the human person, and there is no clear reference to the Holy Spirit here.<sup>16</sup> De Lubac argues that we should understand 'spirit' in the verse as designating that which places the human person as the highpoint of the created order. At its 'highest' or 'deepest' the soul is constituted by a gift which is nevertheless its own and which enables contemplation of the Spirit and Christ whose life wells up within and through this gift: this gift is not truly 'of' us but is 'in' us (following the phrasing of 1 Cor. 2:11: 'the spirit of the man which is in him').<sup>17</sup> As he writes in *Catholicism*:

<sup>15</sup> Henri De Lubac, 'Tripartite Anthropology', in *Theology in History*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), p. 126.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

There is in man an eternal element, a 'germ of eternity', which already 'breathes the upper air' . . . [f]or he is made in the image of God, and in the mirror of his being the Trinity is ever reflected.<sup>18</sup>

Although this account is presented as historical summary, De Lubac has two polemical targets in his sights. In the first place, he openly attacks post-Enlightenment accounts which either describe human reason and action without reference to the transcendence of the human towards the divine, or which assume that the full reality of human mental life and experience can be described in purely psychological (or psychoanalytic) terms. Against these targets De Lubac argues that for Christians the full reality of moral activity is only understood when it is seen as resulting from contemplation of Christ and Spirit welling up in the soul: to use the terms within which he portrays a particular modern opposition, 'morality' and 'mysticism' are inseparable.<sup>19</sup> The very character of 'practical reason' and judgement is misunderstood unless it is narrated as occurring in the light of Christ's presence.<sup>20</sup> Discussion of the highest level of soul is thus for De Lubac the point of departure for understanding the necessity of the language of soul *per se*. When we see the importance of this highest level, then we can see that the language of soul enables our exploring of the dual structure of human activity as truly created and yet given as a contemplation and imaging of the divine.<sup>21</sup> 'Soul names

<sup>18</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, p. 358. It might be thought odd that in what follows I have not attempted to draw out of De Lubac arguments which see soul language as a necessary consequence of Christianity's belief in human immortality. I have not done so because De Lubac's own emphasis is always on the link between some form of a 'tripartite anthropology' and the possibility of accurate description of human life. It is clear enough, of course, that De Lubac sees humanity's permanent end as a completion of our growth into the vision of God and that our capacity for this growth rests in the existence of the soul.

<sup>19</sup> The same argument is further developed in his closely related paper 'Mysticism and Mystery' in *Theological Fragments*, trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), pp. 35–69. Similarly, the theme of the soul and human transcendence is central to his polemic against Marxist materialism, e.g. *Catholicism*, ch. 12.

<sup>20</sup> One can imagine De Lubac saying to the virtue theorist, who leaves little room for the complex relationship between grace, the theological virtues and virtues learnt by habitual practice, that while it is true that habit reaches down to the core of the soul, so too grace reaches all the way up!

<sup>21</sup> In dense fashion Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections of Cultural Bereavement* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2000), ch. 4, offers us something of a parallel. Williams first offers a meditation on what it is to know oneself in the act and process of self-questioning (esp. pp. 145–6) such that (following Walter Davis) 'reflection itself becomes the experience that the self thinks about: the questioning of the self . . . is the consolidation of selfhood that then, in turn, presents itself for thought'. He then articulates an account of a

the full scope of a “zone of activity” that runs “from the periphery . . . to the ‘heart’”.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, but without offering direct reflection on the controversy, De Lubac here offers an anthropology which reflects the controversies around his *Surnaturel*. While De Lubac avoids directly discussing the legitimacy of speaking of human natural and supernatural ends in this text, the whole attempt to show that Christian thinkers have consistently sustained an anthropology in which the innermost sphere of the soul’s activity is constituted as gift from God, but one that must still be named as ‘ours’, represents another aspect of his attacks on those Neo-Thomists who argued for the reality of a purely natural human end.<sup>23</sup> While it is important to

possible (and desirable) mutual desire in which the participants discover each other as mysterious, as being beyond any one relationship and as a source of gratuitous joy because of being so (pp. 159–60). The ‘soul’ that Williams then seeks to recover is a self that is itself sensed to be there not because of need but because of gift in ways that secular discourse cannot sustain (p. 161): ‘For any self to be free to enable another’s freedom means that it must be in some way aware of the actuality, not only the possibility, of a regard beyond desire – and so of its own being as a proper cause of joy, as a gift’. Only a self that is the image of God renders possible an appropriate account of human existence and relationship. The paradox of Williams’s wonderful discussion is that it is precisely the theological narration of the soul that makes this possible: in his text the avoidance of the too specifically theological a language is a tactic intended to gain a wider audience for the argument, but one that perhaps hides one of its fundamental grounds.

<sup>22</sup> It is here that one also sees one reason why Christians should resist the attempt of some to argue for a ‘nonreductive physicalism’ in place of any concept of the soul. For such argument see e.g. Nancey Murphy, ‘Nonreductive Physicalism: Philosophical Issues’, in Brown (ed.), *Whatever Happened to the Soul?*, pp. 127–48, and Warren Brown, ‘Cognitive Contributions to Soul’, *ibid.*, pp. 99–125. Both authors rely on precisely the problematic narrative tropes I identified in earlier sections of this article, creating a straw man from the complex negotiations between the Christian tradition and notions of soul. But ultimately an equally significant problem with their accounts is that they lose an anthropological context within which the structure of traditional discussions of grace and sanctification and the restoration of the *imago Dei* can be articulated. Brown, in particular, makes clear that an account of our resurrection can be sustained within this perspective only by turning to divine fiat – which seems to raise significant problems for the ways in which theologies of sanctification have long been based on the principle that grace perfects nature (the resurrection of the human person involves the final stage of the resurrection/restoration of the soul’s gaze begun in the body of Christ on earth).

<sup>23</sup> For this see the work which is the capstone of his contribution to those debates, *Le mystère du surnaturel* (1965): *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad, 1998), esp. chs 6 and 9. This is also the context within which we should locate John Milbank’s fascination with De Lubac. See esp. his recent *The Suspended Middle: Henri De Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,

remember that De Lubac rarely offers detailed arguments for the idea of soul as such – his theological writings are mostly aimed at an audience for whom the soul’s existence is unquestioned – De Lubac is attempting to shift understandings of soul language by reappropriating pre-modern traditions.<sup>24</sup> In particular, just as he sought in general to emphasise the ultimately mysterious quality of all theological language,<sup>25</sup> De Lubac’s concern in the ‘Tripartite Anthropology’ manuscript is to suggest that accounts of the soul must reflect the *aporía* which follows from our need to acknowledge that in its depths the soul always has as gift the ability to contemplate the divine and receive the presence of Son and Spirit. De Lubac’s doctrine of the soul is thus theologically marked by his insistence that its innermost ‘zone’ of activity can only be described by narrating God’s enabling of the human person’s contemplation. Such a theological marking adds a new cast to discussion of the Christian’s activity as such. This vision will – as I suggested above – affect how we view the nature and importance of practices intended to reshape our awareness and self-understanding within the Christian life (and here I think of the continuum between practices of prayer, liturgy and reading). At the same time, the same account of the soul will affect how we view the formation of virtue, and how we narrate and interpret the course and meaning of human actions.<sup>26</sup>

2005), but also *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 218–23. For Milbank, De Lubac’s emphasis on the paradox of God’s gift to us of the desire for the beatific vision points towards his own argument that ‘all creation is grace-given and the constantly “new” things bestowed on humanity through history are not “in addition” to God’s single creating act’ (ibid., p. 222). What De Lubac (mostly) treats as a question of theological anthropology Milbank adapts and raises to a theological ontology. Milbank also builds on De Lubac’s emphasis on the *paradoxical* gift of grace to promote a vision of Christian life (the ‘contemplative’ and ‘political’ are interwoven here) in which the continual acknowledgement of the gift is the root of all action.

<sup>24</sup> It is a further question of some importance here to see exactly which traditions DeLubac draws on most. I would argue that his account is compatible with a variety of pre-modern traditions, but DeLubac certainly synthesises from a variety of sources to produce a result which does not necessarily reflect any one pre-modern author. Thus, one needs also to ask to what extent he constructs a synthesis in view of its polemical utility in the controversies of his own day.

<sup>25</sup> This aspect of his work is very clearly described in Brian Daley, ‘The *Nouvelle Théologie* and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and the Science of Theology’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005), pp. 362–82.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. it might be argued that one of the enduring influences of an Augustinian account of the soul as implicitly always desiring God – however distorted that desire has become – is in helping to sustain patterns of spiritual and moral guidance that seek to blend judgement of the probity (or otherwise) of particular acts with a strong concern for the future nurture of the soul’s vision. Perhaps it is in such a context that there is an

## Part II: the soul and the multiplicity of senses

This second main section need not be long: as will be clear by now, discussion of the soul *per se* in De Lubac necessarily involves commentary on the relationship between soul, scripture and Christian life. I began Part I of this article by commenting on a passage from the second volume of *Medieval Exegesis*. We can now return to the same short section, 'Quotidie'. At the heart of these few pages De Lubac argues that we must learn to treat the scripture as a mirror: or rather, and importantly, that we must learn to recognise that scripture 'presents itself to us as a mirror'.<sup>27</sup> Scripture is a mirror not simply because we can see in it the features of what he terms 'our internal face', but because the scripture is an active mirror. Relying for his imagery largely on Bernard of Clairvaux and Hebrews 4:12, De Lubac writes:

It is a living mirror, a living and efficacious Word, a sword penetrating at the juncture of soul and spirit, which makes our secret thoughts appear and reveals to us our heart. It teaches us to read in the book of experience and makes us, so to speak, our own exegesis... once acquired by meditation on scripture, experience permits one to deepen this meditation, though it could never free itself of it... In this reciprocity, scripture, which is always primary, is always also the last. The superior experience that it communicates to the one who questions it can only be acquired within faith. It is the scripture that measures us, and which scrutinizes us, and which makes the fountains of living water spring forth in us, and which ends by saying to us, not to deny it to us but showing us the unity of the first Source: 'drink the water from your vessels and from your wells'.<sup>28</sup>

For De Lubac, the reader of scripture who learns to read according to its different senses experiences the text as an ever deepening revelation of the mystery of God's action in Christ. But, at the same time, such a reader finds also the progress of the soul's transformation narrated through the text, and thus comes to a better self-understanding through learning scripture's narrative of transformation. The reading of scripture, self-discernment and the reshaping of the soul are thus part of a circular or spiral meditation.<sup>29</sup> As we have already seen: '[the scripture] teaches us to read in the book of

unexpected convergence between traditions of casuistry in moral/spiritual guidance and robust doctrines of the soul.

<sup>27</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, p. 142 (italics added).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> During the SBL session at which an earlier version of this paper was presented, the respondent, Trent Pomplun of Loyola College, Baltimore, correctly drew attention to the importance of De Lubac's context as a twentieth-century French Jesuit. Much useful

experience and makes us, so to speak, our own exegesis . . . once acquired by meditation on scripture, experience permits one to deepen this meditation, though it could never free itself of it'.<sup>30</sup> But as we saw in De Lubac's text, the scripture is not purely understood as a passive text lying before the active human intellect, but an 'active' text: 'active' because used by the purifying Word within the developing Christian life. There are, then, multiple senses because the reading of scripture is intended as a constant point of departure and return in the process of our soul's growth into Christ.

This basic point must be expanded in two directions. First, the story of the soul's growth is not read off from the text in separation from an account of the character and action of Christ. De Lubac presents the act of encountering scripture as one in which the human person discovers the depths of herself through recognising that Christ's relationship and interaction with the Father reveals the true depths of all human existence. At the same time Christians discover themselves as drawn into the relationship between Christ and the Father:

The Holy Spirit . . . causes the Gospel to penetrate into the soul's depths . . . He creates in man new depths which harmonize him with 'the depths of God', and he projects man out of himself . . . By revealing the Father and by being revealed by him, Christ completes the revelation of man to himself. By taking possession of man, by seizing hold of him and by penetrating to the very depths of his being Christ makes man go deep down within himself, there to discover in a flash regions hitherto unsuspected. It is through Christ that the person . . . becomes conscious of his own being.<sup>31</sup>

Whatever philosophical resources we use to articulate the soul's attention and nature, our understanding of its ultimate depths and the transformation it undergoes is learnt by attention to the scriptural account of the presence of Christ's life in Christians and his drawing of us to the Father. It is here that we see why primacy is accorded to reading scripture's central doctrinal

work could be done on seeing how far the reading practices De Lubac recommends are related to his own spiritual practices, and on exploring what range of other practices could be seen as appropriately following from the less specific account of reading we find in works such as *Medieval Exegesis*. A fuller discussion would also have to consider the extent to which De Lubac's account of scriptural reading is a conscious adaptation of traditions of *lectio divina* – and the extent to which that which we might recommend in De Lubac's wake overlaps with those traditions.

<sup>30</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, p. 142.

<sup>31</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, pp. 338–9.



narrative; within this basic doctrinal matrix one finds the core of all other senses because the restoration of the human person occurs within Christ.

Second, the soul's growth through reading is one that is at the core of a human activity both bodily and corporate. The point is stated with reference to the reading of scripture in the 'Tripartite Anthropology' fragment. Discussing the unity of 'morality' and 'mysticism', De Lubac argues that in the true practice of the virtues is found the end of the virtues. He quotes first Augustine's statement about heaven: 'in that life there will be only one virtue, and it will be both virtue and the reward of virtue'.<sup>32</sup> Turning to exegesis he writes:

Let us say, in the categories of medieval exegesis, that analogy achieves perfection both of allegory and of tropology. Thus one should say of all Catholic mysticism what one historian says of Saint Bernard, through allusion to the traditional interpretation of the 'Books of Solomon' and of their progressive sequence; for each of them, as for him, 'the moral school of Ecclesiasticus and Proverbs, a necessary preliminary for the mystical school of the Song of Songs, is a school whose doors are never closed behind us. And, reciprocally, in fulfilling the precept of the Lord, one merits not only the eternal dwelling, one does not merely prepare for it: one is already building, Saint Hildegarde tells us, the tower of the heavenly Jerusalem'.<sup>33</sup>

Here we see in microcosm some of the central dynamics of De Lubac's Catholicism: the practice of virtue both moves one towards the life of heaven and is already building that life. But if so, the beatific life or vision is a fundamentally embodied and social activity. In parallel the reading of scripture's many senses does not implicate one in a move towards the solitary beatific gaze. Learning to read the different senses both enables one to see how all come together, how the moral implications of scripture flow from its heart in the mystery of Christ, and enables one to see that all the senses come together insofar as they point towards the one restorative action of Christ through which we are built into the body of Christ. It is, I suggest, because De Lubac has in place both a notion of the multiplicity of senses and a notion of soul that he can so successfully relate discussion of the soul's constitution, the corporate nature of the church and the practice of the spiritual life.

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, Ep. 155, 12.

<sup>33</sup> De Lubac, 'Tripartite Anthropology', pp. 190–1.

## Conclusion: thesis 10

The significance of my argument in this article may be drawn out by bringing its conclusions into dialogue with one of the most interesting recent attempts to revitalise Christian theological engagement with scripture. Fourteen scholars – one Catholic and thirteen Protestant – have recently produced nine theses on interpretation as a result of a project organised by the Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton. The fourth of their theses explicitly refers to the tradition of understanding scripture to possess multiple senses, although with some hesitation. The statement ‘[t]he medieval “fourfold sense” is a helpful reminder of scripture’s multivalence’ is immediately followed by assurances that ‘this does not entail a rejection of historical investigation of biblical senses’.<sup>34</sup> ‘Multivalence’ is given little further definition. I suspect that the reason for this hesitation lies in the emphasis we find in other of the nine theses on ‘figural’ reading strategies understood as techniques for reading the text as a whole. The framers of the theses are concerned to claim the possibility of reading scripture as a text which speaks to us of the one narrative of God’s interaction in history.<sup>35</sup> Because of this concern they are able to offer a fairly extended definition of what they mean by a figural practice, but they generally seem to have in mind the typological fulfilment by Christ of Old Testament prophecy.

Despite the very real and important achievements that these theses represent,<sup>36</sup> there is much missing if we are to reclaim and fruitfully engage pre-modern exegetical practice – in particular if we are to reclaim pre-modern understandings of scripture’s place in the economy of redemption. As we have seen, De Lubac’s understanding of the soul’s

<sup>34</sup> See ‘Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture’, in Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (eds.), *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 1–5.

<sup>35</sup> The nine Princeton theses offer a perspective consonant with De Lubac’s insistence on the priority of learning to read the basic doctrinal matrix of scripture. There is, however, a focus on the ‘narrative’ of scripture that leaves the authors uncertain about how to handle the ‘non-narrative’ material in scripture (see thesis 2). It may be that further thought about the inseparability of narrative and embedded truth claims would help here. At the same time the Princeton authors should perhaps reflect further on the extent to which it is the text of scripture, in all its complexity and diversity, that should be the object of Christians’ faith, not the ‘narrative’ that text is taken to embody.

<sup>36</sup> One of the key achievements of these theses, against the background of recent debate, is their insistence that Old Testament texts illuminate New Testament texts: illumination does not flow in only one direction. The statement is an achievement because it tries to shape debate about how Christian readers need to return to the ways in which the people of Israel expressed their history and theology without turning to problematic language about what the Old Testament might mean ‘on its own terms’.

transformation is an important part of a wider vision of the place of scripture within Christian life. In the light of my argument I would, then, like to suggest the necessity of a tenth thesis. Perhaps it could run as follows:

The scriptures are a providentially ordered resource for the shaping and reformation of the Christian's imagination and desire. The reformation of imagination and desire is a reformation of the human soul – the soul that finds its mission and true end as *imago Dei* within the body of Christ. The human person finds this mission and true end through a credally normed meditation on the text of scripture within the church. Understanding scripture's place in the economy of salvation is inseparable from understanding the place of the soul in the triune soteriological action.<sup>37</sup>

De Lubac's theological vision is one that seeks a reintegration of the reading of scripture, theology and the practice of Christian life. For De Lubac the practice of multiple sense reading depends on our understanding ever more deeply the doctrinal matrix of Christian faith and the place of our own restoration within God's economy. But our growth in such understanding necessarily involves our being more and more able to sustain theological discussion of the soul and its purification, a purification shaped in part by the work of grace in and through our meditation on the scriptural text. If we are to retrieve an appropriate theology of scripture's place in the economy of redemption then De Lubac will offer us much when we seek to describe how the text of scripture is used by Word and Spirit in our redemption and transformation.

My suggestion that we need to see a robust doctrine of the soul implicated throughout De Lubac's magisterial account of pre-modern exegesis – and that we need to sustain such an account in our own theologies of scripture – is intended both as a Catholic and as an ecumenical challenge. In one sense it is most certainly a challenge to Catholic theologians to take seriously an aspect of doctrine which remains a clear piece of church teaching but a largely undeveloped theme in recent writing. At the same time there is a challenge here to those Protestant and Anglican theologians who have worked in recent decades towards a sense of the common inheritance of pre-modern Christian

<sup>37</sup> I offer a more extensive account of what might be involved in recovering an account of theological practice able to sustain a thesis such as this in my *Nicaea and its Legacy*, ch. 16. Cf. my earlier sketch, 'On the Practice and Teaching of Christian Doctrine'.

faith. It may well be that it is time to look beyond the commonplace rejection of any sustained account of the soul in recent Protestant systematic theology (in a move which should be viewed as part of the wider and ongoing rejection of narratives which deploy simple distinctions between 'Greek philosophy' and the 'biblical'): if we are to recover with any density the traditional Christian approach to the scriptures then we must learn to talk again of the human soul and its movement in and into the divine life.