E.Y. MULLINS, GEORGE W. TRUETT, AND A BAPTIST THEOLOGY OF NATURE AND GRACE

Dissertation

Submitted to

The College of Arts and Sciences of the UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Theology

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May, 2011
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ABSTRACT

E.Y. MULLINS, GEORGE W. TRUETT, AND A BAPTIST THEOLOGY OF NATURE AND GRACE

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This dissertation examines the prevalent ideas of Baptist theological discourse, finding that they have limited utility for offering a coherent account of particular Baptist practices. It argues that Baptists would greatly benefit from deeper engagement with Catholic thought, especially the theology of nature and grace as articulated by Henri de Lubac, S.J. After detailing the obstacles to and potential for such a theological endeavor, de Lubac’s work serves as a lens for viewing and evaluating particular moments in Baptist history. This project contends that the work of E.Y. Mullins and George W. Truett, Baptist luminaries who have exerted considerable influence on the ways that Baptists view the world around them, significantly contributes to the notable incoherence of Baptist discourse. Through de Lubac’s understanding of the relationship of nature and grace, though, Baptists can critically evaluate Mullins and Truett in order to locate and overcome specific problematic aspects of their thought (both in their own contexts and in the contemporary setting). Moreover, Baptists can also recover
marginalized or forgotten voices within their tradition (e.g., certain seventeenth-century English Baptists and African-American Baptists) as invaluable resources for renewal of Baptist theological discourse. Finally, such work underscores the importance of situating Baptist life and thought within the conversations of the broader Christian tradition.
To Sarah, my joyous partner in life,

And Philip and Simon, the outpouring of our joy together
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As with all works of theology, this dissertation would not be possible without the presence and influence others. Indeed, I have increasingly come to view this sort of collaboration as part and parcel of participating in the body of Christ. With that said, I would like to offer my deepest gratitude to my dissertation advisor, William Portier, for his encouragement throughout my studies at the University of Dayton. It was in my first doctoral seminar (taught by Dr. Portier) that seeds for this work with de Lubac were planted. Moreover, his patience, wise counsel, and good humor have helped me bring this dissertation’s wide range of voices together into a coherent whole. I am a better scholar because of his mentorship.

I would also like to thank my dissertation committee: Kelly Johnson, Dennis Doyle, William Trollinger, and Barry Harvey. They always offered helpful encouragement and advice as well as tough but necessary questions during this process. Their careful attention in reading drafts, discussing the contours of the dissertation’s argument, and talking about the precise trajectory of this project has challenged my thought in ways beyond those seen in the text of this dissertation. For that, and for all of their support, I am tremendously grateful.
Further, at the risk of neglecting to mention many who are deserving of recognition, I am keenly aware that this project was aided by other friends and scholars. Without their contributions, as well as their friendship, this dissertation might not have been possible. Michael Cox has listened to virtually every writing idea I have had and was a helpful friend in discussing the contours of various portions of this work. He also provided expert proofreading assistance. I am indebted to Timothy Gabrielli for our conversations about Catholic sacramental theology and the intriguing notion that Baptists might have any place in that discussion. Ethan Smith read an initial draft of certain chapters, providing helpful feedback and immeasurable encouragement throughout the writing process. Benjamin Peters deserves thanks for his conversations about Henri de Lubac’s understanding of nature and grace, which, I suspect mutually helped to bring both of our dissertations to completion. Additionally, Brad Kallenberg has always been a helpful friend and guide in helping me understand what it means to be part of the guild of theologians. Finally, the scholars associated with the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion Region-at-Large listened to earlier versions of portions of this dissertation. Their feedback was important for discerning the overall shape of this project.

I am fortunate to have loving and supportive parents, Mitchell and Vanessa Hatch. They have always encouraged my academic pursuits in a wholly selfless manner. Moreover, they made our home one that simultaneously supported faith and learning. This project, as well as my vocational journey to this point, has been incubated and nurtured in that household.
Most importantly, words cannot fully express my gratitude to my wife, Sarah, who has been a faithful companion in this journey and who has lovingly sacrificed so that this dissertation could be written. Her grace and patience are a constant gift to me each and every day. Even in frustrating and trying moments during this process, she never ceased to encourage me. This dissertation is my gift to her, and the celebration of its achievement is mutually shared. Our two sons, Philip and Simon, have also made innumerable contributions to this project. Both are an ever-present reminder that, like the supernatural’s relation to the natural, academic work is never divorced from the texture of human experience. Moreover, through diaper changing, trips to the park, and navigating nap time(s), I have come to appreciate the ways in which theological study is an embodied exercise as it is shaped by and reflects upon the union of human and divine within Christ’s Incarnation. As a result, my scholarly work is truly blessed by Sarah and the boys’ presence in my life, and I am most certainly a better theologian because of how I learn to be a better husband and a better dad each day.

-Holy Week 2011
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Tales of Baptists’ Theological Confusion

Since their beginnings in 1609, Baptist communities of faith have nurtured and provided an ecclesial home for countless Christians. Indeed, these churches, and the members who constitute them, have carried on a robust witness to the significance of Jesus Christ over the centuries that is not easily overlooked. Despite their strength and endurance, it is not strange within the Baptist tradition to find oneself confronted with a seeming theological contradiction (or contradictions). That is, some measure of inconsistency in language and/or practice prompts theological questions that strike at the heart of what it means to be Baptist. As an example of such confusion, consider the practice of baptism. As part of a Baptist congregation, one is continually reminded of the importance of baptism. Described as a “church ordinance” within the vernacular of Baptist congregations, baptism has taken up residence in the name of this group of

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1 This dissertation largely addresses historical theological concerns arising from the thought and practice of Baptists in the American South. The author has been a part of many Baptist congregations, but is still existentially shaped by encounters within churches in this region. Moreover, the foci of theological examination in this project come out of Baptist life in the South. Nonetheless, the diversity of Baptist life does not mean that significant similarities do not exist between tribes of Baptists. Thus, while the specific contours of this dissertation’s argument may not be directed toward other Baptists, the conclusions found therein certainly have bearing on a wider Baptist audience.

2 Baptists have generally refused to use the term sacrament to label baptism for many reasons, mainly 1) the aversion to any indication that baptism is salvific in itself, and 2) the fact that most Baptists understand baptism to be a representative act in some manner. Instead, the term “ordinance” is often used, indicating that the act is in obedience to Jesus’ commands. Cf. William H. Brackney, Doing Baptism Baptist Style: Believer’s Baptism (Brentwood, TN: Baptist History & Heritage Society, 2001). There is also
gathered Christians. For Baptists, when baptism occurs, it is often seen as a major event. That is, since they hold that only believers are to be baptized (i.e., what is called by some as credobaptism), there is an element of surprise and delight at the baptism of a new convert (unexpected because it is not explicitly tied to any routine developmental stage of the person’s life).

Moreover, baptism’s significance is indicated by the fact that, aside from keeping records concerning the amount of money Baptist churches give to mission work, numerical baptismal records are kept by state Baptist groups and national organizations, serving as one major metric for a particular congregation’s health. In other words, it is not uncommon for Baptist churches to gauge the success of their evangelistic efforts (and, by extension, the success of their congregations) by counting the number of baptisms performed in a given year and analyzing any trends that emerge in a select period of time.

Due to baptism’s central place in Baptist life, one might expect Baptist parishioners (i.e., congregants of a particular local church) to have a certain level of some preoccupation with avoiding any term (e.g., sacrament) that might have Catholic associations. W.T. Conner, a Baptist theologian from the first half of the twentieth century, remarked: “Christ has instituted two ceremonial ordinances and committed them to his people for perpetual observance – baptism and the Lord’s Supper…. Over against this view is the view of the Roman Catholic Church that these two ordinances, with five others, are ‘sacraments’ that convey grace to the participant” [W.T. Conner, *Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman, 1937; reprint, Nashville: B&H Academic, 1998), 273].

Despite their name, though, Baptists are, of course, neither the only Christians who baptize nor the only Christians who practice believer’s baptism. “Believer’s baptism has long been a distinctive mark of Baptists…. All Baptists, to one degree or another, recognize the importance of a believer’s church and the signal rite or ordinance of baptism” (Brackney, “Doing Baptism Baptist Style,” n.p.).


In addition, Baptists also initiate campaigns focused on increasing the number of baptisms. For example, in 1954, the Southern Baptist Convention began a campaign called “A Million More in ’54” and the Baptist General Convention of Texas recently initiated Texas Hope 2010, aimed to share the gospel with every non-Christian in Texas by Easter 2010.
clarity about the fundamental theological contours of the practice itself. For instance, what occurs in the act of baptism? Who is operative and when? Is there a requisite form for the practice and, if so, what is it? These and other questions are central to explaining baptism. Without answering them, it is difficult to make clear what the nature of the act is and why it is performed. One would assume, therefore, that if anyone had a sufficiently thorough articulation of the practice of baptism (and consistent answers to these questions), it would be the Baptists. However, this seems to be far from the case.

While one might discover silence on key theological points regarding baptism, what one finds primarily is a multitude of answers that move in divergent theological directions. To be sure, there is some sense of commonality among Baptists, but this agreement often concerns aspects of baptism that have minimal theological significance. Baptist historian Bill Leonard observes the same pattern among Baptists, noting, “While Baptists generally agree that the immersion of Christian believers should be the normative mode [of baptism], they divide over the identity of proper candidates and the meaning of the act itself…. The proper age for baptism is another matter that reflects Baptist diversity.”

Leonard rightly identifies this diversity, especially regarding the meaning of baptism itself. With a brief glance, one can observe that some Baptists regard the practice to hold some spiritual or almost salvific quality. Others describe it as a representative or symbolic act. That is, baptism signals an inward change, from leading a

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7 Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 1. It is often a refrain of Baptist discussions of baptism to mention that the original (and therefore proper) meaning of the Greek word *baptizo* is “to dip or immerse.” Cf. Brian C. Brewer, “Believer’s Baptism: Wade in the Water” (sermon presented at George W. Truett Theological Seminary chapel, Waco, Tex., 18 November 2008).
life of sin to following Christ. Finally, occasionally baptism is viewed as primarily sociological in significance for Baptists, serving only as a rite of entry into the body of believers. Such disparate understandings of this central act of Baptist life and thought can contribute to serious theological confusion for Baptist parishioners. Despite this, Leonard indicates that such diversity is in fact a positive aspect of Baptist life, allowing for a multitude of voices concerning a particular topic without any significant motivation for cultivating genuine commonality.

Moreover, while explanations of the meaning of baptism are often puzzling, it is also not evident that Baptists have a clear (or consistent) understanding of the details of the act itself, such as who is operative in the act of baptism and when. For instance, it is not unusual to hear discussions of baptism that are explained in terms of an individual “deciding to follow Jesus.” This points to baptism as a wholly free and personal act on the part of the believer (i.e., one chooses God; baptism reflects that specific exercise of the will). Along these lines, Baptist historian Leon McBeth states, “[T]he nature of faith and baptism are such that they require a personal decision and commitment.” Baptism is also occasionally portrayed as an act of obedience to Christ’s commands (cf. Matthew 28:18-20).

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11 Explanations of baptism as a covenant could be included here as well. That is, the covenant is between God and the corporate person of the congregation. Thus, this understanding of baptism also affirms human ability to choose to follow God.
Conversely (but with a similar result), Baptist theological leaders (i.e., pastors, church teachers, and professors) underscore the fact that God is in control from the beginning of conversion to its culmination in baptism (i.e., the divine will is working at every stage of the process). On one hand, the emphasis is placed on the individual’s initiative without any salvific ramifications (e.g., obedience to Christ, marking someone for church membership). On the other hand, partly in order to avoid anything that sounds like “works righteousness,” the practice of baptism is described as God’s activity alone. The point is not that only one agent or the other is primary; instead, the resulting paradigm for understanding the activity of the actors within baptism is the concern. In other words, these accounts indicate that agency within baptism is caught up in a zero-sum game where only one agent is active at a time. Even when explanations attempt to hold both divine and human agency together, they do so by alternating between the two, thereby maintaining the involvement of both divine and human agency, but not simultaneously.

Sadly, this cognitively dissonant set of circumstances is not even recognized as such by Baptists, who often seem content to leave major aspects of their theological discourse uninterrogated and under-articulated. For example, American Baptists Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, in discussing the need for a theology of baptism, point out that Karl Barth’s 1943 lectures on baptism received little attention from Baptists in the United States, even though the prolific Swiss theologian agreed with

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12 All this while stating that not even baptism is necessary for entrance into the kingdom of God. See William M. Pinson, Rosalie Beck, and Ebbie Smith, Beliefs Important to Baptists (Dallas: Baptistway Press, 2001), 54-55.
their positions: “Barth came out strongly in those lectures in opposition to infant
baptism, contending that New Testament baptism required persons to come to the rite
only upon a personal profession of faith. He also supported immersion as the
appropriate mode.”\textsuperscript{13} This, combined with a general apathy for theologically accounting
for the act of baptism, stands as a “serious gap.”\textsuperscript{14}

What are in fact noticed by lay Baptists are shifts in the practice of baptism. For
instance, recently some Baptists have become concerned that over time believer’s
baptism has transitioned from primarily received by adults to adolescents to now
children. Such developments have begun to concern some Baptists. In 1993, Bill Leonard
commented on this trend:

Statistical analysis of current SBC baptismal statistics would indicate that
anywhere from 10 to 20 percent of that number, depending on the church and
the region, is composed of persons six years or younger. Thus the SBC has
opened the door to semi-infant baptism. A believers’ church that baptizes
preschoolers is committing heresy against its theology of conversion and its
ecclesiology.\textsuperscript{15}

Leonard notes that many factors indirectly contribute to this shift, including sensitivity
to children who were raised within Baptist communities, alleviating the concerns of
Christian parents, and possibly even the appearance of statistical growth for a particular
congregation.\textsuperscript{16} He rightly links this shift in practice with a shift in theological
convictions, but presents too clear of a picture of the landscape. In other words, when

(Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1991), 151.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 152.
\textsuperscript{15} Bill J. Leonard, “When the Denominational Center Doesn’t Hold: The Southern Baptist
Experience,” \textit{Christian Century} (Sept 22-29, 1993): 909. For a more recent treatment of this development,
see Ken Camp, “Troubled Waters: Baptists Watering Down Commitment to Baptism?,” \textit{Baptist Standard},
\textsuperscript{16} Leonard, “When the Denominational Center Doesn’t Hold,” 909.
Leonard states, “[I]n the 20th century Southern Baptists modified their theology of the “believers’ church” to permit the baptism not simply of children but of preschoolers,” he implies that some sort of theological statement on baptism or ecclesiology had been altered, which then precipitated the change of practice. What seems more likely and supported by the discussion above, is that some degree of theological imprecision (or incoherence) regarding baptism (and consequently, ecclesiology) opened the door for novel ways (and people) for Baptists to baptize, despite their stated theological convictions.17

**Interrogating Baptists’ Sources**

Continuing with the example of baptism (and the confusion regarding its role and significance), it may be helpful to turn to the sources of the faith. That is, what are the wellsprings of Baptists’ theology of baptism? First, Scripture, Baptists’ primary (and, for some, the only) source for faith and practice, is somewhat ambiguous regarding such technical questions about baptism. That is, Scriptural texts can be invoked for each explanation of baptism that has been described. This is not intended to nullify the witness of Scripture, but it does illustrate the ways in which appeals to the Bible often do not provide the desired theological clarity. Moreover, Baptists have composed several confessions of faith across the centuries, none of which offers much aid. For example, the “Baptist Faith and Message,” a Southern Baptist confession of faith

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17 Ibid. This is not to say that one cannot read an altered theology of baptism and ecclesiology off of the ways in which Baptists perform baptism. Indeed, such theological convictions are embedded within the particular practices of Baptists, a point that will prove helpful below in chapters four through eight.
originally written in 1925, was revised in 1963 (and again in 2000) and included articles on baptism:

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.\(^{18}\)

While this article aims to define baptism for Baptists, it leaves many questions unanswered. Thus, one of two paths is taken from this point. Either one excises questions that are outside the bounds of Scripture or the statement of faith from one’s mind or one seeks other theological sources that can offer a more robust account of the act of baptism. As has already been mentioned, too often Baptists have (perhaps unintentionally) chosen the former over the latter.

Another source of theological convictions exists within Baptist life and thought: the hymns and songs they sing. As Terry York has stated, “The hymnal serves as a statement of faith. It matters, even if they don’t use it.”\(^{19}\) Thus, attention to the form and content of this liturgical book is important for Baptist discourse. For example, the 1975 *Baptist Hymnal* includes three hymns intended for the occasion of baptism. One, “Come, Holy Spirit, Dove Divine,”\(^{20}\) insinuates that the activity of baptism is solely


determined by God, who will “[o]n these baptismal waters shine” and who deserves praise “for sinners slain.” In other words, while the hymn is set to the physical order of actions within the performance of baptism, the real work is done by God and God alone; the human being functions as the “sinner slain” who is now (passively) redeemed. At the same time, however, when one consults the topical index of this hymnal, the baptism listing includes a suggestion also to examine the hymns listed under “Obedience,” thereby linking baptism to an ordinance, or a rite of obedience. 21 Here, then, we find the same confusion regarding how to understand this central act of Baptists.

Moreover, this quandary in explaining baptism has deeper implications. In other words, while baptism is involved in this dilemma, more than one’s understanding of baptism is at stake. Baptist understandings of the Christian life in general, focusing on conversion and discipleship, also evidence this confusion about agency. Once again, Leonard is helpful, describing how the Baptist emphasis on perseverance of the saints evolved into the slogan “once saved, always saved,” with deleterious effects on Baptists’ understanding of the Christian life: “Evangelists and pastors explained perseverance in terms that maximized justification – entering in – and minimized sanctification – going on. While most did not explicitly deny that perseverance was essential, popular piety heard: ‘Once you are in, everything else is secondary.’” 22 In this way, by focusing on justification over sanctification, aspects of the Christian life that refer to the enduring journey of discipleship are undercut.

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364) in The Baptist Hymnal (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991). This hymn’s author, Adoniram Judson (1788-1850), served as a Baptist missionary to Burma for the vast majority of his life.

21 Baptist Hymnal, 558.

Further, when human and divine agency appear together, it is usually within the individual soul, thereby situating a great deal of the Christian life internally as well. In other words, what drives the Christian is interior to him or her, not in any way exterior. This is depicted by the prominent Baptist hymn “In the Garden,” which describes the encounter with the divine as located in an internal “garden” where only Jesus “walks with me” and “talks with me.” This interior exchange with Jesus confuses divine and human agency, merging the two and not allowing external religious practices to have any legitimate significance in the life of the believer. That is, authority for the Christian is closely tied to the internal life of that individual, discouraging any role for accountability from outside the individual, potentially (and likely often) obscuring the difference between one’s own desires and those of God.

What emerges from these observations is that any possibility for multiple causation by both human and divine agency is diminished. That is, even when both human and divine agencies are identified, they both are often located at the same level. This contributes to the understanding that descriptions of agents function similarly, a perspective known as univocity. For example, if both God and the new Christian are described as good, then they are good in the same manner. Univocal language deepens Baptists’ difficulties, making simple inclusion of both divine and human agency insufficient since it merely reiterates the zero-sum game between God and humans. Instead, what Baptists need is an understanding of language (and, by extension, their

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23 C. Austin Miles, “In the Garden,” (No. 428) in Baptist Hymnal; C. Austin Miles, “In The Garden,” (No. 187) in The Baptist Hymnal.
24 While univocal language is not the focus of this dissertation (and therefore will not be thoroughly examined, it does require attention insofar as it is a contributing factor to Baptists’ troubles.
practices) that allows for human and divine activity on multiple levels. In this way, what results is not cooperation on a single plane of activity, but cooperation by analogy.25

**Schisms/Disputes Provide No Relief**

The problematic aspects of Baptist theological discourse have not been helped in the United States (especially those primarily located in the South)26 by the schisms and controversies within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in the late twentieth century. Prior to this period, Baptists with relatively moderate sensibilities held many of the positions of power within the SBC. As David Stricklin notes, this moderate leadership was flanked by progressives on the left and conservatives on the right, both viewing themselves in the role of dissenters.27 This unity-in-diversity comprises what Bill Leonard calls “the Grand Compromise,” which characterized Baptist life in the late nineteenth century and throughout most of the twentieth century.28 In another place, he describes


26 While it is difficult to give an exact accounting or draw a precise map, the vast majority of Baptists in the United States reside in thirteen states that are traditionally viewed as constituting “the South”: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Moreover, not all Baptists who reside in the South are Southern Baptists (i.e., affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention). For a more detailed description of Baptist groups and their numbers in regions of the United States, see Albert W. Wardin, Jr., ed., *Baptists Around the World: A Comprehensive Handbook* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 367-472 & Albert W. Wardin, Jr., *Baptist Atlas* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980).


28 That is, doctrinal definitions among Southern Baptists would be broad, allowing for diversity of approaches and activity [Bill J. Leonard, *God’s Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 29, 31].
this as “a center – an identity and mythology around which a diverse regional, theological and popular constituency could cooperate.”

As has been detailed by others, this center was intertwined with southern culture, which was virtually identified with Southern Baptist life. Thus, no account of the heart of Southern Baptist thought could be narrowly defined. Instead, any description required “the development of doctrinal statements that were specific enough to be peculiarly Baptist but general enough to include some theological flexibility.”

This center, which had sustained remarkable cohesion among Baptists, dissolved in 1979, when a group of conservative Baptists with strong influence over a large portion of the Southern Baptist population, afraid of the eroding stability of the Baptist ideals of much of the convention and the corresponding shape of SBC institutional life, organized an effort to gain control of the Southern Baptist Convention. This process began by winning the presidency of the convention (Adrian Rogers was elected in 1979), but slowly included the appointments of the presidents and boards of the six SBC seminaries (and thereby controlling their respective institutional principles and practices). While the future of the SBC was contested for many years, by 1990, it had become clear that the “conservative resurgence” (as it was named by its supporters) would endure within the convention.

29 Leonard, “When the Denominational Center Doesn’t Hold,” 905.
31 Ibid., 907.
32 Barry Hankins notes, “[T]he vast majority of Southern Baptists are solidly evangelical in belief and conservative in matters of theology” [Barry Hankins, Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 3].
For the purposes of this project, it is important to note that these conservatives employed traditional Baptist rhetoric, but accented it for advantage within their context. Moderates, who bristled at their loss of standing within the denomination after what they termed a “fundamentalist takeover,” trumpeted “Baptist distinctives,” hallmarks of Baptist identity that “defined” what it meant to be Baptist (and consequently, called certain tactics of the conservatives into question). Invoking past Baptist heroes, such as George W. Truett and Edgar Young (E.Y.) Mullins, the moderates maintained that they were most faithful to Baptist ideals. Regarding the deficiencies in Baptist articulations of baptism (as well as conversion and discipleship), the disputes between the conservatives and the moderates at best distracted Baptists from the important task of developing a more thorough understanding of their convictions and practices and at worst shifted the rhetoric so that no such development was possible without a rethinking of Baptists’ location within the Christian tradition as a whole. Thus, if any possible resolution to Baptists’ theological dilemmas (especially those regarding agency) are to be discovered, broader conversation partners will almost certainly be required.

33 An example of treatment of such “distinctives” can be found at http://baptistdistinctives.org. The articles posted there have been published in the moderate Texas Baptist newspaper, The Baptist Standard. Occasionally, conservative Baptists will invoke “distinctive.” See, e.g., R. Stanton Norman, The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005).

34 It is somewhat difficult to argue for a definition of a Baptist. In many ways it is axiomatic that when two Baptists get together, there are three opinions between them on any given question.

35 The progressives were effectively marginalized through SBC resolutions and their minimal commitment to the SBC. Many of them (and some moderates) formed the Southern Baptist Alliance (now Alliance of Baptists) in 1987.
Baptists Among Other Protestants

In many ways, Baptists’ dilemma regarding agency is not unusual on the Christian theological landscape. Theologians across the centuries have attempted to make sense of the questions concerning divine and human agency with which Baptists have struggled. Their ideas concerning this dilemma are by no means uniform, but they can offer to Baptists insights regarding a fuller understanding of a possible solution as well as potential pitfalls to avoid. This Protestant debate concerning human free will and divine sovereignty (i.e., predestination) has deeper roots, emerging in part from the theological reflections of Augustine of Hippo (354-430) in the fourth and fifth centuries. That is, throughout his work, Augustine wrestled with precisely the same issues: what capabilities for good remain within a human being after the Fall but before the reception of redemptive grace?36

For example, in his *On Free Choice of the Will*, Augustine describes human free will as a good that comes from God. Consequently, no righteous act can be performed without free will.37 Moreover, while he maintains that all good things come from God as a gift, he also notes that God’s foreknowledge does not impinge upon human free will.38 What results from Augustine’s thoughts on this topic is holding in tension divine sovereignty and human free will in a manner that does not allow one to obliterate the other. Crucial to this understanding is his refusal to situate divine and human will

36 To say that Augustine wrestled with the same issues is not to say that his reflections on those issues were consistent over time. In fact, that is not the case, as Augustine is progressively more negative about human capacities and continually more adamant that God’s activity supersedes all other actors. Thus, any inheritors of Augustine’s ideas must deal with the tremendous complexity within his thought.
38 Ibid., 3.1-2.
externally, which allows for some measure of cooperation by analogy between these two powers as part of their intrinsic relationship.\textsuperscript{39}

Within the so-called Protestant Reformation, the magisterial reformers inherited certain aspects of Augustine’s theological outlook, yet also distanced themselves from the bishop of Hippo in significant ways as well. Interrogating these theologians, among them Martin Luther and John Calvin, is important for plumbing the depths of Baptist theological discourse because, according to James McClendon, they were influential on the American theological reflection, reinforcing the terms that constituted Baptist thought on matters of divine and human agency.\textsuperscript{40}

\textit{Martin Luther}

Martin Luther (1483-1546) discussed the human will in a manner that at times left it little, if any, positive role in the Christian life. That is, to obey one’s will was almost always to walk a path towards sin. For instance, in his \textit{Disputation Against Scholastic Theology} (1517), he stated, “Man is by nature unable to want God to be God. Indeed, he himself wants to be God, and does not want God to be God.”\textsuperscript{41} Here Luther indicates that the order of the cosmos is challenged by the human will since human beings are

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{39} “You were more inward to me than my most inward part; and higher than my highest” [Augustine, \textit{The Confessions of St. Augustine}, trans. Hal M. Helms (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 1986), 40].
\item \textsuperscript{40} James Wm. McClendon, \textit{Jr. Ethics}, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 25. McClendon indicates that presenting theological conversations in these terms (e.g., human will vs. divine sovereignty, Calvinism vs. Arminianism) has contributed to the relative dearth of significant Baptist theological scholarship (Ibid., 20-26).
\item \textsuperscript{41} Martin Luther, “Disputation Against Scholastic Theology,” in \textit{Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings}, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 14.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
not content to be servants of God. Moreover, this set of circumstances is described as being “by nature.”

Elsewhere in this treatise, he sharpens this point by stating, “No act is done according to nature that is not an act of concupiscence against God.”\(^{42}\) Once again, the inability of the human will to perform a good act is attributed to created nature. Statements such as these indicate that “nature” is something desperately in need of grace and entirely bankrupt on its own account. Thus, one could state that the pairing of nature and grace is more or less a pairing of sin and grace. That is, sin eliminates any possibility that the human will can (even in a minute way) pursue goodness. Only by the gracious aid of God in Jesus Christ does a human even approximate righteous activity. In the end, activities of human nature and activities of God’s grace run counter to one another.

Luther displays this understanding of the human will in an even stronger sense in his dispute with Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) in On the Bondage of the Will (1525). Erasmus’ De libero arbitrio [“On the Freedom of the Will”] (1524) aimed to respond to Luther’s writings before 1524. However, as Harry McSorley has described, “Erasmus shows little appreciation of the true meaning of Luther’s thesis of the unfree will, namely that the will of fallen man apart from grace is totally incapable of doing anything that is good coram Deo.”\(^{43}\) Because of this deficiency in examining Luther, Erasmus produces an equally deficient understanding of human free will: “By free choice ... we

\(^{42}\) Ibid.

mean a power of the human free will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them.”

Erasmus, in his response to Luther, neglected the nuance of the uses of the term “freedom” within Scripture and the Christian tradition. That is, there is no mention of whether he is discussing natural freedom with reference to the human will before or after the Fall. In fact, Luther at times seems to move beyond the position of Augustine, which held that the fallen human will is “unable to take any initiative in reaching out for God’s grace,” stating instead that the created nature of humanity necessitates the bondage of the will. Moreover, as McSorley notes, Erasmus’ position is problematic because it “defines man’s natural freedom in terms of a supernatural goal – eternal salvation – without mentioning grace.” That is, what emerges from Erasmus’s understanding of the will is the absence of the necessity of grace.

Despite the deficient aspects of Erasmus’ treatise, Luther’s reaction in The Bondage of the Will is equally challenging. While Erasmus overemphasizes the positive power of human free will, Luther deemphasizes it: “‘Free will’ is nothing else but the supreme enemy of righteousness and man’s salvation.” Further, invoking Romans 3, he states,

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46 McSorley, 285. This is not to suggest that Erasmus has no place for grace in his position (i.e., he is a Pelagian), but more that maintaining the nuance and clarity of the operations of free will and divine grace has escaped him at this point.
If Paul were not understood as implying man’s impotence, his argument would lose its point. For his whole concern here is to make grace necessary for all men. But if they were able to initiate anything of themselves, there would be no need for grace. As it is, however, they are not able and therefore they do need grace. So you see that ‘Free-will’ is completely abolished by this passage, and nothing good or virtuous is left in man, since he is flatly stated to be unrighteous, ignorant of God, a despiser of God, turning aside from him, and worthless in the sight of God.  

For Luther, then, to acknowledge that the human will has any capacity to desire God is to rob God’s grace of its redemptive power. The result is that the human will is set over against the will of God, unless, of course, the human will is united with the divine will to such an extent that there ceases to be a distinction between the two. This construal of the relationship between divine and human wills is solidified in the Lutheran Augsburg Confession (1530), prepared by Philip Melanchthon, which states in its second article, “[A]ll men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mother’s wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God.”

For Baptists, both Erasmus and Luther are problematic and do not offer significant resources for moving past the Baptist quandary concerning agency. In fact, together Erasmus and Luther represent that very dilemma itself, with Erasmus overemphasizing human abilities to the detriment of divine agency and Luther pitting divine grace against the human will in a zero-sum game. Under this scenario, baptism is either an act of human capability that receives its significance from the human agents or it is entirely the work of God without any human interference. Such options do not

48 Ibid., 300.
enhance the theological depth of baptism for Baptists. Instead, they simply reify the various articulations of baptism that have already been found to be deficient.

**John Calvin**

John Calvin (1509-1564) stands in continuity with Luther regarding the severe limitations of human free will. He initially describes the corruption of the will as something that did not occur strictly by nature (i.e., proceeding from human nature as created). Calvin, however, takes issue with the use of the phrase “free will,” stating,

> If any one, then, chooses to make use of this term [free will], without attaching any bad meaning to it, he shall not be troubled by me on that account; but as it cannot be retained without very great danger, I think the abolition of it would be of great advantage to the Church. I am unwilling to use it myself; and others, if they will take my advice, will do well to abstain from it.

Thus, while it is possible to apply a valid sense to the term “free will” (i.e., the ability and freedom to choose between alternatives), Calvin is exceedingly concerned that people will understand free will as “unrestricted power to choose either good or evil courses of action.” In other words, Calvin denies the fallen will any inclination for good, claiming that the philosophers’ (e.g., Aristotle) doctrine that “all things by natural instinct have a desire of good” has no purchase on the human will corrupted by sin. In short, the

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50 This is not to equate the thought of Calvin to that of Luther, only to identify the nearly parallel trajectories of their ideas regarding the freedom of the will. They diverge at key places as well, e.g., the foundational Christic understandings of grace (Luther emphasizing the theology of the cross and Calvin focusing on the glorified Christ).
52 Ibid., 2.2.8.
54 Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.26.
fallen will, as part of the whole person, inclines entirely toward evil. The implications of this understanding of the will are significant, as Dewey Hoitenga, Jr. describes: “[I]f the will’s prior instinct or inclination is morally evil without any qualification, there can be no motive left in the will for choosing a morally good alternative instead of an evil one; every choice is doomed from the start to be a choice of evil.”

Later interpreters of Calvin, who also served as the architects of Calvinism, extended his ideas as they systematized his thought. As Diarmaid MacCulloch describes, “Calvin’s successors became ever more dogmatic in their assertions, ruthlessly spelling out questions about salvation that Calvin had generally left understated.” Chief among these theologians was Theodore Beza, who followed Calvin in Geneva after his death in 1564, making him a prominent spokesperson for Reformed theology. Beza was instrumental in pushing Calvinist theology toward explicit double predestination, limiting Christ’s atoning sacrifice to only the elect, as well as positing that the number and names of the elect and reprobate were foreordained by God before the Fall.

While this system of Calvinist thought developed, internal critiques emerged. Jakob Arminius, a student of Beza, questioned Beza’s interpretation of Calvin, and eventually denied the irresistibility of God’s grace, understanding that “alongside those whom God has eternally decreed to be elect to salvation there are those who choose to

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55 “But if the whole man [sic] is subject to the dominion of sin, surely the will, which is its principal seat must be bound with the closest chains” (Ibid., 2.2.27).
58 Ibid., 375.
reject the offer of God’s grace, and fall away into damnation.”⁵⁹ Therefore, God does not foreordain these persons to damnation, but foresees it nonetheless, thereby (to Arminius’ mind) preserving the Reformed emphasis on God’s sovereignty over all of creation. Though Arminius died in 1609, his position persisted by being championed by the Dutch Remonstrants, who were wrongly labeled as Pelagians and eventually condemned at the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619). In response to this crisis, Reformed theologians constructed a rubric for orthodoxy that set human free will over against divine sovereignty. This rubric, which is abbreviated in English by the acronym TULIP, offers five points of emphasis: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistibility of God’s grace, and Perseverance of the saints.⁶⁰

Calvin (and Calvinists after him) held a similar position to Luther: that which is not grace is sin. In other words, grace and nature are not seen as in any way compatible after the Fall (and, for Beza, even before the Fall). Indeed, Hoitenga notes that Calvin is rightly criticized on this point: “Calvin’s Catholic critics complain that he disparages nature to magnify grace. If both nature and grace are from God, there is no need to fear giving nature its full due in its fallen state.”⁶¹ In other words, Calvin had not upheld the full weight of Augustine’s thoughts on this topic, maintaining the seeming paradox between divine and human will. Instead of moving in this direction, Calvin even goes so far as to deny that humans have a proper desire for the good, even a desire that is malformed and misdirected. Rather, the impotence of human beings in pursuing the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 376.
⁶⁰ Ibid., 378.
⁶¹ Hoitenga, 85.
good pervades the whole human person, leaving deficient desire and deficient actions, dividing the realm of God’s grace from the realm of fallen humanity, where nothing but sin remains of the good creation of God. Moreover, with the actions of Reformed theologians at the Synod of Dordt, the possibility for any positive actions by humans is further denied by emphasizing the total depravity of human beings and the inability of human free will to resist God’s grace, leaving grace and nature in an oppositional relationship.

For Baptists, Calvin, like Luther, does not offer any help regarding the theological dilemma concerning baptism. Baptism cannot be an act pervaded by both divine and human agency. Because the human will is unable to pursue good, baptism’s work is initiated and brought to completion by God alone, unpolluted by human influence. Likewise, Arminianism does not offer a better alternative, since it largely reproduces the quandary facing Baptists. Indeed, the Baptist landscape is covered with positions related to the intra-Reformed debate surrounding Arminius. Further, these Protestant ancestors have had significant influence on scores of other Protestant Christian groups, thereby placing much of Protestantism in the same theological conundrum as Baptists).

Thus, Baptists must look beyond the limits of Protestant thought if they will find the

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62 Prominent Baptist advocates of Calvinist positions similar to the TULIP adopted by the Synod of Dordt are Minnesota pastor John Piper (Baptist General Conference) and president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, R. Albert Mohler (Southern Baptist Convention). Theologian Roger E. Olson stands as a significant proponent of ideas resonant with Arminianism, even offering a defense against popular misunderstandings of the subject [Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006).] For more on Baptists’ wide-ranging views regarding Calvinism (and their impact on the dynamics of Baptist life), see Peter J. Thuesen, *Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 193-208.
necessary resources for more clearly articulating the theological importance of baptism, one of their hallmark practices.

**Searching for New Conversation Partners**

The difficulty of Protestant theologians in offering an alternative to Baptists’ quandary of relating human and divine agency stems, in part, from their understanding of the relationship between nature and grace (or the natural and the supernatural). That is, the dilemma of holding together in tension divine sovereignty and human free will belongs to this broader theological context of what could be called the nature/grace problematic. These terms, while occasionally used by Protestant scholars (and rarely if ever by Baptists), have an intellectual home within Catholic thought, where centuries of robust conversations about the relationship between the natural and the supernatural have occurred. The understanding of the human within the created order that develops from Luther and Calvin’s thought does not allow for anything like human participation in the pursuit of the good because human beings lack any ability to perceive the good and act toward it. Focusing on the relationship between nature and grace rather than only on the operations of particular wills allows for a broader theological examination to commence.

Additionally, the questions that animate the nature/grace discussion have their roots in the very beginning of the Christian tradition and Baptists’ quandary is not foreign to these ancient writers of the Christian faith, nor to Scripture itself (where baptism and discipleship have prominent roles). For instance, a passage such as Romans
2:14-15a might indicate that human beings are not completely incapable of doing good:

“When the Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively [lit. “by nature”] what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts...” (NRSV). Thus, conversation with Christians across the centuries should prove important for reflection on what remains to human nature following the Fall. Thus, for Baptists to find a suitable understanding of divine and human agency, they will need theological interlocutors who can engage the categories of nature and grace in a robust manner. In other words, Baptists will need to broaden their horizons and pursue substantive conversations with Catholics.

Overview

Methodologically speaking, this dissertation is a work of historical theology examining the influence of several distinct Baptist “moments” (i.e., events, people). This will not simply involve attention to the necessary historical details, but also evaluating their theological significance in light of the nature/grace discussions found in Catholic theology. This project consists of nine chapters, with this initial chapter offering an introduction to the context and shape of Baptist theological discourse.

Chapter two will exposit significant aspects of the Catholic conversations surrounding the relationship between nature and grace. This research will focus on the twentieth-century French Jesuit Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) as an invaluable thinker on

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this topic and crucial to understanding the historical depth and theological nuance of the nature/grace problematic. De Lubac, who was trained as a Thomist and steeped in the writings of the church fathers, entered the contentious debate concerning the natural and the supernatural, bringing the full weight of the Christian intellectual tradition to bear on the nature/grace problematic and challenging certain articulations while also enabling the full depth and nuance of this theological discussion to speak for itself. As is displayed in de Lubac’s work, this conversation provides the setting for a number of modern theological questions that strike at the heart of Christian faith and practice, such as the relationship of the church and the world, and that between faith and reason.

Chapter three addresses the context for possible conversation between Baptists and Catholics, examining potential obstacles, such as the anti-Catholicism evident historically in the thought of prominent Baptists and the present theological convictions of a large number of Baptists that, even if not explicitly anti-Catholic, remain reticent to dialogue with Catholics. This chapter will also describe recent scholarship from a small tribe of Baptists affiliated with the “Baptist Manifesto,” a document intended to rethink Baptist theological identity. It will be argued that this work provides a context for the present project as well as a possible entry point into a discussion between de Lubac and Baptists.

Chapters four and five investigate the life and work of Edgar Young (E.Y.) Mullins (1860-1928), Baptist theologian and president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at the turn of the twentieth century. Hailed by many as the founder of the
contemporary Baptist faith, Mullins has been immensely influential on moderate
Baptists in the wake of the Southern Baptist disputes in the late-twentieth century.
After describing the historical context of Mullins’s work in chapter four, chapter five will
evaluate the development of Mullins’s ideas by Baptists throughout the twentieth
century using de Lubac’s discussion of the nature/grace problematic as a theological
lens, allowing the potential theological highlights and pitfalls (e.g., a failure to properly
distinguish nature from grace) to become clear.

Chapters six and seven examine George W. Truett (1867-1944), a Texas Baptist
pastor whose place as a spokesperson for the Baptist idea of religious liberty is virtually
unrivalled. After discussing the narrative of Truett’s life and his thought in chapter six,
Truett’s argument for religious liberty is assessed in chapter seven, as seen through the
lens provided by de Lubac. This evaluation will determine that Truett’s thought reflects
a problematic divide between the natural and the supernatural. Having identified this
dichotomy, this chapter will reframe discussions of religious liberty by pointing toward
resources for developing a theological account of religious liberty that does not
marginalize the political aspects of theological discourse.

In chapter eight, de Lubac’s work will aid in (re)discovering sources within the
Baptist tradition that have previously been muted or overlooked, such as seventeenth-
century General Baptists in England (e.g., Thomas Grantham) and African-American
Baptists. Each in their own way embodies aspects of the relationship between the
natural and the supernatural found in de Lubac’s work, making them significant for any
robust Baptist ressourcement (or, lit., “return to the sources”).
A short concluding chapter summarizes the historical theological argument of this dissertation, noting the ways that more direct Baptist engagement with de Lubac’s work and the discussions surrounding the nature/grace problematic will help Baptists to discern issues of nature and grace, not only developing a more robust historical consciousness (understanding from where they have come, as well as helping them know where they should go) and revealing the more subtly dangerous aspects of present Baptist theological discourse, but also enabling Baptists to locate the seeds for the renewal and re-imagining of Baptist thought and practice.
CHAPTER II:
HENRI DE LUBAC AND THE THEOLOGY OF NATURE AND GRACE

When discussing the history of twentieth-century Catholic theological discourse, one cannot ignore the place and influence of Henri de Lubac. While his significance is often overlooked, this French Jesuit’s fingerprints are unmistakable on Catholic conversations before, during, and after the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, he can be seen as the center of many major shifts that occurred in Catholic thought during the last 100 years. Dominican Serge-Thomas Bonino states that de Lubac’s publication of *Surnaturel* in 1946 marked a “turning point in the history of contemporary Thomism.”¹ He stands as the focal point of Fergus Kerr’s recent survey, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism*.² There, despite Kerr’s disagreements with de Lubac’s work (and his choice of research topics), he traces de Lubac’s intellectual lineage, which includes Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI as descendents and collaborators, extending de Lubac’s influence on contemporary Catholic theology beyond his own era.

¹ Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., “Foreword: The Conception of Thomism after Henri de Lubac,” in *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., trans. Robert Williams and Matthew Levering (Ave Maria, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2009), viii. He continues: “In short, if in the year 2000 no one is any longer a Thomist in quite the same way he would have been in 1900 or even in 1945, it is partly because of Fr. de Lubac” (Ibid).
De Lubac’s work was central in a movement within twentieth-century Catholic theology known as *ressourcement*, which stemmed from the conviction that “the renewal of Christian vitality is linked at least partially to a renewed exploration of the periods and of the works where the Christian tradition is expressed with a particular intensity.” Other contributors to this movement included French Dominicans Yves Congar, Marie-Dominique Chenu, as well as Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, and German theologian Joseph Ratzinger. Each in their own way embodied the *ressourcement* impulse, engaging the depth of the sources of the Christian faith. For de Lubac, his writings mainly brought about the renewal of a more integrated nature/grace schema, one that challenged the dominant form of Thomism in the early-twentieth century and served as the foundation for numerous theological developments thereafter. Not surprisingly, his work (as well as a great deal of the work of other *ressourcement* theologians) consisted of historical theological arguments. That is, dogma was not disconnected from historical development, though it was not reducible to history either. In light of this, it makes sense to begin discussing the details of de Lubac’s writings by examining his life and its interaction with his work.

**Historical Background**

Henri de Lubac was born in Cambrai (northeastern France) on February 20, 1896. His father, Maurice, worked for the Banque de France and relocated from time to time. Soon, they moved to Lyons, where Henri spent much of his early years. After two

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semesters studying law at the *Institut Catholique* in Lyons, he applied to join the Society of Jesus in Lyons, entering the novitiate on October 9, 1913.\(^4\) However, instead of undergoing his novitiate and studies in his native France, de Lubac had to travel across the English Channel to Hastings, England.

The Act of Separation of Church and State (passed in December 1905) formally ended the Concordat between the Catholic Church and France (established under Napoleonic control).\(^5\) Within France, therefore, the political situation was such that the French Third Republic did not permit Jesuit training institutions in the country. These circumstances, known as *la separation*, have been viewed by Rudolf Voderholzer as an acceptable characterization for “not only the relation between Church and State, from a political perspective, but also, intellectually, the relation between philosophy and theology, and between the natural order and the supernatural order of grace.”\(^6\) Indeed, as Stephen Schloesser points out, France (both Catholics and non-Catholics) was consumed by the dualism(s) resulting from *la separation*: “Catholicism versus culture, religion versus realism, faith versus fact, eternal versus historical – such pairings represented two radically incompatible and mutually exclusive modes of envisioning the world.”\(^7\) Efforts to bridge the gaps within each of these dualistic couplets would occupy the efforts of many French Catholics, including de Lubac.

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\(^6\) Voderholzer, 27-28.

\(^7\) Schloesser, 49.
Along with members of other religious orders in France, de Lubac was required to serve his country in the First World War, entering military service (Third Infantry Regiment) in 1914. Not only did he fight, but he also killed, and suffered a serious head injury at the Battle of Verdun in 1916 that troubled him for the rest of his life, afflicting him with persistent dizziness and the threat of meningitis until 1954. Following the war, de Lubac continued his Jesuit formation by studying humanities in Canterbury before embarking on his philosophical studies on the island of Jersey (under British control off the coast of Normandy), where the order’s scholasticate had relocated after having been exiled from France following the Act of Separation. In 1924, after the conclusion of his philosophical studies, de Lubac began his theological training, first at Ore Place in Hastings, England (1924-1926) (before French religious were allowed to return to France), then at Fourvière within Lyons (1926-1928). During this latter period, de Lubac was ordained as a priest (August 22, 1927). In September 1929, de Lubac received an appointment to serve as the chair of fundamental theology in the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Lyons.

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8 de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 15, 19.
9 Ibid., 15.
10 Voderholzer, 42. De Lubac points out that he was granted a doctoral degree by the Gregorian University in Rome by his Jesuit superior because of the need to fill a teaching vacancy in Lyons. Moreover, he states that he was never provided the time to earn a doctorate. Cf. de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 143.
Philosophical/Theological Influences

De Lubac notes that his work is greatly indebted to three scholars: Pierre Rousselot, Joseph Maréchal, and Maurice Blondel.\(^{11}\) It is important to note that the influence of these three, while significant, is nonetheless subtle. As Hans Urs von Balthasar writes: “[D]e Lubac followed neither of them as systematic theologians; he only adopted their fundamental élan, or rather he discovered this élan as akin to his own nature and probably took from it the courage to read out of the texts of Thomas Aquinas what he saw in them with evidence.”\(^{12}\)

**Pierre Rousselot.** While at Canterbury, de Lubac encountered the work of Pierre Rousselot (1878-1915) (specifically his dissertation, *L’Intellectualisme de saint Thomas*). Rousselot, a Jesuit priest, was killed fighting for France at Eparges in 1915 (where de Lubac would be stationed one year later), precluding any personal contact between the two confreres. However, as de Lubac notes, “[F]rom 1919 on, I had access to all his papers, which had been entrusted at that time to Father Auguste Valensin in Lyons.”\(^{13}\)

Rousselot’s work centered on the operations of the intellect, discovering that Aquinas understood the intellect not to be “simply reason arranging sense-data but a knowing which grasps implicitly in every act the mystery of divine being.”\(^{14}\) In other words, he rejected the idea that truth consisted in a correspondence between object and intellect, arguing that “interpretations of Thomas's theology as fundamentally a

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\(^{13}\) de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 19.  
form of rationalism, whether they came from his voluntarist detractors or from his would-be neo-scholastic disciples, missed what St. Thomas's intellectualism had set out to do."\(^{15}\) In his short life, then, Rousselot pushed back against the stale apologetic method of the day, offering a new yet more faithful reading of Aquinas on the intellect that understood true knowledge to be “an immanent union rather than just an external correspondence.”\(^{16}\)

**Joseph Maréchal.** In response to the static system of the neo-Thomists, Joseph Maréchal (1878-1944), a Belgian Jesuit and transcendental Thomist, sought to recover a more participatory notion of knowledge in the work of Aquinas by restoring teleology to the natural activity of the intellect, positing that there was at least modest resonance with other philosophical methods, including the transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Thus, in agreement with Kant’s turn to the subject, he emphasized “what he saw to be Aquinas’ grounding of philosophy in the active teleology of the faculties.”\(^{17}\) At the same time, though, he surpassed Kant by arguing that “the human quest could still legitimately be regarded as a search for God.”\(^{18}\)

These positions and their openness to engaging modern philosophy were not lost on de Lubac, who had been acquainted with Maréchal’s work for years. He met and talked with Maréchal several times during a stay in Louvain in 1930. Among other


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 70. Along these lines, Rousselot himself states, “To know is primarily and principally to seize within the self a non-self which in its turn is capable of seizing and embracing the self: it is to live with the life of another. Intelligence is the faculty of the divine because in this way it is capable of embracing God” [Pierre Rousselot, S.J., *The Intellectualism of Saint Thomas*, trans. James E. O’Mahony, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935), 8].

\(^{17}\) O’Meara, 187.

\(^{18}\) Boersma, 64.
things, de Lubac notes that he was “not at all enclosed in his own theories, although these were very systematized. He had a mind that was broader than his ideas.”

Maurice Blondel. The work of Maurice Blondel (1861-1949), a lay Catholic philosopher, emphasized that philosophy and human action could not avoid recognizing God as humanity’s ultimate end. Even so, this response was not forced on the natural realm, but organically and dynamically emerged from its operations. In discussing L’Action (Blondel’s dissertation), Michael Kerlin summarizes:

Starting with the most minimal sense of action, he moves alternatively from the analysis of action to the discussion of the meaning of life. He shows the ways in which we move forward in semi-light by acts of natural faith through wider and wider circles of social involvement to form ourselves and our world. When we make any of these circles a final stopping point, we find ourselves pushed forward by the necessary logic of our situation and our analysis. It is a movement that can logically stop only with the alternative of affirming the possibility of “one thing necessary” beyond all human creations, imaginings, and conceptions.

Thus, when self-reflective, philosophy could not only recognize its own insufficiencies, but it could also acknowledge the intrinsic necessity of a supernatural end.

Consequently, philosophy played an important role in attaining that end, even it could not reach it on its own. There was no need to coerce philosophy to fit a preconceived role provided by faith, an approach Blondel dubbed “extrinsicism.” Rather, the operations of philosophy had seeds that would direct them toward the supernatural.

On Jersey, as de Lubac completed his philosophical studies, he experienced what he later described as a “‘rear-guard’ Suarezianism,” personified most clearly in Spanish

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19 de Lubac, At the Service of the Church, 21.
Jesuit professor Pedro Descoqs. Descoqs, later acclaimed as “the last great representative of the Suarezian tradition,” taught Thomistic philosophy, including metaphysics and natural theology, even authoring philosophical manuals that could be used as textbooks.\(^{22}\) Descoqs was openly critical of Blondel, suspecting him of the heresy of Modernism.

Despite Descoqs’s presence and disdain for Blondel, though, certain of de Lubac’s professors gave him the opportunity to read his works, including *L’Action* (1893) and *Lettre sur les exigences de la pensée contemporaine en matière d’apologétique et sur le méthode de la philosophie dans l’étude du problème religieux* (1896). De Lubac took a great deal from Blondel’s writings and was further encouraged by Father Valensin, Blondel’s former student. Eventually de Lubac was able to meet Blondel in Aix-en-Provence in 1922, when de Lubac had been sent nearby by his Jesuit superiors in order to recover from an earache, a meeting arranged by Valensin.\(^{23}\) While affirming de Lubac’s own work, Blondel’s work also pointed toward the political consequences of various conceptions of the supernatural, notably through his support of the social Catholicism of *Le Sillon* and his critique of a Catholic alliance with *Action française*.

\(^{22}\) Peter J. Bernardi, *Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, & Action Française: The Clash over the Church’s Role in Society during the Modernist Era* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 90-91. Initiated in the late seventeenth century, such manuals had become common in philosophical and theological studies by the end of the nineteenth century, constituting an entire tradition of Thomism. Romanus Cessario, O.P., notes that these works, while usurping the place of Aquinas’s philosophical works, providing sufficient philosophical education for ministers [Romanus Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 83-84]. In 1931, Marie-Dominique Chenu issued a negative evaluation regarding this shift, writing that it produced “a scholastic Thomism hardened by generations of textbooks and manuals [Marie-Dominique Chenu, “Le sens et les leçons d’une crise religieuse,” *La Vie intellectuelle* 13 (1931): 380; quoted in O’Meara, 182].

\(^{23}\) de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 19.
Scholarship

**Catholicisme.** De Lubac’s first book, *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme* [English version: *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*], 24 consists of various articles and lectures he had produced during his first years of teaching, which were then combined into a single volume. 25 It was published in 1938 at the insistence of Yves Congar, O.P., professor at the Dominican house of studies at Le Saulchoir, who had begun a series entitled “Unam Sanctam,” and saw de Lubac’s work as fitting for inclusion. Intending the book to detail the ways in which sociality permeated catholicity as an aspect of the Church rather than a treatise on the Catholic Church itself (i.e., its structures and protocols), de Lubac made it clear that the book’s title is not *Le Catholicisme* (and therefore is missing chapters on tradition and the papacy). 26 Instead, one finds a thorough reflection on what Joseph Ratzinger called in 1988, “[t]he idea of the Catholic, the all-embracing, the inner unity of I and Thou and We.” 27

**Corpus Mysticum.** De Lubac’s second book, *Corpus Mysticum: L’Euchariste et l’Église au Moyen Age*, was completed by 1939. 28 However, war in Europe prevented its publication until 1944. 29 Its appearance stems from de Lubac’s assignment as the

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25 “It is made up of bits and pieces that were first written independently, then stitched together, so to speak, into three parts, without any preconceived plan” (de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 27).
26 Ibid., 27-28.
27 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, foreword to de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 11. As Pope Benedict XVI, Ratzinger again points to de Lubac’s *Catholicism*, stating, “[D]rawing upon the vast range of patristic theology, de Lubac was able to demonstrate that salvation has always been considered a ‘social’ reality” (*Spe Salvi*, §14).
29 By this time, Pope Pius XII’s encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi* had been released (June 29, 1943), treating the topic of the Church as the mystical body of Christ.
second examiner for a doctoral thesis on Florus of Lyons (809/810-860).³⁰ De Lubac notes that further study was required in order to faithfully execute these duties:

This Florus, the important Lyonese archdeacon of the ninth century, about whom I should have known at least a little, was completely unknown to me. So I really had to read him, read his contemporaries, who had, like him, dealt with the Eucharist, sound out something of what came before and after.³¹

During these studies, which included another trip for rest near Aix-en-Provence (where he met again with Blondel), de Lubac was fascinated by the phrase *corpus mysticum* and began to explore its use in the sources of Eucharistic theology, attending closely to three ways in which the term *body* could be understood:

Of the three terms: historical body, sacramental body and ecclesial body, that were in use,... the caesura was originally placed between the first and the second, whereas it subsequently came to be placed between the second and the third. Such, in brief, is the fact that dominates the whole evolution of Eucharistic theories.³²

His focus throughout the book, however, was not on the abstract meaning of the label *corpus mysticum*, but rather on the ways in which it was used by the church over time.

From his studies, de Lubac discovered that prior to twelfth century, the sacramental elements were called *corpus mysticum* while the ecclesial body was known as the *corpus Christi verum*. During the twelfth century, likely in response to a denial of the real presence of Christ in the sacramental elements by Berengar of Tours (c. 999-1088), *corpus Christi verum* was primarily used for the elements and the Church was

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³⁰ de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 29.
³¹ Ibid.
³² de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 256.
called *corpus Christi mysticum*. As a result, over time any sense of the gathered church serving as the real body of Christ waned.

**Surnaturel.** While de Lubac was at the Jesuit theologate in Ore Place, he participated in one of three free “academies” that gathered to engage in academic conversation. Led by Father Joseph Huby, many of these meetings concerned recent publications, including Rousselot disciple and fellow Jesuit Guy de Broglie’s articles, to which de Lubac ascribed great significance as “something like a form of passage from the theses in our manuals to the rediscovery of traditional thought.”

Huby even challenged de Lubac to “verify whether the doctrine of Saint Thomas on this important point (the supernatural) was indeed what was claimed by the Thomist school around the sixteenth century, codified in the seventeenth and asserted with greater emphasis than ever in the twentieth.”

Several essays on Baius and Jansenius resulted from his work in this area, the beginnings of a book concerning the supernatural.

However, during his first decade as a professor, he set such concerns aside until June 1940, when he, along with companions, left Lyons to flee from the approaching Germans during the invasion of France during the Second World War. He did not leave

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33 Cf. ibid., 80-94.
35 de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 35.
36 Michael Baius (1513-1589), a Belgian Catholic theologian, taught that humanity’s original state of innocence was natural and that the benefits of such innocence (e.g., final destination in heaven) were owed to humanity and not based on a gratuitous gift of grace by God. Cornelius Jansenius (1585-1638), a Belgian Catholic bishop, argued that the original state of humanity was based entirely on God’s grace, but also that God could not have possibly created humanity in any other manner. Both positions have been declared inconsistent with orthodoxy by the Catholic Church.
empty-handed, though: “I carried along a bag with a parcel of notes in it, among which was the notebook for *Surnaturel.*” Soon thereafter they returned from their hiding place in La Louvesc, with de Lubac having given more order to the book.

In 1943, when the Gestapo came to Lyons, this time searching specifically for de Lubac due to his involvement in what he called “spiritual resistance” to the occupying Nazi regime, he once again escaped for safety, describing this second departure and its literary productivity:

> [W]hen, in 1943, being hunted by the Gestapo, I had to flee once more, I again carried my notebook. Hidden away in Vals, which I could not leave and where I could not engage in any correspondence, I thus had something to occupy my retreat. Taking advantage of the resources offered by the Vals library, the manuscript swelled. When I came back to Lyons soon after the departure of the German army [1944], it was ready to be delivered to the printer.

The book, entitled *Surnaturel, etudes historiques*, was not published until after the war in 1946. In short, the book argued that “various schools of modern Scholasticism had abandoned the traditional systematic (and already a bit compromised) synthesis in the work of Saint Thomas.” Central to this claim was that the doctrine of *natura pura* (i.e., pure nature), maintained by contemporary Thomists, was an innovation (i.e., a new theological development) in Thomistic thought and therefore not grounded in Aquinas’s works. *Surnaturel* found many critics, and de Lubac quickly became the target of a widespread defense of the Thomism of the manuals, a defense that made him a suspect of possible heterodoxy.

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37 de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 35.
38 Ibid., 35.
39 De Lubac also wrote *Proudhon et le christianisme* (1945) and *Le Drame de l’humanisme athée* (1944) during the war years.
40 de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 36.
Suspected of Heterodoxy

Suspicions among his opponents centered on his association with what was labeled *la nouvelle théologie*, or “new theology.” This pejorative term indicated deviation from the intellectual tradition of the church and often included links to Modernism. In his defense, de Lubac notes that he himself (or anyone teaching at Fourvière) never used the phrase *nouvelle théologie* to describe his work. Instead, he points to two sources of the label. First, Msgr. Pietro Parente (who would later be influential in the shape of *Humani Generis*), disputing, in part, the work of Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., used the phrase in 1942.

Second, and most notably, Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., renowned Thomist of the manualist tradition and professor at the Angelicum in Rome, cited the theologians of this “new theology” and warned of their dangerous tendencies in a 1946 article entitled “*La théologie nouvelle: où va-t-elle?*” [“The New Theology: Where is it Going?”]. By claiming that he (or his associates at Fourvière) had never used the phrase *nouvelle théologie* for their own work, de Lubac was in effect arguing that his work was in continuity with accepted theological tradition. Nonetheless, he was asked by his Jesuit superiors not to teach at the Fourvière scholasticate beginning in 1950 as a precaution, words that became an admonition in June 1950, when “lightning struck

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Several professors from the scholasticate were removed, leaving the future of the school in jeopardy as well.

De Lubac himself was moved to Paris, arriving on the same day that the encyclical *Humani Generis*, promulgated by Pius XII on August 16, was printed in the French newspaper *La Croix*. He notes that when he sat down to read the document, he could not locate any statement that was formulated directly against him. The only sentence that seemed to relate to his work (and that only peripherally) was found in paragraph 26: “D'autres corrompent la véritable gratuité de l'ordre surnaturel, puisqu'ils tiennent que Dieu ne peut pas créer des êtres doués d'intelligence sans les ordonner et les appeler à la vision béatifique.” Moreover, he found that the encyclical did not underwrite the ideas of his opponents (e.g., there was no defense of the doctrine of pure nature). However, he was still described as one of the main targets for the encyclical.

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42 de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 67.
43 This is a point of dispute among readers of de Lubac. David L. Schindler, utilizing input from French theologian Michel Sales, notes that *Humani Generis* favorably used a sentence from de Lubac’s 1949 article on the supernatural and that the encyclical did not defend the theory of pure nature. Moreover, he notes that Pius XII sent de Lubac a letter thanking him for his work and encouraging him in future endeavors (David L. Schindler, “Introduction,” in de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, xxii-xxiii). This letter is found in de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 89-90. John Milbank, however, offers a different reading of this portion of de Lubac’s life, arguing that he was profoundly affected by *Humani Generis*, producing “severe theoretical incoherence” [John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 8]. It should be noted that this argument is informed mostly by Milbank’s reading of the significant texts of the era and less by its historical details (e.g., de Lubac’s correspondence with his Jesuit superiors and his positive encounters with Pius XII, both in person and through correspondence).
44 “Others destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order, since God, they say, cannot create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision” (Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, §26).
45 Voderholzer, 72.
46 De Lubac includes in an appendix a checklist used by Weston College following the release of *Humani Generis* that lists de Lubac as one of the chief proponents of the “new theology” discussed in
De Lubac also saw three of his books, *Surnaturel, Corpus Mysticum*, and *Connaissance de Dieu*, as well as all copies of a 1949 issue of *Recherches de science religieuse* containing the article “Le Mystère du Surnaturel,” removed from Catholic libraries and circulation. While it may have seemed clear to some that de Lubac’s ideas were aberrant, he notes that this was never communicated to him directly at any time:

“I was never questioned, I never had a single conversation about the root of the matter with any authority of the Church in Rome or the Society. No one ever communicated to me any precise charge…. [N]o one ever asked me for anything that would resemble a ‘retraction,’ explanation or particular submission.”

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**Continued Work and Eventual Restoration**

During this time of virtual exile, de Lubac was encouraged to maintain his intellectual faculties by writing on topics other than theology. This resulted in his *Aspects du bouddhisme*, based on his decades of research on the history of religions, which was necessary for his appointment to teach history of religions at Fourvière (1935-1940) and his position, beginning in 1939, at the Catholic University of Lyons as professor of the history of religions. Such a volume caused little controversy. Eventually, de Lubac noticed what he called a “thaw” in the official sanction of his work. He was allowed to lecture on Hinduism and Buddhism in 1956. Moreover, he began work on the four senses of interpreting Scripture, efforts that became the four-volume *Exégèse* literature of that period, as well as in the encyclical itself (Cf. de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 297-298).

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47 Ibid., 78.
48 Ibid., 82.
De Lubac’s restoration was further helped by his appointment by Pope John XXIII, along with Congar, to the Preparatory Theological Commission of the Second Vatican Council. His ideas were most prominent in Schema 13 (on which he collaborated with Karol Wojtyla), which became the basis for Gaudium et Spes (also known as the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). De Lubac’s influence likely also impacted Dei Verbum (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation) since de Lubac’s Exégèse medievale was held in high regard by Pope Paul VI. Following the council, de Lubac published commentaries on various council documents and was appointed to the International Theological Commission.

In 1965, de Lubac returned to the now-controversial topic of Surnaturel by publishing two books which he affectionately named “the twins.” The first, Le Mystère du surnaturel, largely revisited his 1949 article from Recherches de science religieuse “without changing the least point of doctrine.” The second, entitled Augustinisme et théologie moderne, “reproduced with similar fidelity the first part of the old Surnaturel,

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49 For more on de Lubac’s work in this area, see Susan K. Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) and Bryan C. Hollon, Everything is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009).

50 Voderholzer, 80.

51 De Lubac writes that he also learned of this news by reading it in La Croix in August 1960 (de Lubac, At the Service of the Church, 116).

52 Cf. Voderholzer, 86.

53 de Lubac, At the Service of the Church, 123.
enlarging it with new texts.” These texts re-presented the issues of *Surnaturel*. That is, they pointed out the problems associated with an excessive divide between the natural and the supernatural, problems that were endemic to certain forms of theology (e.g., Manualist Thomism). However, the solution was not to blur the line between the two categories, a tendency he observed in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. His concerns about such shifts were published as *Petite catéchèse sur Nature et Grâce* in 1980. De Lubac was made a cardinal by Pope John Paul II in 1983. In 1991, he suffered a stroke, losing the ability to speak, eventually succumbing to death on September 4 of that year.

**The Thought of Henri de Lubac**

The crux of de Lubac’s work involved a recovery of Thomas Aquinas’s understanding of the relationship between nature and grace from what he perceived to be misinterpretations. De Lubac pointed to two particular figures as instrumental in this deviation from a genuinely Thomistic path – Dominican and Aquinas commentator Thomas Cardinal Cajetan (Tommaso de Vio) in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Jesuit theologian Francisco Suárez. Their readings of the Angelic Doctor, although diverging from him, had been passed down as Thomistic thought and were codified in the Thomistic revival inaugurated by Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris* (1879).

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54 Ibid.
With the use of theological and philosophical manuals in institutions of theological education within the early twentieth century, education largely became a task in encouraging conformity. De Lubac, though, even in his years of training, began to think about a counterposition, one that remained faithful to Aquinas over Suárez, unlike many of his instructors at Jersey. He recalls scribbling “some rather nonconformist notes” during the philosophy courses of Pedro Descoqs. These notes “were inspired more by Saint Thomas than by my Suarezian master, whose combative teaching was a perpetual invitation to react.” De Lubac aimed to complexify the Thomist picture and challenge the dominant reading.

Thus, de Lubac plumbed the depths of the Catholic tradition, aiming to re-read important patristic and scholastic texts rather than accept the prevalent manualist reading. This is illustrative of his method of pursuing ressourcement. In Paradoxes of Faith, a later publication, he describes the importance of this approach,

[H]ow should we rediscover Christianity if not by going back to its sources, trying to recapture it in its periods of explosive vitality? How should we rediscover the meaning of so many doctrines and institutions which always tend toward dead abstraction and formalism in us, if not by trying to touch anew the creative thought that achieved them?... The task is not for everyone, obviously, but it is indispensable that it be done and forever done again.

De Lubac countered what was seen as the established (though perhaps better characterized as the loudest) interpretation of Thomas by searching for marginal,

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55 Ibid., 42.
56 “So ingrained has the habit become, that it calls for much time, and sometimes the most painstaking effort of analysis, for us to learn again how to read these texts, even when in themselves they are perfectly clear” [Henri de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967; reprint, New York: Herder & Herder, 1998), 6].
forgotten voices within Catholic theology, those whom Balthasar described as “the great among the vanquished who have fallen because of the machinations of smaller minds or of a narrow Catholicism that is politically rather than spiritually minded.” Some of these “vanquished” persons included early Christian theologian (and later, a condemned heretic) Origen of Alexandria (c. 185-254), Italian Platonist philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), non-Marxian socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), and Jesuit mystic, paleontologist and priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955). Such persons provided de Lubac with the fortitude to track the line of thought in Thomas’s works, recovering aspects of Thomism that had been marginalized in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

De Lubac’s style is such that it can be difficult for the reader to clearly observe his position, since he usually argues by means of the voices of others. Balthasar understands de Lubac to be practicing “proverbial modesty” when he “almost always prefers to let a voice from the great ecclesial tradition express what he intends rather than raising his own voice.” This did not go unrecognized by de Lubac himself. In the introduction to Catholicism, he acknowledged that his use of quotations may be cumbersome at times, but not without significant benefit: “If the quotations are numerous – even at the risk of tiring the reader – it is because I wanted to present the subject as impersonally as possible, drawing especially on the treasures, so little utilized, in the patristic writings.” Moreover, de Lubac paid special attention to how

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59 Ibid., 26.
60 de Lubac, Catholicism, 19.
theologians read and interpreted Scripture. That is, “back to the sources” included not
only post-apostolic tradition, but Scripture as well, with the latter holding the place of
priority. It is not surprising, then, to find the sermons of the Church Fathers to be a
fertile resource for de Lubac’s project, nor that his body of work includes volumes on
reading Scripture.

*Beatific Vision and Desiderium Naturale*

At issue for de Lubac was the interpretation of Thomas’s discussion of the
beatific vision, where seeing and communing with God is the ultimate end of humanity.
In his commentary on the Fourth Book of the Sentences, Aquinas states, “The vision of
God itself is essentially the final end and beatitude of the human soul.” While many
Thomist scholars can affirm that statement by Thomas, the main question that arises
from this declaration is the manner in which the human soul attains this goal. In other
words, how should the theological axiom *gratia perficit naturam* (“grace perfects
nature”) be interpreted? Does grace superimpose its objectives onto nature (which is
helpless to act on its own)? Or is something more cooperative at work here, where the
operations of perfecting do not eclipse nature altogether? Moreover, what is one to
make of Thomas’s mention of humanity as possessing a “natural desire to see God”
(*desiderium naturale visionis Dei*) and its relation to this clearly supernatural end?

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62 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2; *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 6, ad 1.
63 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 12, a. 1; I-II, q. 3, a. 8; *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, c. 25, c. 48-54.
Tommaso de Vio, better known as Cardinal Cajetan (1469-1534), is generally regarded as the most significant commentator on Aquinas’s works. He authored the first complete commentary on the *Summa Theologiae* (comprised of four volumes) between 1508 and 1523.\(^{64}\) This commentary has contributed to two later schools of thought holding him in high regard: the scholastic work of theologians at Salamanca in the sixteenth century and the neo-Thomists during the Thomist revival under Pope Leo XIII (where Cajetan’s commentary was printed with the *Summa*).\(^{65}\) According to Kerr, Cajetan argued that “Aquinas knew that human beings could have a properly natural desire only for a destiny within their own natural possibilities.”\(^{66}\) Because of this, he interpreted Thomas’s discussion of a natural desire for God to refer to a self-sufficient nature elevated by divine grace to a supernatural beatitude.

Cajetan’s positions were further placed in service of the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation. Cajetan himself was commissioned to evaluate the validity of Martin Luther’s teachings in Augsburg in October of 1518.\(^{67}\) With no resolution to the impasse to be found, Cajetan contributed to *Exsurge Domine*, the papal bull that condemned Luther’s teachings.\(^{68}\) Countering Protestant propensities to ascribe only sin to nature and annihilate this by the grace of God alone, Cajetan “needed a distinction


\(^{65}\) Ibid.


\(^{68}\) Wicks, 277.
between human nature as such and human nature as called to union with God in Christ, partly, no doubt, to maintain the rights of (Aristotelian) philosophy over against (Lutheran) theology, but mainly to defend the order of creation over against what seemed obliteration by Protestant exaltation of the dispensation of grace.”\(^{69}\) In other words, to defend the merit of human works against Lutheran ideas, Cajetan had to defend the standing of created nature apart from any reception of grace, effectively resulting in a separation of human nature from the grace of God so that nature could be preserved and one could be certain about what was in fact receiving grace.

De Lubac argues, however, that Cajetan did not invent this understanding of the relationship between nature and grace. Denys the Carthusian (1402-1471) first developed this *duplex ordo*, but he understood his work to be in opposition to Aquinas. That is, Denys was “fully aware that he was out of tune with the teaching of St. Thomas (and his disciple Giles of Rome).”\(^{70}\) Because of this, Cajetan’s “principal originality” was of a different sort: “[H]e puts forward [Denys the Carthusian’s] thesis as an explanation of the thought of St. Thomas,” thereby linking the Angelic Doctor with what de Lubac calls the “Pure Nature Hypothesis.”\(^{71}\)

Intended to maintain the gratuity of God’s grace (i.e., in no way obliging God to grant grace to humanity), this “hypothesis,” which developed over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, claimed that nature could be created without any intrinsic connection with the supernatural, leaving the natural and the supernatural with

\(^{69}\) Kerr, “French Theology,” 114.
\(^{70}\) de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 144.
separate final ends, each pursued separately by their own respective means. In other words, the supernatural beatitude is separate from humanity’s natural end:

According to Cajetan, man can have a really natural desire only for an end which is connatural to him; in speaking of a desire to see God face to face St. Thomas could only speak of the desire awakened in man as he is considered by the theologian, that is, he states clearly, in man actually raised up by God to a supernatural end and enlightened by a revelation.72

This divide between the natural and the supernatural, which is not grounded in Thomas’s thought, is only exacerbated over time, furthering the separation between the two.

Francisco Suárez, S.J. (1548-1617), who was educated at the School of Salamanca, perpetuated and extended this theory,73 explicitly linking the pure nature hypothesis with discussions about natural desire by emphasizing the idea that a natural end requires natural means to achieve that end. The result is that humanity’s end is a natural one since humans only have natural abilities. Any supernatural calling beyond that must be superadded. De Lubac credits Suárez with having “no illusions about [the new system’s] antiquity.”74 That is, he did not understand his work to be wholly Thomistic. Instead, Suárez had widened the divide between nature and grace that was initiated by Cajetan. There was no possibility that humanity possessed a natural desire for a supernatural finality.75 In this way, Suárez even rejects the maxim of Dominic Soto

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72 Ibid., 114.
73 De Lubac notes that Robert Bellarmine, S.J. (1542-1621) was important in solidifying the theory of pure nature, thereby reinforcing the theological inheritance of Suárez. Cf. ibid., 149-157.
74 Ibid., 158.
75 Suárez, through his work in De legibus, was also instrumental in developing the concept of ius gentium (“law of nations”) as distinct from natural law and constituted by the agreement of the nations. This concept, for which Suárez is hailed as the father of international law, was an important contribution to the theory of universal human rights. Cf. Antonio García y García, “The Spanish School of the Sixteenth
and Robert Bellarmine that humanity’s end was “natural with respect to appetite, supernatural with respect to attainment,” arguing rather that “the natural appetite is not based in anything other than natural power.”

A More Augustinian Aquinas

Those who supported the doctrine of pure nature tended to emphasize the Aristotelian side of Aquinas (as opposed to the Augustinian). In other words, the philosophical underpinnings of Thomistic thought are understood to stand on their own, not dependent upon revelation, granting created nature some sense of autonomy. The hypothesis itself has been characterized by the Aristotelian notion that if a being has a particular end, then it must be endowed with the ability to reach that end. Aristotle’s example of the movement of stars from the second book of De caelo was central to this interpretation of Thomas: “If nature had given the heavens an inclination toward progressive motion, it would have also given the means for that motion.” De Lubac notes Denys the Carthusian’s reliance upon Aristotle: “Natural desire does not extend beyond its natural capacity. For nature in accordance with the natural order of things cannot be in vain, since God and nature create nothing in vain according to Aristotle in de Caelo et Mundo.” Along similar lines, Cajetan states,

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76 Francisco Suárez, De gratia, prolegom. IV, c. 1. Quoted in ibid. 158-159.
77 “Si natura dedisset caeli inclinationem ad motum progressivum, dedisset etiam instrumenta ad talem motum.” Quoted in ibid., 169.
78 De lumine Christianae theoriae, book 2, article 56 (Opera omnia, vol. 45, p. 454). Quoted in ibid., 164.
It does not appear to be true, that the created intellect naturally desires to see
God; for nature does not bestow an inclination to something to which the whole
power of nature cannot lead; a proof is that nature placed the organs for any
potency deep within the soul.\(^{79}\)

Suárez, whose system has been described as “Christianized Aristotelianism,”\(^{80}\) utilizes
Aristotle by stating, “Nature, in giving them the inclination to a certain motion, gives
them the organs for it.”\(^{81}\) Advocates of this position from the sixteenth to the twentieth
centuries argued that this \textit{duplex ordo} preserved the gratuity of grace. In other words,
God did not owe grace to humanity because of their inability to attain their intrinsic
supernatural end by natural means.

De Lubac argues toward a more Augustinian position, in fact claiming that a
more Augustinian reading of Aquinas is more faithful to the Angelic Doctor. At several
places he favorably quotes Augustine’s line: \textit{Fecisti nos ad te, Deus, et inquietum est cor
nostrum donec requiescat in te} (“You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts
are restless until they rest in you”).\(^{82}\) That is, humanity is created for communion with
God, possessing a natural desire to see God and attain supernatural beatitude, which
can only come from God’s gratuitous grace. Thus, when Aquinas mentions \textit{gratia perficit
naturam}, it should be understood as a completion of nature by grace, fulfilling its
natural desire: “[T]he supernatural does not merely \textit{elevate} nature...; it does not
penetrate nature merely to help it prolong its momentum... and bring it to a successful

\(^{79}\) Cajetan, \textit{In Primam}, q. 12, a. 1, n. 9-10. Quoted in de Lubac, \textit{The Mystery of the Supernatural},
138n90.

\(^{80}\) Gerald A. McCool, \textit{The Neo-Thomists} (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), 19. De
Lubac writes that no one did more to contribute to the use of Aristotle’s remarks about the motion of
stars from chapter 2 of \textit{De caelo} than Suárez (Cf. de Lubac, \textit{Augustinianism and Modern Theology}, 168).

\(^{81}\) Francisco Suárez, \textit{De ultimo fine}, dissert. 16, sectio 2, n. 11. Quoted in de Lubac, \textit{The Mystery of
the Supernatural}, 148.

\(^{82}\) de Lubac, \textit{The Mystery of the Supernatural}, xxxvii, 53.
conclusion. It transforms it.” Consequently, de Lubac charged that in deemphasizing the fullness of this aspect in Aquinas’s thought, Cajetan had not simply commented on Thomas’s works. He had produced innovations that divided him from Thomas and distorted interpretations of the Angelic Doctor and his reception of Augustine: “Cajetan was in no sense ‘clarifying’ or ‘developing’ Thomist teaching on the matter; far from ‘pushing it to its ultimate conclusion,’ or bringing it to its goal,... he was profoundly altering its whole meaning.”

De Lubac’s argument centers on establishing that “Thomas, whenever he speaks of the nature of created spirit, never ascribes to it any other finality than a supernatural one.” Thus, humanity does not operate within a two-storied universe. There is one final end for humanity, and it is the vision of the Triune God. Human beings are found to be lacking if they do not arrive at this end:

[A]part from the vision of God, man, remaining inevitably unfulfilled, has no real end in the true sense.... Left to nature alone, in other words remaining for ever “imperfectus,” he would be condemned never to know more than a “kind of anxious joy,” which would consist in “always poetizing reality by dreaming,” and

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83 Henri de Lubac, A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace, trans. Richard Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 81. See Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2. “[G]race is proportionate to nature as perfection is to the perfectible” (De Veritate, q. 27, a. 5, obj. 17; quoted in de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 23).
84 de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 9.
86 De Lubac, following Aquinas, does affirm that humanity has a twofold beatitude (duplex hominis beatitudo). The crucial distinction, though, is that humanity’s natural beatitude is imperfect, while the supernatural beatitude is perfect and is humanity’s final end. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I-II, q. 62, a. 1; Henri de Lubac, “Duplex Hominis Beatitudo,” trans. Aaron Riches and Peter M. Candler Jr., Communio 35 (Winter 2008): 599. The latter article is translated and reprinted from Recherches de science religieuse 35 (1948): 290-299.
87 Thomas Aquinas, De Veritate, q. 18, a. 1, ad 5-7: “Man had been made for the purpose of seeing God not at the beginning but at the end of his perfection” (Quoted in de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 17n92).
“expanding possession by desire,” while continuing to call upon “an indifferent and silent heaven.”

To reach this supernatural end, however, humanity requires God’s gracious aid. This led de Lubac to conclude, pace Suárez and others, that “a being striving for the perfect good, even though it requires help from another in attaining it, is more noble than the being that can arrive at only an imperfect good, though by its own power.” In other words, while Aristotle cited the stars in support for natural endowments to attain natural ends, Aquinas did not share the opinion of “the Philosopher.” In fact, de Lubac also views the mature doctrine of natura pura (within modern theology) as insufficient for fulfilling its stated purposes: “As it has developed, with its denial of any organic connection, this system, unknown to the great scholastics, seems to me to be neither the only nor the best means of assuring the stability and dignity of human nature or the transcendence and freedom of the supernatural.”

Two Gifts of Grace

The neoscholastic Thomists separated nature from grace in order to grasp the character of nature and only afterward united nature and grace within salvation history. As Balthasar notes, this method had far-reaching theological consequences: “What was devised by theologians to protect the order of grace turns, according to an inner logic,

88 de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 199.
89 Balthasar, The Theology of Henri de Lubac, 67; Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I-II, q. 5, a. 5, ad 2; de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 152-154.
90 “The nature that can attain perfect good, although it needs help from without in order to attain it, is of more noble condition than a nature which cannot attain perfect good, but attains some imperfect good, although it need no help from without in order to attain it” (Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I-II, q. 5, a. 5, ad 2).
91 de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 32.
into a closed order of nature for which the ‘supernatural’ can only be something ‘superadded’ exteriorly and thus can be dispensed with.” That is, de Lubac recognized that the strategy of the pure nature hypothesis resulted in an excessive separation of the natural and the supernatural: “If we begin by dissociating the two orders completely, in order to establish the existence of a natural order that could be fully and finally self-sufficient, we are all too likely to end up by seeing not so much a distinction as a complete divorce.”

Such a divorce relegates the supernatural to an extraneous position, subject to neglect by modernity. It is for this reason that de Lubac’s strategy, “unite in order to distinguish,” is important for understanding the relationship between nature and grace. He maintained the need to distinguish between the two orders to some degree (i.e., they are not coterminous), yet he also argued for union, countering the extrinsicism of Thomist manuals, where the supernatural is superadded to nature. Therefore, he proposed that nature and grace be held together in a unity and then distinguished. Only then, he argued, can each be appropriately apprehended without being overly divided from the other. Commenting on the unity and distinctions within the Godhead in Catholicism (and using language reminiscent of the Christological Definition of Chalcedon), he offers a parallel description for how these seemingly paradoxical operations can be held together: “Unity is in no way confusion, any more

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93 de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 35.
94 “‘Distinguish to unite’ is a phrase we sometimes hear.... But it can sometimes be useful to recall its converse: unite in order to distinguish the better” (Ibid., 30).
95 “While it remains forever ‘un-naturalizable’, it profoundly penetrates the depths of man’s being.” Thus, grace is *in nobis* but not *ex nobis* (de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis*, 41, 48).
than distinction is separation.” Therefore, the integrated construal of nature and grace articulated by de Lubac does not make the natural indistinguishable from the supernatural, but holds both together so that the natural desire of humanity is oriented toward a supernatural end in God.

De Lubac bases this maintenance of the distinction between the natural and the supernatural on what humanity can understand to be the two gifts of grace from God, both of which are gratuitous. He explains in *The Mystery of the Supernatural*: “[W]e must be careful to distinguish two instances of gratuitousness, two divine gifts, and consequently – if it is legitimate to speak in this way, designating it not in itself but in its twofold goal, its twofold object – a twofold divine freedom.” This should be understood as “the twofold relation of the datum optimum of creation to the donum perfectum of divinization.” That is, understood to be prior to sin, there is a “double ontological movement,” where the first moment of grace grants the gift of being while the second moment imprints the supernatural finality within a human being and later elevates nature to its supernatural end.

It must be remembered, however, that neither of these moments is owed by God to humanity, and neither of them necessitates the other. These result in three

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97 “[W]hen grace and nature have become coterminous, it is as though grace is both everywhere and nowhere” [David Lyle Jeffrey, Review of *The Suspended Middle* by John Milbank, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75.3 (Sept 2007): 716].
99 de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis*, 50; de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 90. This has its basis in another Augustinian statement: “What we have received in order to be is one thing; what we received in order to be holy is another” (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Book V, 15).
100 de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 82.
states for humanity: 1) created nature with a longing beyond itself, 2) imprinting of supernatural finality, and 3) elevation:

If, by a legitimate and indeed necessary process of analysis, we distinguish these three things even more clearly, by staggering them, so to say, in time – the fact of the creation of a spiritual being, the supernatural finality imprinted upon that being’s nature, and finally the offer presented to his free choice to share in the divine life – we shall have to recognize that the first thing does not necessarily imply the second, nor the second the third, in any sense that would inhibit God’s utter independence.  

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Again, with emphasis on the freedom of God, the two gifts are gratuitous and not required on God’s part. Therefore, de Lubac allows that God could have created beings that did not have a supernatural finality, but, he argues, that would be a completely different world than our own.  

102 Furthermore, he clearly states that from God’s perspective, these are one act. It is only the imperfections of the human intellect that produce such faulty (albeit temporarily necessary) distinctions.  

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Centrality of Paradox

De Lubac’s work underscores the importance of maintaining paradox. In fact, de Lubac wrote three books that treated various paradoxes of the Christian faith, largely by juxtaposing seemingly countering statements.  

104 He further argues that heterodox ideas are not a failure to tow a narrow line of right teaching. Instead, quoting from Pascal’s Pensées, de Lubac notes, “Heretics, ‘being unable to reconcile two opposing truths, and

101 Ibid., 80-81.
102 Ibid., 79-80; see Balthasar, The Theology of Henri de Lubac, 72-73n36.
103 de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 79-81.
104 Henri de Lubac, Paradoxes (Paris: Editions du Livre, 1945); Nouveaux Paradoxes (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1955); Autres Paradoxes (Namur: Culture et vérité, 1994). The former two volumes have been published in English as Paradoxes of Faith. The latter has been released as More Paradoxes, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002).
believing that to admit one involves excluding the other, therefore accept one and reject the other, and think that we are simply doing the reverse.”

In other words, a synthetic task is always presented to a theologian, a task to reconcile multiple truths of the faith. De Lubac advises that, if such a union cannot be located at present, then one should at least “hold both ends of the chain.” That is, one truth should not be abandoned for the sake of another. This encouragement is crucial because de Lubac notes that Christian theology cannot avoid encountering paradoxes: “Remember, after all, that the Gospel is full of paradoxes, that man is himself a living paradox, and that according to the Fathers of the Church, the Incarnation is the supreme Paradox.”

At the heart of de Lubac’s understanding of paradox is the human person. This was in fact what he, according to Balthasar, saw in the texts of Thomas Aquinas with the encouragement of Rousselot, Maréchal, and Blondel: “the paradox of the spiritual creature that is ordained beyond itself by the innermost reality of its nature to a goal that is unreachable for it and that can only be given as a gift of grace.” It is this paradox that is important for de Lubac’s argument concerning the natural and the supernatural.

Throughout his work, de Lubac spills a great deal of ink refuting the idea, based on Aristotelian logic from *De caelo*, that if a being possesses a particular telos, then that being must have the ability within itself to reach that goal. In response, he boldly proclaims that “Thomist nature is not Aristotelian nature,” understanding the latter to

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106 Ibid., 183.
involve self-sufficiency while Thomist nature, following Augustine, involves the insufficiency of nature. By laying out these arguments by Thomas, de Lubac separates the neo-Thomists from their avowed theological master, noting that perhaps Thomas himself would not be able to be a member of the neo-Thomist school. Thus, de Lubac finds that the relationship between Thomas and twentieth-century neo-Thomism is much different than advertised, concluding that “the mass of neo-Thomists ... rediscovered not so much St. Thomas himself as the later forms of Thomism.”

Pro ecclesia

Through de Lubac’s forays into the very technical discussion of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural, one observes a theologian whose ideas are thoroughly ecclesiocentric. It is for this reason that, following the Second Vatican Council, he also opposed the position put forth by many that nature and grace are

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109 “Although man is naturally inclined to this end, he cannot pursue it naturally, but only through grace: and this is because of the eminence of this end” (de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 108, 117). The quotation from Aquinas is from In Boethium de Trinitate, q. 6, a. 4, ad Sum.
110 de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 142.
111 Ibid., 152. This statement is based on a quotation from Anatole France that it is rare “for any master to belong to the school he has founded as firmly as his disciples do.” Indeed, he quotes Garrigou-Lagrange, saying, “God, the author of our nature, could not give us the innate natural desire for an end to which he could not lead us ut auctor naturae [‘as the author of nature’]. The order of agents would no longer correspond to the order of ends” (Ibid., 149).
112 Ibid., 188.
united to the point that grace is perceived to be everywhere to the same degree. De Lubac views this as blurring the distinction between the two: “But not everything is, so to speak, sacred by nature. If the holy were everywhere, it would soon no longer be anywhere. Or it becomes a very ambiguous ‘sacred’ that one ought rather to flee than ‘rediscover.’”¹¹⁴ In other words, the sacred maintains a distinct sense of particularity as it is grounded in God’s activity in and through the church. As Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt notes, “Rejecting a two-tiered theology of nature and grace... does not mean that grace is everywhere in the same way.”¹¹⁵

For de Lubac, the church is primarily social, but also universal in that it mediates between God and humanity. To understand it otherwise would be dangerous: “To deny this fundamental distinction [between nature and grace]... would be to deny as well and in its very principle every notion of revelation, mystery, divine Incarnation, redemption or salvation. That would be to deny the Christian faith itself.”¹¹⁶ Within this ecclesiology, the sacraments become the instruments for pursuing the church’s eschatological end.

Again, the social character of these acts is highlighted by de Lubac:

As [the sacraments] make real, renew or strengthen man’s union with Christ, by that very fact they make real, renew or strengthen his union with the Christian community... [G]race which is produced and maintained by the sacraments does not set up a purely individual relationship between the soul and God or Christ.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ de Lubac, More Paradoxes, 162.
¹¹⁵ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic: Five Theses Related to Theological Anthropology,” Communio 31 (Spring 2004): 70.
¹¹⁶ de Lubac, A Brief Catechesis, 20-21.
¹¹⁷ de Lubac, Catholicism, 82.
Baptism, then, is “none other than this incorporation in the visible Church.” Further, de Lubac does not understand baptism to concern one individual person being incorporated into the church, but instead what he calls “a ‘concorporation’ of the whole Church in one mysterious unity.”

Likewise, the eucharist is for de Lubac the sacramentum unitatis ecclesiasticae (the sacrament of Church unity). Always embracing the witness of the church fathers, de Lubac invokes them to support the social character of the eucharist, including John Chrysostom’s declaration that in the sacrament “[w]e become one body,… members of his flesh, bones of his bones. That is what the food that he gives us effects: he joins himself to us that we may become one whole, like a body joined to his head.” Thus, within the sacrament of the eucharist, the gathered assembly of Christians become the body of Christ. As Balthasar writes, “[T]he Church as ecclesia is both convocatio (from above, from God) and congregatio (of men, from below).” Consequently, the church is not like any other human organization. It has a mission “to remind us constantly… of our divine supernatural vocation and to communicate to us through her sacred ministry the seed, still fragile and hidden, yet real and living, of our divine life.” Because of this mission, the witness of Scripture

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118 Ibid., 83. Concerning this, Balthasar writes, “Baptism is incorporation into the people of God” (Balthasar, The Theology of Henri de Lubac, 36).
119 de Lubac, Catholicism, 85.
120 Ibid., 89. As Voderholzer notes, de Lubac coined the oft-employed phrase: “The Church produces the Eucharist and the Eucharist produces the Church” (Voderholzer, 180).
121 Translated and cited in de Lubac, Catholicism, 91.
123 de Lubac, A Brief Catechesis, 110-111.
must be contextualized within the church.\textsuperscript{124} De Lubac, noting that biblical formulae do not stand on their own, but depend upon a tradition that gives hermeneutical guidance for reading both the Old and New Testaments, observes that \textit{sola scriptura} “still remains an untenable position, in fact as well as in principle.”\textsuperscript{125}

Moreover, he writes that “[a] correct idea of the distinction between nature and the supernatural and of unity is also necessary for an understanding of the Church and her role.”\textsuperscript{126} This can be seen in two ways. First, an individual-ecclesial dynamic stands parallel to that of nature-supernatural, where the church is not merely a human institution, but the society where human beings pursue (with divine assistance) their natural desire for the Triune God.\textsuperscript{127} Thus, individual religious experience cannot stand on its own, but must understand its proper location and end in the Church visible and invisible. Along these lines, Balthasar writes, “Both as custodian of the word and the sacraments and as the one who gives birth to the saints, [the Church] always precedes the believing individual and prevents every form of human ‘self-adoration.’”\textsuperscript{128} Second, de Lubac is wary of Christians confusing the church for the world, or reducing explanation of the church to solely social scientific methodologies: “We must, then, take

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{124} Balthasar: “Scripture is read by the Church and by the individual only within the Church” (Balthasar, \textit{The Theology of Henri de Lubac}, 76).
\item \textsuperscript{125} de Lubac, \textit{A Brief Catechesis}, 69
\item \textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 109.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Cf. de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 83; de Lubac, \textit{A Brief Catechesis}, 112.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Balthasar, \textit{The Theology of Henri de Lubac}, 111.
\end{itemize}
care not to confuse the ‘progress of this world’ (itself an ambivalent term) with the ‘new creation’.”

In the end, de Lubac advocates holding on to the paradox of the simultaneous union and distinction of nature and the supernatural, with its consequent anthropological and ecclesiological ramifications, knowing that different eras in history might require the emphasis of one aspect of the paradox over the other (i.e., contextual issues will result in an ebb and flow within theological discourse) and accepting that the ultimate resolution of this paradox is shrouded in the mystery of the Triune God.

**The Significance of de Lubac’s Work**

The significance of Henri de Lubac’s work for twentieth-century Catholic theology is difficult to overstate. In many ways, his efforts (along with those of his *ressourcement* colleagues) to compare the ideas of the Thomist manuals to Aquinas’s works ignited an eventual changing of the guard in Catholic theology, one that began in 1946 with the publication of *Surnaturel*, but ultimately culminated (to some extent) at the Second Vatican Council. In short, one could say that he recovered the more Augustinian elements of Aquinas’s work, thereby nullifying any attempts to place these two theological doctors in significant opposition to one another. Further, there are

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130 This semi-oppositional pairing, has found frequent use among many writers in the field of Catholic social ethics. In general, the contrast centers on a dark pessimism that permeates an Augustinian outlook (i.e., sharp divide between faith and reason, grace and sin) and a more optimistic view from a Thomistic perspective (i.e., affirming the autonomy and goodness of the world). See, e.g., Kristin E. Heyer,
several ways in which de Lubac’s work and method charted a new trajectory for theological discourse.

De Lubac’s work displays that theology should not be construed as an isolated discipline, separate from more basic philosophical or even cultural questions. Rather, theology is placed at the center of these disciplines, carrying an important voice in (and occasionally, in opposition to) historical, cultural, and political movements. Regarding the focus of a theologian’s work, the Christian faith itself, de Lubac states, “Christianity is not an object that we can hold in our hand: it is a mystery before which we are always ignorant and uninitiated.”131 This observation pushes back against the scholastic methodology of de Lubac’s contemporaries. That is, theology cannot be neat and tidy: “[T]heology is not, or ought not to be, a buildup of concepts by which the believer tries to make the divine mystery less mysterious, and in some cases to eliminate it altogether.”132 Most importantly, however, theological work does not end with the conclusion of the day’s studies. As Voderholzer describes, de Lubac argues that the mystery of the Christian faith (i.e., the “object” of theological study) unavoidably makes theology into a self-involving discipline: “The mystery ... that the theologian encounters and reflects upon is at the same time an example, a model and a norm by which to live. The Christ event renews everything, draws the theologian who approaches it thoughtfully and studiously into a process of renewal as well.”133

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133 Voderholzer, 111.
Neo-Thomist understandings of the relationship between nature and grace were originally intended to protect the realm of the supernatural from being overtaken by the natural. With the growth of modern scientific methods (i.e., naturalism) and Cartesian philosophy, Catholic theologians feared the loss of any voice for the Church within the modern world. The solution was to divide the realm of nature from that of grace in order to maintain some distinct and separate sphere for work regarding the supernatural. De Lubac does not quarrel with the intended purpose of this more extrinsic construal of nature and grace, but he does argue that the results have not been as hoped:

[T]he supernatural, deprived of its organic links with nature, tended to be understood by some as a mere ‘supernature’, a ‘double’ of nature…. Such a dualism, just when it imagined that it was most successfully opposing the negations of naturalism, was most strongly influenced by it, and the transcendence in which it hoped to preserve the supernatural with such jealous care was, in fact, a banishment. The most confirmed secularists found in it, in spite of itself, an ally.  

In other words, by creating a situation where the supernatural was viewed as a superaddition (*superadditum*) to nature, the realm of grace was understood to be superfluous to the natural world, which operated according to its own methods and protocols (i.e., naturalistic scientific procedures). In the end, the neo-Thomist schema prompted further neglect of the supernatural, leaving it to occupy the margins of knowledge and contributing to the construction of the secular.

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135 “[B]y this oversimple method of preserving the gratuitousness of the supernatural order, they were, to put it mildly, lessening its meaning” (de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 178).
This is similar to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s critique of liberal Protestant theology, which understood God to be what he termed a “stop-gap:”

If in fact the frontiers of knowledge are being pushed further and further back (and that is bound to be the case), then God is being pushed back with them, and is therefore continually in retreat. We are to find God in what we know, not in what we don’t know; God wants us to realize his presence, not in unsolved problems but in those that are solved.136

Likewise, once the orders of nature and grace had been severed by neo-Thomism, the natural realm (guided by methods of study that were divorced from theology) was free to pursue knowledge and explain occurrences in the world according to naturalistic science, thereby relegating God (and a more theological view of the world) to the “gaps” of human knowledge and contributing to the growth and influence of secularism.137

More troubling, though, are the political possibilities provided by the extrinsic relationship between nature and grace. In general, extrinsic relationships begin to develop with other paired concepts (e.g., faith and reason, church and world).

Anthropologically speaking, the human person is separated from Christology, foreclosing the possibility of what Nicholas Healy describes as “the mystery of Christ reveal[ing] the original purpose and meaning of creation itself – reveal[ing], we might say, the nature of nature.”138 This Christological understanding of humanness is further reflected in Gaudium et spes §22: “Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the

137 De Lubac alludes to these gaps as well: “Today that secularism, following its course, is beginning to enter the minds even of Christians... [E]verything that comes from Christ, everything that should lead to him, is pushed so far into the background as to look like disappearing for good. The last word in Christian progress and the entry into adulthood would then appear to consist in a total secularization which would expel God not merely from the life of society, but from culture and even from personal relationships” (de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, xxxv).
mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.”\textsuperscript{139} Without a Christ-formed anthropology, what constitutes humanity (and even progress for the human race) is separated from any Christian understanding of the human person. In other words, once nature is divorced from grace, human life is disconnected from the abiding presence of the Triune God, and theological positions no longer need any relationship to political commitments, enabling anyone (including a theologian) to have dual (and competing) allegiances to church and state.

For de Lubac, the ramifications of the extrinsicism of his contemporary neo-Thomists was particularly problematic, as evidenced by his concern (like Blondel) about the French conservative organization \textit{Action française} led by Charles Maurras. Within this right-wing movement, Maurras agitated against the anticlericalism of the French Third Republic, calling upon Catholics to support his organization in restoring the Roman Catholic Church and the French monarchy to prominence.\textsuperscript{140} The group was condemned by Pope Pius XI in 1926. Nonetheless, it continued to shape French Catholic sentiments until the Second World War, including backing for the pro-Nazi Vichy government from 1940 to 1944. Among the Catholic supporters were Descoqs and Garrigou-Lagrange.\textsuperscript{141} As Fergus Kerr details, Garrigou-Lagrange “did not conceal his support for the Vichy

\begin{footnotes}
\item[139] \textit{Gaudium et Spes} §22.
\item[141] Komonchak states that, for Descoqs, “Maurras’s political views were independent of his views on religion and that they coincided with Catholic social teaching, so that with proper precautions Catholics could associate themselves with the movement” (Komonchak, 595).
\end{footnotes}
regime nor his longstanding sympathies with *Action française*.”142 Moreover, Kerr points out that the Vichy government corresponded to the contours of Garrigou-Lagrange’s neo-Thomistic outlook: “The Vichy state, in its traditionally Catholic isolation, must have seemed as effective a way of making time stand still as the time-transcending system of the neo-Thomists.”143 De Lubac, again following Blondel, observing these associations, argued that concern for the theology of nature and grace had important implications for the church’s relationship with the world (as well as the possibility of particular political allegiances).144

These aspects of de Lubac’s work underscore the wider significance of his contribution to the theology of nature and grace. That is, his historical studies are more than simply that; they are not about mere historical accuracy or getting the story straight. Instead, they point out the importance of history for theological discourse.145 Such an approach is grounded in the idea that salvation history is not disconnected from human history: “God acts in history and reveals himself through history. Or rather, God inserts himself in history and so bestows on it a ‘religious consecration’ which compels us to treat it with due respect.”146 This not only underscores the importance of history for the work of theology, but it also challenges the neglect of history by de Lubac’s neo-Thomist contemporaries. In this way, his work stands as ecclesiocentric and parallels the

142 Kerr, “French Theology,” 112. He continues: “[Garrigou-Lagrange] was a close associate of the Vichy ambassador to the Vatican, who assured his government in a notorious dispatch that the Holy See had no objections to the Vichy anti-Jewish legislation, even providing supporting citations from Aquinas....”
143 Ibid.
144 As will be seen in later chapters, the extrinsic relationship between the natural and the supernatural can also map onto the relationship between the individual and community.
146 de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 165.
words of Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams: “To engage with the Church’s past is to see something of the Church’s future.”\textsuperscript{147} In other words, de Lubac is neither splitting theological hairs nor dwelling on minute historical details, but he is revealing the broader historical and cultural importance of theology.

In the next chapter, the potential for a robust theological engagement of de Lubac’s thought by Baptists will be explored, specifically taking note of possible incommensurabilities or obstacles between the two traditions, fruitful points of resonance, as well as previously-unrecognized lacunae in Baptist thought that de Lubac’s ideas identify and address. Thus, as will be argued in the remainder of this dissertation, de Lubac’s understanding of nature and grace can (and should) serve as a helpful lens for many within the Christian tradition (especially Baptists), both illuminating dangerous aspects of particular ideas that would be otherwise unseen and revealing new possibilities for future embodiment of the Christian faith.

\textsuperscript{147} Rowan Williams, \textit{Why Study the Past?: The Quest for the Historical Church} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 94.
CHAPTER III: BAPTISTS AND CATHOLICS TOGETHER?:
OBSTACLES, CONGRUITY, AND FRUITFUL POSSIBILITIES

Before moving on to a detailed examination of particular persons in Baptist history through the lens of the nature/grace problematic as described by de Lubac, attention should be given to the context of any possible Baptist engagement with Catholic thought. That is, what are the broader possibilities for the viability of such a conversation? More specifically, how have Baptists (especially within the United States) viewed Catholics both in previous contexts and presently? In this chapter, the task is to examine these and similar questions in order to thicken the background for Baptist-Catholic theological conversations.

First, the focus will be on the anti-Catholicism displayed by Baptists prior to the Second Vatican Council. As will be seen, a vast majority of Baptists understood Catholics in a negative light that not only affected their relations with the Catholic Church, but also shaped how they understood themselves. Next, more recent theological currents (both within Baptist life and Catholicism) have created possibilities for new dialogue between these traditions. Only after such work is completed can we return to de Lubac and the ways in which his views on nature and grace can renew Baptist identity by presenting novel (for Baptists, at least) terms in which to understand Baptist thought and practice but also the task of theology as well.
Protestant Anti-Catholicism

Baptists have often displayed antipathy toward Catholics, especially within the United States, viewing them as foreigners who had little genuine allegiance to the United States. R. Albert Mohler, current president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary stated on national television in 2000 that the Catholic Church was a “false church” that teaches a “false gospel.”¹ In past generations, this would not be an uncommon sentiment among American Protestants. Evangelical historian Mark Noll details how growing numbers of Catholic immigrants to cities in the Eastern United States in the nineteenth century threatened job prospects for Protestants.² Such opposition manifested itself in many ways, one of which was a political organization “founded as the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner in 1849 and reorganized in 1852 as the American Party.”³ Nativist concerns then merged with religious anxieties to fuel Protestant opposition to Catholics (and their expanding portion of the American population) throughout the nineteenth century.

Overall Protestant suspicion of Catholics slowly waned, though, throughout the twentieth century (especially the latter half). Gradually, Catholics were seen as having a significant place within the American intellectual landscape, illustrated by their prominence in Protestant, Catholic, Jew, a sociological study by Jewish scholar Will

³ Ibid., 209. He continues: “[I]ts members were popularly called ‘Know Nothings’ because when they were questioned about the group’s principles or activities, they would always respond ‘I don’t know’” (Ibid., 209-210).
Moreover, portrayals of Catholics in the arts shifted from derogatory images such as those created by Thomas Nast to positive depictions in film. Further, in the latter half of the twentieth century, American Protestants perceived less danger from Catholics and more from what was called secular humanism. In other words, a new enemy entered the scene, bringing with it potential – both for fear and for timely alliances.

Consequently, Protestant evangelicals began to warm to the idea that they could work with conservative Catholics, especially regarding social issues (e.g., abortion, marriage), leading to their inclusion in Rev. Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority as well as other efforts. Finally, Mark Noll has chronicled the development of Catholics’ presence within the American religious landscape, noting that the conclusion of the twentieth century has brought about a pluralistic religious outlook, depicted most clearly in his indication of eight prominent American Christian personalities over the course of the century, three of which are Catholic. Thus, the situation for Catholics has changed markedly in the latter half of the twentieth century, even while pockets of negative sentiments toward Catholics, such as Mohler’s, persist.

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6 For more on this emergence of Catholics in Americans’ cultural imagination over the course of the twentieth century and the ways in which it helped Catholics retain significant agency while becoming more accepted as Americans, see Anthony Burke Smith, The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010).
7 Cf. George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, new ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 242-243. A broader example of this is the 1994 “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” document (co-signed by Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus) that aims to commonalities in order to witness to the modern world in the twenty-first century.
Baptists’ Views of Catholics

For Baptists, not only did they share much of the past general anti-Catholic attitudes of other Protestants (and, in some cases, retain such views when other evangelicals shed them), they also developed more particular views of Catholics. Edgar Young Mullins (1860-1928), who will be the subject of chapters four and five, wrote, “The formative principle of the Roman Catholic system is the direct antithesis to the doctrine of soul competency.” This concept of “soul competency” represented the essence of Baptist life for Mullins and was fundamental for biblical Christianity, excluding “all human interference” such as infant baptism, episcopacy, and “every form of religion by proxy.” Elsewhere, he elaborates: “Direct access to God through Christ is the law of the Christian life. It is a species of spiritual tyranny for men to interpose the church itself, its ordinances, or ceremonies, or its formal creeds, between the human soul and Christ.”

Because of these concerns, it is not surprising to find that Mullins did not hold Catholicism in high regard: “While not desiring in the slightest measure to abate the value or importance of the good Roman Catholicism has done in its benevolent and philanthropic work, one is compelled to say that in its ecclesiastical theory it is not only against the spirit of human development and progress, but is inconsistent with the Christianity of Christ.” Thus, for Mullins, Catholicism is overly authoritative, running contrary to the pattern of biblical Christianity, which privileges freedom for the

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10 Ibid., 54.
11 Ibid., 94.
12 Ibid., 62-63.
individual believer, especially in the area of biblical interpretation. Moreover, while Mullins extrapolates several of his critiques of Catholicism to other, less free-church Christian traditions, such as Episcopalians, he saves his most critical words for those who convert to Catholicism, such as John Henry Newman, whose work on doctrinal development was understood by Mullins to be some sort of personal apology for his conversion: “His principles of development are exactly adapted to relieve the conscience of the man who has left the Church of England for the Roman Catholic fold....” With these statements in view, it is apparent why, in the final evaluation of Catholicism for Mullins, it stands as the opposite of Baptist life and thought.

George W. Truett (1867-1944), a Texas Baptist pastor and the subject of chapters six and seven, also viewed Catholics as an ‘other,’ expanding on Mullins’s statements to the point that anti-Catholic sentiments became key in defining Baptist ideas. In other words, Baptists are tied to the idea that they are the opposite of Catholics, which to some degree makes anti-Catholicism central to Truett’s understanding of what it means to be Baptist. As Lee Canipe explains, this stance toward Catholicism was prevalent among many of Truett’s coreligionists: “For Baptists, the Roman Catholic Church represented the epitome of false religion and stood for everything that Baptists

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13 “[T]he doctrine of papal infallibility combined with that of an authoritative tradition forbids all private or divergent interpretations of Scripture. To discover and proclaim an interpretation of the word of God which contravenes in any essential particular that which bears the stamp of traditional or papal approval, is for the Catholic to invoke upon his head the anathema of the church” (Ibid., 62).
14 Ibid., 23.
15 “Baptist congregationalism is the exact antithesis of the Romish hierarchy” (Ibid., 129). More will be said about Mullins in chapters 4 and 5.
16 This also creates an ironic situation where Baptists are unable to speak of their convictions until after Catholicism is fully described.
despised – autocracy, creedalism, hierarchy, ‘proxy religion,’ and so forth.”

Moreover, Truett stood as a champion of democracy and religious liberty, both of which he observed to be lacking within the Catholic Church. Thus, while he argued that Baptists should support the freedom of Catholics to worship as they chose, even if he thought they were wrong, he observed that the Catholic Church only gave lip service to democratic forms of decision-making.

As can be imagined, the issue of the pope’s temporal authority figures prominently in Truett’s treatment of Catholicism. Efforts to establish a diplomatic connection between Washington and the Vatican disturbed Truett as not only contrary to Christianity, but also contrary to American life: “Once more, the frank declaration is here made that any trend or suggestion of the possible establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and the Vatican would call forth an immediate and unyielding protest from uncounted millions of our American people.”

Regarding the pope himself, Truett stated,

The Pope is simply the honored head of the Roman Catholic Church, and the plea that his dominion over a few acres of ground, called the Vatican City, gives him the status of a temporal Sovereign, is essentially unreal. He has, in fact, no better title to receive governmental recognition from the United States than has the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the Moderator of the Presbyterian General

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18 “Baptists joyfully cherish all these believers in Christ [who hold that Christ is their personal savior and love Jesus in sincerity and truth], as their brothers in the common salvation, whether they be found in a Protestant communion, or in a Catholic communion, or in any other communion, or in no communion” [George W. Truett, “The Baptist Message and Mission for the World Today,” Southwestern Journal of Theology 41 (1999): 117-118].
19 Ibid., 120.
Assembly of the United States, or the Presiding Bishop of the United Methodist Church of this country.\textsuperscript{20}

Mullins and Truett were not the only Baptists who were suspicious of Catholic actions within the United States. In fact, this issue was a major concern of Baptists in the twentieth century. Joseph Martin (J.M.) Dawson (1879-1973), a Texas Baptist pastor, left his ministry position in Waco in 1946, where he had served since 1915, to become the first full-time director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJCPA; an organization that lobbies government officials in support of religious liberty),\textsuperscript{21} holding this position until 1953.\textsuperscript{22} A collective venture on the part of several Baptist denominations, the committee sought to inform Baptists of the significance of certain matters pertaining to church and state as well as serve as an advocate for Baptists in Washington, D.C. Dawson was also instrumental in the 1947 founding of Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (POAU), serving as the first secretary and acting director.\textsuperscript{23} This group stood at the center of a wave of anti-Catholicism in the 1940s and 1950s. Such sentiments were fueled largely by the works of journalist Paul Blanshard, who put forth arguments that Catholics in the United States should not be trusted and that their designs were for world domination.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. More will be discussed regarding Truett in chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{21} Actually, this became the organization’s name in 1950. Before that, it was known as the Joint Conference Committee on Public Relations [Bill J. Leonard, \textit{Baptists in America} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 167].
\textsuperscript{22} For more details on Dawson’s work with the BJCPA, see C.C. Goen, “Baptists and Church-State Issues in the Twentieth Century,” \textit{American Baptist Quarterly} 6.4 (December 1987): 238-243.
\textsuperscript{23} This group has since abandoned part of its name, which was clearly anti-Catholic. Now, they exist as Americans United for Separation of Church and State, with Barry Lynn serving as executive director.
\textsuperscript{24} Cf. Paul Blanshard, \textit{American Freedom and Catholic Power} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949). His second book on this subject set Communism and the Catholic Church as parallel threats to American
POAU, who understood their work to be thwarting the Catholic menace in the homeland, was established in the wake of the Supreme Court case *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), where the Court upheld a New Jersey township’s decision to “reimburs[e] parents of Catholic schoolchildren for bus expenses.” This issue was particularly important to Catholics as they argued that by paying taxes to subsidize public schools (and school buses) that were not used by their children (because they were sent to private Catholic schools), parents of Catholic children were paying double for education. Thus, as Barry Hankins notes, their argument was founded on the principle of freedom of choice: “parishioners should have the choice of sending their children to whatever school they desired and still receive a tax subsidy for doing so.” POAU officials printed articles in many Baptist publications decrying this proposal as a violation of the separation of church and state.

A victory was won for these Baptists and other Protestants with *McCollum v. Board of Education* (1948), which struck down a “release time for religious instruction”


28 Hankins describes three articles from the late 1950s from leaders of POAU, executive director Glenn Archer, C. Stanley Lowell, and Joseph Martin Dawson that were published in *The Baptist Standard*, a Baptist newspaper within Texas (Ibid., 151).
public school program in Illinois as a violation of the separation of church and state. More importantly for the long-term significance of the BJCPA, these two cases established a precedent for the BJCPA of filing *amicus curiae* briefs in order to maintain a vocal advocacy for religious liberty.

Dawson and the BJCPA were also vocal in opposition of President Truman’s appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican in 1951, so much so that the appointment was defeated and no formal diplomatic relations were established until 1984 (presidents after 1968 maintained personal representatives which facilitated some level of official representation). While this opposition to formal relations between Washington and the Vatican did not originate with Dawson, it certainly achieved organizational shape and strength in the BJCPA and POAU. For decades prior to this, distrust of Catholics’ aims within the United States appeared in Baptist writings and statements. Canipe writes, “At the heart of this Baptist antipathy lay an uneasy suspicion that Catholics in America owed their true allegiance not to the United States, but to the Pope and his designs for world domination. Behind every Catholic move, Baptists saw the potential for sabotage.”

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29 Joy over this court decision was not shared by all however. While Baptist opposition to Catholic efforts was lauded, Baptist opposition (via the BJCPA) to remnants of an evangelical Protestant consensus (the *McCollum* case was based on a challenge to a Protestant release time program by an atheist parent) seemed self-destructive to some Baptists. Cf. Leonard, *Baptists in America*, 172.

30 Current BJCPA executive director J. Brent Walker indicates that over 100 *amicus curiae* briefs have been filed since 1948 (J. Brent Walker, “J.M. Dawson (1879-1973) and James M. Dunn (1932-): Religious Libertarians,” in *Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics*, Larry L. McSwain, ed. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008), 285.


32 Canipe, “The Echoes of Baptist Democracy,” 418. Goen notes Dawson’s staunch anti-Catholicism and his frequent use of a quote from French Catholic Louis Veuillot, “When we are in a minority, we demand religious liberty in the name of your principles. When we are in the majority, we
For instance, in 1919, a brief article appeared in *The Baptist Standard*, a Texas Baptist newspaper, describing a message delivered from the Pope by the papal undersecretary of state to President Woodrow Wilson where Pope Benedict XV had voiced admiration for the United States and its democratic principles. In response to these events, the article’s author noted that the pope was “the autocrat of autocrats,” called the sincerity of his praise into question, and quoted a *New York Herald* article that noted the possibility that the pope’s ulterior motive was recognition of papal temporal power by the United States.\(^{33}\) Reacting to this and other perceived seditious actions by Catholics in the United States, Baptists emphasized a fervent love of democratic government, which, as they saw it, ran against the grain of the Catholic Church.\(^{34}\)

Following the Second Vatican Council, Baptist attitudes toward Catholics shifted to some degree. With affirmations of religious freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*) and the use of the vernacular for Mass, among other things, Baptists began to find limited affinity with Catholics. In his book, *Soul Liberty* (1975), Glenn Hinson, a Baptist historian, notes that prior to the council a reactionary mindset reigned, evidenced by the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) and the quashing of Modernism (1907). However, with Pope John XXIII, Hinson views a new era for Catholics and their relations with Protestants. By using the phrase “separated brethren” to describe Protestants, Hinson perceives new avenues for ecumenical dialogue. More importantly, though, *Dignitatis Humanae* took steps to affirm religious freedom that resonated with what Hinson saw as a historic Baptist

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\(^{34}\) See, for example, J.B. Gambrell, “Rome in World Politics,” *Baptist Standard* 33.19 (May 5, 1921): 1.
conviction. In other words, Catholics, like Baptists, now understood that “God created persons free to seek truth according to their conscience,” thereby precluding the use of external coercion to produce religious faith.\(^\text{35}\)

While initially this may seem to be a softening of the anti-Catholicism previously seen by Baptists, in actuality, such sentiments appear to remain, even if not active. That is, Hinson’s praise is based on the fact that Catholics have, in his view, come into greater agreement with Baptists. Moreover, despite his assessment, he retains Baptist opposition to other Catholic topics, noting his displeasure that *Dignitatis Humanae* did not renounce Catholic support for parochial schools and was not clearly in support of separation of church and state.\(^\text{36}\) In summary, therefore, it remains probable that Baptist admiration of Catholics’ decisions following the Second Vatican Council was less about Catholics’ ideas and more about those of Baptists.

**Resulting Theological Convictions**

There are several theological convictions that have emerged as a result of Baptist anti-Catholicism. First is an emphasis on the individual over against the ecclesial community, found most prominently in Baptist support for soul liberty, where no intermediaries stand between the solitary believer and God. As will be discussed in chapter five, many scholars, both Baptist and non-Baptist, have pointed out the quasi-Gnostic tendencies of such ideas. As a consequence of soul liberty, however, Scriptural


\(^{36}\) “The Declaration on Religious Freedom neither denied nor favored separation of church and state. There was clearly a concern also to preserve freedom for parochial schools” (Ibid., 119).
interpretation relies primarily on private interpretation rather than any teaching or hermeneutical authority that might guide the reading of Scripture.

Moreover, most Baptist understandings of sacraments are devoid of God’s presence. Notable in holding this view is eighteenth-century Baptist John Leland (1754-1841). A strong advocate for freedom of conscience as central in the individual’s relationship with God, Leland was influential within the colonies (especially his native Virginia) and later in the nascent states regarding religious liberty (usually involving total separation of church and state). This individualism prompted other views as well, such as Leland’s treatment of the Lord’s Supper: “I lodge no complaint against communing with bread and wine, but for myself, for more than thirty years experiment, I have had no evidence that the bread and wine ever assisted my faith to discern the Lord’s body.”

He went even further, though, as Nathan Hatch notes: “[E]ven his relationship with his own congregation was troubled over his refusal, as a matter of conscience, to administer the Lord’s Supper. Leland defended his position by saying that in thirty years of practical experience he had never seen the ordinance move a single sinner to conversion.”

Clearly, Leland saw the individual as the most important (and perhaps only) site of Christian experience.

Along with these implications, Baptists’ views concerning Catholics contributed to their aversion to creedal statements. In fact, Baptists were very clear that any

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39 Baptist theologian Barry Harvey writes, “Anti-creedalism is... inseparable from anti-Catholicism, which, no matter how one tries to finesse it, is the one prejudice still socially acceptable
confession of faith they affirmed (e.g., “Baptist Faith and Message” in 1925, 1963, and 2000) was merely a reflection of the convictions of a particular group of Baptists at a particular time and place, with no binding authority beyond those or any other circumstances. Eventually, when the late-twentieth-century crisis among Southern Baptists reached its peak with conservative Baptists seeking to utilize the denomination’s confessional statement as an instrument of doctrinal authority, moderate Baptists began using the phrase (or at least increased the volume of its use) “No creed but the Bible” as their refrain, succinctly stating their willingness to categorically affirm anything found in Scripture, but nothing more.40

Finally, historian Martin Marty surveyed the theological landscape of the United States in the late twentieth century, describing it as having undergone “baptistification,” or consisting more of an emphasis “on decision at initiation and decisive identity.”41 Among many Baptists, though they may have described the situation in slightly different terms, this assessment was hailed as a triumph of the Baptist mindset. For instance, Baptist historian Walter Shurden links Marty’s neologism to his own articulation of the


40 Interestingly, as Steven Harmon notes, “The slogan ‘no creed but the Bible’ is actually not indigenous to the Baptist movement proper but rather seems to have originated in the Restorationist movement led by Barton W. Stone, Walter Scott, and Thomas and Alexander Campbell” [Steven R. Harmon, Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 4n9]. The first prominent use among Baptists seems to be when “[t]he founding president of the Southern Baptist Convention referenced the axiom in 1845 to explain why the Convention had adopted no doctrinal statement” (Ibid., 32).

41 Martin E. Marty, “Baptistification Takes Over,” Christianity Today 27.13 (September 2, 1983): 33. Marty contrasts this way of inhabiting the American religious landscape with a catholic style that underscores continuity from generation to generation and transmission of the faith through a network of relatively stable socio-cultural institutions.
center of Baptist life: “Baptistification is a spirit that pervades all of the Baptist principles or so-called Baptist distinctives. It is the spirit of FREEDOM.”

New Trajectories within Baptist Life and Thought

Some small changes in these attitudes toward Catholics have emerged even among Baptists who strongly disagree with many Catholic convictions. Specific topics of theological discussion that had been avoided have begun to be embraced. For example, there is a fairly widespread shift among Protestants to pay more attention to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Previously, largely because of anti-Catholic sentiments, Baptists and other Protestants had neglected to speak theologically about Mary, for fear that they would appear Catholic. Now, this aversion is disappearing to some extent as Protestants realize that the Bible speaks of Mary (and therefore she deserves attention).

Furthermore, another trend among Baptists is a recovery of the church calendar, including the seasons of Advent and Lent (which was especially linked with Catholicism). While the embrace of these practices is often different from that found within the Catholic Church, it seems clear that their use indicates a realization that the seasons of the Christian calendar have served a more significant purpose through the history of Christianity and can similarly serve a more significant purpose in the present.

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44 This author has been involved with several churches that have not only embraced the Christian calendar, but also adopted the lectionary for determining the Scriptural texts for a particular week.
than has usually been held.\textsuperscript{45} Moreover, Baptist periodicals have also recently printed articles that explained Catholic practices such as selecting a new pope, which would have seemed unimportant for previous generations of Baptists.\textsuperscript{46} Such writings are significant because they point to a willingness by Baptists to learn about Catholicism, even if they ultimately still disagree. Before this, most published statements about Catholics displayed suspicion similar to that of POAU and Paul Blanshard.

Finally, another practice among Baptists must be mentioned. In 2005, a group of 28 theologians, in a document entitled “Confessing the Faith,” asked the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) to recite the Apostles’ Creed at their centennial meeting, a request which was accepted. While this is significant on its own (because Baptists generally have not welcomed recitation of creeds), it also bears importance for the BWA because at its initial meeting in 1905, BWA president Alexander Maclaren “proposed that their very first act be an affirmation of the historic Christian faith.”\textsuperscript{47} His intention of reciting the creed was intended “not as a piece of coercion or discipline, but as a simple acknowledgment of where we stand and what we believe.”\textsuperscript{48} Moreover, as Keith Jones points out, the recitation of the Apostles’ Creed was “a way of demonstrating to the Christian World Communions [i.e., conventional Christianity] that Baptists belonged to

\textsuperscript{45} Cf. Marv Knox, “Celebrating Advent makes the wait worthy of Christmas,” \textit{Baptist Standard} 116.26 (December 6, 2004): 5; Hannah Elliott, “Give It Up for Lent,” \textit{Baptist Standard} 118.8 (April 17, 2006): 1, 10. It should be noted, however, that the latter article received a rather critical response in a letter that was printed in the May 12, 2006 edition of the \textit{Baptist Standard}; the letter’s author was concerned about what he perceived to be a “gnawing Catholic influence.”

\textsuperscript{46} John L. Allen, Jr., “Trade-offs of ideal, reality factor into selection of pope,” \textit{Baptist Standard} 117.8 (April 18, 2005): 13; Kevin Eckstrom, “Questions answered about how Catholics pick their pope,” \textit{Baptist Standard} 117.8 (April 18, 2005): 13. The first article is significant because its author primarily works for \textit{National Catholic Reporter}. In other words, this Baptist periodical sought out a Catholic account of this Catholic practice.

\textsuperscript{47} “Confessing the Faith,” in Harmon, 225.

\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in Harmon, 9n25.
the mainstream of Christian life and were not some form of sect....”49 The proposal for reciting the creed in 2005 argued that affirming the convictions presented by the Apostles’ Creed would serve as an important step against theological heterodoxy (i.e., it would stand against those who would add to or subtract from the gospel).50

The “Baptist Manifesto”

Aside from these subtle shifts in Baptist views of Catholicism, more substantial moves have been made by a small but significant group of Baptist theologians. In 1996, six Baptist scholars composed a document entitled “Re-envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America.” This statement, which has become known since then as the “Baptist Manifesto,” aimed to generate conversation about the theological direction of current Baptist life and practice, with the hope of finding a new trajectory for Baptist theological discourse. As part of this program, these theologians sought a forum for consistently engaging topics that had been neglected by predominant Baptist conversations. According to Steven Harmon, this group, “the ‘Region-at-Large’ of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, began gathering as a program unit of the annual meeting of the College Theology Society, an

50 Cf. Harmon, 225-226; Steve DeVane, “At request of educators, BWA agrees to recite Apostles’ Creed at 2005 congress,” Baptists Today 22.8 (August 2004): 27. See the correspondence before and after the Baptist World Congress of 2005 in “Confessing the Faith,” in Harmon, 225-229. Then-BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz stated after this article that the BWA program committee was already committed to reciting the Apostles’ Creed at the centenary, thereby mitigating the influence of these Baptist theologians in the United States. Cf. “ Readers’ Responses,” Baptists Today 22.12 (December 2004): 8.
organization of predominantly Roman Catholic college and university professors of theological and religious studies.”

After several revisions of the statement based on feedback from other Baptist pastors and professors, the Baptist Manifesto was printed in the Baptist newspaper *Baptists Today*, followed by a list of fifty-five signees. The document itself consisted of five affirmations (and corresponding rejections) that focused on “freedom, faithfulness and community.” The statement was reprinted in the Fall 1997 edition of *Perspectives in Religious Studies* (the academic journal of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion) as an appendix to an article written by Baptist Manifesto collaborator Curtis Freeman.

The document opened with an exposition of a theologically-oriented understanding of freedom, noting, “From our beginnings, we Baptists have celebrated the freedom graciously given by God in Jesus Christ.” However, this freedom is not equated with self-determination or “rooted in what the world calls natural rights or social entitlements.” Instead, human freedom is a gift from Jesus Christ, is patterned on God’s freedom, and is grounded in the new creation. This means that freedom is both a freedom *from* (i.e., from bondage to sin) and a freedom *for* (i.e., serving Christ

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51 Harmon, 1-2
53 Ibid., 8.
55 Ibid., 303.
56 Ibid.
and one another). While this theological articulation of freedom was embraced by early Baptists, the Baptist Manifesto authors state that North American Baptists accepted a modern form of freedom by the mid-eighteenth century, one where “the mere expression of the will is the greatest good.” This frames the discussion of Baptist thought that follows in the form of five affirmations.

The first affirmation, “We affirm Bible Study in reading communities rather than relying on private interpretation or supposed ‘scientific’ objectivity,” involves a carefully-held tension between two problematic stances toward Scripture: authoritarian interpretations (whether ecclesial or academic) and biblical readings that are grounded in the individual conscience. The aim here was to move toward communal reading of the biblical text, one that included “an open and orderly process whereby faithful communities deliberate together over the Scriptures with sisters and brothers of the faith, excluding no light from any source.” This affirmation concludes, as does each, with a summary statement that serves as a call for action for readers of the Baptist Manifesto: “We call others to the freedom of faithful and communal reading of Scripture.”

The second affirmation states, “We affirm following Jesus as a call to shared discipleship rather than invoking a theory of soul competency.” Two things deserve mention at this point. First, the contributors to the Baptist Manifesto have been influenced by Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder (though he is mediated to each

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57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 304.
59 Ibid., 304-305.
60 Ibid., 305. Emphasis original.
61 Ibid.
collaborator and operates in their work in a slightly different manner), especially his work in his near-classic *The Politics of Jesus.* Yoder’s emphasis on Jesus’ role as a norm for Christian life in the world challenges the dominant paradigm for Christian identity within Baptist discourse. Largely through the work of Mullins, Baptists have understood the Christian relationship to be defined primarily in terms of the individual believer and God, relegating the communal aspects of the Christian life to secondary positions. Yoder’s understanding of discipleship as following the way of Jesus offers an alternative by grounding Christian activity in imitation of the Son, including faithful participation in the church, where collective discernment takes place. Consequently, this affirmation concludes by stating, “We call others to the freedom of faithful and communal discipleship.”

Third, the Baptist Manifesto authors declare, “We affirm a free common life in Christ in gathered, reforming communities rather than withdrawn, self-chosen, or authoritarian ones.” Here, the authors of the Baptist Manifesto display their continued commitment to convictions constitutive of a believers church. That is, believers baptism and “called-out” church membership serve to embody “a distinctive vision of the church as a community of shared response to God’s mission, message, and renewal.” However, this affirmation is qualified by noting that believers church ecclesiology does

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62 John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*: Vicit Agnus Noster, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). Another prominent intellectual source for the Baptist Manifesto is theologian Stanley Hauerwas, whose own work has been shaped by Yoder, among others. For more, see Andrew D. Black, “Kingdom of Priests or Democracy of Competent Souls?: The ‘Baptist Manifesto,’ John Howard Yoder, and the Question of Baptist Identity” (M.A. Thesis, Baylor University, 2006).
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
not indicate approval of sentiments that either hold Baptist or evangelical churches as wholly representative of God’s people or state that believers church ecclesiology means that “any one congregation (or association of congregations) exists autonomously without connection to the whole people of God.” 66 This affirmation concludes by stating, “We call others to the freedom of a faithful and communal embodiment of a believers church.” 67

The fourth affirmation states, “We affirm baptism, preaching, and the Lord’s table as powerful signs that seal God’s faithfulness in Christ and express our response of awed gratitude rather than as mechanical rituals or mere symbols.” 68 Baptism, through the Spirit’s power, serves as point of entry into a covenant that makes one responsible for growing in discipleship and accountable to the community of faith. Preaching, by the power of the Holy Spirit, becomes the Word of God, declaring the liberating message of the gospel. At the Lord’s table, the Holy Spirit seals the covenant that unites believers among themselves and with Christ. As the Baptist Manifesto notes, there is a significant common thread that ties these acts together: “By repeating these signs we learn to see the world as created and redeemed by God. The Spirit who proceeds from the Father through the Son makes the performance of these practices effectual so as to seal and nourish the faith and freedom of believers.” 69 Something like a sacramental view of these acts is reflected at this point: “The Lord is present and active both in the performance of these remembering signs and with the community that performs

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid. Emphasis original.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 307.
them.”  The result is that there is a possibility for the cooperation (by analogy) of divine and human agency within these practices so that “God’s grace and Christian obedience converge in a visible sign of the new creation.” Moreover, this portion of the Baptist Manifesto underscores the importance of the frequency of these practices, noting that, within Baptist life, the Lord’s table is celebrated too rarely, baptism is underemphasized relative to the evangelistic invitation at the conclusion of the worship service, and preaching has been pushed aside by other forms of Christian ministry. Hence, the concluding statement: “We call others to the freedom of the faithful communal enactment of the Lord’s remembering signs.”

The final affirmation, “We affirm freedom and renounce coercion as a distinct people under God rather than relying on political theories, powers, or authorities,” also bears the marks of John Howard Yoder. While favoring the disestablishment of the church from state control and coercion, the Baptist Manifesto warns against other forms of entanglement with the state that church-state separationists may have overlooked: “independence of the church from the idols of nationalism, racism, ethnocentrism, economic systems, gender domination, or any other power that resists the Lordship of Jesus Christ.” Once again, a tension is presented. On one hand, the authors do not want to affirm a public/private dichotomy that relegates the gospel’s message to the private individual’s conscience (i.e., that which could develop based on secular understandings of church-state separation). On the other hand, they are careful

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70 Ibid., 308.
71 Ibid., 307.
72 Ibid., 308. Emphasis original.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
to maintain some approval of disestablishment within the church-state relationship. The result is an emphasis on the distinct people of God known as the church. That is, rather than simply touting separation of church and state and raising it as a Baptist banner, the authors of the Baptist Manifesto devote more attention to the importance of holding allegiance to the church and its practices: “The skills we learn in the baptized and remembering community help us to resist these powers that otherwise would determine our lives.” Therefore, “We call others to the freedom of faithful and communal witness in society.”

In concluding the declaration, the authors of the Baptist Manifesto note the context of Baptist theological discourse, including the “ideologies of the right and the left that are foreign to the content and direction of the gospel.” Moreover, they point out that, despite their apparent differences, major factions within theological conversations share significant influences from modernity, with certain groups of Baptists emphasizing freedom in terms of “autonomous moral agency and objective rationality” and others underscoring “individualism through religious experience and through the self-evidence of truth available by means of common sense reason.” Declaring each modern alternative to be dissatisfying and unacceptable, the authors of the Baptist Manifesto reiterate their call “for a reclaiming of the Baptist heritage as we re-envision the study of Scripture, the life of discipleship, the embodiment of a faithful church, the enactment of remembering signs, and the disestablishment of the church.

75 Ibid., 309.
76 Ibid. Emphasis original.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 309-310.
from worldly powers.”  

It is their hope that the Baptist Manifesto will begin new conversations among Baptists and develop into new ways of worship, work, and witness.

**Emerging Developments**

Baptist scholars who are sympathetic with the Baptist Manifesto have produced an ever-growing volume of work. Usually called “Catholic Baptists,” their efforts both are linked with the affirmations within the Baptist Manifesto and move beyond them. An important volume for Catholic Baptists in this regard is Steven Harmon’s *Towards Baptist Catholicity*. This book, largely constructed from essays Harmon had previously written and/or presented, offers a more comprehensive view of Baptist life as it aims to move away from the dangers warned against in the Baptist Manifesto. Indeed, while in continuity with arguments contained within the Baptist Manifesto, Harmon imagines Baptist life and thought anew by engaging the Christian past.

At the same time, Harmon’s work is significant for the ways that it distills a large volume of Baptist scholarship in order to discern the way forward. As Harmon rightly

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79 Ibid.

80 Curtis Freeman is often credited with arriving at the term “Catholic Baptist,” though some of his references involve the less formal catholic baptist: “I suggest that Baptists may more easily explore the vast resources of Christian spirituality and that other Christians may more readily receive the unique contributions of Baptist spirituality if we attempt to think of ourselves (at least experimentally) as (little c) catholic (little b) baptists” [Curtis W. Freeman, “A Confession for Catholic Baptists,” in *Ties That Bind: Life Together in the Baptist Vision* ed. Gary A. Furr and Curtis W. Freeman (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 1994), 85.

81 “[T]he work of these ‘catholic Baptist’ thinkers conceptualizes... this book, which is an attempt to chart a course towards Baptist ‘catholicity’ — i.e., towards a reclaimed consciousness that Baptists belong to what the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed confesses is the ‘one, holy, catholic... , and apostolic church’ and that they must strive after the realization of these marks of the church along with all other denominations” (Harmon, 3).
indicates, Baptist discourse emerging from the Baptist Manifesto offered (re-)new(ed) ideas for Baptists. Several areas of theological work deserve particular attention. First, Catholic Baptists have turned their attention to history and tradition. Second, they have embraced a sacramental vision sustained by liturgy. Finally, they have found promise in fruitful conversation with Catholic theology. Each of these topics (though not exhaustive of all topics of interest for Catholic Baptists) reaches back toward the roots of Baptist (and Christian) life while also looking forward toward the ways in which Baptists might inhabit the contemporary Western, liberal context of the United States much differently.

Attention to History and Tradition. Several scholars among the Catholic Baptist tribe have focused their work on Baptist history. This has occurred by two distinct paths: re-examining Baptist history and re-situating Baptists within the broader Christian story. Philip Thompson’s work is especially important in this regard. Many of his articles focus on long-forgotten groups of Baptists, whose manner of performing the Christian faith stands in contrast (to some degree) with the dominant Baptist narrative. Indeed, as he writes, “The first Baptists possessed a catholic mind and, more importantly, a catholic spirit.”

Often cited in his writings are English General Baptist Thomas Grantham (1634-1692) and the General Baptists of the Midlands. These seventeenth-century Baptists embraced practices that would stand at odds with their twentieth-century descendants,}

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82 Ibid., 7-8, 15, 39-69.
83 Ibid., 8-11, 13-14, 151-177.
such as a more hierarchical understanding of clergy (including a role for a bishop or “messenger”), affirmation of historic Christian creeds (Nicene and Athanasian), a more sacramental view of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and an implicit role for mediation of God’s grace through the form of Christian life and worship. This work is important for several reasons. First, these Baptists and their confession of faith (Orthodox Creed) are seldom referenced by moderate Baptists, and when they are, only their statement of the importance of conscience is mentioned. Second, the convictions and practices of these Baptists challenge any Baptist who would declare “Baptists have always been this way,” regarding soul competency, anti-creedalism, or merely symbolic understandings of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Finally, Thompson has pointed Baptists to a wealth of theological resources that had previously been forgotten or ignored, offering greater possibilities for providing a more robust account of Baptists’ theological genealogy.

In another article, “Re-envisioning Baptist Identity: Historical, Theological, and Liturgical Analysis,” Thompson responds to criticism of the Baptist Manifesto that assumes basic theological continuity between early Baptists and their contemporary descendents. Utilizing sources that stand closer to the “ground” of Baptist thought and practice (e.g., hymns, liturgical practices, hymnals, prayers), Thompson asks, “How have

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87 Cf. Bill J. Leonard, The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 98. It should be noted that, while it is not explicitly stated, it is likely that moderate Baptist appeals to conscience’s role in the Christian life are partly intended to separate them from fundamentalists and others (including Catholics) for whom, according to moderate Baptists, conscience is muted. Catholic theologians, however, have not ignored the topic of conscience. See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I, q. 79, a. 13.
the sung, prayed, and enacted faith of Baptists gathered for worship related to the more formal theological writings?" 88 Through these lenses, Thompson observes dramatic changes within Baptist practice through the centuries. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, once understood to be communal acts that oriented individual believers toward the collective *ekklesia* became an outward display of an inward change (i.e., individual conversion) and the believer’s personal reception of Christ. 89 Moreover, Baptists shifted from locating God’s arena of activity from physical creation to the spiritual realm, which exacerbated individualistic tendencies and undercut any sacramental understanding of practices such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Finally, hymnbooks were changed in order to reflect the formal theological alterations.

Thompson states, then, that significant discontinuity exists between early and contemporary Baptists, and he indicates that a major theological source for this divergence is a change from the trinitarian theocentrism of the early Baptists (i.e., during the first two centuries of Baptists’ existence) to anthropocentrism (around the time of John Leland), when freedom became the dominant theme. 90 Thompson’s conclusion, in response to critics of the Baptist Manifesto who argue that it threatens all that Baptists have always been (i.e., it challenges the stable continuity of Baptist theology), boldly states the importance of historical theology in evaluating (apparent) similarities in Baptist life and thought: “Baptist identity has been re-envisioned on the level of its theological foundation. So profound has been the shift, I would venture that

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89 Ibid., 294-295.
90 Ibid., 300-301.
even affirmations shared by early and contemporary Baptists, such as church-state separation, are mere resemblances and no evidence of continuity.”

In a different manner, but no less historically-oriented, Curtis Freeman has focused Baptists’ attention on the theological role of history. Many of his articles offer clarifying analysis of previous periods of Baptist existence, segments of the Baptist past that have been interpreted through the lens of present-day Baptist convictions. This stands in continuity with the perspective of the authors of the Baptist Manifesto (a group which includes Freeman), which stated that their affirmations were “drawn from earlier sources of the Baptist heritage.” Nonetheless, this did not preclude the possibility that their reading could diverge “substantially from what has become the established interpretation.” For instance, in his article, “A New Perspective on Baptist Identity,” Freeman challenges prevalent readings of Baptist luminaries such as Thomas Helwys, noting that his commitment to liberty of conscience was based on “theocentric, not anthropocentric” grounds.

Moreover, Freeman’s work has attempted to bring lesser-known Baptists of the past into the light of the present, arguing that “[i]n every century there have been important voices who as yet have not received a wide hearing: theological writings of women, African Americans, and Christians from the post colonial two-thirds world

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91 Ibid., 302.
92 Freeman, “Re-envisioning Baptist Identity,” 304.
94 Ibid., 62.
which have been largely ignored or suppressed by the wider Baptist community.”

Indeed, Freeman’s work displays its theological strength for present-day Baptist theological discourse precisely by closely examining aspects of Baptist history and seeing more details than are visible from the point of view provided by statements such as “Baptists have always believed this” and “no creed but the Bible.”

The topic of tradition has also piqued the interest of Baptists, especially those who agree with the Baptist Manifesto. About these Baptists, Harmon states, “These tradition-retrieving Baptist theologians believe that becoming more conscious of the inescapable role of tradition in Christian faith and practice can help Baptists to distinguish between healthy and harmful sources of tradition.” With this in view, considerable intellectual effort has been expended for the purpose of articulating a Baptist philosophy of tradition, or an understanding of the role of tradition within Baptist life and thought.

Mark Medley engaged Baptists and their understanding of tradition in a review essay of Terrence Tilley’s *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (2000), offering Tilley’s work as the site for Baptists to revisit their use of tradition. Stating that Baptists usually

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97 Harmon, 34.

operate with a relatively static view of tradition (i.e., tradition is an object that is passed down), Medley refers to Tilley’s use of a more differentiated definition of tradition that encompasses “the act of transmission (traditio), not just the content handed down (tradita).” Medley sees in Tilley’s work the possibilities for a theological conception of tradition, potentially rooted in ecclesiological practices: “Thinking about tradition not as ‘things handed over,’ but as ‘socially embodied, interwoven, enduring practices’ suggests that knowing a tradition is a learned, acquired rule-ordered skill.” With this in focus, the life of the community of faith becomes crucial to the convictions that sustain it, meaning that “theological reflection on tradition emerges from and within the ordinary, concrete practices of communities of faith.”

Philip Thompson also contributes to this area, treating the intersection of memory, history, and tradition. Thompson employs the work of Rowan Williams in delineating the difference between good and bad history. For Williams,

Good historical writing... is writing that constructs a sense of who we are by a real engagement with the strangeness of the past, that establishes my or our identity now as bound up with a whole range of things that are not easy for me or us, not obvious or native to the world we think we inhabit, yet which have to be recognized in their solid reality as both different and part of us.... [B]ad history is any kind of narrative that refuses this difficulty and enlargement – whether by giving us a version of the past that is just the present in fancy dress or by dismissing the past as a wholly foreign country whose language we shall

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99 Harmon notes that, despite resonances between Baptist confessions and patristic confessions of faith, the overlapping theological material likely resulted from the historical inheritance of the early Baptists (e.g., Anglican 39 Articles, Reformed Westminster Confession of Faith), implying some sort of traditioned source for Baptist theological knowledge (Harmon, 77-80).

100 Medley, 121. Medley notes that Tilley derives this distinction from the work of Catholic theologian Yves Congar.


102 Medley, 123.
never learn and which can only be seen as incomprehensible and almost comic in its savagery and ignorance.\textsuperscript{103}

Thompson contends that Baptist historiography suffers from bad history precisely at the points where Baptist historians offer “as the truth of Baptist history a quite universalized ideal that any may appropriate” (e.g., “what Baptists have always believed”).\textsuperscript{104} Counter to this myopia is good history, which Thompson sees as crucial for the maintenance of memory and truthfulness regarding tradition.\textsuperscript{105} That is, good history attends to everything that is found, even the material that seems foreign and strange, which can offer a critical perspective on the state of the present.\textsuperscript{106}

Similarly, a recent dissertation by Cameron Jorgenson addresses the importance of the category of tradition for Baptist discourse. Drawing more from philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre than either Tilley or Medley do,\textsuperscript{107} Jorgenson states, “Arguably, MacIntyre has been the single most influential philosophical resource for Bapto-Catholic

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\textsuperscript{103} Rowan Williams, \textit{Why Study the Past?: The Quest for the Historical Church} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 23-24.


\textsuperscript{105} He makes it clear that one cannot escape the influence of tradition, only one’s conscious apprehension of its role. Thus, Thompson notes, “Baptists have made a tradition of rejecting tradition” (Thompson, “Dimensions of Memory,” 13).

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 24-25.

\textsuperscript{107} While considerably indebted to MacIntyre, Medley is sympathetic with Tilley’s use of James McClendon’s conception of tradition rather than MacIntyre’s, which “understands participation in a tradition as knowing how to argue,” is “too limited to apply to ... liturgical traditions and religious traditions where argument is not the central mode of discourse,” and generally assumes that “the contents of the arguments, the \textit{tradita}, are more important than the process of arguing, the \textit{traditio}” (Medley, 122n8).
thought.”108 From MacIntyre, Jorgenson emphasizes the role of argument within tradition, which intersects well with the oft-recognized role of Baptists as dissenters.109 That is, he argues that Baptists’ life as quintessential challengers of the status quo coheres with resources appropriated from MacIntyre.

Additionally, Jorgenson rightly points to the importance of MacIntyre’s work in critiquing modernity and its effects by arguing for “tradition-constituted rationality.” In other words, individuals do not stand alone in a vacuum; their understanding of the world has a context that underscores the importance of history for Baptists.110 Hence, Jorgenson observes that “MacIntyre’s account is amenable to Baptist sensibilities because it articulates a way to understand historical situatedness, contextual particularity, and the authoritative – yet fluid – nature of tradition.”111 MacIntyre’s work, not surprisingly, has featured prominently in Catholic Baptist writings, especially concerning the interconnection between practices, virtues, and narratives.

Jorgenson sees new possibilities for MacIntyre’s work to influence Catholic Baptist thought, offering several topics where the philosopher’s insights could benefit Baptists. For example, Baptists’ elevation of their dissenting role does not exempt them from acknowledging the place of tradition. That is, MacIntyre’s definition(s) of tradition embrace argument, disagreement, and dissent as vital to the life of the tradition itself.

108 Cameron Jorgenson, “Bapto-Catholicism: Recovering Tradition and Reconsidering the Baptist Identity” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2008), 175.
109 MacIntyre writes, “A living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition” [Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 2d ed (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 222].
110 “[N]o tradition’s claims can be assessed apart from its history” (Jorgenson, 191).
111 Ibid., 178.
However, “dissent is not an end unto itself,” meaning that “dissenting” Baptists must have some sense of that from which they are dissenting as well as that which binds together the dissenters and the tradition from which they are dissenting. This requires space for authority within the concept of tradition. Indeed, part of the nature of tradition is an argument about identity (i.e., what constitutes the tradition). Moreover, Jorgenson notes that MacIntyre points toward an understanding of tradition that is historically-situated. In this way, Baptists are led to engage the history of their tradition rather than simply the ideas.

**Sacramental Vision Sustained by Liturgy.** Another thematic emphasis for Catholic Baptists involves sacramentalism. The prevalent understanding of the sacraments for Baptists has been that they were merely symbols that did not communicate anything from God to the community of faith. They served as representations of the individual believer’s relationship with God (albeit within the corporate setting of worship). In contrast to this perspective, the Baptist Manifesto identifies the sacraments as powerful signs that link divine action (i.e., God’s faithfulness) and human action (i.e., response to God’s initiative). Along these lines, Baptist Manifesto contributor Mikael Broadway has attempted to broaden Baptist

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112 Ibid., 188-189.

113 For more details, see Harmon, 152, 157-159. Elizabeth Newman describes the “memorial” understanding of the Lord’s Supper as follows: “The primary meaning of the practice remains located in the individual believer, as he or she recalls the words of Jesus. Hence the words of the hymn, ‘In Remembrance’: ‘Don’t look above, look in your hearts, yes, in your hearts for God.’ Baptist worship re-enacts this individualized focus as participants remained seated in their pews during the Lord’s Supper and, even more, eat bread already separated and drink from individual cups” [Elizabeth Newman, “The Lord’s Supper: Might Baptists Accept a Theory of Real Presence?,” in *Baptist Sacramentalism* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2003), 215]. For a more positive view of memorialism, see Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 7-8.
conceptions of the Lord’s Supper by offering a more complex survey of Baptist convictions. More specifically, Broadway argues that when all Baptists (including African-American Baptists) are taken into account, the “memorialist” view does not appear as prevalent as advertised. That is, even within the Baptist tradition, a wide range of perspectives on the sacraments exists. Notably, he points out that significant numbers of Baptists (white and black) place emphasis within the Lord’s Supper on its social, political, and moral implications as well as its intrinsic connection to the Incarnation.

Harmon points out that Catholic Baptist theologians advocate for “a theology that understands the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist as paradigmatic of the relation of God to the material order that is disclosed in the Incarnation.” That is, their work opens up the surprising possibility for Baptists to embrace the mediation of the divine. In continuity with his work on seventeenth-century English Baptists, Philip Thompson notes these Baptists’ accent on what he calls “God’s two-fold freedom,” where human control cannot contain God (either conceptually or actually). Thus, creation is to be understood as distinct from the Creator; nonetheless, the freedom of God extends to God’s ability to utilize the created order for God’s purposes (e.g., mediating salvation to humans).

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115 Ibid., 422, 440-441.
116 Harmon, 13.
117 Thompson, “A New Question in Baptist History,” 60. Thompson notes that this is the impetus for the English Baptists’ opposition to infant baptism. As an institution of the state-supported Anglican church, such a practice “constituted the state’s usurpation of God’s prerogative in bringing persons into the church” (Ibid.).
This freedom is significant because it allows for theological discussions concerning the relation between ecclesiology, sacraments, and salvation:

[The full logic of the [seventeenth-century] Baptists’ theology of God’s freedom required a principle of mediation. The only living and true God was free to work in and through the things of earth as God ordained. Certainly, the Baptists strove to maintain a careful balance at this point, but they did not reject the sacramental idea. The locus of the second aspect of God’s freedom, that to mediate grace unto salvation, was the church and sacraments.]

While there are some Baptists who might argue for Baptist acceptance of the Catholic notion of transubstantiation, this need not be the case. Mediation within the sacraments does not require a particular theory of real presence. It does necessitate, however, acceptance of real presence itself. In other words, mediation of salvation to human beings through the powerful signs enacted in the sacraments means that the divine presence must play a prominent role.

Elizabeth Newman focuses on the biblical understanding of words as deeds to articulate a theory of real presence within the Eucharist that does not fully adopt transubstantiation (i.e., places all of the burden on the elements of the Lord’s Supper). To do so, she underscores the role of the community at worship in mediating Christ’s presence to the world, a presence that is received within the event of the Lord’s Supper:

Worship, oriented around the word and table, is structured so that we receive, through the power of the Holy Spirit, God’s word and deed, manifest most fully in the person of Christ. In receiving this gift, that is, Christ, the Church herself


119 Newman’s approach resonates with a shift of emphasis that emerged at the Second Vatican Council, where the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) stated that, in the Mass, Christ is present in the eucharistic elements, the person of the priest, the Scriptures, as well as “when the Church prays and sings” (§7).
becomes Christ’s own body for the world. The new reality that is brought into being and extended is the body of Christ, as those gathered around word and table are incorporated into Christ’s body. Thus, the real presence of God is manifest in the gathered community as it becomes the body of Christ for the world.  

The result from such reflections on conceptions of the sacraments is that new paths for theological investigations (both in conversation with interlocutors from within the Baptist tradition and without) are possible, allowing for renewed practice of these powerful signs.

**Engagement with Catholic Theology.** Harmon mentions that many Baptists are attempting what he calls “thick ecumenism,” which “proceeds on the basis of a common commitment both to deep exploration of the ancient ecumenical tradition and to deep exploration of the particularities of the respective denominational traditions.” Along these lines, several Catholic Baptist theologians have done more than try to push Baptists to embrace the notion of tradition among themselves or incorporate more liturgical practices (e.g., sacraments) into their worship; they have moved toward close conversations with Catholic theology. In other words, they have completely left behind the anti-Catholicism that colored Baptists’ past and seen dialogue with the broader Christian tradition (especially Catholicism) as central for the renewal that Baptist theological discourse needs.
One instance of this sort of engagement is found in the work of Curtis Freeman. Several of Freeman’s articles have addressed places of convergence for Catholics and Baptists. One article offers advice to Catholic theologians in light of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and its requirement that Catholic professors of theology receive a *mandatum*, effectively validating their teaching competence.\(^{123}\) Observing that, despite its reputation to the contrary, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith did not hold as much power as conservatives within the Southern Baptist Convention,\(^{124}\) Freeman notes that Baptists and Catholics have embarked on this conversation in vastly different ways. Nonetheless, there are still lessons to be learned from the Baptist experience.\(^{125}\) Throughout the article, a deep sense of respect and admiration for the Catholic university and its place within the church is present. Further, a handful of Baptist scholars have moved from addressing categories (e.g., tradition) that had previously been given over to Catholics to open attempts at theological dialogue, whether within their scholarship or in person. For instance, Scott Bullard’s dissertation offers Henri de Lubac’s work on the Eucharist as especially helpful for Baptists who aim to embrace a more sacramental (and consequently, more material and political) view of the Eucharist. Moreover, Jason Whitt’s work in a recent dissertation displays a level of engagement with the contours of Catholic thought.

\(^{124}\) Ibid., 21.  
\(^{125}\) Freeman advises that Catholic theologians stay in conversation with ecclesiastical authorities concerning the implementation of the *mandatum* requirement, speak the truth, and serve the goods of the university, society and the academy (Ibid., 22-23).
(specifically by treating Jacque Maritain’s New Christendom model of Catholicism) that was rarely seen earlier in Baptist life.\textsuperscript{126}

Maritain, influenced early in his life by the ideas of Action Française, left the movement after it was condemned by Pope Pius XI in 1927. However, he still held suspicions of the prospects of liberalism (animated by anthropocentric humanism) to sustain the depth of the Catholic faith. Thus, in a series of lectures given originally in Spanish in 1934 and later published as \textit{Integral Humanism},\textsuperscript{127} he developed a new model for Christendom that emphasized what he called theocentric humanism. Maintaining some sense of pluralism, Maritain aimed to bridge the gap between the sacred and profane we observed within the modern world. For his part, Whitt describes significant resonances between Baptist politics and ecclesiology and aspects of the history of Catholic thought (including the New Christendom model), not only bringing Baptist and Catholic ideas to stand closer together, but also placing Baptists in a position to learn from their Catholic brothers and sisters.

Such learning has slowly, but progressively occurred in conversations between Catholics and Baptists in the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One work that is at the frontier of this sort of engagement is Barry Harvey’s \textit{Can These Bones Live?}.\textsuperscript{128} In this book, Harvey attends to the social status of the church, noting that its present condition is one of dismemberment and fragmentation (hence the title’s reference to

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{126} Jason D. Whitt, “Transforming Views of Baptist Ecclesiology: Baptists and the New Christendom Model of Political Engagement” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2008).}


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{128} Barry Harvey, \textit{Can These Bones Live?: A Catholic Baptist Engagement with Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, and Social Theory} (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008).}
Ezekiel 37). His aim is to offer what he describes as “an exercise in theological hermeneutics.” That is, Harvey understands the contours of the church’s life to be “a socially embodied, historically extended interpretation of the world as lived in relation to God.” However, he argues that this problem of a divided church challenges virtually all aspects of the church’s theological discourse (including theological hermeneutics) as well as any use of the word *catholic* to describe the scope of the church’s focus. In other words, how can one speak of the church as the *civitas peregrina* (“pilgrim city” of God) if that city has no shared direction for that journey?

Harvey argues that the dismemberment of the church gradually unfolded through a domestication of the “distinctive way of life as a company of pilgrims” by the powers that ruled what Augustine would call the “earthly city.” Named for the conversion to Christianity by emperor Constantine (272-337), this slow erosion of ecclesial cohesion has been labeled “Constantinianism.” However, while Harvey is clear that Constantine “set into motion a series of events that would contribute materially to the dismemberment of the church as Christ’s true body,” he is also unambiguous in

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129 “The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’ Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord....’ Then he said to me, ‘Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.” Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord’” (Ezekiel 37:1-6, 11-14; NRSV).

130 Harvey, *Can These Bones Live?*, 13.

131 Ibid., 30.

declaring that simple and unnuanced uses of that term will not serve the discussion well:

We must take care... not to perpetuate a caricature or promote a blanket condemnation of what is often referred to as “Constantinianism.”... Many in the patristic era celebrated the first “Christian emperor” as a sign of divine providence, pronouncing his reign as an extension of Christ’s heavenly kingdom.... To such minds Constantine’s conversion marked the beginning of the corpus Christianum.  

Nonetheless, from the fourth century onward, Christianity was slowly transformed, resulting in a Christian identity that was disembodied: “[W]hatever it means to be Christian can no longer be tied to practices that constitute the church as a social body visibly, publicly manifesting the intrusion of God’s apocalyptic regime into the world, but must be limited to matters of the soul, leaving the body to the authority of the powers and economic principalities of this age.”

As resources for re-membering the church, Harvey focuses on “recreating a universe of theological discourse that has grown stagnant from misconstrual and neglect.” In the end, Harvey’s work can be characterized as an attempt to encourage Baptists and other Protestants to cultivate a thoroughgoing analogical imagination. Within his work, Harvey describes a world that is imbued with the sacred, though not to the same degree everywhere. Indeed, even in more subtle ways, “all created things are

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133 Harvey, Can These Bones Live?, 100, 99. John Howard Yoder, one of the original scholars to employ the term “Constantinianism,” also sought to guard the use of it. For instance, see “Christ, the Hope of the World,” in The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1998), 192-218, where Yoder offers a more differentiated view of the history of the church’s embrace of Constantinianism, even if awkwardly labeled (e.g., “neo-neo-neo-Constantinianism”).
134 Harvey, Can These Bones Live?, 123.
135 Ibid., 23.
also signs that refer to their beginning and end in God.”

This runs counter to the more common Protestant dialectical imagination, which (among other things) draws clear distinctions between the presence and absence of the divine. That is, God is located in certain places and not in others. Oftentimes, such a perspective results in a division between the spiritual and material world. However, an analogical imagination, commencing from a clear understanding of the incarnation, offers an alternative: “[T]he doctrine of the incarnation, God made flesh, authorizes the followers of Christ to live unreservedly in the material world without fear of being unfaithful to God.... The incarnation thus decisively disclosed the nature of the world as ‘sign’ or trace of its Creator.”

More specifically, a more sacramental understanding of ecclesial practices follows from this analogical imagination. The Eucharist becomes a vehicle for more than spiritual (read: private) encounters with God. Instead, it is also social and political: “This meal positioned all other realities, because it made a present reality ‘the present moment of ultimate exchange’ between God and humanity that Christians cannot but claim to be the basis for all other exchanges.’ The Eucharist... became the paradigm for all other exchanges between human beings.” While Harvey displays more engagement with the physical world than a dialectic view would employ, he does not mean to imply that there is not something distinct about that engagement. That is, if

\[\text{\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 21.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 31, 33.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 81; emphasis original.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{139} “Like everyone else..., we must eat, drink, find clothing, secure shelter, till the land and fashion instruments of all sorts, marry and give in marriage, raise and protect children, bury parents, and cope with natural disasters, debilitating disease, and social upheavals. We are called to do so, however,}\]

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analogy is viewed as some form of affirmation of the material world and its objects, this
does not remove the possibility of negation. At the same time, this negation, discussed
under the theme of apocalyptic, does not include a radical separation from the created
world. In fact, rather than divesting oneself of ties to the world, apocalyptic points one
toward the authentic “grain of the universe.”

In this sense, negation takes the form of re-orientation of one’s stance toward
the created order such that every aspect of the world is framed by the apocalyptic
action of God in Jesus Christ. Thus, while the analogical imagination is premised on
the radical distinction of God from God’s creation as well as the interruption that
occurred at the moment of the incarnation, this is not a departure from creation, but a
nuanced and negotiated engagement with it: “Because the incarnation does not simply
ratify the world as it is presently ordered, there is no reason to assume, for example,
that we owe unquestioned allegiance to the state, or that we are obligated to
participate in the ever-increasing levels of consumption required to sustain a global
economy. Our involvement in the natural realm is a matter of discernment....”

Because of the analogical imagination that permeates his book, Harvey, not
surprisingly, engages sources from the breadth of the Christian tradition, including
Catholics (e.g., Augustine, Aquinas, David Burrell, Nicholas Lash). The work of Catholic
theologian Denys Turner, who appears throughout the volume, plays a significant role in

\[\text{Ibid., 274.}\]
Harvey’s argument, especially regarding the relationship between faith and reason.\footnote{Cf. ibid., 169n15.} Moreover, de Lubac’s work is crucial, in particular his volumes on the status of scripture and medieval exegesis. Further, while he does cite de Lubac’s argument against the doctrine of “pure nature” at one point,\footnote{Ibid., 38.} there is an even greater theological resonance between Harvey and de Lubac on this point (i.e., some understanding of the “graced” character of creation), even if the former does not refer to the latter.

One place where this is evident is in Harvey’s discussion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s conception of the natural, which is derived from Catholic moral theology. Bonhoeffer understood the natural to be “that within creation which is directed toward the coming of Christ, while the unnatural is that which has closed itself off against Christ’s coming.”\footnote{Ibid., 273.} From this conceptualization, it is clear that Christ’s advent does not necessitate the abandonment of the created order, only a re-orientation of one’s stance toward it and re-direction of one’s use of its goods. Harvey links this (and the necessity of grace implied by it) with Aquinas’s notion of the natural desire to see God, a desire that “can be realized only by God’s gracious initiative.”\footnote{Ibid., 273-274.} Here, not only does Harvey via Bonhoeffer bring Catholic thought to bear on Baptist ideas, but his work intersects with that of de Lubac, for whom the natural desire to see God was central to his recovery of Thomas Aquinas.\footnote{Harvey also quotes Bonhoeffer on the necessity to hold together three elements of grace: becoming human, the crucifixion, and the resurrection (Ibid., 274). This also parallels de Lubac’s work at the point of maintaining the God’s grace is one gift, but is only perceived as two by human beings, the \textit{datum optimum} and the \textit{donum perfectum}. Moreover, Harvey writes “True creatureliness is only
Developments in Catholic Thought

Not only has Baptist theological discourse developed an openness to Catholic ideas, but Catholicism has broadened the scope of its interaction with other parts of Christianity, seen most distinctly at the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II; 1962-1965). At Vatican II, the Catholic Church issued, among other documents, the Declaration on Religious Freedom (Dignitatis Humanae) and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes), which took up a more conciliatory tone with the non-Catholic world than had been observed previously. This sentiment was emblematized in the use of the phrase “separated brethren” to refer to Christians outside of the Catholic Church. While the use of this phrase was not new, the way in which it was employed signified a shift in the status of Catholic-Protestant relations.

Moreover, the Decree on Ecumenism, Unitatis Redintegratio, noted, “[I]t remains true that all who have been justified by faith in Baptism are members of Christ’s body, and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.” Further, Protestant anxieties were eased when the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, stated “[The] Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church...

followable in terms of the relationship between the present age and the age to come, or between nature and grace, made visible in this age by the actions and speech of the risen Christ’s earthly-historical body” (Ibid).

This did not happen overnight. The work of Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838), Yves Congar (1904-1995) and even Henri de Lubac figured prominently in the decisions emerging from Vatican II.

Unitatis Redintegratio §1.

Cf., e.g., Leo XIII, Adiutricem (1895), §19; Caritatis Studium (1898), §1; Pius XI, Rerum Ecclesiae (1926), §23.

Unitatis Redintegratio §3.
although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.” While the primacy of the Catholic Church remains in this statement, it is clear that truth can reside among non-Catholic Christians. Finally, these documents evidence a difference in the terms used to refer to gathered Protestants, moving from viewing them as occupying sects to inhabiting “churches and ecclesial communities” where “the Church of Christ is present and operative.”

The Catholic Church has not only presented its theological stances in such a way as to appear open to dialogue. It has also sought to engage non-Catholics regarding key theological issues. Lutherans and Catholics began a series of conversations in 1964 and continue in the present. Two major events from these dialogues have been a joint statement on justification by faith (approved in 1983) and a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (completed in 1999). Baptists too have engaged in dialogue with the Catholic Church in order to discuss theological matters, though shared doctrinal positions have yet to emerge from these meetings. From the late 1960s until, most recently, December 2010, Baptist-Catholic dialogue of various sorts with different groups of Baptists has taken place.

152 Lumen Gentium §8.
While previous sets of conversations usually included either conservative or moderate Baptist participants, the most recent set of Baptist-Catholic dialogues are notable because they include several scholars from the informal tribe of Catholic Baptists. These meetings began in 2006, concluded in December 2010, and involved participants from the Baptist World Alliance and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, headed by Walter Cardinal Kasper. This was in fact the second phase of meetings between these two groups, the first having occurred from 1984 to 1988. The theme for the most recent five years of dialogue was “The Word of God in the Life of the Church: Scripture, Tradition, and *Koinonia.*”\(^{156}\) A wide range of topics, none of which were marked by simple agreement (e.g., Mary, ecclesiastical authority, Scripture and tradition, as well as the sacraments), set the agenda for the meetings, with the overarching goal of movement in the direction of unity. That is, both Catholics and Baptists saw John 17:21 as the biblical theme for this endeavor: “That they may all be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (NRSV).\(^{157}\)

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\(^{157}\) Pope Benedict XVI echoed this goal when he welcomed the participants to Rome in December 2007: “It is my hope that your conversations will bear abundant fruit for the progress of dialogue and the increase of understanding and cooperation between Catholics and Baptists... For the lack of unity between Christians openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and harms the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature” (Benedict XVI, “To Members of the Baptist World Alliance,” December 6, 2007. See: [http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20071206_baptist-alliance_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20071206_baptist-alliance_en.html)).
Baptists and de Lubac

The proposed Baptist engagement of de Lubac’s work offers several points of agreement and constructive critique to elements of the Catholic Baptist project. That is, appropriation of de Lubac and other ressourcement thought deeply resonates with much of the efforts of these Baptist theologians. For instance, the formative role of the church and the importance of the mediation of God’s grace by means of the material world figure prominently in Catholic Baptist work. With de Lubac’s noncompetitive, yet distinguishable construal of nature and grace, one can perceive the activity of God within the physical world. In other words, God is not relegated to a separate sphere. Rather, the material creation offers resources for the mediation of the divine. As Catholic Baptists have also acknowledged, this is important regarding ecclesiology and the sacraments. Instead of viewing the church as a social group that one chooses just like any other, it is the anticipation of humanity’s full participation in God. That is, something of the paradigm of communion with God and with all creation is imaged within the ekklesia. The church is understood to be not only the gathered living community, but the communion of saints through the ages.158

The sacraments, then, take on new life for Baptists, and revisiting the rhetoric of soul competency and its prohibition of “religion by proxy” is crucial to understanding the nature of God and God’s interaction with the world. Moreover, denial of the mediation of grace within the sacraments has the serious danger of excluding God’s activity from history. That is, it exempts the physical world from the presence of God.

more than is already the case due to sin. This is problematic for Baptists because it leaves them vulnerable to an extrinsicism that requires Baptists to “superadd” grace (in the form of individual internal experience of God) to nature (work, marriage, church, and ordinances). Furthermore, Baptist construals of the sacraments (usually called “ordinances”) also underscore the individual’s relationship with God, with the social aspects of these ecclesial acts diminished if not eliminated entirely. For these Baptists, the primary location of Christian faith is not the church, but the individual heart of each Christian.

De Lubac, on the other hand, offers an account of the sacraments that understands not only grace to be mediated to humanity, but also views the sacraments as primarily social in nature. Once again, the centrality of the church is unmistakable, where the church mediates Christ to the world. Consequently, those bound up with the church are an anticipation of the union with Christ at the eschaton, producing an altogether new form of sociality. De Lubac presents an understanding of the sacraments that, intersecting with concerns for Christian sociality (e.g., those found in the Baptist Manifesto) and the relation of the natural and the supernatural, can be refreshing to Baptists who are seeking to recover the sacraments as mediations of God’s grace to the church for the sake of the world.

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Regarding the issue of freedom, which Baptists have historically held high in one way or another, de Lubac’s thought resonates with ideas found in the Baptist Manifesto. The document is clear that freedom is primarily theological in nature and does not operate in a negative, juridical manner that frees the individual from any sort of interference.\textsuperscript{162} In other words, “a theologically attuned understanding of freedom recognizes that it can never be a right neatly divorced from the good.”\textsuperscript{163} Similarly, de Lubac addresses the topic of freedom by treating the freedom for pursuing the will of God. This freedom is bound up with the freedom of God and the gratuity of grace, which are prioritized by de Lubac.\textsuperscript{164} The freedom of God, then, establishes a context for any human freedom, ordering such freedom to its proper end while not obliterating it. In this way, the natural is imbued with a supernatural end that integrates nature and grace while distinguishing them. Thus, any discussion about freedom that derives from creation must be theologically related to that end.

Connected to the notion of freedom is the emphasis on voluntarism that Baptist theologians and historians utilize. At times voluntarism is touted as part and parcel (and perhaps even definitive) of Baptist identity.\textsuperscript{165} To deny that twenty-first century Christians live in a world that is characterized by voluntarism would be difficult and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{162} Freeman, “Re-envisioning Baptist Identity,” 303.
\bibitem{164} “[T]he will of God is the first thing..., and therefore God’s liberty is total” [Henri de Lubac, \textit{The Mystery of the Supernatural}, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967; reprint, New York: Herder & Herder, 1998), 99]. Because of this, de Lubac will write, “The supernatural is not owed to nature; it is nature which, if it is to obey God’s plan, owes itself to the supernatural if that supernatural is offered to it” (Ibid., 94).
\end{thebibliography}
likely untrue. However, it would seem that a form of voluntarism, emphasizing the individual’s free and unencumbered ability to choose any course of action, contributes to the theological dilemmas related to baptism, discipleship, and conversion that originally prompted this study. That is, this voluntarism can produce the zero-sum game between divine and human agency.

Catholic philosopher/theologian David Burrell has discussed similar issues in his treatment of freedom. He cautions against conceptions of freedom that create a hedge around the autonomous agent: “[O]nce the created agent is deemed to be autonomous, precisely to guarantee its capacity of initiation, then creature and creator will be conceived in parallel, the divine activity will be termed ‘concursus,’ and the stage is set for a zero-sum game in which one protagonist’s gain is the other’s loss.”

Burrell argues that John Duns Scotus, in contrast to Aquinas, displays this understanding of freedom, in part because of his lack of an ontological distinction between creator and creatures. Voluntarism would be constrained when seen through the theological lens of de Lubac’s work. Because of the primacy of the freedom of God, whatever we could call “voluntarism” might resonate with James McClendon’s reflections on the subject,

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167 David B. Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), xviii-xix. “Scotus thereby sought to enshrine human freedom in a self-moving faculty—the will—which could itself ‘elicit’ acts. Effectively separated from ‘outside’ influences, like discernment, human responsibility was secured by making the will a first mover” [David B. Burrell, “Creation, Metaphysics, and Ethics,” *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001): 216]. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to treat in detail the theological and philosophical differences between Aquinas and Scotus and the ways in which Scotus may or may not directly contribute to the hyperemphasis on the will evidenced within modern society. Nonetheless, within Burrell’s argument, Scotus plays a significant role.
where voluntary simply means that “we [consent] to be the Christians that we [are].”168

Thus, Baptists could hold to some sort of voluntarism, but it should be shaped by the freedom of God, which includes the freedom to form a people by means of creation, time, and context.

As has been observed, there are significant intersections between the work of Catholic Baptists and that of de Lubac (and even more resonances that offer potential for fruitful dialogue). These points of commonality should be helpful for Catholic Baptists in finding conversation partners for what has been mentioned as a Baptist ressourcement.169 Moreover, de Lubac is cited on several occasions by Catholic Baptists, often to clarify a crucial theological point that has been misconstrued by contemporary Baptists. For example, Curtis Freeman cites de Lubac’s work in Corpus Mysticum to argue that Catholic sacramental theology is not a static entity (as is usually presumed by Baptists), but has undergone development over time, especially in the twentieth century.170 Nevertheless, on several theological points, de Lubac offers some

168 James McClendon, “The Believers Church in Theological Perspective” in The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder, ed. Stanley Hauerwas, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 311. The full discussion by McClendon is as follows: “[W]as our church... voluntary? Certainly so, if that meant we consented to be the Christians that we were. In that sense, though, the membership of every church in our town, every church in North America, was and is voluntary: no tax to support a state church; no law constituting us Lutherans or Buddhists or Catholics or Baptists..... If that is all ‘voluntary’ meant, it has no present use and we can move on to other matters. Contrariwise, if by ‘voluntary’ any mean to deny the influence of others’ lives upon their own, that is simply mistaken: I owe what I am, including my so-called ‘free’ choices, to a variety of influences and conditionings that make me so; beneath all these influences, as I believe, are the everlasting arms of divine election and divine providence” (Ibid.).

169 Cf. Harmon, 15; Jorgenson, 121.

170 Curtis W. Freeman, “‘To Feed Upon by Faith’: Nourishment from the Lord’s Table,” in Baptist Sacramentalism, 196. Further, he notes several parallels between Catholics and Baptists: “The displacement of the eucharist from the social aspects of ecclesiology paved the way for individualistic eucharistic piety among Catholics in much the same way that the disjunction of the visible and invisible Church in Protestantism made possible the movement to private individual religion. De Lubac’s attention
qualifications and concerns, all of which also have the potential to benefit future Baptist theological discourse.

First, while Catholic Baptist engagement with the topic of tradition has been crucial in their work, ressourcement thought has voices to bring to this conversation. Yves Congar (1904-1995), a French Dominican cardinal and theologian addresses the role of tradition, countering the idea that tradition simply involved passing down the “deposit of faith,” or the sacred teachings of the church. Instead, he argues, like Tilley, that tradition is more than *trādīta*, it is also *trādītio*.\(^{171}\) Congar, like de Lubac, portrays the embrace of tradition as involving several tasks: “Tradition, then, comprises two equally vital aspects: one of development and one of conservation.”\(^{172}\) Therefore, for Congar, tradition is living as it is embodied in the lives of Christians through the ages.\(^{173}\) However, unlike Tilley, Congar’s appropriation of the multivalent term *tradition* is imbued with more theological content, even described as central to the economy of salvation.\(^{174}\) That is, Congar’s treatment of tradition begins and ends with the particularity of the Christian tradition. Thus, he argues that tradition is “the transmission of the faith and Christian life, which in our own lives is transformed into Christian behavior, profession of faith before men and praise of God.”\(^{175}\)

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\(^{172}\) Ibid., 117, 121-122.

\(^{173}\) “Tradition is living because it is carried by living minds – minds living in time.... Tradition is living because it resides in minds that live by it, in a history that comprises activity, problems, doubts, opposition, new contributions and questions that need answering” (Ibid., 78).

\(^{174}\) Ibid., 10-11. Tilley even admits that Congar is “working almost exclusively within the history of the Christian tradition...” (Tilley, 51).

\(^{175}\) Congar, 50.
of tradition positions it as something that Baptists should not neglect. Further, Congar’s understanding of tradition brings to light closer affinities between Catholics and Baptists since they will not only be embracing a similar philosophical category; they will be exploring the Christian faith and the depths of the gospel in a similar manner.

Moreover, the context of Congar’s ecclesiological reflections is a twentieth-century, post-Reformation church where Catholics encounter Christians from other traditions on a regular basis. Consequently, working toward healing wounds of a broken church is part and parcel of his theological reflections. Congar notes that the “seeds of his ecumenical vocation” came from the fact that his childhood friends in the French Third Republic were Jewish and Protestant. Baptists experience a similarly pluriform context that, like Congar’s, raises questions about the location and authority of the Christian theological tradition: what claims does the setting make on one’s own tradition? One’s neighbor’s tradition?

Congar discusses the shifts among Catholicism and Protestantism regarding tradition, viewing this category as crucial to any positive steps within the ecumenical movement. In fact, Congar imagines tradition in a manner that would be open to conversations with Baptists (including Baptists’ penchant for dissent): “Tradition is not disjunctive; it is synthesis and harmony.... Tradition creates a totality, a harmony, a synthesis.” That is, Congar does not intend tradition to produce uniformity. Instead, it weaves a tapestry of Christian witness, embodied throughout time. Baptists, then, can

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177 Cf. Congar, 162-166.
178 Ibid., 98.
participate in this conversation and offer their voice, even in moments of dissent.

However, Baptists will need to recognize, as Medley and Jorgenson point out, that the role of dissent underscores the significance of that from which one is dissenting.

The topic of tradition also raises a slight reservation about MacIntyre and his utility for Catholic Baptists. While MacIntyre’s work has been of great service to Catholic Baptists, especially methodologically, in framing the most important issues facing any effort to re-envision Baptist identity (and for that, as Jorgenson indicates, they are in his debt), it seems clear that there may be a limit to the value of his work. One area where this appears is in MacIntyre’s understanding of the work of philosophy, where he maintains a strong distinction between philosophy and theology. Stanley Hauerwas, a theologian who has had equal impact on Catholic Baptists and for whom MacIntyre has served as a significant influence, points to a 1991 interview where MacIntyre refutes any theological overtones to his philosophical work, concluding by stating, “My philosophy, like that of many Aristotelians, is theistic; but it is as secular in its content as any other.”179 The assertion that his philosophy is “secular” has serious theological implications, as pointed out by Hauerwas:

MacIntyre’s strong claim for the independence of philosophy from theology is all the more puzzling in that it seems to put him on the side of Scotus. In Three Rival Versions, he criticizes Scotus who, in contrast to Aquinas, set the stage for the autonomy of philosophy.... My worry is that MacIntyre’s understanding of the secular may be analogous to some of the neo-Scholastic accounts of nature that resulted in making grace little more than an “add-on.”180

180 Stanley Hauerwas, With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), 23n18. Hauerwas (for all of his intellectual indebtedness to MacIntyre) echoes these sentiments six years later in an article commemorating the accomplishments of MacIntyre:
Thus, MacIntyre’s immense benefits for renewing Baptist theological discourse (including an appreciation for the work of Maréchal and Rousselot)\(^{181}\) might need to be steeled against this philosophy/theology division, which could also manifest itself as a nature/grace division, threatening to unravel the invaluable gains of Catholic Baptists.

**Ressourcement Method**

An important lesson that Baptists can learn from de Lubac concerns his theological method. *Ressourcement*, or “returning to the sources,” has some rhetorical resonance for Baptists, even if the referent for “sources” is not usually the same for Catholics and Baptists. Nonetheless, Steven Harmon notes that this method can be seen in some of the work of Catholic Baptists, especially with regard to recovering a sense of tradition.\(^{182}\) Curtis Freeman, for example, encourages Baptists to embrace a broader sense of Christian unity by 1) listening carefully “to voices within the heritage of the whole church” and 2) listening cautiously “to the voices of the past by always referring new insights to shared baptist convictions.”\(^{183}\)

This attention to history is significant among Catholic Baptists and can serve as a bridge to de Lubac’s understanding of *ressourcement*, which offers even more

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\(^{181}\) Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 76. MacIntyre also describes how the Thomism that influenced Leo XIII and *Aeterni Patris* (1879), coming from Joseph Kleutgen, was more Suárez than Thomas, making Thomas into a finished system or the “culmination of a tradition” (Ibid., 74-75).

\(^{182}\) Harmon, 15.

\(^{183}\) Freeman, “A Confession for Catholic Baptists,” 86.
theological resources for Baptists to engage the broader catholic tradition. Indeed, his method of recovering a fuller reading of the tradition’s understanding of the natural and the supernatural can make possible a more robust Baptist theology. As de Lubac encourages readers of The Mystery of the Supernatural, “[W]e return at once... to simplicity and to antiquity.”¹⁸⁴ It is important to remember, however, that ressourcement involves the identification, recovery, and evaluation of the readings of particular people within the tradition that have been forgotten and cast aside. In other words, it is always already historical and theological. Such a return to the sources, though, will not be purely a restoration of an older, yet static, set of circumstances. That is, instead of defining Baptist theology in terms of principles or distinctives, thorough historical theological work must take on a new life in a new context. As de Lubac writes, “[R]eturning to the essence of an older position can never be purely and simply a return.”¹⁸⁵ Thus, Baptists should treat well-known people like Isaac Backus, H. Wheeler Robinson, and even George W. Truett and E.Y. Mullins, yet more historical work in locating and studying the presently-unknown Baptist analogues for those whom Balthasar calls “the great among the vanquished” must be done as well.

A discussion of theological method for Baptists would be incomplete if it did not address the role of Scripture. De Lubac does not marginalize the Bible, but he does argue that Scripture does not operate in a vacuum. Since the tradition of the church preceded the codification of Scripture, de Lubac states that the church must be central

¹⁸⁴ de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, 14
¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 18.
in understanding the Bible and that a rigid adherence to *sola scriptura* will fall short.\(^{186}\)

The church, then, is the context within which one addresses the interpretation of Scripture,\(^{187}\) human freedom, even freedom to interpret the Bible, is properly located within the church. Consequently, Baptists will need to move beyond the rhetoric of biblicism and recognize the ways in which subtle “tradition(s)” already shape biblical interpretation, and embrace a broader role for tradition to clarify and to elaborate the witness of Scripture.

With this background material now in view, the task will be to apply de Lubac’s historical theological method to the Baptist tradition. In a manner similar to de Lubac’s challenge of prevalent readings of the ideas of theological ancestors (e.g., Aquinas) and his simultaneous restoration of those who had been theologically “sacked,” the remainder of this project will re-examine the ideas and people who have been elevated by contemporary Baptists and recover the voices of those who have fallen through the cracks. For the former, E.Y. Mullins and George W. Truett will be the subject matter. These individuals are important to this project for several reasons. First, both of them emerge from the Southern Baptist Convention, which is not to say that their concerns are provincial; in fact, due to the intellectual and cultural stability of the South (the most “Baptist” places of higher education, esp. divinity training schools, were located within the SBC), it is less difficult to describe these Christians as distinctly Baptist. Their

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\(^{186}\) Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Richard Armande (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 69. Likewise, Congar states, “Both Scripture and tradition are human and divine, but in different degrees and conditions. It would be misleading to say that Scripture was wholly divine and tradition purely human: Scripture too is human and historical” (Congar, 99).

\(^{187}\) Balthasar: “Scripture is read by the Church and by the individual only within the Church” (Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 76).
influence also extends beyond Southern Baptist life. Second, there is a variety of 
thought within Baptist life, and these two individuals’ ideas still hold sway today 
(perhaps in a more essentialized manner as well), making the interpretation of their 
moments of much more import to the Baptist tradition. Mullins, the subject of the next 
two chapters and architect of what he called the “axioms of religion,” centered on soul 
competency, holds a treasured place among contemporary Baptists because of the 
manner in which his theological innovation reinforced a personal sense of religion.

As Harvey’s work illustrates, theological endeavors are sharpened by 
appropriating the contributions of the exchanges about nature and grace. That is, 
Baptists would do well to engage these and other elements of Catholic theology, which 
would bring Baptists into close conversation with de Lubac’s work. Therefore, for both 
Mullins and Truett, de Lubac’s method and the lens of the nature/grace problematic will 
be employed in order to reveal the unintended yet still perilous consequences of their 
ideas as embraced and developed by later Baptists. Additionally, this project will aim to 
restore the voices of the (relatively) forgotten within the Baptist tradition, such as 
certain English Baptists of the seventeenth century and African-American Baptists. 
Through the ways in which each of them proclaims and practices the Baptist faith, they 
implicitly embody an understanding of nature and grace that bears a closer resemblance 
to that of de Lubac and the broader Catholic tradition.
Edgar Young (E.Y.) Mullins is not a relatively well-known name within American religious history. Nonetheless, among Baptists, Mullins stands as a theological luminary for twentieth-century Baptists (especially those in the American South). The perceived importance of Mullins and his thought has not diminished over time. If anything, as the turmoil within the Southern Baptist Convention has threatened the stability of the denomination, scholarship concerning Mullins has only increased, marking him as a site for contemporary Baptist thought. In the past fifteen years, for example, his magnum opus, *The Axioms of Religion*, has been reprinted twice, three issues of different Baptist journals have been dedicated to discerning his legacy, and innumerable Baptists have

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held him in high esteem, describing him in terms such as “Mr. Baptist,” “Interpreter of the Baptist Tradition,” and “Public Spokesperson for Baptists in America.”

This chapter details the life and thought of Mullins, underscoring his significance for contemporary Baptists. Indeed, Mullins is more than simply one Baptist voice. He represents one of several theological authorities for twentieth-century Baptists, something of a norm for what passes as Baptist orthodoxy. In this chapter, the contours of Mullins’s life will be described followed by a discussion of major aspects of his thought, including his central theological concept, soul competency. The next chapter will return to de Lubac and the nature/grace problematic. While Mullins did not employ this terminology, de Lubac’s work can nonetheless offer a helpful evaluation of Mullins as a signal Baptist “moment,” commenting not only on his ideas, but also his legacy among his Baptist descendents. In other words, this project is interested not only in what Mullins said and did, but also (and perhaps more importantly) in what others have said about and done with Mullins.

**Mullins’s Life**

Edgar Young Mullins was born on January 5, 1860 in Franklin County, Mississippi, the fourth child and oldest son of eventually nine children born to Seth and Cornelia Mullins. Both Edgar’s father and grandfather were Baptist preachers. Seth’s vocation is

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in fact what brought the Mullins family to Franklin County, as he was the pastor of Hopewell Baptist Church near Bude. However, since the compensation at this church was not sufficient, other forms of work were adopted by Edgar’s father. After several moves around the state, the Mullins family eventually decided to leave for Texas, arriving in Corsicana (approx. 60 miles SSE of Dallas) in November 1869 in order to “reorganize a Baptist church and establish a school.”

Since Mullins had not converted to Christianity, he did not closely associate himself with his father’s church work. Nonetheless, he was encouraged to find part-time employment, which included working for a local paper and as a telegraph operator. Seth Mullins had earned a Master of Arts degree from Mississippi College, and likewise encouraged his children to pursue education. Young Edgar was first educated at his father’s school and was influenced by his father’s broader reading interests. At age sixteen, Edgar left home for college. Rather than attending Baptist-affiliated Baylor College in Independence, Texas (his three older sisters had attended Baylor Female College at the same location), Mullins enrolled at the new Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas (now Texas A&M University) in College Station near Bryan, Texas, the state’s first public institution of higher education. According to William Ellis, possible

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7 Ibid. Ellis refers to 1860 census data that indicates that Seth Mullins had $1600 in income and $5500 in personal property, which “consisted of four slaves, all rather young, but at least two of whom were old enough to be field hands.” Ellis also estimates that more than fifty percent of the population in Franklin County consisted of slaves (Ibid).
8 Ibid., 4.
9 Ibid., 6.
11 Ellis notes Edgar was exposed to a volume by Herbert Spencer, Jared Sparks’s Library of American Biography, as well as Henry George’s Progress and Poverty (Ellis, 5).
reasons for this decision include his lack of a religious conversion at this point in his life, the relative affordability of an education, and the appeal of a technical education to a man who was proficient operating a telegraph.¹²

When the school’s first term opened on October 4, 1876, Mullins was among the original 40 students. It was mandatory that all students serve in the school’s Corps of Cadets, which meant that students “received a literary or liberal arts course within a military atmosphere.”¹³ Mullins took his studies seriously and graduated in 1879, returning to full-time telegraphy afterward in Galveston, Texas with plans to prepare to study law. The next year, however, while on a trip to Dallas, Mullins attended a revival service led by Major William E. Penn, leading to his conversion to Christianity and subsequent baptism by his father in Corsicana on November 7, 1880.¹⁴

Ministerial Experience

Soon after his baptism, Mullins began to sense a call to Christian ministry and entered the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky in 1881.¹⁵ During his four years at Southern, he completed the requirements for the “full course,” which included studies in biblical languages, German, Latin, scripture classes, as well as church history and theology.¹⁶ After graduation, Mullins accepted the pastorate of Harrodsburg Baptist Church in Harrodsburg, Kentucky (approx. 35 miles SW of

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¹² Ibid., 7.
¹³ Ibid., 8.
¹⁴ Ibid., 9.
¹⁵ The seminary had moved to Louisville in 1877 from its original location, Greenville, South Carolina.
¹⁶ Ellis, 12-14.
Lexington) and was ordained to the ministry by the church on June 6, 1885. He had desired to become a missionary to Brazil, but left this hope behind when he received medical advice that such a trip could be hazardous to his health. While at Harrodsburg, Mullins married Isla May Hawley in 1886, whom he had met in Louisville while he was in seminary.

In 1888, Mullins moved to Lee Street Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland, which offered him a more metropolitan ministry. As Albert Mohler points out, Louisville and Baltimore also extended Mullins’s cultural knowledge beyond what he had experienced in Mississippi and Texas: “Like Louisville, Baltimore was a meeting place of northern and southern cultures.” Soon after their move, Edgar and Isla May celebrated the birth of their first child, Edgar Wheeler. Ministry in Baltimore exposed Mullins to new social concerns, and he developed a sense of social consciousness about issues such as children’s safety and the rights of labor. Moreover, his status within the city grew over the course of his seven years at Lee Street. However, not everything was joyous during their stay. In 1891, Mullins’s second child, Roy Granberry, died from complications of an incorrect prescription when he was only four weeks old.

In 1895, Mullins left Baltimore to serve in an administrative position within the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, located in Richmond, Virginia. This lasted only a few months as tensions arose between Mullins and his supervisor. Because of this, Mullins was happy to accept the pastorate at Newton

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17 Ibid., 18.
18 Ibid., 17-18.
20 Ellis, 21-22.
Centre Baptist Church in the Boston area, though his family moved only one month after the tragic death of their first son due to illness in February 1896.

At Newton Centre, Mullins was located at the intersection of ministry and academia. Not only was Boston adjacent to Newton Centre, but Mullins was in close proximity to Boston University, Harvard College, and the Newton Theological Institution, the oldest Baptist seminary in the country and the professional home for many of his parishioners. In many ways, the Mullinses’ time in Massachusetts signaled a period of respite from the busy life of Baltimore, tensions in Richmond, and personal tragedies in the deaths of their sons. Moreover, the elevated academic level of his congregation provided Edgar with significant intellectual stimulation as he fulfilled his duties as pastor. Nonetheless, Mullins’s time at Newton Centre was short-lived, largely because of events occurring in Louisville at Southern Seminary.

“The Whitsitt Controversy”

When John Broadus, professor of New Testament and homiletics (and from 1888 onward, president of Southern Seminary), died in 1895, William Heth Whitsitt succeeded him as president. Whitsitt, a church history professor at Southern since 1872, soon was opposed by Southern Baptist conservatives, who at that time were proponents of “Landmarkism.” Landmark Baptists, or “Landmarkers,” argued that Baptist practices, particularly believer’s baptism and congregational church governance, were present throughout the history of Christianity, even predating practices that may

21 Mohler, “Introduction,” 5. Ellis reports that most of the faculty of Newton Theological Institution attended Mullins’s church (Ellis, 31).
be described as more “Roman Catholic” in nature. The point of such claims (known as “church successionism”) was that Baptists could not be seen as a relatively recent player on the Christian ecclesial landscape because “Baptist” churches had existed throughout all of Christian history.\(^{22}\) The result was the view that visible Baptist congregations represented the Kingdom of God on earth.

Igniting what is now called “The Whitsitt Controversy,”\(^{23}\) Whitsitt, in an 1895 article and an 1896 monograph, countered the increasingly popular Landmark sentiments by questioning whether English Anabaptists actually practiced believer’s baptism by immersion before 1641 and by stating that Roger Williams (renowned for his distinction as the first Baptist in the United States) was likely “sprinkled rather than totally immersed.”\(^{24}\) As Ellis notes, Whitsitt’s arguments were not merely an academic exercise: “Many ill-educated Southern Baptists... glorified the ‘Baptist distinctives’ that gave them their separate identity and that Whitsitt seemed to attack.”\(^{25}\) The dispute was elevated by the prevalence of Landmark ideas within the Southern Baptist Convention (renowned Landmarker B.H. Carroll was dean of the theology department at Baylor and would later prove instrumental in founding Southwestern Baptist Theological

\(^{22}\) It should be noted that some, though not all, Landmark Baptists identified with particular historical “Baptist-like” congregations (even if some had been viewed as heterodox), such as the Waldensians, Lollards, the medieval Cathari, Donatists, and Montanists. The most prominent historical arguments along these lines are G.H. Orchard, A Concise History of Foreign Baptists, 1838 (reprinted by Landmark leader J.R. Graves in 1855) and James M. Carroll, Trail of Blood, 1931, which appears in Curtis W. Freeman, James Wm. McClendon Jr., and C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell, eds., Baptist Roots: A Reader in the Theology of a Christian People (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1999), 233-240.


\(^{25}\) Ellis, 33.
Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas) and by Whitsitt’s refusal to recant his position, to threaten the fabric of the Convention itself and its ties to its flagship (and, at that time, only seminary). ²⁶ For his part, Mullins remained in contact with the events of the South, even noting his defense of Whitsitt by writing a series of articles, including one that described Landmark Baptists as “a Roman Catholic party among the Baptists.”²⁷ A split of the Southern Baptist Convention was averted, however, when Whitsitt submitted his resignation in 1899.

In the search for a new president after Whitsitt, the board of Southern Seminary was tasked to find someone who might be able to transcend the divisions and bring the contentious parties together. Eventually Mullins’s name emerged as a clear candidate who was viewed by many in the South to be “a man untouched by the controversy over Whitsitt.”²⁸ He had been pastoring mainly outside the orbit of the South in Baltimore and Boston. Moreover, as far as anyone could remember, Mullins did not have an entrenched opinion regarding the recent dispute that would polarize one Baptist faction or another.²⁹ On June 29, 1899, E.Y. Mullins was elected the fourth president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.³⁰ Once he accepted the position, he set himself to the task of healing the wounds of partisan strife as well as navigating the continuing concerns of both Landmarkers and non-Landmarkers. As fellow seminary professor A.T.

²⁶ Ibid., 34-36.
²⁸ Ellis, 36.
²⁹ Ellis notes the surprising nature of this identification with Mullins. Describing the deliberations about Mullins, he writes, “During a lengthy discussion Mullins gained support.... One trustee mentioned that he had read something that Mullins had written about Whitsitt, but he could not remember which side the Newton Centre minister took in the Whitsitt debate” (Ibid., 37).
³⁰ Ibid.
Robertson noted later in life, “He was watched sharply by both sides to see how fair he would be.”

President of Southern Seminary

At Southern, Mullins took on the added role of administrator, especially focusing on the financial status of the seminary. While he had received modest support from the factions associated with the Whitsitt Controversy, Mullins was keenly aware that, due to the seminary’s funding structure (dependent upon contributions from individual Baptists and organizations), there was a direct relationship between doctrinal disputes among Baptists and the financial support Southern received. These concerns largely prevented Mullins from doing a great deal of significant theological work. He did, however, establish a Baptist theological journal, Review and Expositor (initially the title was Baptist Review and Expositor). Starting in April 1904, the quarterly publication, which served as Southern Baptists’ only scholarly journal for some time, aimed to express more openly the depth and breadth of Baptist scholarship (the journal was interested in Northern Baptist contributions as well). Mullins, like his Southern Seminary presidential successors (until 1996), served as the editor-in-chief.

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32 Ellis, 39-40. Because of these and other struggles, Mullins was instrumental in the eventual founding of the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program, which collectively raises money for numerous SBC institutions, including seminaries, mission boards and other denominational agencies, as well as state Baptist associations.
34 In 1996, in response to the conservative reforms of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president Albert R. Mohler, Review and Expositor broke ties with the seminary and was supported and
Moreover, Mullins participated in the first Baptist World Congress meeting in London in 1905. There he delivered a speech on July 14 entitled, “The Theological Trend,” which expounded upon new developments in religious and philosophical thought, concluding with six axioms that he viewed as “the basis at once for a new Baptist apologetic and a platform for universal adoption.” This address, which also appeared in *Review and Expositor*, along with one at the American Baptist Publication Society in St. Louis in 1905, two at Richmond College and The Baptist General Association in 1906, and one in 1907 in Jamestown at the Baptist Convention of North America, became the foundation of Mullins’s 1908 book, *The Axioms of Religion*. The aim of the book was twofold. For Baptists, Mullins hoped to restate Baptist positions in order to facilitate greater clarity for other Christians, thereby inspiring further theological work among Baptists. Outside the Baptist fold, however, Mullins intended to argue for distinct Baptist contributions to the proper understanding of New Testament Christianity. That is, he wanted to declare that to embrace biblical Christianity meant in some sense to become Baptist.

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39 “[W]e shall find that there are a number of great elementary truths, of the nature of axioms, which lie at the heart of the Baptist conception of Christianity.... [T]hese universal and self-evident truths are simply the expression of the universal elements in Christianity and thus serve as the best statement of what the religion of Christ is in its essential nature” (Ibid., 50).
Throughout his time at Southern Seminary, Mullins maintained, for the most part, a moderate stance on most issues. Kentucky was viewed as a border state between the North and the South, and Mullins’s interactions with both Southern and Northern Baptists ideas proved to be tempering influences as well. Moreover, his position at an institution of the stature of Southern heightened Mullins’s prominence among Baptists across the United States. The result was that, “[b]y 1920 Mullins was established as the most important moderate Baptist leader in the country.”

This standing was also manifested in Mullins’s roles within the wider Baptist bureaucratic structure(s). From 1921 to 1923, he served as the president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and from 1923 to 1928, he was president of the Baptist World Alliance. Nonetheless, a significant portion of Mullins’s later years were given to the debate surrounding the theory of evolution. After early discussions among Baptists in the late-1910s, the controversy became more intense in 1923. Mullins, in his opening address to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting that year, which he titled, “Science and Religion,” argued that neither field needed to take an oppositional posture toward the other. Science and religion had different aims and approaches, and there was no need for antievolution legislation.

Despite Mullins’s efforts, the evolution debates continued to threaten the unity of the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1924, antievolutionists argued for an “outright

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40 Ellis, 145.
41 Ibid., 166-167.
repudiation” of evolution. Mullins managed to keep such an action from the floor of the 1924 Southern Baptist Convention meeting by proposing that a committee write a statement for presentation at the 1925 meeting. Mullins served as the chair of this seven-person committee, which was assigned the task of developing a “Statement of Baptist Faith and Message.” C.P. Stealey, editor of the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger, was the only member of the committee who was an avowed antievolutionist. Among the members, Stealey argued for a new confessional statement, stating “the well known confusion in the religious world... seems to me to make it very desirable for us to give testimony to the world for the glory of our Christ, about whom there is much confusion of thought today, and to steady and strengthen our own people.”

Mullins, though he had reservations, held the opinion that sometimes confessional statements could serve a limited purpose. That is, he did not view confessions and creeds as always invalid. To clarify his position on the proper nature of confessions of faith, Mullins penned a ten-point purpose statement, which was the substantial source for the five points of clarification regarding confessions of faith found in the preface to the 1925 “Baptist Faith and Message,” which was passed.

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42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
46 Handscript of E.Y. Mullins, Mullins Papers. These ten points can be found in Hinson, “E.Y. Mullins on Confessions of Faith,” 54-55.
overwhelmingly at the 1925 Southern Baptist Convention meeting. While this statement would be revised by Baptists in 1963 and later in 2000, Mullins’s efforts minimized the impact of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy on Southern Baptists, enabling them to maintain a moderate position for the majority of the twentieth century.

While the decisions at the 1925 meeting resulted largely from Mullins’s elevated prominence within the convention, the circumstances shifted following that year as Mullins “lost his dominant position in the Convention and was no longer able to control Convention meetings as he had in the early 1920s.” Opposition from within the convention continued. In fact, when conservatives praised a Baptist entity for rejecting a more moderate stance with regard to evolution, it described it as a repudiation of “Pope” Mullins. One last public effort by Mullins, though, involved opposing the 1928 presidential candidacy of New York governor Alfred Smith, a Catholic. Mullins aimed to

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47 These five points state 1) “That [confessions of faith] constitute a consensus of opinion of some Baptist body, large or small, for the general instruction and guidance of our own people and others concerning those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us. They are not intended to add anything to the simple conditions of salvation revealed in the New Testament, viz., repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord;” 2) “That we do not regard them as complete statements of our faith, having any quality of finality or infallibility. As in the past so in the future, Baptists should hold themselves free to revise their statements of faith as may seem to them wise and expedient at any time;” 3) “That any group of Baptists, large or small, has the inherent right to draw up for themselves and publish to the world a confession of their faith whenever they may think it advisable to do so;” 4) “That the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience;” 5) “That they are statements of religious convictions drawn from the Scriptures, and are not to be used to hamper freedom of thought or investigation in other realms of life” (“Baptist Faith and Message, 1925,” Introduction).


49 Ellis, 202.

50 Quoted in ibid., 193-194.
avoid criticizing Smith’s religious background. Instead, he focused on Smith’s opposition to Prohibition, which, among other things, proved successful in preventing Smith’s election.

Mullins died on November 23, 1928, a few weeks after the presidential election of 1928, leaving behind his wife of forty-two years, Isla May. His legacy can be linked to both his scholarship and the mark he left on Southern Seminary. He wrote numerous articles, many of which were printed in Review and Expositor, as well as ten books, including Why is Christianity True? (1905), The Axioms of Religion (1908), Baptist Beliefs (1912), Freedom and Authority in Religion (1913), The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression (1917), and Christianity at the Crossroads (1924). Moreover, he oversaw the strengthening of Southern Seminary that included both financial stability and a location shift to a 100-acre plot of land east of downtown Louisville known as “The Beeches,” which the seminary made its new home in March 1926 (even though few of the buildings were completed at that time). The monument in Louisville that marks the graves of Mullins and his family extol him for his work as preacher, teacher, scholar, administrator, Christian statesman, world citizen, and servant of God.

Mullins’s Thought

As indicated by Ellis’s treatment of Mullins’s life, his general intellectual outlook centered on being moderate. That is, he often sought to construct “middle positions”

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51 Nonetheless, Mullins’s 1928 presidential speech to the Baptist World Alliance in Toronto “glorified his denomination, particularly excoriating Catholicism as the antithesis of Baptist polity” (Ibid., 211).
between what appeared to be significantly divergent and irreconcilable views. In short, Mullins’s work is characterized by “maintaining the eternal truths of Christianity while accepting newer methods of study.”

Mullins explains this moderate mentality:

The lines of doctrinal cleavage are as radical as at any time in the past, but the issues are new. As usual the extreme parties are doing most of the harm. On one side is the ultra-conservative, the man of the hammer and anvil method, who relies chiefly upon denunciation of opponents, and who cannot tolerate discussion of a fraternal basis; on the other is the ultraprogressive whose lofty contempt of the ‘traditionalist’ shuts him out from the ranks of sane scholarship and wise leadership. The really safe leaders of thought, however, are between these extremes.

This approach served Mullins (and, consequently, Baptists) well throughout the twentieth century. Curtis Freeman describes Mullins’s work as navigating the “Southern Baptist ship” between the Scylla of fundamentalism and the Charybdis of liberalism.

Moreover, Bill Leonard notes that Mullins’s approach was transferred to the entire denomination as he “personifies the Grand Compromise that characterized the SBC throughout most of the twentieth century.” With this overall perspective on his theological work, three points of concern arise when discussing the specific contours of Mullins’s thought: personal religious experience, the doctrine of soul competency, and the importance of social responsibility.

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52 On numerous occasions, this word is utilized to describe Mullins and his approach to a variety of topics (e.g., the Social Gospel, racial issues, interdenominational cooperation, politics, evolution).
53 Ellis, 77.
56 Bill J. Leonard, God’s Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 49.
Personal Religious Experience

Religious experience holds a central place in Mullins’s thought. As a result, while his theological positions were generally viewed as orthodox, they were also innovative and engaged with contemporary philosophical methods. Through his travels during his pastoral ministry, he had been exposed to and influenced by the pragmatism of William James (1842-1910) and the personalism of Borden Parker Bowne (1847-1910). Each in his own way had emphasized the role of experience in human knowledge. James linked the truth of any idea to personal experience, while Bowne saw the person as the fundamental modality of existence.

Mullins approached Christian thought with this background. This is evident in the opening chapter of his systematic theology, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression*. Mullins develops a particular understanding of the term “religion.” Noting that certain authors have described theology as “the science which treats of God,” Mullins argues that more is involved. In fact, what this static definition of theology requires, writes Mullins, is to be linked with religion. In other words, the Christian

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57 This book was used as the textbook for systematic theology at Southern Seminary following its publication in 1917.
59 In what appears to be an implicit reference to Thomas Aquinas’s “Five Ways” (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3), Mullins writes, “In the past men have usually begun treatises on theology by undertaking to prove the existence of God by logical inference from nature and man. There are arguments from causation, from order and arrangement, from design, from the moral order, from the necessities of reason itself, and others.... They are valuable in their place, and are by no means to be rejected. But they are not primary and fundamental for Christian theology” (Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression*, 38).
religion is not merely a science. Instead, religion is “man’s relations to the divine Being.... It is a form of experience and of life. It is an order of facts.”

Along these lines, C. Douglas Weaver rightly notes that “[m]ethodologically, [Mullins] considered religious experience to be the starting point for theological reflection.” Consequently, he points to the centrality of experiential knowledge rather than rational coherence. In other words, the type of certainty of religious conviction that is required is one that “results from actual contact of the soul with the religious Object. It is a certainty based on a knowledge of reality, and not simply on the cogency of a logical inference.” Stating that at its best theology has tacitly embraced the experiential aspects of doctrine, he avers, “It is the principle which animates all the biblical writers of both the Old and New Testaments. It is the source of power in the writings of an Augustine, a Clement, a Schleiermacher.” With this in mind, it is not surprising that Mullins wrote in 1905 that experience was “the holy of holies of theology.”

Religious experience, then, serves as a source of factual data for theological reflection. Nonetheless, Mullins is clear that experience is not the only source.

Mullins’s goal was to set experience as an important contributor to theological work and

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60 Ibid., 1-2. In another work, Mullins stated, “Religion is a personal matter between the soul and God” (Mullins, The Axioms of Religion, 54).
63 Ibid., 3.
65 “[W]hen we speak of making experience explicit in expounding the doctrines of Christianity, we are by no means adopting that as the sole criterion of truth. He would be a very unwise man who should attempt to deduce all Christian doctrine from his own subjective experience.... [T]he clear recognition in doctrinal discussion of the experience of Christians does not render theology less biblical, or less systematic, or less historical” (Mullins, The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression, 3).
as a significant apologetic resource. He further describes possible sources of religious knowledge, including the Bible, comparative religion, and even “the decisions of ecclesiastical courts and councils as expressed in creeds and articles of faith.”

About the latter, though, while underscoring the primacy of experience, Mullins declares:

[T]hey are not and can never be original sources of religious knowledge.... [T]hey are second-hand knowledge, echoes rather than original voices. They are sometimes of great value. They declare the doctrinal beliefs of the age or people who put them forth. But religious knowledge does not arise primarily by subscription to creeds. It comes rather through the presence of God in the soul.

Regarding Scripture, Mullins links the Bible to religious experience: “Being the literary expression of living experience in the religious life, the spontaneous and free output of that experience under the guidance of God’s Spirit, it is precisely adapted to reproduce that experience in men today.”

Thus, following his usual moderating position, Mullins does not set biblical revelation over against religious experience; rather, he grounds the authority of the Bible in religious experience. The result is that the Bible becomes a witness to the common experience of Christians. For Mullins, then, Christians, with both Scripture and personal encounter, have a “union and combination of the objective source and the subjective experience.” In this manner, it seems evident that, even though Mullins did not see experience qua experience as the sole determining factor for religious convictions, he did hold it as at least equal to other factors.

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66 Ibid., 40.
67 Ibid.
Soul Competency

Mullins’s development of the substance of his second book, *The Axioms of Religion*, must be understood within the context of the Whitsitt Controversy, especially the heated disputes about the historical origins of Baptists. In this volume, Mullins’s central claim was that “[t]he sufficient statement of the historical significance of the Baptists is this: the competency of the soul in religion.”70 As E. Glenn Hinson notes, any claim about Baptist history entered a contentious arena: “With the Whitsitt Controversy still very much in the air, Mullins did not want to tread disputed historical ground. It was enough that he set out ‘The Historical Significance of Baptists’ in which he basically outlined his central thesis. Baptists were the consistent advocates of ‘soul competency’ throughout their history.”71 Thus, since Mullins considered soul competency the prime contribution of Baptists to Christian thought and practice,72 he worked to acknowledge Baptist history (i.e., Mullins thought that Baptists have always historically embodied this principle) while also de-emphasizing the particular historical proposals for Baptist identity that characterized the Whitsitt Controversy (i.e., in effect, granting soul competency the status of a first principle). In this way, Mullins sought to resolve (or, at least move beyond) a significant historical debate regarding what it meant to be Baptist by setting forth a rather ahistorical theological *regula*.

In short, the “soul’s competency in religion” refers to direct access of the individual believer to God. For Mullins, it excluded the possibility of “all human

interference” such as infant baptism, the episcopacy, and “every form of religion by proxy.” Mullins invoked a term with geometric etymology, arguing for six axioms that he saw as self-evident to all Christians and based on sound New Testament texts. First, the theological axiom stated that “[t]he holy and loving God has a right to be sovereign.” Second, the religious axiom averred that “[a]ll souls have an equal right to direct access to God.” The main thrust of this axiom centered on the refutation of any proxy or middle-step between God and individual humans: “Religious privilege and religious duty subsist between men and God in the first instance in their capacity as individuals and only secondarily in their social relations.... It is a species of spiritual tyranny for men to interpose the church itself, its ordinances, or ceremonies, or its formal creeds, between the human soul and Christ.” Thirdly, Mullins deduced from soul competency an ecclesiastical axiom: “All believers have a right to equal privileges in the church.” The moral axiom was fourth, affirming that “[t]o be a responsible man must be free.” “A free Church in a free state” made up the religio-civic axiom, and Mullins concludes with the social axiom, summed up as “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

While these six axioms constitute Mullins’s interpretation of what it means to be Baptist, they apply to more than Baptists. Mullins saw that the axioms (and the doctrine

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74 Ibid., 73.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., 93-94; emphasis added.
78 Ibid., 73.
79 Ibid., 74.
80 Ibid.
of soul competency from which they were derived) were “simply the expression of the universal elements in Christianity and thus serve[d] as the best statement of what the religion of Christ is in its essential nature.”\textsuperscript{81} Moreover, as discussed in chapter three, Mullins’s conception of soul competency is central in his opposition to Catholicism, which he considered to be counterposed to Baptist sensibilities: “In every particular of the ecclesiastical and religious life of the Roman Catholic, the soul’s incompetency is assumed.”\textsuperscript{82} Mullins continues by detailing the ways in which the seven sacraments display this incompetency.\textsuperscript{83} Further, underscoring the fact that ecclesiology is dependent on personal experience (rather than the more communal Catholic view), Mullins stated that the church “is the social expression of the spiritual experiences common to a number of individuals.”\textsuperscript{84}

The strong emphasis on Baptist life over against Catholicism is further evident in the ways that Mullins evaluates other Christian denominations, criticizing the ways in which they lack Baptist-like elements of polity and practice (and usually embrace quasi-Catholic practices) and praising them for where they seem most aligned with Baptist ideals. When seen in combination with his declaration that the six axioms are indicative of genuine Christianity, Mullins’s argument for soul competency acquires a quasi-
ecumenical edge.\textsuperscript{85} Thus, his ultimate hope (which he thought was coming to fruition) was that other Christian traditions would recognize and accept the truth of the Baptist position, declaring, “We are approaching the Baptist age of the world....”\textsuperscript{86}

These axioms, or as Mullins calls them, “the first truths of the Christian religion,” all bear a great deal of family resemblance to one another, especially with regard to the individual’s authority and freedom within Christianity. Indeed, as has been discussed above, Mullins placed individual religious experience at the center of Baptist life and thought (and based on the self-evident character of the axioms, at the center of Christianity as a whole).\textsuperscript{87} Thus, no authority other than God stands above each individual Christian. In this way, the soul’s competency in religion under God stands as Mullins’s new interpretation of the Baptist faith, reinforcing particular Baptist practices (e.g., individual Bible readings, advocacy of religious freedom, and priesthood of every believer within congregational church polity) and placing Southern Baptists on firm footing that would seemingly last until 1979.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 275. In another publication, Mullins wrote that as freedom spread, “Baptist life becomes the inner principle of an ongoing civilization – the formative influence of which fosters and promotes every great cause on earth” (Mullins, \textit{Soul Freedom Applied}, 15).
\textsuperscript{87} The immediacy and self-evident character of the axioms is even manifest in the tale of Mullins’s original drafting of the six principles, recounted by Isla May Mullins in her biography of her husband:

In the spring of 1905, Dr. Mullins was asked to make an address before the American Baptist Publication Society, at St. Louis, Mo. As he was preparing that address he called to his wife to come and listen to something he had just written. It was a call to which she never failed to respond.

He said, “I have just written the Axioms of Religion,” and smiled triumphantly as he said it. “Here they are...

After reading them, he looked up for her reaction and found in her face all that he wanted.

“They are wonderful, in their aptness, in their briefness, in their completeness,” she cried. “Where did you get them?”

“They just this moment came to me – like a flash – the whole thing!” (Isla May Mullins, \textit{Edgar Young Mullins}, 138-139).
Social Responsibility

While Mullins is clear that no authority, be it a church, an ecclesiastical leader, or even a creed, stands between God and the individual Christian, he also argues for the importance of the social aspects of the Christian life. Mullins addresses the communal implications of the concept via anthropology: “[M]an is more than an individual. He is a social being.” After describing the centrality of soul competency for Baptists and its repudiation of any “religion by proxy,” he continues by stating, “The doctrine of the soul’s competency, however, goes further than individualism in that it embraces capacity for action in social relations as well as on the part of the individual.” Mullins makes this point clear in his description of the efforts that arise from the social axiom of religion: “To imitate Christ is to labor for equitable social conditions, just laws, and equal privileges for men that they may earn their own bread. To imitate Christ is not to take sides with labor against capital or with capital against labor in the contest for rights, but rather to teach capital and labor to perform their respective duties.”

Mullins’s work as a pastor, especially in Baltimore, impacted his thinking on these topics. Further, while in Louisville, Mullins aided African-American Baptists from the National Baptist Convention in the founding of a seminary in Nashville (now American Baptist College) and supported historically-black Simmons University (now

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89 Ibid., 55.
90 Ibid., 208. It should be noted that, all differences in their larger projects aside, Mullins’s sentiment resonates at this point with that of Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical Rerum Novarum (1891), who states, “Each needs the other: capital cannot do without labor, nor labor without capital. Mutual agreement results in the beauty of good order, while perpetual conflict necessarily produces confusion and savage barbarity” (§19).
Simmons College of Kentucky) during its financial struggles. Indeed, Mullins did not imagine that a competent soul was licensed to ignore the condition of society. One’s unmediated relationship with God has implications for how one inhabits and shapes the world; one has a responsibility to work for better social conditions.

Moreover, Mullins understands community to play a role in shaping the individual, even though this should not be understood to stand between the individual soul and God. For instance, at several points, he emphasizes the influence of context on the development of children, noting the necessity for “an environment of the child which will predispose it to Christ and the church.” Mullins states that even Jesus received the awakening in his soul that comes from an environment that lifts him “to a new stage in his career under God’s blessing.” It is perhaps because of the influence of this environment that Mullins claims, “We may assume that the child will become a Christian, but we dare not assume that he is a Christian prior to his own choice.”

The significance of such statements concerning what Mullins calls “Christian nurture” is that the individual’s actions are not solely determined by the unmediated relationship between God and the human being. Rather, Mullins’s view of soul competency seems to presuppose (and possibly require) a substantial community that

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91 Ellis, 132, 172. Despite these actions, Ellis characterizes Mullins racial views as “paternalistic,” pointing out that Mullins was a pioneer for Southern Baptists, but he himself still “did not believe in racial equality or desegregation” (Ibid).
92 “The Christian who understands the meaning of his religion, therefore, will be a force for civic, commercial, social, and all other forms of righteousness” (Mullins, The Axioms of Religion, 207).
93 Ibid., 181.
94 Ibid., 182.
95 Ibid., 174.
96 “Christian Nurture” is the title of chapter 10 of The Axioms of Religion, a name which is taken from Horace Bushnell’s 1847 book. This is significant since Mullins’s chapter is organized as a dialogue with Bushnell’s work.
shapes individuals, preparing them for the moment when they will enter into direct
access to God. After this formation, individuals would become the prime advocates for
social change. This community, then, would serve a vital function, though, for Mullins,
not a mediatorial one. This explains Mullins’s statement that the church “cannot
become the organ of social reform save indirectly.”97 While this sort of community is
never explicitly addressed in connection with soul competency and therefore remains
unexamined, references such as these would underscore the formative nature of
Southern culture on Southern Baptists (“the Catholic Church of the South”), an influence
that only comes into view as that culture unravels.98

Conclusion

Edgar Young Mullins stood in a unique place within the Baptist universe.

Thoroughly prepared for Southern Baptist sensibilities by his education and experience
in Mississippi, Texas, and Kentucky, it was Mullins’s time in Baltimore and Boston that
gave him the intellectual resources to develop the theological innovations for which he
is remembered. In his own context, Mullins’s prominence was not lost on many Baptists,
even if this was reflected occasionally in derogatory comments by some (e.g., “Pope
Mullins”). Nonetheless, his ideas, especially his central contribution – the doctrine of

97 Mullins, Baptist Beliefs (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1925), 77.
98 Curtis Freeman echoes this sentiment, stating, “[Mullins] might have done well to delineate
the qualities of character that constitute competency: the habits and skills which a competent soul would
need to possess in order to read the Bible wisely. He could also have indicated the sort of community and
spiritual formation that are necessary to initiate and sustain converted souls in the Christian life…. 
[P]erhaps he says nothing because the safeguards of character and community were givens, part of the
evangelical consensus of his day, constitutive elements of the Baptist understanding of the Christian life
that he thought needed no explanation to his readers” [Curtis W. Freeman, “E.Y. Mullins and the Siren
soul competency, as well as his moderating influence were crucial for Southern Baptists as the fundamentalist-modernist tensions swept through the United States during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In many ways, he helped Baptists in the South ward off the effects of the contentious battles raging elsewhere.

However, while it is important to evaluate Mullins’s positions in their early twentieth-century setting, it is imperative to trace their development by his Baptist descendents as well. In other words, as often is the case, concepts take on new shape in new (or shifting) contexts. Indeed, the enduring significance of one’s thoughts is discovered by discussing this intellectual history. This is no different for Mullins’s ideas, especially regarding the doctrine of soul competency, which is evaluated quite broadly by a variety of Baptists. Therefore, in the next chapter, this idea and its interpretation by a number of Baptists throughout the twentieth century will be in view, indicating, with the help of de Lubac’s work, whether soul competency is an idea that remains vital in explaining Baptist life and thought or if it has outlived its usefulness for contemporary Baptists.
CHAPTER V: “AN ENVIABLE IMMORTALITY”:

E.Y. MULLINS AND THE INTERPRETERS OF SOUL COMPETENCY

Evaluation of Mullins is not complete with the details of his life and writings. Equally important are the ways in which his thought has been received and employed by his Baptist descendents. Thus, in this chapter, the reception of Mullins’s work will be traced, describing how his most notable contribution to Baptist theological discourse, soul competency, has been used throughout the twentieth century. What will emerge is a theological trajectory moving from Mullins to his contemporaries, to Baptists in the mid-twentieth century, to Baptists associated with the post-1979 controversy in the SBC, and, finally, to a non-Baptist reading of Mullins’s significance.

While Mullins might disagree with some aspects of later uses of his work, these more recent developments of soul competency remain a constituent part of Mullins’s legacy and his significance to Baptist thought. Moreover, they are indicative of the shape(s) of contemporary Baptist discourse. After this history of reception and interpretation is recounted, the theological import of these developments will be ascertained through de Lubac’s understanding of the natural/supernatural relationship. Through this work, it will be shown that, while Mullins and his descendents may have helped Baptist discourse in the past by invoking various interpretations of soul competency, the concept’s utility for future Baptist thought is doubtful.
Baptists’ Reception of Mullins

Pre-World War II

H. Wheeler Robinson. British Baptist H. Wheeler Robinson quotes Mullins in 1927 in order to write that Mullins’s identification of the significance of Baptists as the soul’s competency in religion would be acceptable to most Baptists. At the same time, there are points where Robinson understands soul competency to be tempered by a stronger sense of community than one finds in Mullins. Noting the strengths and weaknesses of Baptist theology, he points out that the emphasis on the individual, while important, can be overstated, reducing the significance of the church overall so that it, following the thought of Rousseau, becomes an “arbitrary and voluntary creation of a number of unitary individuals, instead of being the cradle in which the individual life is nurtured.” Robinson directs his concern to the formation of a church as a cohesive whole that is more than an aggregate of individuals, correcting the over-emphasis on the individual that neglects the fact that “the two elements of individuality and sociality [grow] side by side from the very beginning, and not less in religious than in biological and cultural and moral development.”

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2 Ibid., 172. Recall that Mullins described the church as “the social expression of the spiritual experiences common to a number of individuals” (Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 35).
3 Robinson, *The Life and Faith of the Baptists*, 172-173. Robinson even quotes portions of *The Axioms of Religion*, indicating that his comments might concern Mullins’s work as well: “The family is already a social environment, and without it there could be no individual life, yet it is possible for a Baptist [Mullins] to write, ‘fatherhood and sonship are relations expressive of individual and not of corporate experiences’” (Ibid., 173). Robinson’s work in other areas reflects a similar concern. His *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* notes the ways in which an individual-community dichotomy is problematic.
Even if Robinson’s critique of the individualism that may result from overemphasizing certain aspects of soul competency does not touch Mullins directly, this British Baptist’s advocacy for “Baptist Tractarians” might establish more distance between himself and Mullins. Mullins refers to John Henry Newman and his essay on the development of doctrine several times within The Axioms of Religion, never in a wholly positive light. Mullins’s dispute with Newman’s work is linked, in part, to Newman’s conversion to Catholicism; however, on one occasion, he clearly expresses his distaste for Newman’s entire project (and possibly that of the Oxford Movement). Mullins takes issue with Newman’s search for a religious authority outside of the Bible as interpreted by each individual (led by the Spirit). His (and the Tractarians’) quest for an organic ecclesial unity and external authority (as well as an interpreter of the Scriptures) disgusted Mullins, as he considered it a move away from the soul’s competency in religion. Robinson, on the other hand, with his concern for an integration of the individual and the social, argues that “Baptists need an ‘Oxford Movement’ of their own order, so as to give their truth of an individual relation to God its complementary truth of a social relation to Him.”

George Truett. Another contemporary of Mullins, George W. Truett (1867-1944), stands as one of the most prominent Southern Baptists of the early twentieth century. Truett found much in Mullins’s understanding of soul competency that supported his

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4 Robinson, The Life and Faith of the Baptists, 174; emphasis original. Following this quote, Robinson states that this Baptist Oxford Movement would certainly bring about changes in liturgy and church polity, but it would not graft new ideas onto an old tradition. Rather, it would be realizing “true changes of a living development in which the unity is not lost” (Ibid).
own views. Indeed, Truett aligned himself closely with Mullins’s argument for the religio-civic axiom of religion: “A free Church in a free State.” In contrast with Robinson, Truett’s emphasis on religious liberty was grounded in the notion of the individual conscience’s facility in matters of religion, which he saw as a biblical truth.

This theme was a constant throughout Truett’s life. In 1925, Truett lauded Mullins at an anniversary event for his social and cultural as well as his intellectual achievements at Southern Seminary and throughout Baptist life. Truett notes that Mullins’s 1905 address to the inaugural Baptist World Congress (where the six axioms were first introduced) “would have given him an enviable immortality if he had never made another.” Truett even lists the six axioms, with interpretive glosses in order to praise their individual significance and “their ultimate triumph.” Moreover, addressing the sixth Baptist World Congress in 1939, Truett reiterated much of Mullins’s description of soul competency:

The late President Mullins has left on record one sentence that may well characterize the historic significance of Baptists. That sentence affirms the competency of the individual, under God, in matters of religion. That principle is the keystone truth of the Baptists…. Religion is a matter of personal relationship between the soul and God, and nothing extraneous may properly intrude here—

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5 Mullins, The Axioms of Religion, 74; George W. Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” in God’s Call to America and Other Addresses Comprising Special Orations Delivered on Widely Varying Occasions (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1923), 43-44. Interestingly, while this phrase, through Mullins and Truett, became a rallying cry for many twentieth-century Baptists, they seem unaware of its source — Charles Montalembert (1810-1870), a French Ultramontane liberal Catholic. Described as the inventor of this slogan, Montalembert deployed it in favor of separation of church and state in an address at a Catholic Congress at Malines in 1863 [Sidney Z. Ehler and John B. Morrall, eds., Church and State Through the Centuries: A Collection of Historic Documents with Commentaries (Westminster: Newman Press, 1954), 281].

6 “When we turn to this New Testament, which is Christ’s guidebook and law for His people, we find that supreme emphasis is everywhere put upon the individual” (Ibid., 38).


8 Ibid., 60.

It is not surprising that Truett supported soul competency as understood by Mullins, and perhaps emphasized the individual even more than the latter. Indeed, the preeminent Baptist pastor from Dallas often made it clear that soul competency (viewed as a New Testament principle) primarily concerned the individual (an interpretation that figured significantly in Truett’s argument for religious freedom): “The individual is \textit{segregated} from family, from church, from state, from society, from dearest earthly friends and institutions, and brought into direct, personal dealings with God. Everyone must give account of himself to God. There can be no sponsors or deputies or proxies in such vital matters.”\footnote{Ibid.; emphasis added. See chapters six and seven for more on Truett and religious freedom.}

\textit{Post-World War II}

Following the conclusion of the Second World War, Baptist uses of soul competency entered a different phase. By this time, persons like Mullins and Truett had, in the eyes of mid-twentieth century Baptists, become “heroes of the faith” who held to the recognized sources of Baptist identity. Despite crises that arose, these Baptists were confident that soul competency was the path to the future. However, soul competency can be seen on both sides of important issues during this period of time, invoked in favor of and against a particular stance. This is seen most poignantly in a comparison of
contemporaries Herschel Hobbs (1907-1995) and Douglas Hudgins (1905-), both of whom were Southern Baptist pastors. Hobbs served in leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention and represented more progressive Southern Baptist views (especially on issues of race) while Hudgins represented a more traditional Southern perspective. Yet, despite their divergences, both utilized soul competency as the foundation of their positions. Along with the tacit critique of the concept that emerges from this comparison are the cautionary words provided by Winthrop Hudson, who, like Robinson, saw peculiar dangers in Baptists’ use of soul competency.

**Herschel Hobbs.** In 1963, the Southern Baptist Convention revised the “Baptist Faith and Message,” which had remained unchanged since Mullins’s contributions in 1925, under the chairmanship of then-president of the Southern Baptist Convention Herschel Hobbs. After the revision was completed, Hobbs, who was also pastor of the First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City from 1949 until 1972, wrote an exposition of the document, describing the significance of each article. In the introduction to the book, Hobbs turns to Mullins in order to address “The Rock From Which We Are Hewn.” While Hobbs largely stands in agreement with Mullins, he does argue that soul competency is found in the Old Testament, bound up with the creation of humanity in the image of God.  

Moreover, Hobbs clarifies some of the implications of Mullins’s ideas when he writes,

[I]n reality Baptists are the most broad-minded of all people in religion. They grant to every man the right that he shall be free to believe as he wants. But they insist upon the same right for themselves.... This does not mean that Baptists believe that one can believe just anything and be a Christian or a

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Baptist. The competency of the soul in religion entails the authority of the
Scriptures and the lordship of Jesus Christ. The priesthood of believers grants to
every Christian the right to read and interpret the Scriptures for himself as he is
led by the Holy Spirit.12

As the center of Hobbs’s understanding of Baptist identity (signaled by his appropriation
of it at the outset of his exposition of the Southern Baptist confession of faith), soul
competency opens Baptists to other faith traditions while also establishing some sense
of authority found in the New Testament and Jesus Christ.

Other treatments of soul competency were also produced in this period,13 with a
revised edition of Mullins’s The Axioms of Religion in 1978 as one of the more
prominent. Despite the fact that Mullins had been deceased for nearly fifty years, Hobbs
and Mullins “co-wrote” this edition, which meant that Hobbs utilized portions of
approximately half of the original chapters and added his own contributions, mixed with
Mullins’s original words, for explaining their importance for that context. For instance,
following the introduction of soul competency as the historical significance of Baptists
(which comes directly from Mullins), Hobbs intensifies the force of Mullins’s statement:
“This is not a creed; Baptists are not a creedal people. To the contrary, it stands as a
safeguard against coercion with respect to solidifying one’s faith in the form of a written
creed.”14

12 Ibid., 9-10.
13 For a historical study illustrating the importance of Baptist soul competency in the struggles for
religious liberty, see Glenn Hinson, Soul Liberty (Nashville: Convention Press, 1975). Hinson also reflects a
shift where, unlike Mullins, who utilized soul competency to distance Baptists from other Christian
traditions, Hinson employs the concept in order to respect other traditions and learn from them, all the
while neglecting to consider whether soul competency itself does not sabotage that effort from the start.
Press, 1978), 48. Mullins’s original statement, which can be seen as leaving open the question as to
whether Baptists can have creeds, was “I am not stating a Baptist creed.... It is the historical significance of
the Baptists I am stating, not a Baptist creed” (Mullins, The Axioms of Religion, 53).
Furthermore, in the chapter regarding the social axiom of religion, Hobbs inserts an evaluation of the social gospel movement. He holds that the social gospel brought to light the need for social concern on the part of regenerated individuals, but any idea that the goal of the gospel was solely to effect a change in social conditions is wrong.\textsuperscript{15} At the same time, Hobbs points to the role of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission in fulfilling the duty to social responsibility that is bound up with the gospel, calling it “the social conscience of the Southern Baptist Convention.”\textsuperscript{16} Thus, while much of Mullins’s original work remains intact (at least that which is included in the revised edition), Hobbs’s additions intimate that he may have moved away from some of Mullins’s initial ideas, intensifying soul competency, so that its anticreedal function is stronger, and in some sense leaving behind what Mullins might have originally presumed, a largely Christian (perhaps even Baptist) culture that would play a significant formative role in persons who claim to be competent.

\textbf{Douglas Hudgins.} Douglas Hudgins, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Jackson, Mississippi from 1946 until 1969, was no less involved in Southern Baptist life, having served as the vice-chairman of the revision committee for the “Baptist Faith and Message.” Nonetheless, he displayed a use of soul competency that diverges from

\textsuperscript{15} Hobbs and Mullins, \textit{The Axioms of Religion}, 150. It should be noted that Mullins’s chapter on Christian Nurture, which details the need for a Christian environment in order to facilitate the child’s free choice of the gospel, is not present in the revised edition of \textit{The Axioms of Religion}. It is possible that the reasons for this omission are twofold. First, Hobbs and later Baptist interpreters of Mullins have not recognized the interconnectedness of this chapter and the rest of Mullins’s work (even Mullins himself neglects to integrate the two together). Second, the Baptist cultural hegemony that had existed in the South had weakened to a large extent (additionally, the struggle for civil rights was in large part concerned with repudiating this culture).

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 155. It is also possible that this portion of the argument (and perhaps the revised edition as a whole), which concerns the Christian Life Commission’s work from 1940-1977, is linked to an apology for Southern Baptist life and thought in light of the 1976 election of Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist from Georgia, to the presidency of the United States.

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Hobbs in several places. Leading a prominent church in the deep South during the struggles for civil rights, Hudgins unwaveringly “preached a gospel of individual salvation and personal orderliness, construing civil rights activism as not only a defilement of social purity but even more as simply irrelevant to the proclamation of Jesus Christ as God. The cross of Christ... has nothing to do with social movements or realities beyond the church; it’s a matter of individual salvation.”

This sharp division between the individual and the social contributed to the lack of support by Baptists for the civil rights of African-Americans. Charles Marsh frames Hudgins’s posture as a concern for purity, so that, for Hudgins, “If the Christian admits other concerns into the event of salvation – like good works, doctrinal or creedal confession, or mediations like church traditions and hierarchy – then the purity of the soul’s intimacy with God becomes threatened.” Such sentiments diminish the importance of events in the physical world (and even particular people within that world), interiorizing the faith to such an extent that political and social changes in line with the gospel are neglected. That is, while remaining faithful to the full theological

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18 Hudgins even employed the Baptist ecclesiological principle of the autonomy of the local church to argue that his congregation was not bound to follow the 1954 Southern Baptist Convention resolution supporting the Supreme Court decision *Brown vs. Board of Education*: “[L]et me remind you that every Baptist congregation in the world – if it be truly Baptist in its position – is a democratic entity, and is responsible to no other body or individual, but is under the leadership of the Lord” (Ibid., 99-100). Herschel Hobbs, while not serving on the committee proposing the resolution, was a member of the Southern Baptist Convention executive committee from 1954 until 1956. Thanks to Richard Cheek of Oklahoma Baptist University’s Mabee Learning Center Library for his help in obtaining this information.

19 Ibid., 106.
force of soul competency,\textsuperscript{20} Hudgins’s use of the term effectively allowed him to neglect creation (in this case, the bodies of certain people in the South). Using Mullins’s words, Hudgins avoided all “religion by proxy,” that is, any sort of mediation of God’s presence to humanity.\textsuperscript{21} Moreover, Hudgins developed three principles of religion, which should be seen as a distillation of Mullins’s six. First, the New Testament is the only rule of faith. Second was the emphasis on individuality in matters of religion. Third, Hudgins focused on the autonomy of the local church.\textsuperscript{22} Consequently, according to Marsh, Hudgins’s views resulted in an “unmediated harmony with God” that turned “racial homogeneity into a theological – if not a metaphysical – necessity.”\textsuperscript{23}

Further, the atomization of individual Christians under the banner of soul competency (each with their own personal social responsibility) left little, if anything, for the creation of a common ecclesial identity. As a result, Marsh rightly notes that “accidents of race, class, and custom” fill the void and provide form to the social framework of the competent soul’s existence.\textsuperscript{24} Moreover, even though Mullins himself might have questioned the actions of Southern Baptist pastors such as Hudgins (Mullins did, after all, advocate some measure of social responsibility and aided African-


\textsuperscript{21} “When salvation is interiorized to the soul’s competency before God, every reality outside this encounter, which is to say all worldly reality, is stripped clean of sacramental consequence” (Ibid., 108).

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 107. Marsh notes that the second principle is actually first in importance. Hudgins, who invokes Mullins at several places, writes, “The individual, not man en masse, is the primary object of God’s love. ‘God loves the whole world, but the whole is reached by contacting individuals one by one.’ Individuals do not respond to God as a part of a group; each acts on his own responsibility. Each must act in his own sovereign power of choice…. A man’s relationship to God is his own responsibility” (Quoted in ibid., 108-109).

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 112.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 109.
Americans on certain issues), the appeal to soul competency as the basis for the individuality of religious belief and the unmediated nature of the Christian faith (which closely follows Mullins’s thought) uncovers a more ambiguous character of soul competency due to its complicity in injustice. That is, as it has developed after Mullins, soul competency has not proven to be capable of positively influencing social conditions. It is also important to note that the disparity between Hobbs and Hudgins regarding their use of soul competency reveals the tension within the concept itself, as well as the ways in which the two trajectories of the concept align with the social disputes concerning race in the South.

**Winthrop Hudson.** One scholar who detected and identified the underside of soul competency was American Baptist Winthrop Hudson, who identified Mullins and his notion of soul competency as the basis of virtually any Baptist apologetic for their ecclesial life in the early twentieth century. However, Hudson counters claims that this concept arises from the New Testament, stating, “It has become increasingly apparent that this principle was derived from the general cultural and religious climate of the nineteenth century rather than from any serious study of the Bible.” The problems associated with soul competency were not just its individualism, which distracted from the necessity of Christian sociality. Indeed, Hudson argues that the competency of the soul does not merely lack certain positive characteristics, but embodies negative ones as well:


\[26\] Ibid.
Not only did [soul competency] fail to provide detailed guidance for questions of church order beyond such generalized corollary axioms as “all believers have a right to interpret the Bible for themselves” and “all believers have a right to equal privileges in the church”; but also it served to dissolve any real concept of the church, for it interpreted faith as a one-to-one relationship between God and the individual.  

From this critique of soul competency, Hudson concludes with a memorable statement:

“The practical effect of the stress upon ‘soul competency’ as the cardinal doctrine of Baptists was to make every[one’s] hat [their] own church.”

**Moderate Baptists and Soul Competency**

After conservatives gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979, so-called moderate Baptists (those who aimed to resist the conservatives within the denomination) rallied around soul competency and people such as E.Y. Mullins. That is, conservatives, understanding Baptists to have lost their way, argued that theological accountability was necessary in the form of stronger doctrinal statements from the denomination (as well as a stricter view of the infallibility of Scripture). Moderates, by invoking Mullins and the competent soul, hoped to forestall these efforts. In the end, both groups were equally concerned about Baptists remaining faithful to their heritage, even if their disagreements directly involved the contours of that heritage. The result, while not holding the SBC constituencies together, has been a heightened interest in

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27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Both the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (published by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) and *Review & Expositor* (a publication founded by Mullins) in 1999 released journal issues dedicated to the influence of E.Y. Mullins and soul competency.
30 Barry Hankins details how Southern Baptist conservatives came to an awareness of the impending doctrinal collapse of the SBC, largely through experiences outside of the South. See Hankins, 14-40.
Mullins by conservatives (as an obstacle) and by moderates (as a hero) as well as an amplification of certain aspects of soul competency.

**Bill Leonard.** Baptist historian Bill Leonard stands as one voice in favor of locating soul competency at the center of Baptist theology. Indeed, the divisions between late-twentieth-century Baptists correspond to what Leonard sees as the two sides of Mullins’s thought, biblical authority and soul competency. Leonard, though, refuses to separate these ideas, holding that Mullins was both “Dr. Mullins the inerrantist, and Dr. Mullins the prophet of soul liberty.” In other words, for Mullins, biblical authority and soul competency were intertwined. However, the two main schools of thought that emerged from the SBC controversy that erupted in 1979 (i.e., conservatives and moderates) often did not see eye to eye, each claiming that they were genuinely Baptist, seemingly emphasizing one aspect of Mullins’s thought over against the other.

Leonard states elsewhere that soul competency results in a “radical and dangerous ideal: the people can be trusted, the individual ‘soul’ is competent in matters religious.” This is meant to open up the ecclesial polity to dissent that will challenge authority within the church while not destroying all forms of authority. It is this sort of freedom for dissent that leads Leonard to see antebellum Baptists who owned slaves as acting contrary to soul freedom (i.e., resisting “the liberating power of the gospel”).

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32 Ibid., 75-76.
34 “The misinterpretation of religious truth is not a reason for withholding the truth from the people of God” (Ibid).
while the triumphs of the civil rights movement enact the genuine freedom at the core of soul competency:

In the autonomy of those communities of faith [black Baptist churches], preachers spoke out against the oppression of a people, even in the face of bombings, threats, and death.... The Baptist heritage of freedom flourished even when it divided Baptists, black and white. The radical freedom of the gospel which stands at the center of Baptist ideals cannot long be inhibited, even by Baptists themselves.\textsuperscript{35}

From this quote, it is apparent that, for Leonard, freedom stands at the heart of Baptist life and thought.

\textbf{Walter Shurden}. Walter Shurden’s \textit{The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms} (1993) briefly describes four types of freedom that characterize the Baptist theopolitical imagination: bible freedom, soul freedom, church freedom, and religious freedom.\textsuperscript{36} When addressing soul freedom (which functions as a synonym for soul competency), Shurden favorably cites Mullins at several points, concluding that, while soul freedom does not signal human self-sufficiency in regard to salvation, it does mean “the right to choose,” even to choose error.\textsuperscript{37} Likewise, Shurden emphasizes voluntary faith and one’s responsibility for one’s decisions: “The Baptist word for the world is that each individual is free to answer and is responsible for answering.”\textsuperscript{38} Like Leonard, Shurden underscores a significant Baptist link to the idea of freedom, noting the centrality of the individual as well:

\begin{quote}
Freedom is such an important ingredient in the human enterprise that one could philosophically justify freedom for freedom’s sake. Baptists had more in mind,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 26-27.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 28.
however, than simply breaking free from chains that held them back. Freedom had purpose for Baptists. They wanted freedom from a state-enforced religion because they thought that the freedom of the human spirit was worth saving. They rebelled against the priority of institutionalism because they believed that the priority of the individual was worth saving. 39

Shurden also invokes soul freedom in order to argue for broad diversity within the Baptist family. In fact, in the introduction to the book, he lists Jerry Falwell, Billy Graham, Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Jesse Jackson, and Jesse Helms as persons who are Baptists (or were when alive) and yet divergent in multiple ways. 40 This pluralism within and among the Baptist denominations, in Shurden’s eyes, is consistent with Baptist convictions and does not preclude them from sharing specific beliefs, despite the frustration it can cause for interpreters of the Baptist tradition.

In response to the conservative actions within the Southern Baptist Convention, Shurden avers that, for any Baptists who focus on correct belief, “[w]hile they would agree in principle with the idea that ‘Baptists are non-creedal,’ they often create a theological ‘law of the Medes and Persians,’ an unwritten but often heavy-handed creedalism. Correct and accurate intellectual comprehension of the Christian faith has never been the basic demand in historic Baptist life, however.” 41 Thus, Shurden’s use of soul competency underwrites the importance of a multivalent diversity among Baptists (cultural, theological, philosophical), with that shared sense of diversity signaling a significant portion of the commonality between Baptists.

39 Ibid., 27.
40 Ibid., 3
41 Ibid., 28.
James Dunn. James Dunn, former director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJCPA) has written about the impact of soul competency on issues of church and state. In a 1999 article entitled, “Church, State, and Soul Competency,” Dunn surveys several prominent references to soul competency, assesses its meaning, and evaluates its detractors. In this latter section, he addresses Winthrop Hudson’s concerns about soul competency contributing to a hyper-individualism that is more at home with the broader culture than within a biblical worldview. Dunn responds to these claims by pointing to Mullins’s interaction with “much of the best available Baptist writing on social justice.”

Furthermore, Dunn draws from Mullins’s optimism concerning soul competency as an influence on societal progress:

> The principle of the competency of the soul in religion under God, along with the axiomatic spiritual principles rooted in it, can show a vital connection with all the great lines of human progress. Intellectual liberty, or the right to think; aesthetic liberty, or the right to self-expression in the realm of art; economic liberty, or the right to work and a fair wage; political liberty, or the right to vote; religious liberty, or the right to worship – all these are the fruit of the direct revelation of men [and women] to God.

Curiously absent from this list of freedoms are any that bind Christians together in a community of faith. That is, they could all be described primarily as “freedoms from” rather than “freedoms for.” Indeed, this negative freedom is evident in Dunn’s

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42 James Dunn, “Church, State, and Soul Competency,” *Review & Expositor* 96.1 (1999): 66. It seems, though, that simply positioning Mullins’s concern for the social alongside the individual does not fully answer Hudson’s concerns, the necessity of Christian sociality and a more developed understanding of ecclesiology. Moreover, one can observe Mullins becoming more like a late-twentieth century moderate Baptist when Dunn describes him as “creedless” (Ibid., 68). If indeed Mullins’s writings presume a more substantively formative community/culture that shapes potential Christians, then perhaps Dunn’s claim that Mullins is creedless loses some of its force since some sense of catechesis would be operative within this formative environment. Mullins’s ideas about the function of creeds and confessions of faith, as displayed in his work as chairman of the committee that formulated the 1925 “Baptist Faith and Message,” is also neglected by Dunn.

43 Ibid., 70.
statement in a 1998 interview that sums up his understanding of Baptist soul competency: “The only Baptist creed is, ‘Ain’t nobody but Jesus goin’ to tell me what to believe.”

As can be seen, among Baptist interpreters, soul competency is central in presenting Baptists as a diverse group of Christians who emphasize freedom. In subtle ways, it seems evident that, while later uses of this concept resonate with Mullins’s ideas in 1908, it certainly has developed (pace Mullins) into a doctrine that underwrites a strong sense of individualism against corporate influence on Christian conscience as well as a pathway toward pluralism as a social good. These evolutions in soul competency are much more distinct when described by a non-Baptist, Harold Bloom. For him, soul competency reflects a significant portion of what constitutes the “American religion.”

The Curious Case of Harold Bloom

In 1992, prominent literary critic Harold Bloom described E.Y. Mullins as “the most neglected of American theologians”: “Edgar Young Mullins I would nominate as the Calvin or Luther or Wesley of the Southern Baptists, but only in the belated American sense, because Mullins was not the founder of the Southern Baptists but their

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44 Kenneth L. Woodward, “Sex, Sin, and Salvation,” Newsweek 132.18 (Nov 2, 1998): 37. Curtis Freeman sees this negative freedom extending one more step: “Such a claim quickly devolves into ‘Ain’t nobody goin’ to tell me what to believe’ as the ‘me’ of this creed becomes the exclusive arbiter of what Jesus is saying. Thus soul competency mutates into sole competency” [Curtis W. Freeman, “E.Y. Mullins and the Siren Songs of Modernity,” Review and Expositor 96 (Winter 1999), 41n88].
refounder, the definer of their creedless faith." The instrument of such a refounding was Mullins’s understanding of soul competency. Bloom points out that Mullins’s work surrounding this concept has become the center of Baptist thought. Drawing on this reality, he invokes soul competency in order to locate Southern Baptists as one of the two exemplars (along with Mormonism) of genuine American religion, which he describes as “irretrievably Gnostic.” He argues that both of these “rival American Gnosticisms” pursue “a knowing, by and of an uncreated self, or self-within-the-self, and the knowledge leads to freedom, a dangerous and doom-eager freedom: from nature, time, history, community, other selves.”

Bloom’s book *The American Religion* provides a treatment of Mullins and soul competency that arises from a distinctly non-Baptist perspective. While it may (or may not) be surprising to observers that he described American religion as Gnostic, Bloom’s focus on Southern Baptists and Mormons as standard-bearers of this American Gnosticism might strike some as startling, despite the inextricable yet independent link that each one has with the American experience. Bloom argues that “more than any other groups they are imbued with the ambivalent vitalism of our national faith.” For Bloom, Mullins’s redefinition of religion by means of soul competency aided Southern Baptist moderates in coping with the loss of God’s saving actions in history (i.e.,

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46 Ibid., 49.
47 Ibid., 195, 49. Concerning Southern Baptists, Bloom writes, “[T]heirs indeed is what I call the American Religion, and not European Protestantism or historical Christianity” (Ibid., 192).
48 Ibid., 195, 191.
catastrophic defeat in the Civil War). Following this defeat, Mullins enabled Southern Baptist thought to transcend the physical world by focusing primarily on the personal relationship between God and the individual.

Central to Bloom’s description of soul competency is his thematic use of a hymn that is popular among Baptists, “In the Garden,” which begins with the line, “I come to the garden alone,” and has the following refrain: “And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.” Bloom finds the lyrics to this hymn helpful in his evaluation of Southern Baptists as Gnostic: “Each Southern Baptist is at last alone in the garden with Jesus.” Claiming that Mullins invented the term soul competency, Bloom follows Leonard in seeing Mullins’s work as consisting of the twin emphases of liberty and biblical authority. However, Bloom thinks that it is ultimately impossible to maintain the tension between the two concepts. That is, while Leonard argues for the need to maintain a unity between “Dr. Mullins the inerrantist, and Dr. Mullins the prophet of soul liberty,” Bloom thinks that the two cannot be held together. As a result, with soul competency victorious over any form of authority, Bloom thinks that the emphasis on soul competency will marginalize biblical authority.

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49 Ibid., 195-196.
51 Bloom, 202. Theologian and literary critic Ralph Wood agrees with Bloom in his evaluation of the Gnostic character of this hymn [Ralph C. Wood, Flannery O’Connor and the Christ-Haunted South (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 158-159].
52 Bloom, 41.
53 Ibid., 206, 209.
54 Leonard, God’s Last & Only Hope, 76.
Furthermore, Bloom sees the unraveling of this conceptual tension to be consistent with the trajectory of Mullins’s project. Instead of recognizing soul competency as a concept that arises from Scripture (thus placing Scripture epistemically prior to religious experience), Bloom understands Scripture’s claims to authority over the individual to be called into question, along with those of any church:

If soul competency is simply a description of an absolutely unmediated and intimate relationship with Jesus, then what precisely is the function of reading and interpreting Scripture?... If you reject the Catholic idea that the Church is the mystical body of Christ, then why cannot you be free of congregation, preacher, and text, and so be wholly alone with Jesus, walking and talking, spirit with spirit, spirit to spirit. These are crucial questions for anyone who wants to hold on to soul competency.

Addressing the intersection of experience and biblical authority at the point of reading the Bible, Bloom observes:

The awakened, indeed spiritually resurrected, Baptist will read the Bible by an inner light kindled by the experiential fellowship with Jesus. That reading, by the economic principle of soul competency, will be a justified interpretation.... Having talked to Jesus, any Baptist whatsoever is at least as competent to interpret Scripture as the Reverend W.A. Criswell.... For the Spirit is immediate, and mediates the Bible, preventing the Bible from any possibility of being external to the Baptist.

The Bible, therefore, does not stand prior to the experience of the believer, but is interpreted by the individual under the guidance of the Spirit, who is never located in a church, expressed in any creed or confession, or understood to be present in any particular historical events, but only in the individual believer’s personal experience.

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55 E.g., “If one’s undying spirit accepts the love of Jesus, walks with the resurrected Jesus, knows what it is to love Jesus in return, alone with Jesus in the only permanent and perfect communion that ever will be, then there can be no churchly authority over one” (Bloom, 205).
56 Ibid., 207.
57 Ibid., 210-211.
From his treatment, Bloom makes it clear that soul competency is primarily a negative concept, establishing the freedom of the individual Baptist from any forms of authority. In fact, one cannot even expect anything close to a standard definition of soul competency. This is well illustrated by Bloom’s source for Southern Baptist life and thought, the Reverend John Doe, an anonymous Southern Baptist minister.\textsuperscript{58} Quoted often by Bloom, Doe broadens the sense of Mullins’s concept when he claims, “Everyone is competent to understand soul competency as she or he sees fit.”\textsuperscript{59}

One wonders where any church can stand under these conditions (indeed, it would seem that Winthrop Hudson’s fears have come to fruition). Doe continues, stating his understanding of soul competency (which is consistent with how the doctrine operates among late-twentieth-century moderate Baptists). His remarks have such value for evaluating soul competency’s utility for future Baptist discourse that they are worth quoting at length:

To me [soul competency] means that the individual Christian is unassailable in her interpretation of Scripture and in her own understanding of God’s will for her life. It means that when someone says, “This is what the Bible means to me,” I cannot tell her she is wrong. I can merely say that her understanding is meaningless for me. Only the preacher’s understanding of Scripture is expected to be generally meaningful for the whole community, and it is up to each individual to decide whether the preacher’s words are useful or not. Soul competency means to me that anything I understand to bring me closer to God is true and cannot be taken away from me, because my life is unique and there is a way of understanding Scripture which is unique to me. Soul competency means to me that I find truth when I am furthest removed from the distractions and

\textsuperscript{58} In the acknowledgments, Bloom notes that he was heavily indebted to a particular unnamed Southern Baptist minister for his information concerning the Southern Baptist Convention. In the book, he is referred to as the “Reverend John Doe.” Despite the passage of more than fifteen years, Bloom still guards this minister’s anonymity, even declining to provide this author with any background information (if not the name) concerning his source.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 202.
contingencies of people and things and authorities – again, when truth takes forms which are unique to me and my understanding of the Bible.\(^{60}\)

It seems clear that, despite Bloom’s assertions, this is not E.Y. Mullins’s soul competency. Moreover, his description of soul competency and Baptist thought based on this concept would likely not align with the terms used by other Baptists.\(^{61}\)

Nonetheless, Bloom’s argument is important since it stands as a *reductio ad absurdum*, following Mullins’s logic to the conclusion that no authority, not even biblical authority, can guide an individual’s spiritual life.\(^{62}\) For example, Mullins gives weight to the charge of quasi-Gnosticism in his discussion of the eucharist, writing, “We reject the sacramental conception of the Lord’s Supper because the ‘real presence’ of Christ is not a fact in the realm of matter but a fact in the realm of mind.”\(^{63}\) With this in mind, Bloom, while sympathetic to soul competency as a component of the “American religion,” casts doubts on its usefulness within Baptist theological discourse.

Further, missing from Bloom’s description are the references to Christian sociality and responsibility for the wider society that one finds in Mullins. Yet, it seems that he has not so much neglected what is present in Baptist life regarding sociality and communal formation as he reveals its absence. That is, the freedom granted by soul competency has produced Baptists, like Reverend John Doe, who have no influence on the biblical interpretation and Christian witness of their fellow Baptists (nor want to

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 202-203. The last sentence of this quote is used by Charles Marsh in *God’s Long Summer*, but is incorrectly attributed to E.Y. Mullins, instead of the Reverend John Doe.

\(^{61}\) Bloom states as much in the acknowledgments as he recognizes the contributions of the Reverend John Doe, but notes, “My interpretations of his insights are my own, and are not always shared by him” (Ibid., acknowledgments).

\(^{62}\) Soul competency is “the freedom from every form of overdetermination: societal, historical, economic, even psychological” (Ibid., 211).

have such influence in any form). In fact, for Bloom, these Baptists emphasize the individual to the point that even the divine begins to look like the individual: “Call it man-godhood, or theomorphism, or what you will, but both Mullins and [Joseph] Smith exalted the image of the human. Baptist freedom, like the freedom of the Mormons’ Restored Gospel, is the freedom to come very close to the divinity as well as the manhood of Jesus.” In this way, Bloom sees Gnosticism as the destination for Baptist theology founded on the soul’s competency in religion.

E.Y. Mullins and the Nature/Grace Problematic

In Conversation with Henri de Lubac

Linking Nature and Grace. When bringing Henri de Lubac’s discussion of the relationship between nature and grace to E.Y. Mullins’s work and the reception of that work, one can observe a few places of conceptual overlap. For instance, both de Lubac and Mullins argue that human beings have something of an intrinsic capacity for God. That is, the divine is certainly not external to human existence. In his 1917 article for The Fundamentals, which was entitled, “The Testimony of Christian Experience,” Mullins

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64 It is odd that James Dunn uses much of Bloom’s treatment of soul competency, argues with little of it, and does not even take issue with the function of Southern Baptists (by which Bloom means moderate Baptists who follow Mullins) within the gnosticism that Bloom observes characterizing genuine American religion. See Dunn, “Church, State, and Soul Competency,” 61.

65 Bloom, 217.

66 “No Southern Baptist, of any camp, will believe me when I tell them that they are the subject and object of their own quest. This most aggressive of Protestantisms is no Protestantism at all, but a pure outflaring again of an ancient Gnosis” (Ibid).

describes every human soul as having a “seeing spot” that can recognize Christ. Later interpreters of Mullins ground this intrinsic link in the individual conscience as the guide for biblical interpretation and the search for truth. De Lubac also argues for some link between the human and divine, drawing on Thomas Aquinas to state that human beings have a natural desire to see God. Thus, both men understand the human person to always already have some sense of the divine. Consequently, neither of them treats human beings as completely tarnished by the effects of sin. Humans have residual capabilities (e.g., conscience) that enable some degree of cooperation with divine activity once it is recognized as such.

**Collapsing the Natural and the Supernatural.** At the same time, however, de Lubac would likely take issue with the way in which this intrinsic connection between humans and God is discussed by Mullins and further developed by later Baptists. In effect, these Baptists can be seen to demonstrate a hyperintrinsic link between the natural and the supernatural. In other words, while de Lubac does acknowledge the natural desire to see God, underscoring the union of the orders of nature and grace to some extent at that point (though even that natural desire is a gracious gift from God given at the point of creation), he is also careful to distinguish nature from grace, for

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70. “The phrase ‘total depravity’ has been employed in theology to describe the sinful state of men. But it needs careful defining lest it lead astray. In brief, it means that all the parts of our nature have been affected by sin. It does not mean that men are as bad as they can be, nor that all men are equally bad. It does not mean that human nature is destitute of all good impulses in the moral sense” (Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression*, 294).
example, by stating that this natural desire can only be fulfilled by the gratuitous gift of God’s grace. This involves the social as well as the individual. In discussing the sacraments, de Lubac notes that they facilitate a union with the Christian community which that mediates the individual Christian’s link to God: “Just as redemption and revelation, even though they reach every individual soul, are none the less fundamentally not individual but social, so grace which is produced and maintained by the sacraments does not set up a purely individual relationship between the soul and God or Christ.”

This is a point at which Mullins and his later interpreters diverge from de Lubac. For them, in contrast with de Lubac, their hyperintrinsicism is fully located within the individual and his or her relationship with God. In fact, Mullins and others often write of human personality and conscience as essential to the individual’s spiritual (i.e., supernatural) life. The result, then, of Mullins’s contempt for “religion by proxy” is that a substantive ecclesial role in mediating the divine is lost. Over time, this focus has become even stronger, as illustrated by Shurden in his response to the Baptist Manifesto’s emphasis on the communal aspect of the Christian life: “For me, one of those [Baptist convictional] genes has to do with the centrality of the individual, the individual’s religious experience with God, the individual’s freedom from God, the individual’s freedom of conscience.” This elevation of individual conscience (and, as

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Shurden indicates, freedom from God) sets the individual over against the social, focusing the activity of grace on the individual soul.

Further, Mullins makes clear that the soul’s competency in religion parallels the individual scientist’s competency in studying nature: “The competency of the soul in religion under God is the guarantee of the competency of man as an investigator in God’s universe.” That is, the radical freedom that arises out of the doctrine of soul competency has significant implications for other fields as well. In the same way that the soul possesses the necessary “equipment” to relate to God, the scientific investigator also already has the requisite “tools” to complete his or her work. According to Mullins, all people have to ability to directly access God, which establishes the importance of science’s right to direct access to its object as well. In other words, with this direct access, there is no sense in which the scientist or competent soul will be found inadequate in their respective quests. While de Lubac would certainly affirm the scientist’s relative autonomy in his or her field, he would, following Blondel, caution against viewing those endeavors are completely self-contained and self-sufficient.

Starting Points. Another key difference between de Lubac and Mullins involves their points of departure for their respective theological projects. Mullins begins with personal experience and later Baptist interpreters of Mullins emphasize some aspect of anthropology such as human freedom or even the competence of the individual soul.

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75 “Science results from the direct and free approach of competent observers to the world about us. Philosophy is born of the free approach of human thought to the universe of abstract truth. The world of nature and the world of thought, these are the regions in which the men of science and the students of philosophy ply their callings. Both these forms of activity and the rights of both sets of observers are implicit in the right of all men to direct access to God” (Ibid).

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With anthropology as the starting point, it is not difficult to (re)define theology in terms of the human person. For instance, in *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression*, Mullins argues that God engages human beings via personality. In answering an objection that human beings’ finitude prevented any comparison to the infinite God, Mullins writes, “We infer that God has will, intelligence, consciousness, from the possession of these qualities by men. That is, we argue God’s personality from our own.”

De Lubac, on the other hand, begins with God’s self-disclosure in the Incarnation. In other words, Christology becomes the center of a web of theological convictions that includes anthropology. Thus, Christology is prior to anthropology and provides its form. The difference between de Lubac and Mullins concerns how attributes are applied to humans and God. Something similar to univocal language is invoked within Mullins’s theological discourse, where God-talk is employed in a manner like that used for humans. That is, for example, God is a being, not being itself. De Lubac (and, it should be noted, Aquinas) utilizes analogical language that links human beings (and all of creation) to the divine but also notes the ever-greater difference between the two. In other words, humanity (or any other part of creation) is not God. By beginning with anthropology as he does, Mullins (and his descendants who follow suit) is in danger of collapsing the analogical link (and distinction) between creator and creature.

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76 “[A] human personality is the only adequate medium for the self-revelation of a personal God. Only personality can fully reveal and express the meaning of personality” (Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression*, 22).

77 Ibid., 192.

**Material Existence and the Sacred.** Along with the near-univocal relationship between humans and the divine, Mullins also operates with a dualistic relationship between the material world and the spiritual world. The material world consists of what Mullins describes as “nature.” By nature, he refers to the non-human natural material world, which he conceives in relative isolation. That is, he approaches it as if it were a relatively self-contained realm that operated according to its own self-regulating precepts and can be studied via scientific principles. The spiritual realm concerns salvation and is where, for Mullins, Jesus is located. This is consistent with Mullins’s idea that revelation comes only through Jesus Christ and is manifested in a personal encounter with the divine. Thus, Jesus is necessary for gaining knowledge of God’s existence. Christ reveals God to humankind, but he does not effect anything for creation. The immediate result of this schema is that the material world is foreclosed from mediation of the divine. The loss of this mediation through the natural material world means that the church’s function of mediating the divine is also lost. That is, the individual’s personal relationship with God provides the only link between humanity and God. Moreover, as Curtis Freeman points out, the divide between the operative soul and passive body also contributes to a “chasm between salvation and history.” Therefore, the resulting image is of an isolated individual “in the garden with Jesus.”

Ironically, a collapse of the orders of nature and grace is evident even in Mullins’s abolishment of any material mediation of the divine. That is, while on the one

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79 Mullins distinguishes human beings from the rest of creation, stating that “the laws of nature come to an end when we rise above nature into the realm of persons...” [E.Y. Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1925), 30].
hand, Mullins unhinges nonhuman creation from any participation in the divine, at the same time he also privileges the subjectivity of the human person. With religious experience established as the starting point for theological work, the individual’s experiences have immense hermeneutical power. This locates virtually all authority within the individual, as acknowledged by one commentator on Mullins: “Once the autonomous individual is made the central authority in matters of theology – a move made necessary by Mullins’s emphasis on religious experience – the authority of Scripture becomes secondary at best, regardless of what may be claimed in honor of Scripture’s preeminence.” That is, the individual is endowed with the power of arbitrating the parameters of a genuine encounter with the divine by the competent soul, meaning that any experience has the potential to carry the fullness of God’s presence, not based on any analogous relationship with an external norm, but based on the judgment of the individual.

Bloom points to this in the eventual unraveling of Leonard’s tension between biblical authority and soul competency. As individual hermeneutical competence receives more emphasis, external forms of authority, such as the Bible, become extraneous at best. In other words, even if the biblical witness is affirmed, the text of Scripture is still subordinated to the individual’s conscience. Thus, Mullins’s denial of the

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81. This is an uncontested part of Mullins’s thought. Both conservative Albert Mohler and moderate C. Douglas Weaver make statements related to this. The difference between these two interpreters involves how useful they perceive Mullins is. Both men have edited recent printings of Mullins’s *The Axioms of Religion*, with Mohler’s introduction aimed to limit his usefulness for contemporary Baptists and Weaver’s directed to support his inclusion in current Baptist debates. Cf. R. Albert Mohler, “Introduction,” in *The Axioms of Religion* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 1-32; and C. Douglas Weaver, “Introduction,” in *The Axioms of Religion* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2010), 1-35.

possibility of material mediation for genuine religious experience cannot be fully

guaranteed since it might violate the individual soul’s relationship with God, which
determines the validity of any given encounter (recall John Doe’s reluctance to even
circumscribe the limits of soul competency for interpretative endeavors). The individual
soul, not an a priori statement about “what Baptists do believe or have always
believed), is responsible for coming to such conclusions.

**Cultural Implications.** Further, as has been discussed, the development of soul
competency among Baptists during the twentieth century has undercut any significant
possibility for external authority and for the individual and communal to maintain a
reciprocal relationship. With personal experience standing in the prime position, even
corporate Christian activities (e.g., the eucharist) are placed as subservient to the
individual’s relationship with the divine. Additionally, it becomes difficult for soul
competency to provide the foundation for a substantial critique of culture. Despite
Mullins’s best intentions, as the comparison of Hobbs and Hudgins reveals, soul
competency is ambiguous at best in theologically undergirding social action (including
critique). At the same time, one is reticent to take a critical stance toward certain
elements of culture due to the danger of foreclosing personal experience that may
deepen one’s relationship with God. In other words, grounded in the theological
framework offered by soul competency, one is hard pressed to distinguish that which is
grace (and the extent to which it is grace) from that which is not (or, better put, that
which is capable of receiving grace). On the other hand, as is clear when comparing de
Lubac with his Catholic coreligionists, his understanding of nature and grace attends to
the culture-forming aspects of grace, which includes a critical faculty for precisely what Mullins and his interpreters lack.

**Nature and Grace after Vatican II**

Following the Second Vatican Council, the shape of Catholic theology began to shift. Moving away from an extrinsicist view of the relationship between nature and grace, many theologians saw the council as a turning point that “opened the church to the world.” The result was encouragement that the Catholic Church was moving beyond what was described by some as a “siege mentality” (i.e., the Church saw itself under attack from the modern world) and toward further *rapprochement* with modernity. While these theologians are not the primary focus for this project, it is important to note that they interpreted statements that grace was discernable in the material world to be an overarching description for all sets of circumstances. In other words, they claimed that grace was present in the physical world “everywhere in the same way.”

Many of these theologians relied on the work of Karl Rahner (1904-1984) who begins his theology with human experience and who argued that human beings have a capacity for God via what he called the “supernatural existential” (*das übernatürliche Existential*). William Dych, in describing what he see as the implications of Rahner’s

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83 Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic: Five Theses Related to Theological Anthropology,” *Communio* 31 (Spring 2004): 70. Bauerschmidt counters this perspective by noting that the move to integrating nature and grace is not complete: “What matters is *how* one integrates nature and grace” (Ibid., 71).

84 Harvey Egan describes the supernatural existential as "Rahner’s emphasis upon grace as God’s very own self-communication to every person" [Harvey D. Egan, “Theology and Spirituality,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 16].
work, writes, “Understanding church and sacrament as real symbols means that we do not encounter God for the first time in a church or in explicitly religious activities, but in human life.... We can, indeed we must find God in all things.”\(^\text{85}\) That is, for Dych (even if not for Rahner), the sacred and the profane cannot be clearly distinguished from one another.\(^\text{86}\)

These theologians’ emphasis on anthropology affected their understanding of the sacraments, a tendency displayed in the work of Catholic theologian Bernard Cooke. Beginning with human experience, Cooke writes, “Sacraments are specially significant realities that are meant to transform the reality of ‘the human’ by somehow bringing persons into closer contact with the saving action of Jesus Christ.”\(^\text{87}\) He further discusses what it is that is constitutive of human existence or “the reality of ‘the human’”:\(^\text{87}\) “One thing that is absolutely basic to being human is our ability to be conscious, to be aware of what is going on within us and around us.... We are aware that as self-identifiable knowers we have this perception of ‘the world.’”\(^\text{88}\) Moreover, this ability has important ramifications for human freedom and its potential social connections: “Each of us is able

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\(^{85}\) William V. Dych, “Theology in a New Key,” in A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology, ed. Leo J. O’Donovan (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 15. It has been noted that a major impetus for Rahner’s work was the Spiritual Exercises of the Jesuits, where discernment of the will of God (and consequently, some manner of grace) in a particular context is emphasized. In other words, Rahner’s vocation as a Catholic priest is important for understanding his thought. For more, see Avery Dulles, “Jesuits and Theology: Yesterday and Today,” Theological Studies 52 (1991): 524-538.

\(^{86}\) As others have argued elsewhere, Rahner is more complex than many of his followers. For a discussion of the nuances of Rahner’s theological positions, see J.A. Colombo, “Rahner and His Critics: Lindbeck and Metz,” The Thomist 56.1 (January 1992): 71-86.

\(^{87}\) Bernard Cooke, Sacraments and Sacramentality, rev. ed. (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994), 10. For a far bolder statement regarding sacraments, see Joseph Martos’s Doors to the Sacred: “[S]acrament can... be broadly defined as a sign or symbol of something which is sacred and mysterious. And if sacraments are understood in this broader sense, then the religions of the world are full of sacraments” [Joseph Martos, Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church, rev. ed. (Liguori, Mo.: Liguori Publications, 2001), 4].

\(^{88}\) Cooke, 11. The second chapter of Cooke’s book is titled, “To Experience is to Live Humanly.”
to establish a unique identity as the person we are; we are truly able to decide who and what we wish to be.” It is important to point out the lack of references to human bodies in these statements. That is, Cooke’s sacramentality, grounded in the idea that sacraments are intended for humans, is located primarily in human consciousness.

This shift in Catholic theology in the late twentieth century is similar to theological discourse among descendents of Mullins. Both emphasize anthropological starting points for theological work, with the experience of the human consciousness receiving a great deal of attention. Consequently, each group underscores the intrinsic link between the divine and human to the point where human beings are capable of observing the divine presence within the material world but seemingly incapable of (or uninterested in) sufficiently distinguishing the divine presence from the material world (i.e., God is everywhere).

De Lubac would offer a scathing critique of these Catholic theologians and to Baptist heirs of Mullins, arguing that their (sometimes implicit) understanding of nature and grace obscures more than it clarifies. Much of this criticism centers on de Lubac’s abiding concern, even while arguing with neo-Thomist scholars prior to the Second Vatican Council, to maintain a distinction (but not a separation) between nature and

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89 Ibid., 13.
90 While it is not a main point of this project, it should be noted that another point is seemingly true: as Mullins’s descendents stand at the heart of Bloom’s American Religion, insofar as these Catholic theologians resemble Mullins’s interpreters, they are also best described as a species of the American Religion as well.

91 It should be pointed out that de Lubac’s critique would not extend to Rahner himself, whose work on potentia obedientialis seemed similar to de Lubac’s work on the natural desire to see God. For discussion of the similarities and key differences between these two Jesuits, see Dennis M. Doyle, Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 91-94; and Max Seckler, “’Potentia obedientialis’ bei Karl Rahner (1904-1984) und Henri de Lubac (1896-1991),” Gregorianum 78.4 (1997): 699-718.
grace. That is, creation (and especially humans) might have an intrinsic link with the
divine, but the divine is still distinguishable from the human. Along these lines, de Lubac
wrote, “To deny this fundamental distinction [between nature and grace]... would be to
deny as well and in its very principle every notion of revelation, mystery, divine
Incarnation, redemption or salvation. That would be to deny the Christian faith itself.”92
This distinction, which has as a theological foundation the twofold gift of grace (datum
optimum and donum perfectum),93 even becomes central to the hopes of certain
Catholic theologians who aim to open up political possibilities for the poor, the
orphaned, and the widow in the developing world. Noting the always already graced
caracter of the world does not accomplish this task, however. Instead, worldly
vocations (e.g., social worker, politician, teacher), while not devoid of grace entirely as
they currently stand, are in need of further transformation (and some, in fact, receive
grace as judgment). Thus, in order to maintain the theological importance of worthwhile
sociopolitical concerns, greater differentiation must be exercised with regard to
describing the present context, so that not every aspect of the world is graced in the
same manner.94

Furthermore, despite their apparent differences, Mullins’s descendents and
these particular post-Vatican II Catholic theologians overlap concerning the sacraments

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92 Henri de Lubac, A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace, trans. Richard Arnandez (San
93 Ibid., 50; Henri de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York:
94 Along these lines, de Lubac writes, “‘[N]ot everything is, so to speak, sacred by nature. If the
holy were everywhere, it would soon no longer be anywhere. Or it becomes a very ambiguous ‘sacred’
that one ought rather to flee than ‘rediscover’” [Henri de Lubac, More Paradoxes, trans. Anne Englund
Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 162].
as well. As Bloom pointed out, the emphasis placed on personal experience within Mullins’s work may be difficult to hold in tension with a concern for biblical authority. Where the two clash, personal experience via soul competency seems to win the day.  

Likewise, shifts in Catholic theologies regarding the sacraments often revolve around expanding sacramentality to include activities outside the traditional seven-sacrament schema. In the process, however, everything is left open to be a sacrament. As discussed above, univocity is the danger, where all God-talk has the same weight and God’s presence is seen everywhere to the same degree. William Cavanaugh, in his *Torture and Eucharist*, comments on this stance that all the world is “graced,” stating, “If God always stands ‘behind’ signs, then signs become interchangeable, and God never truly saturates any particular sign.”

As an example of such theological work, Cavanaugh points to Catholic liberation theologian Leonardo Boff’s *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*, where home and life-story are sacraments, but so also are his family’s mug and his father’s cigarette butt. This sharply diverges from de Lubac, who understands the Eucharist to be the sacrament of ecclesial unity (*sacramentum unitatis ecclesiasticae*), effectively bringing about corporate identity. That is, sacramentality is not determined by the individual, and not everything that is imbued with the divine is so to the same degree. Thus, while

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95 This has been the experience of this author as well, especially in situations where academic research is brought to bear on the text of Scripture in an effort to strengthen biblical authority by clarifying the Bible’s message. Some form of backlash often results, indicating that the message of the Bible has been determined by the competent soul.


98 de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 89.
discernment of the divine presence is still operative, such activity is informed by Christ’s incarnation as the primary anchor for understanding sacramentality.

Bound up with de Lubac’s understanding of the sacraments is the notion that the church is not simply one social organization among many. It has a supernatural vocation. Moreover, the distinction between nature and grace maintains space for deliberation concerning developments for each. In other words, while the church no longer operates with something like a “siege mentality” towards the world, this does not mean that the church will affirm (or sanctify) everything that is defined as a success by the world. De Lubac states as much when he writes, “We must, then, take care not to confuse the ‘progress of this world’ (itself an ambivalent term) with the ‘new creation’.” The result is that a critical faculty must be retained such that judgments can be made concerning the presence (and, correspondingly, the absence) of the divine. The apparent collapse of the orders of nature and grace make such judgments difficult at best and impossible at worst, with potentially devastating effects on the social conditions of other people throughout the world (recall soul competency’s use against the civil rights movement). With these considerations in mind, de Lubac offers not only to certain Catholic theologians, but also to the Baptist heirs of Mullins, an understanding

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99 In numerous places, de Lubac comments on the affinity of Belgian Catholic Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009) for describing the church as “the sacrament of the world,” a phrase that never appears in the documents of Vatican II. Schillebeeckx, by this phrase, sees the church as an expression of that which grace is already completing in human existence. That is, nothing new is actually manifested by the church and her activities. De Lubac critiques this view, arguing that the church is not simply a clear expression of the reality of the world, sanctifying its activities; rather, the church is a herald and witness to a new reality that grace is bringing about by transforming the world. Cf. de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis*, 191-234.

of nature and grace that focuses on the human created in God’s image and locates this anthropological claim within the broader theological orbit of Christology, where the enfleshed God-man reveals genuine humanity to itself and situates that humanity within God’s gracious gifts to and for the world.\footnote{Cf. Gaudium et Spes §22. David L. Schindler, crediting Paul McPartlan, points out that this text from Gaudium et Spes appears “in virtually the same form” in de Lubac’s Catholicism [David L. Schindler, “Introduction to the 1998 Edition,” in Henri de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967; reprint, New York: Herder & Herder, 1998), xi]. Cf. de Lubac, Catholicism, 342. For more on this parallel and its significance, see chapter seven.}

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, even within the context of Baptist theological discourse, Mullins is a contested figure, receiving a great deal of support in the twenty-first century from moderate Baptists as a champion of freedom. Negative evaluations of his significance, though, are also to be found:

The emphasis on soul competency is, as Mullins must have both hoped and expected, the most enduring element of Mullins’s legacy. The concept does underscore the necessity of personal religious experience – including repentance and faith – to the Christian life. But soul competency also serves as an acid dissolving religious authority, congregationalism, confessionalism, and mutual theological accountability.\footnote{Mohler, “Introduction,” 26.}

That is, Mullins’s signal concept was problematic from the beginning as it imbibed too deeply from theological liberalism and served, despite Mullins’s best intentions, to destroy Baptist identity.

A better, and more nuanced, critique that appreciates Mullins’s work in its own context while also noting new challenges for which Mullins’s usefulness may be marginal comes from Curtis Freeman:
One way of accounting for how [Mullins] negotiated a route through the narrow straits between the crushing rock of common sense rationality and the threatening swirl of experiential religion is that he made the journey on a calm day. The seas on which we sail, however, are more turbulent, and the currents are more treacherous. The consensus of evangelical doctrine with which Mullins bound himself has long since disappeared, and the value of soul competency as a navigational tool for averting danger is limited.103

In other words, historical, social, cultural, and even theological transitions undercut aspects of Mullins’s argument, as was seen with racial issues, but also with the lack of interrelatedness between the individual and the communal. Even his aim to be a moderating influence among Baptists over time challenged his theological coherence. Such difficulties were easily amplified by Mullins’s theological descendents, whose desire to hold tightly to soul competency as a hermeneutical key for Baptist life and thought only presented more serious problems (e.g., maintaining biblical authority in the face of soul competency’s radical individualism).

Moreover, while placing Mullins and his theological descendents in conversation with de Lubac affirmed some facets of their theological schema (e.g., something of an intrinsic relationship between humanity and God), it also uncovered further problematic aspects of their thought. That is, through the lens of the categories of nature and grace, Mullins’s theology is found to be deficient in crucial areas such as maintaining the Creator-creature distinction. Since Mullins has assumed an important role within Baptist theology, these evaluations become all the more important, underscoring the vital role of a proper understanding of the relationship between nature and grace within the life of the church.

CHAPTER VI: “THE TRIUMPH OF DEMOCRACY MEANS THE TRIUMPH OF BAPTISTS EVERYWHERE”: GEORGE W. TRUETT AS A BAPTIST AMERICANIST

When considering the most notable Baptist pastors, several prominent names come to the fore. In each case, these pastors had significant influence not only on the life of their churches, but also on wider Baptist discourse. Certainly included among this collection of important Baptist leaders is George W. Truett, who was the pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, following his graduation from Baylor University in 1897 until his death. Committed to his place in the pulpit, Truett shared sermons in Dallas and around the world, averaging “at least one message a day for over forty years.”¹ In this role, he was and still is regarded as “the greatest pastor Baptists in America have ever produced.”²

His pastor’s heart notwithstanding, Truett’s personality, which has been described as “Texanic,”³ combined with his position as pastor of what Baptist historian Leon McBeth calls “the bellwether church of the denomination,” made him a spokesperson for all Baptists.⁴ In this way, without forgetting his primary vocation, Truett’s influence extends beyond his ecclesial function to the life of Baptists

throughout the United States. In this chapter, Truett is examined as an exemplary representative of certain aspects of Baptist theological discourse. Moreover, Truett’s ideas concerning religious liberty (for which he is hailed even today by Baptists) are central to the development of what can be called a “Baptist Americanist” tradition.

Truett’s Life

George Washington Truett was born in Hayesville, North Carolina (in Clay County in the western portion of the state) on May 6, 1867. His maternal grandfather, James Kimsey, was a regionally-renowned preacher, and his mother, Mary Kimsey Truett, was “a woman of great Christian faith and genuine piety.” George was the seventh of eight children (seven boys and one girl). Despite the fact that he converted to Christianity at the age of forty-five, Charles Truett, George’s father, ran the family’s farm in the mountains of western North Carolina and encouraged his children’s faith and intellectual growth by providing them with a great deal of religious literature.

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5 Powhatan W. James, George W. Truett: A Biography (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1939), 19. It should be noted that James’ biography contains a wealth of information regarding Truett’s family background. This may be due to the fact that James was related to Truett by marriage. In the introduction to the first edition of Truett’s biography, Douglas Southall Freeman writes, “Of all this and of much that Dr. Powhatan James knows more intimately than any other man, he writes delightfully in this volume…. Especially in the explanation of Dr. Truett’s habits of study and of sermon-preparations, Dr. James supplies information that otherwise might not be preserved” (Ibid., ix-x). In the foreword of a collection of Truett sermons, James notes that before his death, Truett “gave exclusive rights [to publish sermons] to his biographer, Powhatan W. James, and his daughter Jessie Truett James.” [George W. Truett, Some Vital Questions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 7]. James was also, like Truett, a pastor.

6 The Truett’s fifth child, Marion Lee, died in 1863 when he was nineteen months old. Also, their fourth child, Charles Spurgeon, lost his hearing after being stricken with scarlet fever in 1872.

7 Keith Durso lists several books (aside from the Bible) that were available for the Truett children to read at home: Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan, Saints Everlasting Rest by Richard Baxter, Christian Doctrines by J.M. Pendleton, and Fox’s Book of Martyrs. Further, the reading material found in the Truett home includes sermons by Jeremiah J. Jeter, James P. Boyce, Dwight L. Moody, and Charles H. Spurgeon, and news from the Baptist world came to the family through a few Baptist state newspapers: Religious Herald (Virginia), Biblical Recorder (North Carolina), Tennessee Baptist, and Watchman-Examiner (New
back, George observed, “During those years I read every book on the farm and every one I could borrow from outside.” Moreover, his family moved before George was born so that the family’s children could attend Hayesville Academy (formerly Hicksville Academy). George was a student there from 1875 to 1885.

The Truettts attended Hayesville Baptist Church while they lived in the area. Mary Truett prayed earnestly for the conversion of her children and husband. George actively participated in the ministries of Hayesville Baptist Church as well as other Protestant churches in the area. When he was nineteen, he made a public profession of faith at his home church during a revival meeting led by evangelist J.G. Pulliam on October 3, 1886 and joined the church the next day. Truett intended to go to college and study law, but a few days after his conversion, he was given a ministry opportunity, exhorting the assembly following a revival session. While he did not waver in his intended profession, fellow church members began to wonder whether preaching was in George’s future.

On November 14, he was baptized in the Hiawassee River.

After his graduation from Hayesville Academy, Truett took a job teaching at a school in Crooked Creek, just across the state border in Towns County, Georgia. During his time there, Truett developed the idea of establishing a school that functioned like Hayesville Academy, serving the educational needs of a broad section of people in a

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8 Quoted in George W. Gray, “Out of the Mountains Came This Great Preacher of the Plains,” American Magazine (November 1925): 16.
9 James, 14-15.
10 For a more detailed description of this event in Truett’s own words, see ibid., 23-26.
11 Durso, 19-20.
12 Ibid., 21.
largely rural region. Specifically, he wanted to start a school in Hiawassee, the county seat of Towns County. Located near most of the county’s population and easily accessible, Hiawassee was also near Truett’s cousin, Fernando (Ferd) McConnell, who was ten years older than Truett and had attended Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, as well as the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. McConnell’s family was immensely helpful in transforming Truett’s hopes for a school into reality.13

In January 1887, the Hiawassee Academy opened in the town’s courthouse with Truett as its principal. Meanwhile, in Hayesville, Truett had been serving as his church’s clerk since late November 1886. Beginning in 1888, he became Hayesville Baptist Church’s Sunday School superintendent. Soon he and the school received the attention of Georgia Baptists, who supported the institution through financial and personnel gifts. One Baptist even offered to pay Truett’s educational expenses at Mercer University.14 However, Truett’s path took a different turn when his family decided to sell their mountain farm and relocate to the Southwest. Truett discerned that he should follow them. Thus, in June 1889, after the enrollment of Hiawassee Academy had grown to 300 students, he moved with his family from North Carolina to Whitewright, Texas (a small town approximately 60 miles NNE of Dallas).15

13 James, 30-31.
14 Ibid., 40-41.
15 Ibid., 40.
Moving to Texas

In Whitewright, the family encountered the sweltering Texas heat but also land that was more fertile than the rocky soil of western North Carolina. George helped with the family farm before enrolling at Grayson Junior College in town in September 1889. He hoped that his studies, which included Greek, Latin, public speaking, history, and literature, would move him closer to his goal of becoming a lawyer. After they arrived from North Carolina, the Truett family began attending Whitewright Baptist Church. George taught Sunday School and over time was selected to be that church’s Sunday School superintendent. As J.M. Dawson noted, the members of the church also “were not tardy in discovering the rare capabilities of George Truett.”

James describes the congregation’s stance toward Truett and his gifts:

Gradually, the conviction grew upon the members of the little Baptist Church that George Truett ought to be a preacher. They discovered in him physical, mental, moral, and spiritual qualities which, in their judgment, were essential elements for that profession. Within a year after he had come among them their conviction grew so positive that they took... definite and concerted action about the matter.

This “definite and concerted action” began with an elderly deacon rising to speak at the conclusion of a church business meeting on a Saturday in 1890. His words eventually revealed a motion to ordain Truett to the ministry, which was seconded and passed unanimously, without Truett’s consent.

Truett offered his rebuttal, asking for more time to consider this possibility: “I appealed to them and said, ‘Wait six months, wait six months!’ And they said, ‘We won’t

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16 Ibid., 44-45.
18 James, 47.
wait six hours. We are called to do this thing now and we are going ahead with it. We are moved by a deep conviction that it is the will of God.”

Truett went home that evening and, after much deliberation, recognized that the *vox populi* represented the *vox Dei* and surrendered to the call to ministry. He was examined by an ordination council the following morning, which included his pastor from Hayesville, who was visiting his family at the time, and ordained that morning.

At the same time, Baylor University, a Baptist institution in Waco, Texas, was burdened with $92,000 of debt ($2,162,751 in present-day currency), an amount that threatened the future existence of the school. Baylor had been chartered in 1845 by the Republic of Texas and was initially located in Independence, Texas (in Washington County near Brenham; at that time, the wealthiest community in Texas). While Baylor was not established at first as a university, it did provide education for both men and women (originally coeducationally, then as a separate department that eventually was chartered as Baylor Female College). In 1886, in response to the decline of Independence as well as the merging of two state Baptist organizations (the Baptist General Association of Texas and the Baptist State Convention of Texas), Baylor University united with Waco University, retaining the Baylor name as the title of the new institution (At the same time, Baylor Female College moved to Belton, Texas, located between Waco and Austin; it is now known as the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor and is now coeducational).

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19 Quoted in ibid., 49.
20 Ibid., 51.
From this point forward, Baylor enjoyed prominent status as the flagship educational institution of Texas Baptists, but by 1890, the future looked dim. Debt crippled the school, and their financial agent, J.B. Cranfill had left to take another job with Texas Baptists. B.H. Carroll, pastor of First Baptist Church of Waco, professor at Baylor, and chairman of Baylor’s Board of Trustees, was tasked with the responsibility of finding someone to raise the requisite funds to save the university. R.F. Jenkins, pastor of Whitewright Baptist Church, began to believe that Truett was the right person for the job, despite the fact that he was virtually unknown to all Baptists in the state, and wrote to inform Carroll, stating, “There is one thing I do know about George W. Truett – wherever he speaks, the people do what he asks them to do.”

Carroll was skeptical at first, but invited Truett to meet him in McKinney, Texas (about halfway between Whitewright and Dallas) on November 12, 1890. They discussed the primary task of Baylor’s financial agent, traveling the state to solicit contributions for the institution, as well as Baylor’s beloved place among Texas Baptists.

Truett took two months to consider the job before he traveled to Waco in January 1891 in order to accept the position and meet the Board of Trustees, who were shocked at Carroll’s choice of a young man of twenty-three years of age to save Baylor from financial ruin. However, Truett reassured them that he was capable and asked for their prayerful support. Living with and working alongside Carroll, Truett traveled the state and within twenty-three months had raised the necessary funds to settle Baylor’s

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21 Quoted in ibid., 52.
22 Ibid., 56-57.
debt, with Carroll declaring to Truett at the conclusion of the fundraising effort, “It is finished.”

Following this remarkable feat, Truett enrolled as a freshman at Baylor in 1893, stating, “When at last the entire fund had been raised and the mortgage paid,... I found that I had not only talked the people of Texas into giving $92,000 to Baylor, but I had also talked myself into attending there.” Truett was a hard-working student while at Baylor, and soon after he entered Baylor, he was called to be the student pastor of East Waco Baptist Church, which he accepted. They paid him modestly ($400 annually), but enough to enable him to pay for his education. By the time his four-year tenure at the church was completed (which Truett described as a time of “experimenting” on the congregation with his preaching), his salary had increased to $1000 annually.

During Truett’s time at Baylor, he also met his future wife, Josephine Jenkins, the daughter of a deacon at First Baptist Church of Waco and a Baylor trustee. She herself graduated from Baylor in 1890 and was referred to Truett by several shared acquaintances. They were married on June 28, 1894 in a ceremony officiated by B.H. Carroll. Along with his formal studies, Truett also received an informal education from his relationship with Carroll, who became a theological mentor to the young minister, offering his pulpit when available for Truett to preach, opening his library to Truett, and

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23 For more details on this accomplishment, see ibid., 59-64 and Durso, 39-45.
24 Quoted in Gray, 138.
25 Truett had given his $500 of savings, which was intended to pay for his education, to the Baylor fundraising effort, reasoning that he also should support the cause. Cf. Gray, 136, 138.
26 James, 68.
27 Josephine’s father, Judge W.H. Jenkins, graduated from Baylor when it was located in Independence. He was one of the trustees who met Truett at B.H. Carroll’s home in early 1891 and was initially skeptical of Truett’s ability to erase Baylor’s debt (Ibid).
28 Ibid., 72. For more details about these years of Truett’s life, see ibid., 66-79.
engaging him in conversation on relevant theological topics. The formation from this relationship continued even as Truett completed his work at Baylor in June 1897.

After his graduation from Baylor University, Truett intended to remain at East Waco Baptist Church, perhaps taking time off to study at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In other words, he was not looking to leave town and was very content with his circumstances. During the summer after his graduation, the Truett family welcomed their first child, Jessie, into their family. Nonetheless, many churches solicited his services as pastor, but he informed each suitor that he was not interested in departing from Waco. However, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, would not take no for an answer. When they asked him to consider their opening, he declined. The church ignored Truett’s refusal and extended a call for him to be their pastor.29 Once he met with the church following this action, he decided to accept the call to pastor the church, starting this position on the second Sunday in September 1897 and serving there for the rest of his life.30

*First Baptist Church of Dallas*

From the very beginning of his pastorate, George W. Truett displayed significant loyalty to First Baptist Church, which was reciprocated. He became close friends with many power brokers within Baptist life and the city of Dallas.31 However, one event early in his tenure threatened Truett as a pastor and a person, and ultimately influenced

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29 Ibid., 80.
30 Ibid., 80-82.
31 McBeth notes that Dallas was the epicenter of Texas Baptist life, “with the state convention office, the *Baptist Standard*, and Buckner’s Orphans Home located there” (McBeth, “George W. Truett: Baptist Statesman,” 12).
the shape of his ministry. In February 1898, Truett went on a hunting trip to Cleburne, Texas (approximately 50 miles SW of Dallas) with another pastor and Jim C. Arnold, a member of Truett’s church and a former Texas Ranger who was also the chief of the Dallas police department. After being unsuccessful the day before and earlier that day (February 4), Arnold and Truett returned to hunt at a previous location late in the afternoon, where an unfortunate tragedy occurred: “Captain Arnold was walking along a path a few paces in front. Truett shifted his gun from one arm to the other and in so doing the trigger of the hammerless gun was touched. A load of bird shot struck Chief Arnold in the calf of the leg.” While this was not a bad wound, Truett began to worry. Arnold was stabilized and in fair condition, which enabled him to encourage Truett to return to Dallas to inform his family of the accident before he returned. Eventually Truett agreed. Arnold returned later the next morning but died of a heart attack that evening at his home.

This event devastated Truett, prompting him to consider leaving the ministry altogether. When he finally returned to the pulpit on February 20, his face was described as “drawn and his eyes were so sad.” Moreover, his voice was different: “we heard for the first time the note of sadness and pathos which later we came to know so well. It seemed to carry the burden of all the grief in the world.” As a sign of support for Truett in his return to active ministry, Methodist and Presbyterian churches in the area cancelled Sunday evening services. In 1939, Truett would tell his son-in-law that a

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32 James, 85.
33 Originally it was reported that Arnold died of “blood poisoning.” While this was later refuted, the heart attack was likely brought on by the accident. Cf. Gray, 138.
34 James, 87.
35 Gray, 138.
vision of Jesus, where the Lord declared to Truett, “Be not afraid. You are my man from
now on,” bolstered his faith and enabled him to continue his work at First Baptist
Church. Nonetheless, this series of events was equally traumatic and formative in the
life of the young pastor, and he would refer to this chapter of his life as “something at
least of what Gethsemane meant to Jesus.”

Once he regained his confidence, Truett’s commitment to the gospel and his
ministry at First Baptist Church was never in question, though his services were in
demand in many places. When the trustees of Baylor University offered him the
presidency in 1899, Truett stopped to consider the proposal to lead his alma mater. He
had become a trustee of Baylor in 1898 and remained so throughout his life. Moreover,
he had been further linked to Baylor when he was awarded an honorary doctorate of
divinity in 1899. In the end, however, he rejected the offer, replying, “I have sought and
found the shepherd heart of a pastor. I must remain at Dallas.” This would not be the
last time that Truett would garner the attention for other jobs.

Growing Influence on Baptists’ Life and Thought

While he never wavered in his commitment to First Baptist Church, Truett did
not find that his pastorate hindered his opportunities beyond his local congregation. In
fact, his church supported him as he traveled to serve Baptists in a broader context. He

36 James, 88.
37 Quoted in Durso, 55.
38 Quoted in James, 95-96.
39 Truett was also offered positions at churches in Kansas City (1903), Philadelphia (1903), San
Antonio (1904), Seattle (1904), Louisville (1906 and twice in 1907). Even when First Baptist Church of
Waco, where B.H. Carroll had served, called Truett to fill his mentor’s former pulpit in October 1901,
Truett declined (Durso, 59-61).
gave speeches at numerous events, including annual meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention or the Baptist World Alliance, evangelistic meetings, university and seminary convocations, as well as non-Baptist gatherings.\textsuperscript{40} Truett even served as a YMCA chaplain to Allied forces during the First World War, leaving Dallas on July 9, 1918 and returning to First Baptist Church on February 9, 1919.\textsuperscript{41}

Among Texas Baptists, Truett served as an amazing fundraiser for a variety of causes. One of these efforts surrounded efforts by Baptists to establish a hospital in the Dallas area. In 1904, the Texas Baptist Memorial Sanitarium opened in a 14-room renovated house, but closed a year later because it was overwhelmed by the need. New facilities were required. Truett worked for over five years to raise the necessary $250,000 for a new building. On October 14, 1909, the sanitarium reopened in its 250-bed facility. Baylor University moved its medical school, as well as other related academic entities, to Dallas, prompting the sanitarium to be renamed Baylor Hospital in 1921 (later Baylor University Hospital in 1936 and Baylor University Medical Center in 1959).\textsuperscript{42}

Truett also served in a leadership capacity during the Southern Baptist Convention’s first major fundraising effort, the “75 Million Campaign.” Intended to collectively solicit funds for Southern Baptist ministries over a five-year period, (1919-1924), the 75 Million Campaign served more than pragmatic ends; it presented the amazing financial support of Baptist work to the world. Baptists pledged their money to

\textsuperscript{40} For a detailed account of Truett’s growing popularity in the early twentieth century, see James, 115-129.
\textsuperscript{41} See Durso, 137-158.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 68-71, 112, 255.
the campaign over a seven-month period, which concluded on December 7, 1919. It was calculated that the Southern Baptist Convention had pledged $92,630,923, well exceeding the goal. Truett had encouraged his own congregation to lead by example, prompting them to pledge $606,742, the largest donation ever given by the church.\footnote{James, 166. Dawson includes a slightly longer description of the “75 Million Campaign” in \textit{A Century with Texas Baptists} (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1947), 83-84.} However, because of more difficult economic circumstances in the early 1920s, only $58,591,713 was collected, even after the program was extended to 1925.\footnote{McBeth, \textit{Texas Baptists}, 164-165.} Nonetheless, this experience contributed to the development of the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program in 1925, which embraced collective giving but established more stability over the long term.\footnote{The Cooperative Program was an effort by churches to contribute funds to denominational work through regular giving, sharing a portion of the funds with state conventions and the national Southern Baptist Convention. For more information, see Austin Crouch, “Cooperative Program,” in \textit{Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists}, 1:323-324.}

Truett’s prominence grew nationwide. He served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1927 until 1930. He was acclaimed in a nationwide survey of preachers in 1924 as one of the twenty-five greatest preachers in the United States.\footnote{“Greatness in Preachers,” \textit{The Christian Century} 42 (January 8, 1925): 44-45.} Moreover, he was later profiled as one of the thirty-two greatest American preachers.\footnote{Edgar DeWitt Jones, \textit{American Preachers of To-day: Intimate Appraisals of Thirty-two Leaders} (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1933), 292-301.} In 1930, one Kentuckian proposed that Truett be nominated as a candidate for President of the United States in 1932.\footnote{See Durso, 209-210; McBeth, “George W. Truett: Baptist Statesman,” 20.} He declined to serve his country in that capacity, but he was elected president of the Baptist World Alliance, holding one five-
year term (1934-1939). At the 1939 Baptist World Alliance meeting in Atlanta, Truett arrived to immense fanfare, even receiving the key to the city. On July 23, he delivered his presidential address, entitled, “The Baptist Message and Mission for the World Today,” to over 67,000 people who had filled the baseball stadium of the minor league Atlanta Crackers. In many ways, Truett’s speech offered a clear summary statement of his theological convictions, echoing many points of emphasis (e.g., individual religion, Baptists as heralds of freedom) from earlier addresses.

Late in life, Truett faced his inability to fulfill his duties as pastor of First Baptist Church due to his declining health. On June 4, 1944, he resigned his position, but his congregation voted unanimously to reject his resignation. His health further deteriorated until his death on July 7, 1944 at his home in Dallas. He was mourned by Baptists and non-Baptists alike, especially in Dallas, where the Dallas Morning News prominently reported his passing and burial on the front page of two separate issues of the paper. Historian Leon McBeth reports that “[w]hen he died, it was said, even the undertakers were sad.” On his grave marker, as if testifying to his lasting significance for Baptists after his death, a fragment of Hebrews 11:4 is listed: “He being dead yet speaketh” (KJV). Truett’s legacy includes many memorials within the names of Baptist buildings and institutions, including a hospital and a seminary as part of Baylor.

49 James, 186, 189.  
50 Durso, 237. It is estimated that 20,000 – 25,000 people were outside the stadium, unable to enter because of safety restrictions. This speech was reprinted recently, see George W. Truett, “The Baptist Message and Mission for the World Today,” Southwestern Journal of Theology 41 (1999): 107-129.  
51 Durso, 260-261.  
52 Felix R. McKnight, “Dr. George W. Truett, Minister to World, Dies,” Dallas Morning News (July 8, 1944): 1, 7; Lois Sager, “Christendom Bows Its Head as Dr. Truett Laid to Rest,” Dallas Morning News (July 11, 1944): 1, 9, 12.  
As for First Baptist Church of Dallas, when Truett died, it was the largest non-Catholic church in the United States. While Truett’s death brought an end to an era within the church’s history, a new chapter was soon to begin. After much deliberation, W.A. Criswell was called to succeed Truett as pastor in the fall of 1944.

Truett Among the Baptists: Exemplar of the Distinctive of Religious Liberty

The 1920 Speech. Much could be said to describe Truett’s thought. However, no event cemented George W. Truett’s legacy in Baptist, and even American, life than his speech on the U.S. Capitol steps on May 16, 1920 during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting. Since he delivered it, Truett has been linked with the ideas of religious liberty and hailed as one of its most significant Baptist spokespersons. Friend and fellow Baptist pastor J.M. Dawson commented, “Perhaps in no more emphatic manner was his message heard by a multitude with stronger approval than it was on [that day].” Not officially an event of the convention, the speech that Sunday

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54 George W. Truett Memorial Hospital (part of the Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas) and George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas, respectively. Truett’s namesakes also include Truett Auditorium at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Georgia (not far from the location of Hiawassee Academy), the Truett Home for Children in Israel, and two Truett Baptist Associations in North Carolina and Tennessee.

55 W.A. Criswell expanded the membership of the church from approximately 8,000 to 25,000 during his 51-year tenure as pastor. Moreover, he played a central role in the conservative segment within SBC life, preaching premillennial dispensationalism and supporting Republican political candidates.

56 Dawson, Baptists and the American Republic, 220-221. This moment was re-enacted on June 29, 2007 at the Baptist Unity Rally for Religious Liberty at Fountain Plaza of Upper Senate Park, near the U.S. Capitol. The event, sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, included some remarks by several U.S. Congressmen and the recitation of portions of 1920 sermon by nine Baptists: William Underwood, president of Mercer University, Baptist denominational leaders Daniel Vestal (coordinator for Cooperative Baptist Fellowship) and Jeffrey Haggray (executive director of District of Columbia Baptist Convention), professor Quinton Dixie (IUPUI at Ft. Wayne, IN), Baptist historian Pamela Durso, Baptist journalist Robert Marus, and pastors Amy Butler (Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.), Steven Case (First Baptist Church in Mansfield, PA), and Julie Pennington-Russell (First Baptist
afternoon to an immense and diverse crowd\textsuperscript{57} followed a corporate singing of “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee.”\textsuperscript{58} The topic of Truett’s address, which was assigned to him by event organizers (the Baptists of Washington), was “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” specifically Baptists’ distinctive role in spreading religious liberty in the United States and around the world.\textsuperscript{59} One of his most memorable statements from the speech was “Indeed the supreme contribution of the new world to the old is the contribution of religious liberty. This is the chiefest [sic] contribution that America has thus far made to civilization. And historic justice compels me to say that it was pre-eminently a Baptist contribution.”\textsuperscript{60}

Despite the fact that Truett’s speech did not offer any new concepts or ideas to Baptist discussions of religious liberty, it remains one of the hallmarks of Baptist advocacy in this area. Virtually all articles and book chapters on the subject of Baptists and religious liberty at least mention this speech, and several treatments are relatively lengthy. Walter Shurden notes that Truett’s 1920 address is “one of the most often

\textsuperscript{57} Dawson states that this assembly numbered “more than fifteen thousand, including members of both houses of the Congress, army and navy officials, Supreme Court justices, editors, and citizens of every field of endeavor” [Dawson, \textit{Baptists and the American Republic}, 220]. James echoes this number of the crowd and its constituents (James, 1-2). There are several other reports of varying estimates, including one (that could be attributed to either typographical error or numerical enthusiasm) by E.W. Stephens, who stated that Truett addressed “an assemblage of over 100,000 people” [E.W. Stephens, “At Washington with the Southern Baptists,” \textit{The Baptist} 1 (May 29, 1920): 8].

\textsuperscript{58} James, 1.


\textsuperscript{60} Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 32.
quoted Baptist statements on religious liberty of the twentieth century.” In a note at the conclusion of the 1998 reprinting of Truett’s address, an editor of Baptist History and Heritage declared that Truett’s words from the Capitol steps are “a powerful statement of Baptist beliefs,” and that they “[remind] Baptists of foundational principles and [defend] them eloquently and passionately.”

Thus, even if he did not augment the arguments for religious liberty, Truett is generally remembered as a prominent exemplar of this “Baptist distinctive,” one that has increasingly been elevated by some Baptists. With this context, it is not surprising, then, that Truett’s address is congruent with several aspects of Baptist discourse at that time (and stands prominently along the trajectory of current Baptist thought). Within the speech itself, the three themes of personal salvation, reservations about Catholicism, and democratic freedom properly characterize the thrust of Truett’s argument that day from the Capitol.

Religious Liberty and Personal Salvation. Personal salvation stands at the center of Truett’s thought. Indeed, this places the focus on the individual who privately believes. In reporting on Truett’s speech, Texan J.B. Gambrell, who was elected SBC president in 1920, observed, “[F]undamentally, Baptists hold that religion is individualistic; that it is something in the realm of mind and spirit.” Truett himself declared that this emphasis was grounded in the Bible, stating, “When we turn to this

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New Testament, which is Christ’s guidebook and law for His people, we find that supreme emphasis is everywhere put upon the individual.”

As discussed in chapter five, Truett echoed Mullins’s advocacy for a direct approach to God, stating, “Every one must give account of himself to God. There can be no sponsors or deputies or proxies in such a vital matter.” Moreover, Truett elevated the individual’s ability to read and interpret for him or herself, describing this as a right that was anthropologically grounded: “The right to private judgment is the crown jewel of humanity, and for any person or institution to dare to come between the soul and God is a blasphemous impertinence and a defamation of the crown rights of the Son of God.” Consequently, religious liberty was firmly grounded in the freedom of the individual’s conscience to pursue voluntary and uncoerced belief (or lack of belief), a point that Truett makes in contrasting absolute liberty to toleration.

**Religious Liberty and Opposition to Catholicism.** Like many of his Baptist (and Protestant) coreligionists, Truett was suspicious of Catholicism. That is to say, Truett was a whole-hearted participant in the Baptist anti-Catholicism described in chapter three. Extending from his emphasis on individualism, which he positioned against “absolutism,” Truett opposed what he considered to be autocracy. Within the 1920s Truett was suspicious of Catholicism. That is to say, Truett was a whole-hearted participant in the Baptist anti-Catholicism described in chapter three. Extending from his emphasis on individualism, which he positioned against “absolutism,” Truett opposed what he considered to be autocracy. Within the 1920s

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66 Ibid. Recall Truett in 1939: “The late President Mullins ... affirms the competency of the individual, under God, in matters of religion.... Religion is a matter of personal relationship between the soul and God, and nothing extraneous may properly intrude here” (Truett, “The Baptist Message and Mission for the World Today,” 113).
68 “Toleration implies that somebody falsely claims the right to tolerate. Toleration is a concession, while liberty is a right. Toleration is a gift from man, while liberty is a gift from God” (Ibid., 33).
69 Democracy is the manifestation of individualism. For Truett, it seems as though there are few, if any, mediating positions between autocracy and democracy: “[T]hrough the long years two ideas have
address, Truett saw the Catholic Church as antithetical to Baptist and even American ideals: “The Roman Catholic message is sacerdotal, sacramentarian and ecclesiastical.... The Baptist message is non-sacerdotal, non-sacramentarian and non-ecclesiastical.”

In his 1939 speech in Atlanta, Truett elaborated: “Baptists are in conscience compelled to reject and oppose sacerdotalism that puts a priest between a soul and Christ; and sacramentarianism that makes external ordinances in themselves, vehicles of grace; and ecclesiasticism that puts a church between a sinner and salvation.” He saw Catholicism as an “other” that stood on the fringe of (American) society. Nonetheless, Truett defended Catholics’ ability to practice their faith without imposing it on others:

Although the Baptist is the very antithesis of his Catholic neighbour in religious conceptions and contentions, yet the Baptist will whole-heartedly contend that his Catholic neighbour shall have his candles and incense and sanctus bell and rosary, and whatever he wishes in the expression of his worship. A Baptist would rise at midnight to plead for absolute religious liberty for his Catholic neighbour, and for his Jewish neighbour, and for everybody else.

Thus, while Truett would argue that Catholics’ beliefs and practices were false, he certainly did not desire to prevent such religious expression through formal civil

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been in endless antagonism – the idea of absolutism and the idea of individualism, the idea of autocracy and the idea of democracy” (Ibid., 46).

Ibid., 36; such words were repeated in 1939 at the Sixth Baptist World Congress in Truett’s speech, “The Baptist Message and Mission for the World Today.”


Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 37-38. Recent Baptist scholars have attempted to distance themselves from Truett’s apparent anti-Catholic sentiments. See the editor’s note in Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” Baptist History and Heritage, 85; and Walter B. Shurden, “Introduction,” 5-6. While Canipe is dubious of these attempts to “decontextualize Truett’s remarks in the name of ecumenism” (Canipe, “The Echoes of Baptist Democracy,” 430n34), J. David Holcomb has offered a more sustained defense of Truett. See J. David Holcomb, “A Millstone Hanged about His Neck?: George W. Truett, Anti-Catholicism, and Baptist Conceptions of Religious Liberty,” Baptist History and Heritage 43.3 (Summer/Fall 2008): 68-81.
restraint, a point where he echoes the words of prominent Baptists from previous
generations.73

In his diatribe against religious proxies, Truett singles out infant baptism, noting
that it is “a Romish tradition and a cornerstone for the whole system of popery
throughout the world.”74 Also disturbing to Truett was the Catholic notion of papal
infallibility, which he discussed (and seemingly mocked) by stating, “That was a
memorable hour in the Vatican Council, when the dogma of papal infallibility was
passed by a majority vote.”75 Truett counterposed this dogma with individual
interpretation of the New Testament.76 According to Truett, not only did papal
infallibility threaten unimpeded individual access to God by solidifying the place of the
pope and the episcopal hierarchy between the individual and God, but it also stood as a

73 In 1612, English Baptist Thomas Helwys wrote, “For men’s religion to God, is betwixt God and
themselves; the King shall not answer for it; neither may the King be judge between God and man. Let
them be heretics, Turks [i.e., Muslims], Jews or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to
punish them in the least measure” [Thomas Helwys, A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity, in
Radical Christian Writings: A Reader, ed. Andrew Bradstock and Christopher Rowland (Oxford: Blackwell
Publishers, 2002), 108].

that, if all the Protestant denominations would once for all put away infant baptism, and come to the full
acceptance and faithful practice of New Testament baptism, the unity of all the non-Catholic Christians in
the world would be consummated, and that there would not be left one Roman Catholic church on the
face of the earth at the expiration of the comparatively short period of another century” (Ibid).

emphasis added. It should be pointed out that the First Vatican Council did not initiate the Catholic
understanding of papal infallibility; it dogmatically defined it. Further, the definition issued requirements
that restrict the papal statements that are considered to be infallibly promulgated. That is, the definition
of papal infallibility of 1870, while it was intended to solidify the papacy as an authoritative arbiter of
ecclesial disputes, actually made it possible for Catholics to better distinguish between infallible
statements and those that were authoritative to a lesser degree.

76 “You recall that in the midst of all the tenseness and tumult of that excited assemblage [at the
First Vatican Council], Cardinal Manning stood on an elevated platform, and in the paper just passed,
declaring for the infallibility of the Pope, said, ‘Let all the world go to bits and we will reconstruct it on this
paper’... But what is the answer of a Baptist to the contention made by the Catholic for papal infallibility?
Holding aloft a little book, the name of which is the New Testament, and without any hesitation or doubt,
the Baptist shouts his battle cry: ‘Let all the world go to bits and we will reconstruct it on the New
Testament’” (Ibid., 37-38).
constituent part of the obstacle to democratic religious freedom presented by the Catholic Church.\(^7\) Thus, Catholicism stands as the prime example of autocracy (of a spiritual variety) that is to be avoided.

**Religious Liberty and Love for Democracy.** The previous two themes reinforce the third, Truett’s love for democracy. Spurning any ecclesiology that produced a hierarchy of authority (seeing this as synonymous with the autocracy found in the Catholic Church), Truett saw democracy as the hope of the church: “Christ’s church is not only a spiritual body but it is also a pure democracy, all its members being equal.”\(^7\)

Viewed through his focus on individualism in religion, Truett underwrites a form of political atomism, where each person and his or her actions are to be isolated as much as possible. In this way, liberty of conscience indicates that no other person can determine the truth for another, which is why toleration of others’ religious beliefs is not sufficient. Thus, Truett labeled the Protestant Reformation as an “arrested development,” because the Reformers “turned out to be persecutors like the Papacy before them.”\(^7\)

For him, then, the United States, despite retaining some of the remnants of church-state union, became a truly remarkable site where genuine religious

\(^7\) “We are, in all kindly candor, compelled to say that the Catholic doctrines of baptismal regeneration and trans-substantiation are to the Baptist mind fundamentally subversive of the Spiritual realities of the Gospel of Christ. Likewise, the Catholic conception of the church, thrusting all its complex and cumbersome machinery between the soul and God, prescribing beliefs, claiming to exercise the power of the keys, and to control the channels of grace – all such lording it over the consciences of men, is to the Baptist mind an insufferable tyranny in the realm of the soul, and tends to frustrate the grace of God, to destroy the freedom of conscience, and terribly to hinder the coming of the Kingdom of God” (Truett, “The Baptist Mission and Message for the World Today,” 112).

\(^7\) Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 42.

\(^7\) Ibid., 48.
and civil liberty could take root and flourish as the fruits of democracy, and, according to Truett, this was “pre-eminently a Baptist achievement.”

**Truett Among Other Protestants: Separation of Church and State**

Despite his critique of Protestantism, as one moves away from Baptist interlocutors, Truett’s argument for the separation of church and state still appears well at home within a Protestant world. Each of the three themes of this thought link Baptists’ advocacy of separation of church and state with individual religion, support of American freedom, and wariness of Catholics. Referring to the words of Jesus, Truett states, “[T]here must be no union between church and state, because their nature and functions are utterly different.” After dividing the functions of church and state, he notes the implications of this division for Christians: “We are members of the two realms, the civil and the religious, and are faithfully to render unto each all that each should receive at our hands.” Consequently, each person has responsibilities to fulfill in both the religious and the civil realms. According to Truett, one does not supersede the other. Moreover, he does not indicate that these two realms will ever conflict with one another. That is, once separated, the state will never tread on the church’s liberty.

With his emphasis on democracy over autocracy, both the civil and the religious arenas are constituted by individuals who participate in two different democracies, one

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80 Ibid., 50.
81 Ibid., 43. Truett references Matthew 22:21 (“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s”; NRSV) and John 18:36 (“My kingdom is not from this world”; NRSV).
82 Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 53.
for citizens and the other for believers. This, as will be seen below, resonates with the conceptualizations of church-state relations found in the work of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Locke while also clarifying the shape and direction of Truett’s argument. Furthermore, Luther, Calvin, and Locke sharpen Truett’s argument for religious liberty, perhaps even standing as the intellectual backdrop for Truett, even if their influence was indirect and unacknowledged by him.  

**Luther on Church & State.** Martin Luther (1483-1546) argued that church and state should be understood as two separate entities, where the temporal (or political) stands separate from the spiritual: “There are two kingdoms, one the kingdom of God, the other the kingdom of the world.” He stated that Christian freedom, or the freedom granted within the kingdom of God, was not related to circumstances in the kingdom of the world. Developed in response to the liberties taken by German peasants who argued that the freedom granted in baptism made Christians equal in all respects in the civil realm as well, including status and possessions, Luther declared in 1525, “[B]aptism does not make men free in body and property, but in soul; and the gospel does not

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83 Truett does not mention Luther and Calvin by name in his 1920 address. He does offer a quotation from Locke, which declares, “The Baptists were the first propounders of absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty” (Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty, 32). It is noteworthy to mention that attempts by Baptist scholars to locate this statement of praise for Baptists in Locke’s writings have been unsuccessful thus far. Cf. Conrad Henry Moehlman, “The Baptists Revise John Locke,” *The Journal of Religion* 18.2 (April 1938): 174-182.


85 “[C]are must be taken to keep these two governments distinct, and both must be allowed to continue their work, the one to make people just, the other to create outward peace and prevent evildoing. Neither is enough for the world without the other” [Martin Luther, “On Secular Authority,” in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, ed & trans. Harro Höpfl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12. Also see Article XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession (1530).
make goods common....” According to Alister McGrath, “Luther’s social ethic seems to suggest that two totally different moralities exist side by side: a private Christian ethic, reflecting the rule of love embodied in the Sermon on the Mount and challenging human conceptions of righteousness; and a public morality, based upon force, which endorses human conceptions of righteousness.” Moreover, the division between the spheres of authority for the two kingdoms correlated with a division between one’s body and one’s soul: “Secular government has laws that extend no further than the body, goods and outward, earthly matters. But where the soul is concerned, God neither can nor will allow anyone but himself to rule.”

**Calvin on Church & State.** John Calvin (1509-1564), while different from Luther in some significant respects, parallels him on this topic. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin writes,

[L]et us observe that in man government is twofold: the one spiritual, by which the conscience is trained to piety and divine worship; the other civil, by which the individual is instructed in those duties which, as men and citizens, we are bound to perform.... The former has its seat within the soul, the latter only regulates the external conduct.... Now, these two, as we have divided them, are always to be viewed apart from each other. When one is considered, we should call off our minds, and not allow them to think of the other. For there exists in man a kind of two worlds, over which different kings and different laws can preside.

Like Luther, Calvin sees government as consisting of two parts that are separated from one another. Moreover, these two authorities divide the body from the soul.

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86. Martin Luther, “Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants,” in *Selected Writings of Martin Luther*, 3:351.
Consequently, Calvin is clear that an individual Christian has dual sets of duties to perform (i.e., there are two different “kings”) in order to display proper loyalty in both the civil and religious spheres. Thus, to attempt to link the responsibilities of the soul to those of the body would be incorrect and misguided.

“The Noble John Locke.” English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), paralleling this distinction, states, “There is a twofold society, of which almost all men in the world are members, and that from the twofold concernment they have to attain a twofold happiness: viz. that of this world and that of the other: and hence there arises these two following societies, viz. religious and civil.” Following this statement, Locke systematically details the difference between “religious society, or the church” and “civil society, or the state,” linking the civil sphere to the operations of the state and the religious sphere to the church. In addition, Locke argues that the political point of departure (i.e., the state of nature) was one of individuality. Society, then, is constructed when “individuals come together on the basis of a social contract, each individual entering society in order to protect person and property.”

Two important points emerge from this statement. First, civil government cannot decide on the truth of various religious claims since they are internal to each

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90 Truett uses these words to describe Locke (Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 32).
92 Ibid.
93 William Cavanaugh, Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 17. Cavanaugh notes that a less palatable description of this state of nature comes from Thomas Hobbes, who argues for individual freedom and equality of all human beings by stating that human beings are in a state of bellum omnis contra omnem (i.e., “war of all against all”) (Ibid.)
individual. Second, religion is also grounded in the individual who has been convinced of the truth of a particular tradition. Because of this, churches serve as associations of like-minded people, choosing to assemble with one another for worship, which serves to undercut any substantive social nature of the church. Finally, Locke’s political philosophy also offers a body/soul dichotomy, articulating church/state separation so as to locate all genuine political activity in the state-centered public arena (i.e., as statecraft), leaving the church as an (apparently) apolitical, private entity concerned only for the salvation of souls.

Echoing the thoughts of Luther, Calvin, and Locke, Truett argues that church and state must never be joined because the individual liberty of conscience would be violated. He also employs a separation between body and soul, implying that responsibilities to the state are bodily while those of religion relate to the soul. For instance, while he consistently writes of the soul’s uninhibited relation with God, Truett also identifies the causes worthy of giving one’s life: “The sanctity of womanhood is worth dying for. The safety of childhood is worth dying for.... The integrity of one’s

94 Locke did, however, argue against religious toleration for Catholics and atheists.
95 “All the life and power of true religion consist in the inward and full persuasion of the mind” [Locke, “A Letter Concerning Toleration,” in John Locke, Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 219].
96 Cavanaugh, 40. “A church... I take to be a voluntary society of [people], joining themselves together of their own accord in order to the public worshipping of God” (Locke, “A Letter Concerning Toleration,” 220).
97 “The care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate, because his power consists only in outward force, but true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind...” (Ibid., 219).
98 “[If each of them [i.e., church and state] would contain itself within its own bounds, the one attending to the worldly welfare of the commonwealth, the other to the salvation of souls, it is impossible that any discord should ever have happened between them” (Ibid., 251).
country is worth dying for. And, please God, the freedom and honour of the United States is worth dying for.”

With this divide between the body and soul, the church is left with no concerns for external (i.e., “worldly”) affairs, only with saving souls. The church, then, is constituted as an association of like-minded individuals. Not surprisingly, though, Truett views Baptists as remarkably good citizens: “Happily, the record of our Baptist people toward civil government has been a record of unfading honour. Their love and loyalty to country have not been put to shame in any land.” Indeed, Truett does not seem to allow for the possibility that church and state might be counterposed, that love for country could come into conflict with love for Christ. Thus, rather than viewing them as opponents, he discusses the missions of church and state by using the same terminology, setting them up as parallel entities: “Democracy is the goal toward which all feet are travelling [sic], whether in state or in church.” Freedom, then, is a rhetorical link between the civil and religious spheres, as Canipe notes: “Baptists stood for freedom in the spiritual realm, America stood for freedom in the political realm.”

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99 Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 57; emphasis added.
100 Ibid., 53.
101 In his dissertation, Jason Whitt notes that “Truett was not unaware that the combatants on each side [during World War I] were largely Western countries who comprised the ‘Christianized’ world. Yet, he saw the war as one of ideology: the ideals of freedom and democracy that were inculcated in the Christian schools of America against the ideals of tyranny and religious oppression taught in the schools of Germany” (Jason D. Whitt, “Transforming Views of Baptist Ecclesiology: Baptists and the New Christendom Model of Political Engagement” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2008), 170n54). For more on the school question within Truett’s discussion of the First World War, see Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 60-61.
102 Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 65. In another sermon, he writes that democracy “is the goal for this world of ours – both the political goal and the religious goal” (George W. Truett, “The Prayer Jesus Refused to Pray,” in Follow Thou Me (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1932), 43.
In other words, Truett was fully Baptist and fully American, indicating that the temporal and spiritual realms were separate, yet also parallel.

**POAU and Baptist Americanism**

Truett’s conception of separation of church and state were manifested in the work of J.M. Dawson and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BLC PA), where opposition to Catholicism was a prime concern. According to Baptist historian Robert Torbet, the offices of the BJCPA were “strategically located when there is need for Baptists to defend religious liberty by raising their voices against encroachments of the state upon the church, and against what Baptists regard as Roman Catholic aggression in behalf of sectarianism in education and political favor.”\(^{104}\) Moreover, Dawson and many Baptists had associations with Protestants and Other Americans for the Separation of Church and State (POAU), a group for which Paul Blanshard, an anti-Catholic secularist, was a lawyer.\(^{105}\) Like the later POAU, Truett and many of his Baptist contemporaries held suspicions about Catholics in the United States, wondering if they “really believed” in the separation of church and state, concerns that some Catholics constantly felt.

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\(^{105}\) Several articles written by POAU leaders were printed in the *Baptist Standard*, a newspaper for Texas Baptists. For more on POAU and Blanshard, see chapter 3, pp. 76-78.
obligated to refute.\textsuperscript{106} Dawson, Truett’s friend, stated that those who did not hold to strict separation had “failed to become thoroughly Americanized.”\textsuperscript{107}

**Conclusion**

As has been discussed, Truett’s positions were fairly typical for Baptists of his day, and he is still extolled as a hero for Baptist advocacy of religious liberty. What is more, he was not alone in linking Baptist ideals to the American experiment. As Baptist historian Barry Hankins has noted, “[M]any of the elites who ran the SBC quite naturally and logically connected the historic Baptist witness in favor of religious liberty with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the idea of being a good American, and the Protestant disdain for Catholic arguments [for more accommodation and funding for religiously-based infrastructure].”\textsuperscript{108} Thus, Truett (along with Dawson) stands at the heart of something that could be labeled “Baptist Americanism,” where Baptists are connected with the past and future of the American context by means of their shared love for democratic freedom: “This is democracy’s hour…. [T]he triumph of democracy means the triumph of Baptists everywhere.”\textsuperscript{109}

\textsuperscript{106} John Courtney Murray seems to know this experience well: “It is customary to put to Catholics what is supposed to be an embarrassing question: Do you really believe in the first two provisions of the First Amendment?” [John Courtney Murray, S.J., *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Lanham, Md.: Sheed & Ward, 1960; reprint, Lanham, Md.: Sheed & Ward, 2005), 62]. For more on Murray, see chapter seven.


\textsuperscript{109} George W. Truett, “God’s Call to America,” in God’s Call to America and Other Addresses Comprising Special Orations Delivered on Widely Varying Occasions (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1923), 19. This text is the transcript of a speech delivered by Truett at the conclusion of the annual meeting of the Baptist World Alliance in 1911.
In the next chapter, Truett (as representative of Baptists on religious liberty) will be examined through the lens of nature and grace provided by de Lubac, offering new perspective on Truett’s insights and the future shape of Baptists’ advocacy of religious liberty.
CHAPTER VII: GEORGE W. TRUETT, RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, AND
THE THEOLOGY OF NATURE & GRACE

In the previous chapter, George W. Truett was introduced as a prominent Baptist spokesperson and representative of the Baptist ideal (i.e., distinctive) of religious liberty. Indeed, he stands as prominent representative of “Baptist Americanism.” In order to turn attention toward Catholic ideas of nature and grace and their relation to religious freedom, though, Truett’s argument for religious liberty will be evaluated by placing him in conversation with two Catholic thinkers on the subject: John Courtney Murray, S.J., and David L. Schindler. These two American Catholics will help (each in distinct ways) to examine the sufficiency of Truett’s ideas, particularly in viewing his work through the lens of nature and grace, with Truett’s views ultimately found to be lacking.

As will be seen, Murray’s understanding of American religious liberty offers a clear critique of the substance of Truett’s ideas about Baptists’ role in shaping the American constitution. At the same time, Schindler’s work is crucial for reframing the dialogue surrounding religious liberty, as well as sharpening the focus on de Lubac’s understanding of the relationship between nature and grace. Thus, the chapter will conclude with an exposition of the extant resources for facilitating a robust theological understanding of freedom within Baptist discourse in order to address the most significant aporia of Truett’s articulation of religious liberty.
Truett and American Catholics: John Courtney Murray

John Courtney Murray (1904-1967) emerges as a relevant conversation partner for Truett for the ways in which his argument for engagement with the American sense of separation of church and state is structured similarly to Truett’s. For example, both argue that their religious traditions stand at the wellspring of the development of religious freedom in the United States. That is, each argues that their tradition has an intrinsic link (both historical and theological) with the American constitutional system, underwriting their tradition’s unique status as interpreter of the American political landscape. In this way, both can be called “Americanists” within their respective religious traditions.¹

On the whole, Murray understood his work to be positioned between the ideal of church/state union held by the Catholic Church and the particular arguments for church/state separation from free-church Protestants such as Dawson and secularists such as Paul Blanshard. In many ways, then, Murray was (and should be considered) an insider to conversations about religious liberty in the post-World War II consensus period, making his comparison to Truett not only relevant, but also a potentially fruitful exercise for Baptist theological discourse.

¹ Technically speaking, Americanism refers to a theological position that held the political arrangement and cultural aspects of the American religious landscape (e.g., separation of church and state) as normative for the entire Church. This position was condemned in 1899 by Pope Leo XIII in Testem Benevolentiae. Murray’s connection to this tradition arises from Donald E. Pelotte’s treatment of Murray’s life, which includes a final laudatory chapter that situates Murray within an “Americanist” tradition. Cf. Donald E. Pelotte, S.S.S., John Courtney Murray: Theologian in Conflict (New York: Paulist Press, 1975).
Murray on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church & State

John Courtney Murray, S.J., educated both in the United States and in Rome, taught dogmatic theology at Woodstock College in Maryland from 1937 to 1967. During much of this time, he was the editor of the Jesuit theological journal, *Theological Studies*. A prolific writer, Murray was subject to suspicion in the United States (by Catholic University of America professors Francis J. Connell, C.Ss.R. and Monsignor Joseph Clifford Fenton) and in Rome (by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, Pro-Secretary of the Holy Office) for his positions concerning church and state. In 1955, his Jesuit superiors asked him to cease writing on the topic. Ultimately, he and his legacy were perceived as vindicated when he was welcomed as a peritus at the Second Vatican Council.

Murray attempted to shift Catholic conversations about the relationship between church and state. Previously, church teaching had preferred an established union between church and state. In the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), Pope Pius IX condemned the proposition that church and state should be separate from one another. The situation in Europe in the nineteenth century contributed to such a stance by the Catholic Church. Disestablishment of church and state in France resulted in radical anti-clerical sentiment that challenged any sizeable presence of the church in the region. Meanwhile in Germany, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf* brought restrictions on Catholic activities in that country.

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3 John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 208. McGreevy notes that a friend of Murray watched him locate the books on church/state topics so they could be returned to the library (Ibid.).
4 For a sympathetic and more detailed account of Murray’s life and work, see Pelotte.
5 *Syllabus of Errors*, §55.
In light of these challenges, what developed among Catholic scholars was an understanding of church/state relations where the ideal construal, or the “thesis,” was a church/state harmony, but certain, limited historical circumstances could produce an acceptable alternative, or “hypothesis.” Murray, in no way straying from his Catholic training, argued that different philosophical and historical influences stood behind the intellectual traditions of various forms of non-Catholic states. As Joseph Komonchak notes,

[Murray] distinguished an Anglo-Saxon liberal tradition whose roots he found in the medieval tradition and whose distinction between the duo genera of societies, the church and the civil order, was quite compatible with the Catholic insistence on the public significance and necessity of religion. Continental liberalism, on the other hand, was the heir of the absolutism of the ancien régime and understood the separation of church and state to imply the irrelevance of religion to the public order and the sole right of the state to control all aspects of public life.

Thus, based on philosophical differences as well as historical factors (e.g., the U.S. did not shed an established church in the same manner as France or Germany), the United States’ liberal philosophy was not the same as that of Europe. Popes and prelates were right to be worried about the European context, but “failed to take note of the quite different philosophy underlying the liberal tradition that inspired the American political

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6 William Portier notes that this distinction originated with Félix Dupanloup (1802-1878), a French bishop, in response to the Syllabus of Errors, an interpretation that was commended by Pius IX [William L. Portier, “Theology of Manners as Theology of Containment: John Courtney Murray and Dignitatis Humanae Forty Years After,” U.S. Catholic Historian 24 (Winter 2006): 85.]

7 Philip Gleason states that Murray was “thoroughly Catholic, for though he applied the resources of Neoscholasticism in new and creative ways, his thinking was steeped in the Thomism that had been the official Catholic philosophy since Leo XIII’s Aeterni Patris of 1879” [Philip Gleason, “American Catholics and Liberalism, 1789-1960,” in Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy, ed. R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 66].

experiment.” In other words, concerned that democracy in its American form was wrongly demonized because of abuses in European countries, Murray argued that democratically-based separation of church and state need not always present a danger to the church.

Murray’s primary text on issues of church and state, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (1960), was a collection of Murray’s work gathered from the 1950s. Some articles were revised before they appeared in 1960, while others were merely reprinted. In the second chapter, originally published as “The Problem of Pluralism in America,” Murray avers that the First Amendment of the American Constitution should be read as “Articles of Peace” rather than “Articles of Faith.” To read the First Amendment as “Articles of Faith” is to see it as “dogmas, norms of orthodoxy, to which one must conform on pain of some manner of excommunication…. It is necessary to believe them, to give them a religiously motivated assent.”

In contrast, an “Articles of Peace” reading of the First Amendment declares that “[t]hese constitutional clauses have no religious content…. [T]hey are not invested with

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9 Komonchak, “Vatican II and the Encounter between Catholicism and Liberalism,” 86. For example, in commenting on a portion of Pope Leo XIII’s *Longinqua Oceani* (1895) where he discusses the American system of church/state separation “[l]t would be very erroneous to draw the conclusion that in America is to be sought the type of the most desirable status of the Church, or that it would be universally lawful or expedient for State and Church to be, as in America, dissorced and divorced (*Longinqua Oceani*, §6)], Murray argues that Leo maintains a distinction, based on a dyarchy established by Pope Gelasius I, that there are two forms of authority, spiritual and temporal (or divine and human law) [Cf. John Courtney Murray, “Leo XIII and Pius XII: Government and the Order of Religion,” in *Religious Liberty: Catholic Struggles with Pluralism*, ed. J. Leon Hooper, S.J. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 86-89].


the sanctity that attaches to dogma, but only with the rationality that attaches to law....

[It is not necessary to give them a religious assent but only a rational civil obedience.]^{12}

In a claim directed toward the positions of Dawson, Murray states that the “Articles of Faith” reading has historical roots in free-church Protestantism. In many ways, Murray can be seen as mounting an historical argument against those, such as Baptists, who would hold up someone like Roger Williams as the “original theologian of the First Amendment.”^{13} To do so, in Murray’s eyes, would insert a free-church ecclesiology into the US Constitution and allow “an outstanding Baptist spokesperson” to speak of public schools as agents of “the Americanization of the churches,” tacitly placing Baptist life and thought at the heart of being American.^{14}

Much of Murray’s argument involves what he perceives to be the difference between the American and French contexts, essentially stating that their revolutions were godly and godless, respectively.^{15} In fact, Murray states that the American Revolution was “less a revolution than a conservation” of the liberal tradition of politics.^{16} Murray notes that hostility toward religion characterized French society under

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^{12} Ibid.

^{13} Ibid., 68.


^{15} “The first truth to which the American Proposition makes appeal is stated in that landmark of Western political theory, the Declaration of Independence.... I mean the sovereignty of God over nations as well as over individual men. This is the principle that radically distinguishes the conservative Christian tradition of America from the Jacobin laicist tradition of Continental Europe” (Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 44).

^{16} Ibid., 46.
Jacobin rule.\footnote{Jaime Balmes offers a similar contrast between the American and French revolutions. Cf. Jaime Balmes, \textit{European Civilization: Protestantism and Catholicity Compared in Their Effects on the Civilization of Europe} (Baltimore: Murphy & Co., ca. 1850), 389.} Such polarization between religion and the state also held during the French Third Republic. As mentioned in chapter two, \textit{la separation} (The Act of Separation of Church and State, passed in 1905) created and symbolized the sharp divide between Catholicism and culture, as well as numerous other categories (e.g., faith and reason).\footnote{Joseph Komonchak has described these circumstances as theology being in exile, drawing on Marie-Dominique Chenu’s term, a Christianity of émigrés. Cf. Joseph A. Komonchak, “Returning from Exile: Catholic Theology in the 1930s,” in \textit{The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview}, ed. Gregory Baum (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 35-48.}

Within the United States, however, political unity and stability were maintained, even as democratic processes and institutions were embraced:

[\textit{T}he American Republic was rescued from the fate, still not overcome, that fell upon the European nations in which Continental Liberalism, a deformation of the liberal tradition, lodged itself.... There have never been “two Americas,” in the sense in which there have been, and still are, “two Frances,” “two Italys,” “two Spains.” Politically speaking, America has always been one.\footnote{Murray, \textit{We Hold These Truths}, 47.}

Murray rightly identifies crucial differences between the American and French contexts, even commenting on the divergent philosophical foundations of both places: “The Jacobin tradition proclaimed the autonomous reason of man to be the first and the sole principle of political organization. In contrast, the first article of the American political faith is that the political community, as a form of free and ordered human life, looks to the sovereignty of God as to the first principle of its organization.”\footnote{Ibid., 44.} As a result, by beginning with the formative ground of the community rather than the autonomous individual person, Murray distinguishes the United States from other countries, pointing
out that America has not historically experienced the “militant atheism” found elsewhere, despite the fact that the United States has been populated by a significant number of non-Christians.\textsuperscript{21} Moreover, Murray argues that, even though what he calls the sectarian liberalism that animated continental European countries held anti-religious views, it actually put forth a theological argument.\textsuperscript{22} By contrast, the American system is “simply political.”\textsuperscript{23}

In the end, Murray views the United States as constituted by a consensus that binds together the American political community, so that the First Amendment does not underwrite any form of quasi-religious establishment (i.e., the “Articles of Faith” rendering of the First Amendment) and is directed toward the good of social peace. Moreover, while for Murray church and state were separate, church and society were not. Murray pointed to the religious character of the United States as evidence that the church was unencumbered by establishment issues there.\textsuperscript{24} That is, separation of church and state (as constructed in the US) does not silence the church, but actually accomplishes the same goals as concordats with national governments, namely, the founding of a stable place for the church within society and the independence of the church to pursue its mission.\textsuperscript{25} Indeed, Murray writes that Catholics should not merely accept the American ideas of religious freedom and the separation of church and state, but they should welcome them as a breath of fresh air:

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\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 77. “The Jacobin thesis was basically philosophical; it derived from a sectarian concept of the autonomy of reason. It was also theological, as implying a sectarian concept of religion and of the church” (Ibid., 78).
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 79.
\end{flushright}
For Catholics this fact [the American distinction between church and state] is of great and providential importance for one major reason. It serves sharply to set off our constitutional system from the system against which the Church waged its long-drawn-out fight in the nineteenth century, namely, Jacobinism, or... totalitarian democracy.26

Thus, for Murray, the separation of church and state cannot be seen as an idol, an object of faith, or even an ecclesiology (as in the “Articles of Faith” interpretation), but it certainly (in its American instantiation, at least) provides the possibility for the church to thrive.27

Murray’s understanding of separation of church and state within the American context maintains natural law as crucial. While only a few Catholics were among the founders of the United States, Murray, echoing the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884), argued that the founders of the American constitution were “building better than they knew,”28 constructing a political context that was thoroughly informed by Catholic natural law, even if that influence was unacknowledged.29 This providential development enabled Catholics to give an account for the existing American consensus in which they could participate.

26 Ibid., 77.
27 Ibid., 86.
28 This phrase and its variants have a significant role in American Catholic history, though this trajectory begins with Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1839 poem, “The Problem” (“builded better than they knew”). American Catholic convert Orestes Brownson invoked the phrase in his 1856 essay, “The Mission of America,” stating that the founders of the United States “did not follow their Protestantism. They were bravely inconsequent, and ‘builded better than they knew’” [Orestes A. Brownson, “The Mission of America,” in vol. 11 of *The Works of Orestes A. Brownson* (Detroit: H.F. Brownson, 1884), 569]. In the pastoral letter of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884, the phrase was used, again emphasizing a providential fit between the United States and the Catholic Church: “We consider the establishment of our country’s independence, the shaping of its liberties and laws as a work of special Providence, its framers ‘building wiser than they knew,’ the Almighty’s hand guiding them” [“Pastoral Letter of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore,” in *The Memorial Volume: A History of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, November 9 – December 7, 1884* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Publishing Company, 1885), 20].
29 “[T]he American political community was organized in an era when the tradition of natural law and natural rights was still vigorous” (Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 46). Murray goes as far as calling Thomas Aquinas “the first Whig” (Ibid., 47).
Furthermore, Murray counters the notion that natural law cannot be employed within the American context if one does not accept its Catholic underpinnings by arguing for a form of natural law without Catholic presuppositions that is aimed at developing and maintaining a public consensus.\footnote{The only presuppositions of Murray’s conception of natural law are: 1) human beings are intelligent, 2) reality is intelligible, and 3) when reality is grasped by intelligence, it imposes the obligation that it be obeyed on the will (Ibid., 111).} The United States is unique in its ability to foster this consensus by not arguing about final ends:

In America, we have been rescued from the disaster of ideological parties.... It has been remarked that only in a disintegrating society does politics become a controversy over ends; it should be simply a controversy over means to ends already agreed on with sufficient unanimity. The Latin countries of Europe have displayed this spectacle of ideological politics, a struggle between a host of “isms,” all of which pretend to a final view of man and society, with the twin results of governmental paralysis and seemingly irremediable social division. In contrast, the American experience of political unity has been striking.... To this experience of political unity the First Amendment has made a unique contribution; and in doing so it has qualified as good law.\footnote{Ibid., 82.}

In other words, Murray understands substantive discussions about final ends to threaten the fabric of a society. The United States has structurally avoided such problems while, according to Murray, pursuing a public peace. In \textit{We Hold These Truths}, he calls this “the common good in its various aspects.”\footnote{Ibid., 73.}

\textbf{Murray Against the Baptists}

Despite their similarities, Murray’s construal of the American system of separation of church and state diverges from Truett’s, offering several points of criticism for the Texas preacher. First, Murray saw political atomism, where rights are founded in...
the individual citizens apart from any constitutive community, as problematic. He critiques Locke’s “state of nature” on the grounds that the “common good consists merely in the security of each individual in the possession of his property.... the social end differs from the individual end only quantitatively.”\textsuperscript{33} Because of this concern, much of Murray’s argument aims to conceive of Americans as bound together as a cohesive body politic that shares a consensus concerning important (public) judgments.\textsuperscript{34} Komonchak writes that, according to the decisions made at Vatican II (in which Murray played a significant part), individuals could not be examined in isolation from their respective communities:

Rights do not belong to isolated individuals, pre-political monads, for whom society is a later, man-made artifact. Rights adhere in persons in communities.... Behind the broader liberal tradition which [Murray] defended there also lay a set of ideas about the relationship between these political structures and the truths and values contained in what he called “the public consensus.” This consensus was so basic to the political arrangement that without it the structures could not achieve their desired ends.\textsuperscript{35}

Therefore, the Lockean privatization of religion found in Truett would worry Murray.

Similarly, Murray argued that civil society is a vital aspect of the political landscape. This counters the usual configuration by two entities, the individual and the state, which are often opposed to one another.\textsuperscript{36} Instead, it is in civil society that various

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 275.
\textsuperscript{34} “This individualism, this atomistic social outlook, is the predominant characteristic of Locke’s system. His law of nature is solely a law of individual nature, conceived after the abstract fashion of the rationalist. The premise of Locke’s state of nature is a denial that sociality is inherent in the very nature of man, and the assertion that the civil state is adventitious, that man is by nature only a solitary atom, who does not seek in society the necessary condition of his natural perfectibility as man, but only a utilitarian convenience for the fuller protection of his individual self in its individuality” (Ibid., 276).
\textsuperscript{35} Komonchak, “Vatican II and the Encounter between Catholicism and Liberalism,” 90.
\textsuperscript{36} Noting that the French Republicans worked out the implications of Locke’s theory, Murray states, “The logical outcome of Locke’s individualistic law of nature, in its French transcription, was the juridical monism of the successive French Republics. In consequence of the false antithesis, individual
non-state actors, such as the church, can have relative freedom to pursue their own ends. Truett, for his part, does not openly equate the civil sphere with the state, but rather employs support from theologians and philosophers (e.g., Locke) who do. Additionally, his assumption of a harmony between the aims of the civil and religious spheres does not account for circumstances where the church might need structural and juridical protection of its freedom from the overextended reach of the state.\footnote{This is also an ecclesiological question because Truett adopts a Lockean perspective that views the church as a free association of like-minded individuals. When one views the church in this way, protection of the church’s freedom is extraneous at best.}

Finally, and most importantly, as has been mentioned already, Murray’s argument for reading the First Amendment as articles of peace rather than articles of faith is directed at Truett and Baptists. As Murray elaborates on what constitutes an “articles of faith” reading, Truett’s Baptist ideas come to the fore:

\begin{quote}
Is the no-establishment clause a piece of ecclesiology, and is the free-exercise clause a piece of religious philosophy? The general Protestant tendency, visible at its extreme in the free-church tradition, especially among the Baptists, is to answer affirmatively to these questions. Freedom of religion and separation of church and state are to be, in the customary phrase, ‘rooted in religion itself.’\footnote{Murray, \textit{We Hold These Truths}, 64.}
\end{quote}

In other words, Truett’s hailing of Baptist achievements of religious liberty enshrined in the U.S. Constitution is, in Murray’s terms, an articles of faith reading of the First Amendment, which, despite its intentions to bring all people together within civil discourse, actually divided the civil sphere by requiring an affirmation of the First Amendment akin to religious faith.

\begin{flushright} 
\textit{versus} state, all self-governing intermediary social forms with particular ends are destroyed, in order to create ‘free and equal citizens,’ who are subject only to one law, the positive law of the state, the exclusively competent lawmaker. There is no longer any pluralism of social institutions existent and self-directing by natural or positive divine right (e.g., workers’ unions or the Church), antecedent to, or above the state” (Murray, \textit{We Hold These Truths}, 278).
\end{flushright}
Murray “Among” the Baptists

Despite the ways that Murray is helpful in pointing out the deficiencies in Truett’s position, Murray’s stance is problematic as well, though for different reasons.³⁹ Murray was positioned against the leading neo-scholastic theologians of the day (e.g., Fenton and Connell), but when one looks at Murray’s work in its broader theological context, one discovers that “[his] project was fundamentally an exercise in the distinction of realms; as such, it assumed the traditional dualities of nature and grace, secular and sacred, temporal and spiritual.”⁴⁰ In other words, Murray maintained an extrinsic relationship between nature and grace that held both realms apart from one another. Drawing on Thomas Aquinas, Murray writes, “Grace perfects nature, does not destroy it – this is the central point of emphasis. There is indeed a radical discontinuity between nature and grace, but nature does not therefore become irrelevant to grace.”⁴¹

This “radical discontinuity” moves beyond simply distinguishing the orders of nature and grace and granting each a sense of autonomy. Indeed, Murray writes that the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom (1965) establishes the idea that “the aim and object of the action of the Church in the world today” is “[n]ot nostalgic yearnings to restore ancient sacralizations, not futile efforts to find new forms of sacralizing the terrestrial and temporal order in its structures and processes and the

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³⁹ In this section, I am indebted to the work of David L. Schindler for his pointed critique of Murray.
⁴⁰ Gleason, 67.
⁴¹ Murray, We Hold These Truths, 176-177. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I, q. 1, art. 8, ad 2.
sure direction of them to their *inherently secular ends.*"\(^{42}\) The church, then, is not tasked with pursuing a supernatural end within society, but only natural ends. David L. Schindler explains how this positions nature and grace extrinsically by contrasting Murray with Henri de Lubac:

> For Murray, grace’s influence on nature takes the form of assisting nature to realize its own finality; the ends proper to grace and nature otherwise remain each in its own sphere. For de Lubac, on the contrary, grace’s influence takes the form of directing nature from within to serve the end given in grace; the ends proper to grace and nature remain distinct, even as the natural end is placed *within*, internally subordinated to, the supernatural end.\(^{43}\)

The emphasis here must be placed not on the number of ends or *teloi*, but their relationship. Murray’s argument situates the temporal and spiritual realms with distinct ends that are parallel to one another, creating dual final ends. Recall that de Lubac never stated that humanity only had one end; rather, he argued that there was one *final* end, communion with God. Schindler points out as much, underscoring the intrinsic and ordered relationship between the role of citizen and the role of believer: “For de Lubac,... the call to sanctity ‘comprehends’ the call to citizenship. The eternal end ‘comprehends’ the temporal ends.”\(^{44}\)

> While helpful for Murray’s argument for church/state separation, this dualism threatens to undermine his gains since a dichotomy between the spiritual and temporal


\(^{44}\) Ibid.
realms results in a duality between citizen and believer.\textsuperscript{45} That is, as Schindler argues, instead of one integrated civilization (which is, in fact, Murray’s aim by invoking the American consensus and focusing on civil society), two civilizations exist: “One is a civilization wherein citizenship is to be suffused with sanctity; the other, a civilization wherein sanctity is always something to be (privately/hiddenly) added to citizenship.”\textsuperscript{46} Murray’s argument for natural law without Catholic presuppositions reinforces this extrinsic construal of the relationship between nature and grace. The result is that one commentator describes Murray’s natural law as a “kind of separate, free-standing philosophical position to which grace or theology is superadded.”\textsuperscript{47}

Murray’s goal was to theoretically establish space for public consensus. This is why he admired the United States’ lack of controversy (and discourse) concerning ultimate ends. According to Michael Baxter, Murray viewed American constitutionalism, founded on a separation of the spiritual and temporal realms, as “cultivat[ing] a distinctively non-ideological form of politics, one in which Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and members of other religious or secular groups, are able to unite in order to develop a public discourse concerning the common good of society as a whole.”\textsuperscript{48} This frees Catholics in the United States to enter into dialogue with their fellow countrymen (and women) about what is best for their homeland, although this is devoid of any reference to final ends (e.g., the formative role of society, the purpose of the state).

\textsuperscript{45} “For Murray, then, the result is an insistence on a dualism between the citizen and believer, and on the sharpness of the distinction between eternal (ultimate) end and temporal (penultimate) ends” (Ibid).
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{47} Portier, “Theology of Manners as Theology of Containment,” 101.
Additionally, Murray’s argument for public consensus employs terms (e.g., common good, peace, and natural law) that originally had Catholic underpinnings and were directed toward and shaped by a supernatural end. Murray’s new formulations of these terms remove any supernatural teleology. Instead, society pursues a public peace or a common good that is completely natural. Thus, because Murray wants to affirm public peace as a good, though not one informed by final ends or ordered in any supernatural direction, He is left with the mere absence of conflict as a significant portion of the substance and goal of such “peace,” and Murray’s specific political arguments are sometimes indistinguishable from American public and foreign policy.⁴⁹

What emerges from Murray’s construal of the public sphere is a conception of freedom that is “non-confessional.” In other words, it is not intended to achieve any specific goal other than non-interference. Schindler describes this notion of freedom as juridical-negative (i.e. freedom from), coinciding with Murray’s development of natural law as disconnected from any confessional (i.e. Catholic) foundation.⁵⁰ Murray himself states as much:

[R]eligious freedom is obviously not the Pauline elutheria, the freedom wherewith Christ has made us free (Gal 5:1). This is a freedom of the theological order, an empowerment that man receives by grace. In contrast, religious

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⁴⁹ For example, in chapter eleven of We Hold These Truths, Murray, as he aims to promote appropriate uses of military technology, addresses the use of force in global politics, including the utilization of “ABC warfare” (Atomic, Biological, and Chemical weapons), noting that “force is still the ultima ratio in human affairs, and that its use in extreme circumstances may be morally obligatory ad repellendam iniuriam. The facts assert that today this ultima ratio takes the form of nuclear force, whose use remains possible and may prove to be necessary, lest a free field be granted to brutal violence and lack of conscience” (Murray, We Hold These Truths, 244).

⁵⁰ Cf. Schindler, 60-71.
freedom is an affair of the social and civil order; it is an immunity that attaches to the human person within society, and it has its guarantee in civil law.\textsuperscript{51}

One wonders at this point what sort of freedom is gained for the church within American constitutionalism. That is, does the church, as Murray claimed, have social and political space to pursue its mission or is it reduced to virtual silence by having its theological content (because it inherently concerns final ends) excluded from the public discourse? Schindler thinks the latter is the case: “Murray’s (putative) purely juridical definition of religious freedom serves, notwithstanding his explicit intention to the contrary, to dispose society logically toward an ‘indifferent’ nature and away from a nature always-already positively oriented toward God.”\textsuperscript{52}

In the end, what are lost in Murray’s understanding of freedom are the culture-forming aspects of grace. Even as he is sympathetic to Murray’s goals, Komonchak posits,

The issue is whether the construction of society is possible simply on the basis of a formal notion of freedom, as “freedom from,” which leaves in suspense or perhaps even considers unresolvable the question of “freedom for.” This is the question not only of the purposes for which freedom of conscience is being used, but also of the cultural, ethical, and even religious presuppositions which underlie the very choice of a liberal political order. Put most simply, does the constitutional indifference of the state imply substantive cultural indifference to questions of truth and value?\textsuperscript{53}

The question of indifference and its scope is crucial to how Murray’s public peace unfolds for the theological (and no less public) claims of the church. If grace does not


\textsuperscript{52} Schindler, 65. Schindler also notes that, similar to Murray in the United States, in France a logical connection existed between a nature/grace dualism and “the cultural exile of theology in the modern era” (Ibid., 64n18).

\textsuperscript{53} Komonchak, “Vatican II and the Encounter between Catholicism and Liberalism,” 90.
play a significant role in forming culture, then one is left with a marginalized church with a virtually private faith (which is ironically similar to the Lockean position Murray hopes to avoid). Schindler points out that Murray’s stumbling blocks at this point may arise from the way in which he argues against formal church/state union:

[Murray] hesitates to affirm the need for Christianizing “the terrestrial and temporal order in its structures and processes” because Christianizing entails “juridicalizing,” which in turn entails a renewed integralism. To put it another way, Murray backs away from any strong affirmation of the culture-forming dimension of grace, because “forming” for him would immediately imply the juridical sort of form(ing) indicated by the legal-magisterial structure of the Church.\(^{54}\)

Though Truett is not the intended target of Schindler’s critique, much of it would also apply to him. Most importantly, Truett’s thought reflects a dualism between nature and grace similar to that found in Murray. That is, without discussing the categories of nature and grace specifically, Truett tacitly segregated the sacred from the secular, the temporal from the spiritual. This manifested itself in a variety of ways. First, Truett deployed a dichotomy between citizen and believer, using the words of Jesus to justify this dualism. As he stated on numerous occasions, the separation of church and state is predicated upon a sharp divide between the religious and the civil realms. Even though he envisioned both arenas as democracies, they were never to be intertwined. Each governed one aspect of human existence in separation of the other (e.g., body divided from soul).

Second, Truett’s extrinsic relationship between nature and grace is most clearly evident in his notion of freedom. As Murray argued for a form of freedom that

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\(^{54}\) Schindler, 85n39.
emphasized non-interference, Truett did likewise, linking his understanding of freedom to concepts such as soul competency and individualism, which encourage caution toward other entities (e.g., church) that might usurp the proper autonomy of the individual. This bears closer resemblance to liberal democratic concepts of freedom than a positive view of freedom. That is, both Murray and Truett maintained a concept of freedom that is more oriented toward freedom from, namely, a juridical-negative form of freedom.

For Truett, the goal was to safeguard the freedom of individual conscience by removing any obstacles to the individual soul’s relationship with God, but while Truett argued for a “free church in a free state,” he actually left the church as a non-public entity. In other words, Truett’s emphasis on individual salvation, combined with liberty of individual conscience (undergirded by soul competency) undercuts any freedom for the church to be a formative community. Instead, other sociopolitical institutions (e.g., schools, American political processes, economic structures) garner virtually all influence of this sort. Thus, not only is citizen divided from believer, but in the temporal realm (which has rather expansive boundaries), the role of citizen (and even consumer) supersedes that of believer.

Therefore, Truett’s (and Murray’s) arguments for the separation of church and state lead Baptists (and Catholics) to look to the nation-state as the arena of genuine political activity and ultimate guarantor of religious freedom. The church, while not entirely eliminated, is left without a politics, except insofar as it can facilitate the civil realm’s achievement of its natural, political ends. In the end, then, despite his critique of
Dawson and Blanshard, Murray is not entirely successful in extricating himself from a Baptist (or free-church ecclesiology) reading of the First Amendment.

As has been argued, Truett and Murray would both benefit from a theological notion of freedom. That is, what they lack is a sense of the purpose of freedom (i.e., freedom for). Such an understanding of freedom would address the culture-forming aspects of grace that both Murray and Truett neglect. Moreover, the church could play a significant role within that culture, forming the lives of Christians into conformity with the life and witness of Jesus. While this deficiency is serious and requires thorough remedy, it will suffice to gesture toward resources in developing a theological account of freedom that maintains an affirmation of religious liberty (i.e., non-coercion in matters religious) but also attends to the gaps in the arguments of Murray and Truett.

**Dignitatis Humanae: Searching for a Theological Account of Religious Liberty**

Despite the observed problems with Truett’s understanding of religious liberty, this does not mean that the concept need be abandoned. Rather, an alternative construal of the relationship between nature and grace can bolster efforts to put forth a theological account of freedom that could re-envision religious liberty. The groundwork for such work is found in portions of the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965). This document is generally seen as vindicating Murray’s career and his ideas on the subject. From his perspective, however,
Murray thought the document was “a significant event in the history of the Church” but of minor importance within human history as a whole.  

Nonetheless, Murray’s is not the only argument present within the document. As Agnes de Dreuzy describes, the deliberations concerning the form and content of the declaration constituted an encounter between two “towering theologians,” Murray and French Dominican Yves Congar. Murray and most of the Americans preferred an argument for religious liberty that was more juridical, constitutional, and linked to American arguments for liberty, while the French participants, including Congar, articulated a more theological argument grounded in revelation. Specifically, “Congar suggested that after a short introduction there should be a section on the biblical concept of freedom, starting with the idea of the original freedom given by God to humanity and of the development of the history of salvation.”  

In the end, both perspectives are found in the document. The first half (§1-8), with one exception, frames religious freedom within a constitutional argument, discussing the proper function of government and religious freedom as part of that role (§3, 6). Religious communities have freedom within society, then, to educate their

55 John Courtney Murray, “Religious Freedom,” in The Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), 673. “The principle of religious liberty has long been recognized in constitutional law, to the point where even Marxist-Leninist political ideology is obliged to pay lip-service to it. In all honesty it must be admitted that the Church is late in acknowledging the validity of the principle” (Ibid).


58 That exception is found in §2, where religious liberty is stated to be a right that has “its foundation in the very dignity of the human person.” Murray did not approve of this sort of justification for religious freedom, though he was absent when this was introduced into the Declaration, having suffered a collapsed lung (de Dreuzy, 42).
adherents (including children) accordingly, with no danger of infringement by the state, except in cases where the public order is violated (§4-7). The second section is clearly more theological and refutes the extrinsicism latent in Murray’s thought, noting the ways in which religious freedom aligns with Catholic doctrine (§10), the life and witness of Jesus and the apostles (§11), and the Church’s mission in the world (§13-14). The contrast between the two sections is further evident by the amount of biblical references in the text of the second section (fourteen) compared to the first (one).

Evidence such as this has led theologian Stanley Hauerwas to note that Dignitatis Humanae has a distinctly divided mind. Because of the sharp contrast between the two sections, both Hauerwas and William Portier describe the declaration as performing an extrinsic relationship between nature and grace “in the double-decker theological universe of modern Catholic theology.” Without a doubt, this configuration is problematic and results in a document that is incoherent in many places.

After the Declaration was promulgated by Paul VI, Murray further worked to ensure that the juridical perspective was given primacy over the theological. In 1966, Murray participated in an interfaith conference at Notre Dame regarding the developments of the Second Vatican Council. Murray’s task was to discuss Dignitatis Humanae:

[T]he Declaration presents the content or object of the right to religious freedom as simply negative, namely immunity from coercion in religious matters. Thus the Declaration moves onto the solid ground of the constitutional tradition of

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the West, whose development, in what concerns religious freedom, was first effected by the Constitution of the United States in 1789 and by the First Amendment in 1791.\footnote{John Courtney Murray, “The Declaration on Religious Freedom,” in Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal, ed. John M. Miller (Notre Dame: Associated Press, 1966), 568.}

This was consistent with Murray’s other remarks about the Declaration after the Council. Commenting on the text of the document elsewhere, Murray wrote, “[I]n assigning a negative content to the right to religious freedom (that is, in making it formally a ‘freedom from’ and not a ‘freedom for’), the Declaration is in harmony with the sense of the First Amendment to the American Constitution.”\footnote{Murray, “Religious Freedom,” 678n5.} Like the document itself, while he was the most vocal regarding how to read the Declaration on Religious Freedom, Murray’s was not the only voice emerging from the Council. French-speaking theologians, such as René Coste, continued their work following the Council, attempting to either invert the arguments within the declaration or move beyond the document altogether.\footnote{Cf. René Coste, Théologie de la liberté religieuse: Liberté de conscience, liberté de religion (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1969). For more on some of the efforts of these French-speaking theologians, see Hermínio Rico, S.J., John Paul II and the Legacy of Dignitatis Humanae (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 41-51.}

These theologians, while sharing Murray’s displeasure with church/state union, had a much different experience within France than Murray in the United States. Komonchak has described theology in France during the early twentieth-century as in exile. Thus, theologians in the context (including de Lubac) had to navigate the church/state union proposed by Action Française and the radical division between church and state advocated by the Third Republic. Murray, having only experienced the
favorable conditions for religion in the United States, was not able to conceive of the dangers of certain forms of church/state separation as were his French coreligionists.

We have already examined the first form of argument for religious liberty and noted the ways in which it is found to be lacking. Indeed, what was observed was that both Murray and Truett embraced more liberal forms of freedom rather than theological notions, emphasizing freedom as non-interference. Several theologians have suggested that a different account of freedom can be established by emphasizing section 11 of *Dignitatis Humanae*, which grounds non-coercion in discipleship to the life of Jesus. This, as intended by the French-speaking theologians behind the Declaration, begins the discussion of religious liberty with biblical revelation. In many ways, this resonates with the affirmation of *Gaudium et Spes* 22: “Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.”64 In other words, Christ reveals what it means to be authentically human. Thus, efforts to ground religious freedom in anthropology without this Christological link are deficient. As Schindler has pointed out, this parallels a statement by de Lubac from *Catholicism*, underscoring Christ as the lens through which to approach anthropology.65 Therefore, in terms of nature and grace, this rejects an extrinsic link by underscoring the ways in which revelation speaks to the truth of nature and the relationships found therein. Put differently, religious freedom cannot be

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64 *Gaudium et Spes*, §22.
65 “Christ, by completing humanity in himself, at the same time made us all complete – but in God. Thus we can say... that we are fully persons only within the Person of the Son...” [Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 342].
established on the merits and dignity of the human person or society alone. Rather, the content of revelation does not reveal merely spiritual realities.

**Religious Liberty Enriched by Nature/Grace Conversations**

Once this theological form of freedom, based on a more integrated construal of nature and grace, is embraced, markedly different cultural results are produced without compromising Murray’s initial goal of resisting formal union between church and state: “The upshot... is that the ‘integration’ of secular and sacred called for by de Lubac’s organic-paradoxical theory of nature and grace does not imply any dynamic for uniting the Church *juridically* with the state....”

Thus, establishment of a state church is still avoided, guaranteeing non-coercion in religious matters. Moreover, the church is enabled to pursue its mission, which involves a more critical, though no less engaging, role within the world. That is, discourse concerning freedom will not be viewed as outside the church’s competence (i.e., it is not simply a juridical, constitutional issue).

With Murray and Truett, the church’s freedom was restricted in the temporal realm by a dualistic relationship between nature and grace. By contrast, when nature and grace, while distinct, maintain an intrinsic relationship, then the political is not disconnected from the theological. Along these lines, de Lubac writes,

> The authority of the Church is entirely spiritual and is exercised only on consciences. But it does not follow that there are areas of thought or human activity that ought to be, a priori, closed to it. Because there is no activity, however profane it may appear, where the Faith and morality guarded by the Church cannot in one way or another, one day or another, be involved. Christianity is universal not only in the sense that all men have their Savior in

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66 Schindler, 84.
Jesus Christ but also in the sense that all of man has salvation in Jesus Christ.... And it is hard to see why ‘politics’ should be an exception to this principle.\(^{67}\)

Therefore, theology can and should have purchase on contemporary sociopolitical concerns. For example, the justification of a war (or the condemnation of a particular military action) would not be offered simply on the basis of national goals and interests. Instead, the means and ends of particular moments of military action could be examined and evaluated through a theological lens.

Moreover, as evident from the quote from de Lubac, conscience retains an important role within theological anthropology, though it is not the virtually unfettered individual conscience found in Truett’s thought. Instead, through the influence of the church, conscience is ordered toward the good and subject to supernatural direction.\(^{68}\)

Individual Christians, formed in the church and inhabiting society, act as a leavening influence that shapes political structures and decisions, enacting social renewal more subtly. In this manner, de Lubac notes that the church has power “in temporal matters,” without ascribing to it any form of power over the temporal. In other words, the church is not privatized, but formal church/state union is also avoided.

Further, closer contextual examination reveals de Lubac to be a timely resource for Baptists in arguing for religious liberty. Murray and Truett’s assessment of the United States’ political landscape, even if it accurately reflected their own eras, does not apply in the present circumstances of late modernity. In other words, appeals to consensus (like Murray’s) and parallel trajectories of freedom (like Truett’s) have little


relevance. Instead, fragmentation and hyperdiversity characterize American society, with attendant problems for constitutional interpretation. In other words, there are now (at least) “two Americas,” each with their own view of the origins, structures, and purposes of the American Constitution. Even more telling, Keith Pavlischek notes that there are “different factions within the Catholic community, each seeking to claim Murray’s mantle,” with the result that two Murrays now also exist: a progressive Murray and a neo-conservative Murray.69 The effects of such fragmentation (even of Murray’s thought) are further indicative of the inadequacy of Murray’s project for the contemporary context.

De Lubac’s situation, however, has much more resonance with ecclesial existence in late modernity. He lived in a time and place (France in the first half of the twentieth century) that was hostile to Christianity, even to the point of exiling the Jesuits’ theologate from mainland France to England. Moreover, his theological positions had significant bearing on his context during the Second World War, prompting de Lubac’s participation in what he called “spiritual resistance to nazism.”70 Through this and his previous work, de Lubac criticized political options such as Action française and Nazism, underscoring the expansive political significance of faith and theology.

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Baptists today face a pluralistic context that, while different in key ways, more closely resembles the laicist state of the French Third Republic than the lay state of the United States (as described by Murray). That is, Baptists are more likely to encounter indifference and hostility regarding the public significance of the Christian faith than consensus and acclaim. Accordingly, it is not uncommon to describe the church’s position within late modern American society as one of exile. Likewise, Baptists can learn from Catholics who navigated the Scylla of overt and formal church/state union and the Charybdis of complete privatization of the Christian faith. Therefore, because de Lubac understood a context such as this, he is instructive for Baptists as he presents particular insights for living as what Pierre Colin has called “the presence and exercise of a spiritual power in a pluralist society.”

Conclusion

George W. Truett has enjoyed considerable attention within the Baptist tradition. A thoughtful pastor who cared for the city where his church was located, Truett left an overwhelmingly positive mark not only on Baptists, but on the world as well. Nonetheless, it is still necessary to thoroughly evaluate his importance and influence. That is, as has been detailed, his articulation of religious liberty has the potential to undercut the significance and formative role of the church. However, most

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71 Pierre Colin, L’audace et le soupçon: la crise moderniste dans le catholicisme français (1893-1914) (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1997), 267; cited and translated in C.J.T. Talar, “Swearing Against Modernism: Sacrorum Antistitum (September 1, 1910),” Theological Studies 71.3 (September 2010): 547. While these words by Colin describe the Modernist crisis of the early twentieth-century, he also notes that this crisis is the matrix of modern Catholic theology, underscoring its staying power for describing the contemporary context.
Baptists have not been aware of these difficulties. As this chapter has described, the problematic aspects of Truett’s (and later Baptists’) understanding of religious liberty are visible most clearly when Baptist life and thought is first situated within the broader Christian tradition, linking Baptists with the communities of Christians who preceded their four-hundred-year history. Moreover, the deficiencies of Truett’s argument are even clearer when viewed through the lens of the nature/grace problematic. That is, in those terms, new evaluative measures are available for Baptists as they read and inhabit their own tradition.

Further, as has been discussed, de Lubac’s construal of nature and grace offers the possibilities for serious engagement with the world while remaining faithful to the mission of the church. Therefore, not only is attention to the pitfalls of Truett’s position helpful for Baptists as they seek a theologically robust understanding of religious liberty, but it is also instructive regarding the ways in which Baptist theological discourse receives tremendous benefits when in conversation with the breadth and depth of the Christian tradition.
CHAPTER VIII: BAPTIST RESSOURCEMENT?

ALTERNATE SOURCES FOR BAPTIST THOUGHT

In the previous four chapters, de Lubac's articulation of an intrinsic relationship between nature and grace has served as a lens to critique two prominent thinkers within the Baptist tradition, E.Y. Mullins and George W. Truett. As has been pointed out, many Baptists hailed Mullins and Truett as both descriptive of what Baptists have believed and proscriptive for how Baptists should inhabit the world. De Lubac's work has served two important purposes thus far. First, employing the categories of nature and grace has allowed Baptists a new means to evaluate their theological discourse and identify the ways in which present theological discourse suffers from serious deficiencies. That is, the nature-grace problematic has given Baptists new eyes with which to see the salient cul-de-sacs of their thought. Second, by examining the ideas of Mullins and Truett in light of the relationship of the natural and the supernatural, Baptists are helped to locate the sources of these deficiencies, viewing exemplars of Baptist life, such as Mullins and Truett in a new light.

While the theological lens provided by de Lubac's construal of nature and grace can be (and has been) deployed for the purposes of critique, it can also illuminate elements of Baptist life and thought that have been overshadowed by the dominant Mullins-Truett paradigm/narrative. This chapter aims to identify these resources within
the Baptist tradition, namely the ideas of certain English Baptists of the seventeenth century and of African-American Baptists, in conversation with the nature/grace problematic, in hopes of augmenting these Baptist voices and elaborating on their fruitful potential for contributing to a Baptist ressourcement.

**Early English Baptists**

Thomas Grantham and the General Baptists of the Midlands of England stand as a site rich in possibilities for Baptist theological reflection. Grantham was born in Lincolnshire (a county in the east of England) in 1634. He was baptized in Boston (also in Lincolnshire) in 1653, and he became a pastor at a General Baptist church meeting at nearby Halton-Holegate in 1656. Jailed several times for his faith, he worked tirelessly for General Baptists, eventually being ordained as a messenger (another word for bishop) for the growing number of churches in South Lincolnshire in 1666, a task which included delivering petitions on behalf of his co-religionists to King Charles II.

Around 1685, Grantham moved to Norwich (in the county of Norfolk, further south), establishing General Baptist churches there and in nearby Lynn and Yarmouth.

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1. A brief biographical sketch of Grantham is given below. No thorough treatment of his life has been written. Perhaps the best, if not one of the few available, is found in a recent dissertation. See John D. Inscore Essick, Jr., “Messenger, Apologist, and Nonconformist: An Examination of Thomas Grantham’s Leadership among the Seventeenth-Century General Baptists,” (Ph.D diss., Baylor University, 2008), esp. 43-91.


3. Ibid, 111. At the time, debate surrounded the status and origin of the office of “messenger.” Grantham, in his *The Successors of the Apostles*, argued that the office was a divine institution, but that messengers were not successors of the apostles. Nonetheless, their responsibilities were “to preach the Gospel where it is not known, to plant churches where there is none, to ordain elders in churches remote, and to assist in dispensing the holy mysteries [i.e., the sacraments]” [Thomas Grantham, *The Successors of the Apostles*, 20; quoted in Underwood, 120].

4. Underwood, 111.
A stalwart defender of General Baptist convictions, he died in 1692. Grantham was a prolific writer, authoring numerous theological pamphlets and books, including *The Prisoner Against the Prelate* (1662) [penned while in jail], *The Baptist and the Papist* (1663), *A Sigh for Peace* (1671), *The Loyal Baptist* (1684), *Hear the Church* (1687), *Truth and Peace* (1689), *The Grand Imposter Caught in His Own Snare* (1691), and *The Slanderer Rebuked* (1691). His most significant and voluminous work, *Christianismus Primitivus*, was printed in 1678 while another important work, *St. Paul’s Catechism*, was released in 1687. Grantham’s work offers a window into the convictions of the General Baptists, which are also seen in the *Orthodox Creed*, published in 1678 and composed by a group of General Baptists from counties in the Midlands of England. It remains distinctive among Baptist creeds and confessions for its elevation of ministerial authority as well as its inclusion of the Apostles, Athanasian, and Nicene creeds.  

By treating these three texts, the theological ideas of the General Baptists will become clear (focusing on creation, authority, ecclesiology, and sacraments).

**Theological Ideas**

**Creator and Creation.** While these early English Baptists did not explicitly examine creation in isolation from other doctrinal issues, they did make some important statements regarding how creation is to be understood in relation to God. Specifically, Grantham cautioned against equating human knowledge with God’s knowledge, stating

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that “the most illuminate Christian must and doth confess he knows but in part, sees but darkly as through a glass... [we] therefore must acknowledge we are far from a plenary knowledge of him.”

He also wrote that this stance produces a particular intellectual disposition: “And in the mean time [sic] avoid all unnecessary questions, either concerning God, his shape, and manner of residence in heaven; or concerning his works, as what he did before he created the worlds, knowing that he is not bound to give account of any of these matters, further than it pleaseth him.”

Such sentiments should not be seen as indicating a form of anti-intellectualism. Rather, Grantham aimed to curtail attempts to encapsulate God within a world of reasonableness. This would echo the *Orthodox Creed*, when it states, “We verily believe, that there is but one, only living and true God, whose subsistence is in and of himself, whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself.”

In other words, what was at stake was not the intellectual pursuits of Christians but the distinction between God and the world. As Baptist theologian Philip Thompson rightly points out, such statements indicate an ontological (and epistemological) gap between Creator and creation. That is, just as we cannot know God to the extent that we know the natural world, God and creatures also have being in a different manner.

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7 Thomas Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* (hereafter CP) (London, 1678), Book II/Part 1, p. 38 (or II/1.38).
8 Ibid.
Thompson, following Grantham, ties this into a two-fold conception of God’s freedom,\textsuperscript{11} where human control cannot contain God (either conceptually or actually).\textsuperscript{12} Thus, creation is to be understood as distinct from the Creator; nonetheless, the freedom of God extends to God’s ability to utilize the created order for God’s purposes (e.g., mediating salvation to humans).

**Authority.** Moreover, Grantham and his tribe of General Baptists discussed authority in two distinct (yet still related) ways, focusing on ecclesiastical and theological authority. Regarding ecclesiastical authority, the *Orthodox Creed*’s thirty-first article notes a three-fold division of ministry within General Baptist congregations of the Midlands (whereas most Baptists have historically only recognized a two-fold division of ministry)\textsuperscript{13}: “Bishops, or Messengers; and Elders, or Pastors; and Deacons, or Overseers of the poor.”\textsuperscript{14} Bishops are to be chosen collectively by a number of churches and ordained “with imposition of hands, by the bishops of the same function....”\textsuperscript{15} Pastors are chosen by the congregation and “ordained by the bishop or messenger God hath placed in the church he hath charge of.”\textsuperscript{16}

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\textsuperscript{11} While language of God’s freedom resonates with the Reformed tradition, Thompson’s discussion of this freedom brings to light farther reaching connections with the broader Christian tradition, as will be discussed later.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 60. Thompson notes that this is the impetus for the English Baptists’ opposition to infant baptism. As an institution of the state-supported Anglican Church, such a practice “constituted the state’s usurpation of God’s prerogative in bringing persons into the church” (Ibid.).

\textsuperscript{13} “As congregationalists, [Baptists] generally acknowledged that the two basic officers of a New Testament church were pastors (elders) and deacons” [Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists Ways: A History* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 53].

\textsuperscript{14} “Orthodox Creed,” Art. XXXI, in Lumpkin, 319. The alternate designations result from the multiple words used within Scripture to describe the roles and positions of various Christians within the nascent church.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., in Lumpkin, 319-320.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., in Lumpkin, 320.
While bishops appear to have authority over and duties to many churches (whether they have distinct territories is unclear from the *Orthodox Creed*), pastors have charge only over their specific congregation: “[T]he [pastor], so ordained, is to watch over that particular church; and he may not ministerially act in any other church before he be sent, neither ought his power, or office, any way to infringe the liberty, or due power, or office of his bishop.” Deacons are chosen for service within a particular congregation, specifically receiving alms and benevolent giving in order to share such goods with the poor.

This description gestures toward a hierarchy of authority, where deacons answer to the congregation and the pastor, pastors answer to their congregations and their bishops, and bishops answer to the church (represented by the collective authority of the bishops). In fact, such a hierarchy is a reflection of the divine character: “God being a God of order, having ordained things most harmoniously, tending every way to unity.” Moreover, the ordination of a new bishop by current bishops indicates some manner of succession, where the authority of already-ordained bishops (standing as the voice of the church) validates the authority of the new bishop.

Grantham uses different terminology to describe the offices, but nonetheless understands the office of messenger (as well as that of pastor) as divinely instituted: “Christ Jesus by his Holy Spirit being always powerfully present with his own doctrine, to put those into a capacity to manage the affairs of the gospel, who receive the truth

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17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Grantham links “elder” with “bishop” (similar to pastor) and “messenger” with “apostle.” Deacon remains the same.
thereof in the love of it....”\textsuperscript{21} In fact, messengers serve, both terminologically and conceptually, as successors to the apostles.\textsuperscript{22} While they stand at a greater remove from Christ (both personally and epistemologically) than early Christian bishops, Grantham still writes, “God hath given to his church, a ministry of messengers or apostles [or bishops] (though much inferior) yet truly to succeed the first apostles, in such things as were ordinary and fixed to that office.”\textsuperscript{23} The duties of pastors and bishops, according to Grantham in \textit{Christianismus Primitivus}, include caretaking of souls, defending orthodox doctrine, feeding the flock by living in a Christ-like manner, exercising authority to exhort, reprove, rebuke (i.e., binding and loosing), as well as the rejection of heretics.\textsuperscript{24}

Thus, the hierarchy of authority involves more than greater facilitation of communication between congregations; it is concerned with the preservation of the faith and the faithfulness of the church through time and across locations.\textsuperscript{25}

Addressing the sources of theological authority unavoidably involves discussions about Scripture and confessional statements (both current and historical). For the General Baptists, Scripture occupies the highest status of theological authority, but,
while they argued for its proliferation into the hands of all Christians, they did not admit the validity of private interpretation:

> And we do believe, that all people ought to have [the Scriptures] in their mother tongue, and diligently, and constantly read them in their particular places and families, for their edification, and comfort; and endeavor to frame their lives, according to the direction of God’s word, both in faith and practice, the holy scriptures being of no private interpretation, but ought to be interpreted according to the analogy of faith, and is the best interpreter of itself, and is sole judge in controversy. And no decrees of popes, or councils, or writings of any person whatsoever, are of equal authority with the sacred scriptures.²⁶

So Scripture holds unparalleled authority, but creeds also served as a significant source of theological authority. The *Orthodox Creed* states in the thirty-eighth article:

> The three creeds, [that is the] Nicene Creed, Athanasius’s Creed, and the Apostles Creed, as they are commonly called ought tho[roughly to be received, and believed. For we believe, they may be proved, by most undoubted authority of holy scripture, and are necessary to be understood of all Christians; and to be instructed in the knowledge of them, by the ministers of Christ, according to the analogy of faith, recorded in sacred scriptures, upon which these creeds are grounded.²⁷

The authority of such confessional statements resided not only in their positive declaration of right doctrine, but also in their corrective potential, such that they “might be a means to prevent heresy in doctrine, and practice, these creeds containing all things in a brief manner, that are necessary to be known fundamentally, in order to our salvation....”²⁸

As can be seen, Scripture and creeds did not stand at odds with one another. More significantly, though, Scripture was not situated in a vacuum. It occupies a prominent place within a conversation across time, prompting Thomas Grantham to

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²⁶ “Orthodox Creed,” Art. XXXVII, in Lumpkin, 325.
²⁷ “Orthodox Creed,” Art. XXXVIII, in Lumpkin, 326.
²⁸ Ibid.
note that the 1663 General Baptist confession follows the Nicene and Apostles Creeds “to [show] that though the composition of these articles [of the General Baptist confession] be new, yet the doctrine contained therein, is truly ancient, being witnessed both by the Holy Scriptures, and later writers of Christianity.”29 Thus, these Baptists understood their theological sources to move from Scripture to the contemporary period (there is no chasm between the two). Rather, confessions and creeds, as well as theological reflection by Church Fathers such as Chrysostom, Augustine, Ambrose, Justin Martyr, Jerome, Tertullian, among others, is crucial for sound doctrine and faithful practice.

Issues of ecclesiastical and theological authority also concern the shape of ecclesiology, which was also important for these Baptists. The Orthodox Creed states,

There is only one holy catholick [sic] church, consisting of, or made up of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered in one body under Christ, the only head thereof, which church is gathered by special grace, and the powerful and internal work of the spirit, and are effectually united unto Christ their head, and can never fall away.30

Indicating that the unity of Christians moves beyond simply the togetherness of living Christians, the General Baptists saw all Christians across time as bound together in the church (a sentiment echoed in the tradition of theological sources embraced by these Baptists). The concept of catholicity receives attention as well with the addition of a key ecclesiological phrase: “[W]e believe the visible church of Christ on earth, is made up of

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29 Grantham, CP, II/2.61. “As God hath delivered but one form of doctrine to the churches, so it’s the duty of all Christians to hold and diligently to observe the same, and not to be carried about with divers [sic] and strange doctrines, Hebrews 13:9” (Ibid., II/2.59).
30 “Orthodox Creed,” Art. XXIX, in Lumpkin, 318.
several distinct congregations, which make up that one catholick [sic] church, or mystical body of Christ.”

Describing the church catholic as the mystical body of Christ is significant because it unites Christians in a manner that is deeper than mere congregational church polity or associationism. That is, the ecclesial bonds that tie Christians together are constituted by and exceed the established earthly relationships (be those interpersonal or interdenominational). Grantham employs this image along with Ephesians 4:16: “From whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love” (NRSV). This language of the mystical body of Christ is a major part of Philip Thompson’s conclusion that the General Baptists saw the church as the “locus of the fullness of God’s freedom.” In other words, the God who is free to act in the world chooses to act most prominently in the people of God known as the church. For the General Baptists, this sense of ecclesiology was best displayed in the sacraments: “[T]he Body of Christ mystical is here to be discerned, as this is the evidence of that unity between the head and the members....” It is fitting, then, to turn our attention to Grantham and the General Baptists’ ideas concerning the sacraments.

Sacraments. To treat the ideas of the early English Baptists concerning the sacraments necessarily involves asking whether there was some allowance for mediation. That is, can the created order be used as a vehicle for the communication of

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31 Ibid., Art. XXX, in Lumpkin, 318-319.
32 Thompson, “A New Question in Baptist History,” 63.
33 Grantham, CP, II/2.92-93.
the divine? This returns to the importance of what Thompson calls the “two-fold freedom of God:” 1) God’s freedom from human control by overly determined theological ideas and practices and 2) God’s freedom to “use creation to mediate salvation and form a people under God’s gracious rule.” 34 The latter freedom, what Thompson describes as God’s “freedom for,” opens up possibilities for the mediation of God’s grace. Elsewhere, he writes, “The only living and true God was free to work in and through the things of earth as God ordained.” 35 Indeed, Grantham describes baptism as a “sacred ordinance,” while also using the language of sacrament as well. 36 Thus, instead of denying the possibility that things within the created order could be vehicles for the communication of the divine, the General Baptists embraced the possibility, even if they described the acts as both ordinances and sacraments. 37

The journey of faith, then, was not constituted only by interiority. Instead, externalities sustained and nurtured the life of faith: “And as [the Israelites] had the manna to nourish them in the wilderness to Canaan; so we have the sacraments, to nourish us in the church, and in our wilderness-condition, till we come to heaven.” 38

Moreover, Grantham states that once believers are properly prepared and rendered “fit

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34 Philip E. Thompson, “Baptists and ‘Calvinism’: Discerning the Shape of the Question,” Baptist History and Heritage 39.2 (Spring 2004): 71.
36 Grantham, CP, II/2.28.
37 Generally, when the term ordinance is used, it signifies that special ecclesial acts such as baptism and the eucharist are performed because Christ commanded them to be done, not because grace is communicated through them. Conversely, sacrament is viewed as a term that signifies the communication of grace through the act, leading some Baptists (indeed many) to avoid the term altogether.
38 “Orthodox Creed,” Art. XIX, in Lumpkin, 311-312.
for communion in that Mystical Body, the Church,”\textsuperscript{39} they share in the flesh and blood of Christ: “Sure in this ordinance we have as real an offer made of the flesh and blood of Christ for us to feed upon by faith, as in any other part of the gospel of God.”\textsuperscript{40}

The possibility of mediation is significant because it allows for the cooperation (by analogy) of divine and human agency within the sacramental acts. In other words, human and divine activity would not be viewed as opposed to one another, though they remain distinct from one another as well. Such cooperation is evident in the description of the significance of baptism, calling it a “sacrament of initiation” as well as a “sacrament of regeneration.” Here, initiation refers to entering both the mystical body of Christ and the earthly ecclesial body, while regeneration refers to the work of mortification and vivification (i.e., burial with Christ and rising with him).\textsuperscript{41} In this way, baptism stands as a human activity that is infused with and communicates God’s grace:

... Baptism in the ordinary way of God’s communicating the grace of the Gospel is antecedent to the reception thereof, & is propounded as a means wherein not only the remission of our sins shall be granted to us, but as a condition whereupon we shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.... [It] was fore-ordained to signifie and sacramentally to confer the grace of the pardon of sin, and the inward washing of the conscience by faith in the bloud [sic] of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{42}

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the General Baptists, while embracing the mediation of God’s grace within the sacraments, rejected infant baptism and an ex

\textsuperscript{39} Grantham, \textit{CP}, II/2.89.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., II/2.88.
\textsuperscript{41} Thomas Grantham, \textit{An Apology for the Baptized Believers} (London, 1684), 15.
\textsuperscript{42} Thomas Grantham, \textit{A Sigh for Peace} (London, 1671), 87-88.
opere operato understanding of the sacramental acts. Both positions were grounded in their aim to avoid usurping “God’s place in the economy of salvation.”

Catholic Resonances

In order to consider the ways in which these early English Baptists are helpful in moving Baptists toward greater engagement with Catholicism, the opponents of Grantham and the General Baptists must be considered. Most notably, they argued against the established Anglican Church, though also against Roman Catholics. Book IV of Grantham’s Christianismus Primitivus includes ten arguments against the “Present Papal Church of Rome,” most of which address what Grantham perceives to be the usurpation of God’s place by human authority. Such criticism of Catholicism is to some extent to be expected. Various Reformation impulses within England did not encourage a favorable view of Catholicism. In fact, the most demeaning insult that could be applied to someone was “papist.” Without question, though, anti-Catholic views also stood as an obstacle for the General Baptists’ thought. For instance, Curtis Freeman writes,

On the basis of Luke 24, Grantham argued that Christ was (and continues to be) known in the breaking of bread. Yet he was limited by a residual anti-Catholic prejudice and the fixed doctrinal categories of the seventeenth century. These

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43 Philip E. Thompson, “Re-envisioning Baptist Identity: Historical, Theological, and Liturgical Analysis,” Perspectives in Religious Studies 27.3 (Fall 2000): 300. The claim is that ex opere operato overly defines the action of God within the eucharist.

44 Grantham, CP, IV/1. One of the arguments (#9) claims that the Catholic Church cannot be the true church because it lacks the marks of the church: antiquity, succession, universality of time and place, visibility, sanctity, unity, and miracles (Ibid., 37). This section of Christianismus Primitivus reprints Grantham’s previous work, The Baptist Against the Papist.
left him with relatively little sacramental latitude and few theological resources to account for God’s presence.  

While one might describe Grantham’s criticism as viewing Catholicism as overly determined, this is not the only critique within Grantham’s work. Indeed, he is much more pointed with regard to Quakers, whose aversion to virtually all external religious practices concerned him. Thus, Grantham understood that ecclesial practices could be too fluid as well. Moreover, Grantham’s ideas (and those found in the Orthodox Creed) seem to have something of a Catholic hue to them. For this reason, even though these early Baptist ideas are interesting in their own right for understanding this group of Baptists, there are subtle yet distinct resonances with Catholic theological ideas that are worthy of a brief examination.

**Creator/Creation Distinction.** The first resonance with Catholic thought is found in the ontological distinction between Creator and creation. This distinction is crucial to theological language, as it facilitates Catholic discussion of analogy, where terms (or names) predicated of God are not the same as predicated of humanity. As David Burrell, following the work of Aquinas, notes, “For as creator, God is not only characterized by perfections, as the adjective connotes, but is the source of them as well, as the abstract term expresses.”  

For example, while humans may be described as just and God is described as just, interrogating the similarities of these statements reveals even greater

45 Curtis W. Freeman, “‘To Feed Upon by Faith’: Nourishment from the Lord’s Table,” in Baptist Sacramentalism, 205.  
46 Cf. Grantham, CP, IV/2.  
dissimilarities, in large part because God’s actions reflect the perfection of justice and humans’ do not. Additionally, God is the source of justice, making all human just activity derivative of God’s justice in the first place. In the same way, God is not only not a being in the same way as humans, but God is also the source of all creaturely existence. In other words, no part of creation is God, but aspects of creation can be described in a similar manner as God (i.e., they mediate God’s presence), but only insofar as they participate in God. In effect, as with the distinction (though not separation) between nature and grace, God and creation are not placed on the same planes. Nevertheless, they are not divorced from one another, never to have any relation with each other. Thus, the Catholic dictum, *gratia perfectit naturam* (grace perfects nature), would seem to have a place in dialogue with the General Baptists. Moreover, God’s “freedom for” using creation for salvation underscores the gifts given by God, notably the gift of existence and the gift of perfection, or what de Lubac calls, respectively, the *datum optimum* of creation and the *donum perfectum* of divinization.48

**Ecclesiology and Sacraments.** Two issues concerning ecclesiology overlap with Catholic ideas. First, the General Baptists have an understanding of authority that is historically unique among Baptists, including embracing the authority of creeds and bishops. When Grantham argues for the divine institution of the office of bishop (and bishops as successors to the apostles) and the *Orthodox Creed* outlines the method of ordaining new bishops (i.e., by the authority of sitting bishops), something similar to

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apostolic succession emerges. Even if this does not establish formal relations with the Catholic Church, it does indicate some theological parallels between the two traditions.

The use of the term “Mystical Body of Christ” is significant as well. While this term has found many uses within the Catholic tradition, it should be noted that the early English Baptist use of the term (indicating a close relationship between the sacramental elements and the ecclesial body) resonates with the argument of Henri de Lubac in his *Corpus Mysticum* (originally published in 1944) that before the twelfth century, a close relationship between the sacraments and the ecclesia was the standard practice. In short, de Lubac states that a minor change of terminology occurred after the twelfth century, shifting the referent of *corpus Christi verum* from the church to the sacramental elements and *corpus Christi mysticum* from the elements to the church. 49 This change was significant, however, because prior to the twelfth century, “the truth [of the sacrament] was to be found beyond the sacrament.” 50 After the twelfth century, “the sacrament itself has become the ‘thing’ and the ‘truth’ of the ancient rites.” 51

This shift happened largely in response to a denial of the real presence of Christ in the eucharist by Berengar of Tours, but, due to its theological ramifications, it created a set of circumstances where the sacramental elements involved individual rather than communal piety (even to the point of setting the ecclesial body of Christ over against

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50 Ibid., 204.  
51 Ibid.
the sacramental body of Christ).\textsuperscript{52} By contrast, de Lubac argues, “Nourished by the body and blood of the Saviour, his faithful people thus all ‘drink of the one Spirit,’ who truly makes them into one single body. Literally speaking, therefore, the Eucharist makes the Church.”\textsuperscript{53}

Certainly, Grantham and his coreligionists held that the eucharist was linked with ecclesial unity, even noting the ways in which the sacrament nourished the church. Thus, while the General Baptists’ ideas may not intersect with the terminological aspects of de Lubac’s argument (i.e., the General Baptists’ use of “mystical body” is historically dependent on the same development de Lubac describes), it seems that a conceptual parallel exists between their understanding of the eucharist and de Lubac’s notion that this sign serves as the \textit{sacramentum unitatis ecclesiasticae}.\textsuperscript{54}

\textit{Toward a Baptist Ressourcement?}

It is important to note that these Catholic resonances are simply elements of thought from a group of Baptists that diverge from the dominant Baptist narrative. That is to say, they do not represent a completely different sense of what it means to be Baptist. Much that reflects the prevalent Baptist views can also be found. In other words, there are limits to an examination of these early English Baptists. Ideas such as those found in the \textit{Orthodox Creed} and Thomas Grantham’s work (i.e., conversant with aspects of the patristic tradition) appear relatively early in Baptists’ existence, primarily

\textsuperscript{52} “The essential link that bonded the Eucharistic rite to the unity of the Church has disappeared” (Ibid., 245).
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 88; emphasis added.
during their first one hundred years. As Steven Harmon notes, “Confession adopted after the seventeenth century, especially those adopted by Baptists in America, shied away from patristic formulations in favor of more biblical terminology.” Moreover, as Harmon rightly points out,

Continuities between the patristic tradition and Baptist confessions are not necessarily attributable to a conscious engagement with the patristic tradition as a source of religious authority or resource for theological reflection; rather, these continuities were retained from the ecclesiastical bodies out of which the confessing Baptist communities came or by which they were influenced.56 Thus, one can underscore the historical (even if unacknowledged) link between Baptists and older aspects of the Christian tradition, but one cannot ascribe intentionality to these convictions as they might have been inherited.

Likewise, the potential found in the study of these Baptists is not to re-instantiate communities of their sort in the contemporary context; too much cultural disparity exists to make such an endeavor fruitful (nor is this a genuine ressourcement).57 Instead, the benefit granted from engaging the General Baptists of the Midlands involves the cultivation of theological imagination, allowing Baptists to creatively inhabit their present context in a manner different from other Baptists. Such a stance is also helpful when bringing the theological sensibilities of African-Americans to bear on Baptist theological discourse as a whole.

56 Ibid., 77.
57 “Ressourcement is now part of the mainstream of theological discussion . . . the return ad fontes is not in principle a nostalgic retreat to the theological safety of premodern Christendom. Rather, it is a vital struggle for the proper diagnosis of our present condition and for the proper pharmakon that will treat and heal what ails, not only the church, but the global cultures which now suffer so many afflictions . . . that might together be taken as our postmodern condition” [Kevin L. Hughes, “The Ratio Dei and the Ambiguities of History,” Modern Theology 21.4 (October 2005): 645].
African-American Baptists

While the issue of race within Baptist life and thought is very complicated, even with brief consideration, significant differences between black and white Baptists can be observed (though being wary of the danger of essentializing one group or the other). That is, African-American Christians in general (and African-American Baptists in particular) inhabit the Christian faith in a manner much different than the predominant (i.e., “white”) manifestation. First, black and white Baptists emphasize different aspects of the individual/communal spectrum. In other words, in general, white Baptists tend to focus on the ways in which priority is (and should be) granted to the individual. For example, in his response to the Baptist Manifesto, Walter Shurden, though arguing against the disconnection of the individual from the church, asserts that the individual is an individual-in-community, thereby indicating that the individual stands before the community of faith (and holds epistemological and hermeneutical priority). 58

This understanding of the individual is more muted among many black Baptists. For instance, in 1971, Howard Thurman wrote,

The human spirit cannot abide the enforced loneliness of isolation. We literally feed on each other; where this nourishment is not available, the human spirit and the human body – both – sicken and die. It is not an overstatement that the purpose of all of the arrangements and social conventions that make up the

formal and informal agreements under which [people] live in society is to nourish one another with one another.\textsuperscript{59}

Here, while the individual does not disappear altogether, the concern is more with how the community is constitutive, in part, of who one is. That is, instead of noting the importance of community for the individual’s work and life, as Shurden does, Thurman states that Christians “feed on each other” and therefore become part of each other.\textsuperscript{60}

Along these lines, African-American Baptist theologian J. Deotis Roberts describes the church as an organic entity that is “not a self-appointed, self-initiated community.” Instead, the activity of God in Christ is the ground of the church’s existence.\textsuperscript{61} In this way, Roberts does not view the church as a social club among many or as an optional add-on to an individual’s salvation. Rather, it is the locus of Christ’s presence in the world. Thus, in contrast to an emphasis on individual salvation found in E. Y. Mullins, George W. Truett, and even Shurden, Roberts underscores the corporate aspect of salvation by stating, “We must remember that we cannot be saved one by one – but as a people.”\textsuperscript{62}

There are also some subtle differences regarding how white and black Baptists tend to understand the relationship between what might be called the physical and the spiritual. White Baptists often see the physical world as completely separate from the

\textsuperscript{59} Howard Thurman, \textit{The Search for Common Ground}, 3-4; Quoted in Luther E. Smith, Jr., ed., \textit{Howard Thurman: Selected Writings} (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 157.

\textsuperscript{60} J. Deotis Roberts echoes these convictions, noting that the unity-in-diversity found in the church extends beyond material communal ties to spiritual nourishment that comes from the Eucharist as it binds together the body of Christ as one [J. Deotis Roberts, \textit{Roots of a Black Future: Family and Church} (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 91]. This is reminiscent of de Lubac’s statement that the Eucharist makes the church. Cf. de Lubac, \textit{Corpus Mysticum}, 88.

\textsuperscript{61} J. Deotis Roberts, “A Black Ecclesiology of Involvement,” \textit{Journal of Religious Thought} 32.1 (1975): 38. Further indicating the centrality of the communal, he states that the images of a chosen people, family, and the body of Christ serve as the prime metaphors for the \textit{ecclesia}.

\textsuperscript{62} Roberts, “A Black Ecclesiology of Involvement,” 45.
spiritual. That is, because the individual’s relationship with God holds the place of priority, the material world is marginalized to some degree. This has been detailed in a variety of ways with respect to the development of Mullins’s ideas about soul competency and his aversion to anything that could be conceived as “religion by proxy.”

In effect, this perspective, along with the strong emphasis on individual salvation, creates, as Elizabeth Newman describes, “a kind of ‘divorce’... between creation and salvation, with the effect of moving salvation more and more inward and associating it almost entirely with the inner self or soul.”63 Black Baptists such as Roberts, however, have not held such a sharp divide, holding creation and salvation together and portraying the human person as created with an intrinsic tie to God from creation that culminates in redemption.64 This means that all aspects of physical existence are of theological significance.65

Further, numerous scholars, including James McClendon, have pointed out the importance of embodiment for black religious life. For African-American theological discourse, the location of “spiritual exchange” is not solely the interior of the individual; rather, the community of faith is equally significant. This was one of McClendon’s points of emphasis when he discussed African-Americans’ life and thought in his Ethics, noting


64 “Kinship with God is rooted in nature as well as grace. The God of the creation is the God of redemption” (Roberts, Roots of a Black Future, 83).

65 For example, African-American theological discourse has frequently insisted on the theological (usually called “spiritual”) significance of a political turn of events, e.g., voting rights.
that black religious life centered on “the profound theme of presence – the presence of God to souls and of souls to God and one another.... [I]t is embodied religion and does not evade the task of presence....”

By focusing on presence, a Christological link is made manifest. In short, grounded in the Incarnation, the physical world is not divided from the spiritual, but they intersect and are joined in Christ. Thus, Christ is present among Christians (and other Christians are present to one another) as they struggle throughout their earthly pilgrimage.

Finally, in general, black Baptists have a sharper political edge to their theological discourse than white Baptists. For their part, white Baptists have participated in the “Protestant center” of American life. For this reason, among others, white Baptists have frequently linked the destinies of Baptist life with that of the United States. An example of such a sentiment comes from Truett who, in his renowned 1920 speech, simultaneously trumpeted the separation of church and state as well as “Baptist Americanism.” Black Baptists, however, have not enjoyed such a privileged position within the United States. It is not surprising, then, to find that black Baptists have understood realities that would be described by others as “merely political” (e.g., minimum wage, health care) to be intrinsically related to the gospel. In other words, they have seen more readily the political character of the gospel.

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67 E.g., while Truett did argue that “Church and state must in this land be forever separate and free, that neither must ever trespass upon the distinctive functions of the other,” he also stated “[T]he triumph of democracy means the triumph of Baptists everywhere” [Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 50; George W. Truett, “God’s Call to America,” in God’s Call to America and Other Addresses Comprising Special Orations Delivered on Widely Varying Occasions (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1923), 19].
For instance, Roberts admonished African-Americans to see the theological as inherently political: “Many Blacks believe that they must sit loose to theology and even leave the church if they really want to get involved in acts of black liberation. They do not see how the theological understanding of faith relates to the problems of the here and now.”68 In other words, there is no need to look for action outside the church; the church, when properly oriented, is clearly political. Moreover, black Baptists have not accepted symbolic achievement as a replacement for such realities. Here one is reminded of Martin Luther King Jr.’s indignation in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” toward “white moderates” who were “more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice.”69

Having sketched these differences in broad outline, the question remains whether they, in fact, make a difference. That is, are we simply talking about a different style in which Christians inhabit the world (i.e., of being Baptist) or something much more significant? In what follows, it will be argued that the differences observed between black and white Baptists influence and are influenced by significantly different theological convictions. Awareness of these differences could prove beneficial for all Baptists, as they could offer resources for renewed theological discourse. However, these resources will be more readily apparent when viewed under the aspect of the more Catholic terminology of nature and grace.

The relationship between grace and nature can be seen to largely correspond to that of sacred and profane, church and world, as well as faith and reason. With this in mind, consideration of de Lubac’s understanding of the natural and the supernatural is as important for Baptists as it is for all Christians. In more Thomistic terms, grace perfects nature (gratia perficit naturam) by fulfilling a longing for completion that was already latent within nature from its inception. As detailed in chapters four and five, E.Y. Mullins’s work displayed a confusion of the natural and the supernatural, making it difficult (if not impossible) to distinguish nature from grace. This is especially evident (and ironic) when considering the strong denial of the mediation of the divine through the material world (including the sacraments) found in ideas such as soul competency and its critique of “religion by proxy.” Chapters six and seven noted the ways in which George W. Truett’s arguments for religious liberty operated with a dichotomy between nature and grace, where the spiritual realm (the individual’s relationship with God, etc.) is unencumbered by the circumstances of embodied existence.

By contrast, the perspective of African-American theologians stands as theologically different in its construal of the nature/grace problematic and its resultant theopolitics. Most prominent is the fact that the happenings of the physical world are not exempt from critique by the spiritual (because they can be distinguished from God’s activity) but are also not divorced from the spiritual at all (i.e., they are related to spiritual existence). Therefore, as the recent work of J. Kameron Carter points out, this

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70 Certain modern white Baptist assumptions display a tendency to map “community” and “individual” onto “nature” and “grace,” maintaining a dichotomous relationship between the two (i.e., we’re saved from and out of community into the freedom of a personal relationship with Jesus).
understanding of the nature/grace problematic offers resources for articulating theological accounts of ideas, such as freedom and even race.

### J. Kameron Carter’s Race

An alternative to this account is found in the work of J. Kameron Carter, especially his recent book, *Race: A Theological Account*. Carter articulates a theological understanding of race that reflects an intrinsic link between nature and grace. His argument, in his own words, is that “modernity’s racial imagination has its genesis in the theological problem of Christianity’s quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots.”

That is, under modernity’s gaze, Jews were viewed primarily as a racial group (i.e., Oriental) distinguishable from Western Christians (who also subtly became a racial group) and then as inferior to those Western Christians on racial terms. As a result, Carter writes, “whiteness came to function as a substitute for the Christian doctrine of creation.”

Because of this racial configuration of the Jewish people, the significance of their covenant with YHWH, and the way in which it situates Jewish flesh as redemptive of all people, is muted.

In order to recover the importance of the people of Israel (and, consequently, Jesus’ identity as a Jewish person), Carter revisits the patristic era, noting the role that the covenant community of YHWH played in the work of Irenaeus against the Gnostics,

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72 Ibid., 5.
Gregory of Nyssa in response to slavery, and Maximus the Confessor against colonial tyranny. Along the way, he also offers praise and critique for the contributions of three scholars. He states that the later work of historian Albert Raboteau, seen in his 1992 essay, “Praying the ABCs,” embraces analogy in a way that develops “what might be termed an incarnational understanding of faith and history, of Christian consciousness and African heritage, an understanding that integrates the two sides through the plotline of the person of Jesus in his Jewish humanity.”

Carter argues that, as James H. Cone’s work progressively becomes less Barthian and more Tillichian in its deployment of dialectic, he has more difficulty in maintaining his contentious stance toward abstraction within theology, as the divine, labeled transcendence, “does not name YHWH, the God of Israel; rather, for Tillich ‘God’ is the symbol under which one speaks of the overcoming of finitude, the deathly shadow of nonbeing that attaches itself to existence.”

Carter evaluates Charles Long’s history of religions perspective as, despite its intentions otherwise, leaving little space for the specific and particular (e.g., Christian theological discourse), in part because his work considers otherness, even between deities and religious persons, to operate on the same plane and to utilize descriptive

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73 Carter states that Gregory does not understand human and divine freedom to operate on the same plane: “[I]n the proper sense, God is free; while in the analogical sense, humans are free – that is, in ‘analogy’ to God. This means that human freedom is an analogue of and as such participates in the divine freedom” (Ibid., 237).

74 Ibid., 150.

75 Ibid., 188. This has significant problems for a clear doctrine of creation as creation is increasingly set against the divine in a dialectical zero-sum game.
terms univocally.\textsuperscript{76} In the end, while Carter is sympathetic with the aims of each scholar’s work, he is also clear that each remains beholden to the modern racial imagination, rendering inert their positive contributions for black religious discourse.

For Carter, however, it is Christology which grounds his work, with the Incarnation indicating the theological significance of creation (i.e., it is not a completely separate realm from the spiritual).\textsuperscript{77} With this Christological emphasis, analogy becomes a central category for Carter’s volume, underscoring the importance of creation by looking beyond creation itself to the Creator. As seen above in Burrell’s analysis of Aquinas on analogy, while creation and Creator remain distinct, this need not imply a sharp divide between the two. In fact, Carter notes that it is precisely this distinction that produces the possibility of union. Commenting on the centrality of love in the thought of Maximus, he writes,

[L]ove is what causes the reality of the Creator and that of creation to fruitfully converge – the dissimilarity between them at the level of nature notwithstanding. Rather than the creature-Creator distinction being the violent division of a purely extrinsic or parallel relationship, love, rendered concrete in Christ, enacts “the closest union” between the creature’s and the Creator’s modalities of existence, causing these two modalities to thoroughly “interpenetrate” each other while in no way “annulling” the distinction between the natures that the modalities enact.\textsuperscript{78}

Such reflections echo aspects of de Lubac’s work on nature and grace, where the natural realm is not divorced from the supernatural even as they are distinguished from one another. That is, relying on Maximus’ articulation of the Creator-creature distinction,\textsuperscript{76,77,78}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{76} In response to this, Carter writes, “God, in Christian terms, is not an-other either to history or to historically constituted beings in the way that oil is an-other to water.... God relates to the world as its genuine other not because God is an-other to the creature but because God is first and foremost ‘non-other’ (\textit{non aliud}, as Nicholas of Cusa once put it) to the creature” (Ibid., 226).
\textsuperscript{77} “Christology [is] the discursive site of negotiating the meaning of material existence” (Ibid., 12).
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 349.
\end{flushright}
Carter, like de Lubac, holds that nature and grace are to be distinguished from one another (*pace* Mullins). At the same time, de Lubac’s (and Carter’s) clear concern is to view the two as united in order to discern the ways in which the supernatural fulfills the natural (e.g., graces “perfects/completes” nature). In other words, the natural does not stand autonomously on its own (e.g., grace does not “build on” nature); it retains theological significance as it is imbued with traces of the divine (*pace* Truett). In this way, we can state that Carter’s work, through his emphasis on the Incarnation of Jesus in Jewish flesh and the analogical relationship between the divine and human produced thereby, reflects an understanding of nature and grace as different, but related; as distinct, but united.

One could also note a similar distinction by observing that white Baptist ecclesiology is largely grounded in anthropology, where the notion of humanity as sufficient on its own is employed to explain the nature and work of the church (interestingly resulting in both Mullins’ and Truett’s construals of nature and grace). In contrast, African-American Baptists (and African-American theology more broadly), as seen in the work of both Carter and Roberts, emphasize what Carter calls the Christological sensibility, in which the church and the people who constitute it as the

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79 In this way, scholars, like Raboteau, who note the parallels between native African religions and aspects of Christianity for New World slaves are making the same point historically.

80 “Incarnation is the centerpoint between divinity and humanity. It is the phenomenon by which these two realities touch even as it safeguards the distinction between what it means for God to be God and for humans to be human. Indeed, the difference between God and humanity is the very vehicle of both humankind’s (and creation’s) divinization on the one hand and God’s hominization on the other” (Ibid., 350).
body of Christ are understood through Christ, the god-man, who brings together the human and the divine.  

Conclusion

De Lubac’s theological method aimed to give attention not only to major theological sources such as Thomas Aquinas, but also to those that had been left behind (or even condemned). This chapter’s gesture toward reincorporating early English Baptists such as Thomas Grantham and African-American Baptists such as J. Deotis Roberts into Baptist theological discourse accomplishes a similar goal by (re-)discovering the insights of voices that have been pushed to the theological margins. By doing so, a broader view of that discourse becomes available, allowing greater imagination in how Baptists have inhabited (and could still inhabit) the world. The differences, then, between these “lost” Baptist voices and predominant contemporary Baptist thought make a theological difference.

Such work would be very difficult without de Lubac’s understanding of the natural and supernatural, categories and conversations which allow Baptists to view marginalized Baptists of the past (even minor ones) to be considered as important historical theological resources for present Baptist faith and practice. What motivates this constructive work is a sense of wholeness that Baptists have often neglected. In fact, this investigation suggests that desires to pursue Baptist catholicity are not

\[81\text{Ibid., 8. “The site from which God as Creator mingles with creation yet maintains his distinction from creation is Christ’s flesh” (Ibid., 25).}\]

\[82\text{Hans Urs von Balthasar describes these sources as “the great among the vanquished.” For de Lubac, these included Origen, Pico della Mirandola, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.}\]
inherently nostalgic or even betraying “what it means to be Baptist.” Rather, Catholic ressourcement theology and these early English Baptist and black Baptist voices are both aimed at “wholeness” (i.e., catholicity) by re-theologizing the natural world. Thus, this becomes more than a recovery of old or interesting facts about other Baptists. Instead, it centers on the importance of tradition, both within Baptist thought and within broader Christian discourse. Tradition (not only tradita but also traditio), then, serves as a vital category for engaging the world. This makes it possible to re-conceive categories such as freedom (in the case of the early English Baptists) and race (in the case of Carter and African-American Baptists) as bound up with the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the one who reveals what it means to be genuinely human and the one who asked the Father that the church might be made one (John 17:22-23).
CHAPTER IX:

CONCLUSION: WHY BAPTISTS NEED HENRI DE LUBAC

This dissertation has aimed to make two claims. First, bringing the categories of nature and grace to bear on Baptist theological discourse illuminates some troublesome pitfalls to Baptist thought. Second, these pitfalls, once identified, can be surveyed and resolved by accounting for the (implicit) relationship between the natural and the supernatural found in significant Baptist moments (e.g., the thought of E.Y. Mullins as well as George W. Truett). In other words, the nature-grace problematic and the Catholic conversations in which it is situated help Baptists to see the theological confusion detailed at the outset of this dissertation as well as think through and reconceptualize certain ideas that were previously uninterrogated in this manner (e.g., religious liberty and soul competency). To make such an argument, though, would require an historical theological examination of Baptist discourse.

In 2009, Baptist periodicals around the world heralded the four-hundredth anniversary of the Baptists.¹ Commemorating the founding of the first Baptist church in the world in Amsterdam in 1609, most Baptist theological discourse has been located within the four-hundred-year boundaries of the Baptist tradition. That is, Baptists have

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¹ See, for example, a number of articles by Ken Camp, Bob Allen, and James White that commemorated aspects of Baptists’ 400-year heritage and were published in the January 12, 2009 edition of the Baptist Standard.
generally limited the focus of their research to that time period, answering questions such as “What holds Baptists together?,” “What distinguishes Baptists from other Christians?,” and “What does it mean to be Baptist?”

Occasionally, some Baptist scholars have addressed these issues by employing the work of other Protestant reformers, such as Luther and Calvin, as discussed in chapter one. Nonetheless, even with those interlocutors, the focus has remained the same: what are Baptists and why are they necessary to the Christian landscape? Over time, as has been discussed throughout this dissertation, this approach has not served Baptists well in developing a thorough theological discourse. Indeed, Baptists are often left without a strong foundation regarding the development of Christian doctrine, which can (and has) seriously injured Baptist thought. Not surprisingly, then, Baptists have gradually found that insufficient resources exist for navigating a variety of theological conundrums, such as explaining agency within the act of baptism.

Because of these dilemmas, and the inability of presently-employed theological resources (i.e., Baptist and other Protestant theologians) to resolve them, Baptist theological discourse would reap immense benefits from more thorough engagement with Catholic theology, specifically Catholic discussions of the relationship between nature and grace. While these categories are virtually a new language for Baptists, as well as for other Protestants, they and the relationship between them can serve as a theological lens, allowing Baptists to better see the pitfalls and potential of their theological work.
In an effort to pursue such an inter-tradition conversation, chapter two discusses the work of Henri de Lubac, S.J., which has played a prominent role in twentieth-century Catholic theology and is invaluable in offering to Baptists precisely the theological resources necessary for re-envisioning their discourse. De Lubac’s argument, that the predominant neoscholastic divide between nature and grace (which was presented as based on the work of Thomas Aquinas) had deleterious effects on the Church’s stance toward the world, was not simply a dispute about how to read a thirteenth-century Catholic theologian.

Arguing with these neoscholastic scholars (Cajetan and Suaréz, as well as Pedro Descoqs and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange), de Lubac stated that a separation between the natural and the supernatural was neither from Thomas’s work (it arose from misreading by later commentators) nor helpful in responding to the rise of secularism. In fact, the extrinsic relationship between nature and grace actually contributed to the marginalization of the supernatural from the natural world. In response, de Lubac argued that Thomas Aquinas should be read as more in line with patristic sources (esp. Augustine) that maintain a much more fluid interconnection between the natural and the supernatural. In many ways, then, de Lubac stands as a faithful Catholic theologian who dissented (a favorite motif for some Baptist scholars) from the prevalent theological trajectory in order to recover a genuine sense of the relationship between nature and grace (and thereby gain greater insight into the shape of faithful Christian living).
Most certainly, as was discussed in chapter three, a theological conversation between Catholics and Baptists has several significant obstacles to overcome. A history of negative encounters between Baptists and Catholics (especially in the United States) must be carefully described and evaluated before it can be left behind. Once this is done, however, Baptists will be much more capable of fully embracing the work of de Lubac as helpful for theological renewal, a hope that many evangelicals (e.g., Mark Noll and Hans Boersma) have also expressed for their own theological discourse.²

Moreover, currents within Baptist thought that appear to be outliers (and are critiqued as such) are seen anew in their stewardship of that which the Baptist tradition has received from the broader Christian tradition and tacitly passed on. In other words, Baptists who argue for more significant Catholic engagement (e.g., so-called Catholic Baptists) should not be denigrated as destroyers of Baptist life and thought, but appreciated as people who care deeply about the future of Baptist theological discourse (even if there is disagreement with other Baptists regarding what shape or shapes that is to take).

In order for Baptists to take seriously the contributions of the nature/grace problematic, considerable historical theological work is necessary. That is, Baptists will have to attend to the particularities of Baptist thought and practice rather than appeal to grand statements about “what Baptists have always believed” or atemporal “distinctives” that are described as consistent across time and place. This dissertation

has attempted to do just that: closely examine pivotal “moments” in Baptist thought (E.Y. Mullins & George W. Truett) through the categories of nature and grace in order to observe the problematic aspects of what has been lauded by Baptists, with the hope of seeing these deficiencies and addressing them responsibly and with the most important theological resources.

E.Y. Mullins, the subject of chapters four and five, stands as a monumental figure in Baptist discourse. Hailed for coining the phrase “soul competency,” Mullins is viewed as helping Baptists better understand themselves. However, over time, the sociocultural context of Mullins’s term disappeared, leaving little, if any, foundation for soul competency and muting any helpfulness the phrase offered in Mullins’s setting. Thus, contemporary invocations of Mullins by Baptists become problematic, as displayed by its use by present-day moderate Baptists and as extended in Harold Bloom’s work to underwrite a form of American “Gnosticism.”

Through the theological lens provided by the categories of nature and grace, the significance of these problems is sharpened and more clearly recognized. By blurring the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, Mullins (along with certain post-Vatican II Catholic theologians) is unable to maintain the Creator-creature distinction, a theological nuance that makes possible analogical speech about God. Moreover, the emphasis on human experience found in Mullins’s work presents obstacles to genuine discernment of God’s presence. Individual human consciousness endowed with the capacity to read the world (whether that is described as locating God’s sacramentality or the presence of the Holy Spirit) is not beholden to any external authority (e.g., tradition,
magisterium, or even Scripture). Consequently, while Mullins denies the possibility of material mediation of the divine, the outworking of soul competency makes discerning the absence of God’s presence an increasingly difficult task within these circumstances since God is understood to permeate the material world to the same degree and the metric for judging whether God is present lies entirely within the individual. Thus, the importance of distinguishing (and the ability to distinguish) between church and world is undercut.

In chapters six and seven, George W. Truett, renowned Baptist preacher of the first half of the twentieth century and exemplar of Baptist advocacy of religious liberty, presents a different construal of nature and grace, excessively separating the natural from the supernatural, which produces an extrinsic relationship between the two. De Lubac’s emphasis on paradox, or uniting the natural and supernatural in order to better distinguish them, underscores the problematic aspects of Truett’s articulation of religious liberty whereby the role of citizen is overly divided from that of believer. With dual positions of citizen and believer, Truett construed freedom (esp. religious liberty) in terms derived from the state, thereby mitigating any theological sense of religious liberty that Baptists might offer. Consequently, even while Baptists, in part following the “Baptist Americanism” of Truett and others, remained stalwart defenders of separation of church and state, they marginalized the leavening influence of the church in society. Instead, Truett’s articulation of church/state separation elevates non-ecclesial sociopolitical entities’ influence, in some cases allowing the importance of being a good American to supersede that of being a faithful Christian.
Nonetheless, as discussed in chapter eight, while the theological lens of nature and grace facilitates critical judgment of dominant features of Baptist theological discourse, it also reveals little-known (or little-appreciated) alternatives within Baptist history that reflect a better understanding of the natural/supernatural problematic. As was seen in the previous chapter, the General Baptists of the Midlands of England embraced an ecclesiology (i.e., sacramentalism and a more differentiated sense of the ministry) that was more robust than most contemporary Baptists as well as an appreciation for the role of theological authority in maintaining orthodoxy across time that has largely been lost or ignored.

African-American Baptists have long embraced a more nuanced understanding of the individual as constituted by the community of faith and a broader notion of the political that, even while holding to religious liberty, has ample space for the very public work of the church in the world. Since it was beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully treat these resources, more research is needed to complete the analysis of these Baptist groups. However, even in the brief examination found in this dissertation, one primary consideration comes to the fore. One stance towards these Baptist groups would be to discuss aspects of their life and thought as merely interesting, yet not of importance for all Baptists (i.e., it contributes to the broad diversity of Baptists, but is not binding in any way). On the other hand, de Lubac’s work frames these Baptists as embodying a more integrated construal of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural, indicating their broader importance for the Baptist tradition as a whole.
while also underscoring the fruitful theological resources within that tradition available for a closer engagement with Catholicism as well as a Baptist ressourcement.

This study began with reflections about theological accounts of baptism and the rhetorical cul-de-sacs encountered in those endeavors. This project emerged from these observations but has had the relatively modest aim of diagnosing Baptists’ intellectual challenges by identifying several underlying theological currents that have obstructed Baptist coherence regarding acts such as baptism, to say nothing of the theological significance of the church. With the categories of nature and grace providing the optic for evaluating Baptist discourse, it is hoped that future Baptist theological conversations can move beyond the previously-experienced wrong turns and dead ends to discover the depths of the entire Christian tradition. Thus, this dissertation contributes to the work of other Baptist scholars in searching for, describing, and embracing a sense of tradition and catholicity by offering another invaluable theological tool and even a new dialect for theological discourse (i.e., de Lubac’s construal of the natural and the supernatural). In future research, it is hoped that deeper engagement with non-Baptist and Baptist sources and deployment of de Lubac’s understanding of the nature/grace problematic can serve Baptists well as they seek to live as faithful Christians and as a light to the world.


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