

JOHN HUGO AND
AN AMERICAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF NATURE AND GRACE

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Benjamin T. Peters

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Dayton, Ohio

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**JOHN HUGO AND AN AMERICAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF
NATURE AND GRACE**

Name: Peters, Benjamin

Approved by:

William Portier, Ph.D.
Faculty Advisor

Dennis Doyle, Ph.D.
Faculty Reader

Kelly Johnson, Ph.D.
Faculty Reader

Sandra Yocum, Ph.D.
Faculty Reader

Michael Baxter, Ph.D.
Outside Faculty Reader

Sandra Yocum, Ph.D.
Chairperson

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ABSTRACT

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Name: Peters, Benjamin Tyler
University of Dayton

Advisor: Dr. William L. Portier

This dissertation examines the theological work of John Hugo by looking at its roots within the history of Ignatian spirituality, as well as within various nature-grace debates in Christian history. It also attempts to situate Hugo within the historical context of early twentieth-century Catholicism and America, particularly the period surrounding the Second World War.

John Hugo (1911-1985) was a priest from Pittsburgh who is perhaps best known as Dorothy Day's spiritual director and leader of "the retreat" she memorialized in *The Long Loneliness*. Throughout much of American Catholic scholarship, Hugo's theology has been depicted as rigorist and even labeled as Jansenist, yet it was embraced by and had a great influence upon Day and many others. Hugo was also significant beyond his association with Day and the Catholic Worker, in that he represented a unique theological impulse within American Catholicism.

This inquiry reveals that not only is the Jansenist caricature of Hugo's theology false, but also that that caricature itself is rooted in the particular theological perspective of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century neo-Thomism. Hugo offered a critique of this once dominant theological perspective, and indeed his theology shared many similarities with the work done by Henri de Lubac, S.J. during the same period. This project ultimately intends to show that Hugo's theology of nature and grace remains relevant to contemporary American Catholic discourse, as it provides a corrective and an alternative to the somewhat intransigent debates between thinkers who tend toward a "Thomistic" stance and those who take a more "Augustinian" approach.

Dedicated to Liza

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INTRODUCTION

J.F. Powers, winner of the National Book Award in 1963 for *Morte d'Urban*, met Father John Hugo two decades earlier. Powers, a Catholic conscientious objector in World War II, attended a retreat led by Hugo just before Powers' imprisonment for draft resistance.¹ He described Hugo in a letter written decades later,

... there were a few in fairly high places who stood up for Fr. Hugo. In general, though, it was, to quote from my story "The Forks": "If that fellow's right, Father, I'm' –his voice cracked at the idea- 'wrong!'"

-Fr. Hugo's writings in the Catholic Worker were influential in my decision to be a conscientious objector, but this would've happened anyway because of an instinct I had then and still have at times to say Shit, no. I say it nowadays when I see newscasters, oh so serious, wearing striped shirts and floral neckties.

-I first saw Father Hugo at a priests' retreat, preached by him, in the summer of 1943 at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, to which I'd received an invitation and train fare from an old friend, a priest in the St. Paul diocese. I knew I was going to prison and so I was in the mood for Fr. Hugo (unlike one elderly retreatant, I remember, who, on learning there would be no group picture, checked out). I remember seeing Fr. Hugo off at the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport, all of us kneeling on the tarmac for his blessing. I seem to remember seeing him again when I made a private retreat at the orphanage in Oakmont with Fr Farina. I admired and liked Father Hugo, his mind, heart, wit, courage.²

¹ According to Patricia McNeal, Powers was one of 15 Catholic CO's whose sentence at the Danbury Federal Prison was eventually commuted through the efforts Arthur Sheehan and the Association of Catholic Conscientious Objectors (a group started by Catholic Workers). Powers and the other CO's were assigned to work at hospitals in New Haven, Boston, and Baltimore. McNeal, "Catholic Conscientious Objection During World War II" *The Catholic Historical Review* (April 1975, vol. 61, no. 2): 233.

² This quote is taken from letter (dated August 22, 1994) written by Powers to Mike Aquilina who co-edited, with David Scott, *Weapons of the Spirit: Selected Writings of Father John Hugo* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1997).

While Hugo is best known for his association with Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, Powers' letter suggests that Hugo was important beyond that relatively limited circle of so-called Catholic radicals. Indeed, as this project will show, Hugo was significant in that he offered a theological perspective that, while somewhat unique for American Catholicism, was similar to several of the more important impulses within early twentieth-century Catholic theology. Before more can be said on this current examination of Hugo, though, a short biography is needed.

A Brief Biography

John Jacob Hugo was born in McKeesport, Pennsylvania in 1911, and he died in a car accident in 1985. After studying at St. Vincent's College in Latrobe, he was ordained a priest into the diocese of Pittsburgh by Bishop Hugh Boyle (1873-1950) in 1936. Hugo, who had an M.A. in philosophy, was assigned to teach sociology at Seton Hill College in Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

In September, 1938, after having missed the annual priests' retreat in the diocese, Hugo attended a retreat at St. Mary's seminary in Baltimore, led by a French-Canadian Jesuit named Onesimus Lacouture, S.J. (1881-1951). Hugo was greatly moved by the retreat and attended a second Lacouture-led retreat held in September of the following year. That fall, Hugo was also transferred from Seton Hill to Mount Mary College (now Carlow College) in Pittsburgh, where he worked as the chaplain for the women's college run by the Sisters of Mercy. In the summer of 1940, he and Louis Farina, another Pittsburgh priest who had attended a Lacouture-retreat, began leading Lacouture-inspired retreats at St. Anthony Orphanage in Oakmont, Pennsylvania, which Farina directed at

the time. While Lacouture's retreats were mainly offered to clergy, Hugo and Farina opened their retreats to the laity.

Dorothy Day (1897-1980) attended her first Hugo-retreat in July 1941, having been encouraged to do so by several friends. Day was so inspired by the retreat that she asked Hugo to lead the second annual Catholic Worker retreat at Maryfarm two months later. Day also began to enthusiastically promote the retreat, and Hugo became a regular contributor to *The Catholic Worker* throughout the next decade, writing several articles, in particular, that defended American Catholic conscientious objectors in World War II. But not everyone in the Catholic Worker appreciated the association of Hugo and the retreat, and division emerged within the movement over the retreat.

More formal opposition to Hugo and the retreat also existed. In 1942, responding to complaints from his clergy, Hugo's bishop transferred him to a rural parish, effectively ending his ability to regularly lead retreats. In response to this criticism, Hugo wrote *Applied Christianity* in order to present the retreat and its theology. It was published by The Catholic Worker Press in 1944 with illustrations by Ade Bethune (1914-2002) and an imprimatur from Cardinal Spellman (1889-1967). In July 1945, a series of articles by influential American Catholic theologians began to appear in prominent journals like the *American Ecclesiastical Review* criticizing the theology in *Applied Christianity*. Hugo responded to his critics, leading to what Joseph Clifford Fenton called the "controversy" surrounding the retreat.³ This controversy itself had been predated by an earlier one surrounding Lacouture in Canada in which charges of "Lacouturism" appeared. In 1939, Lacouture had been banned from leading retreats by his Jesuit superiors.

³ Joseph Clifford Fenton, "Nature and the Supernatural Life" *American Ecclesiastical Review* 114 (January 1946): 54-68.

While in “exile,” transferred to various assignments throughout the diocese, Hugo continued to write articles for *The Catholic Worker*, as well as several books and pamphlets. These writings both described the retreat and employed its theology in discussing issues like war and economics. He also continued to request an assignment from his bishop, now John Dearden (1907-1988), that would allow him time to resume leading retreats. Hugo and Farina even traveled to Rome in the early 1950s to “appeal” their case to Cardinal Ottaviani (1890-1979), only to be turned away by his secretary.⁴

In 1959, Hugo was finally able to resume leading retreats with the blessing of his new bishop, John J. Wright (1909-1979). Hugo had been made pastor of a suburban parish, and was thus able to take the time necessary to lead retreats. Wright was clearly a supporter of Hugo, and appointed him the founding director of the diocesan Theological Commission. In the midst of the build-up to *Humanae Vitae*, Wright even asked Hugo to write a defense of the Catholic teaching on artificial birth control, which was published in 1968 under the title *St. Augustine on Nature, Sex, and Marriage*.⁵ Hugo was also invited by Wright’s successor in Pittsburgh, Bishop Donald W. Wuerl, to help write a catechism for adults edited by Wuerl.

For a short time, starting in 1964, Hugo also resumed giving the annual Catholic Worker retreat at Tivoli farm. He led one each of the following two summers, but cancelled the 1967 retreat, claiming to be too engaged in writing his book on birth control. Late the following year, *The Catholic Worker* began printing a series of chapters

⁴ Hugo later recalled that they had not realized that “there was no such thing as recourse to Rome.” Hugo, *Your Ways are not My Ways*, volume 1 (Pittsburgh: Encounter with Silence, 1986), 179.

⁵ In his “Introduction,” Wright wrote: “Comes now Father Hugo, a student of St. Augustine during all the years of his life as a scholar, retreat director and thoroughly pastoral priest... In this scholarly work he has successfully (indeed, at times heroically!) met the trial of contradiction and the testing by that magisterial criticism which forces on the intellectually honest a careful weighing of their conclusions and leads to the kind of results reflected in this book.” Hugo, *St. Augustine on Nature, Sex, and Marriage* (Chicago: Scepter Press, 1968).

from another of Hugo's forthcoming books, *Love Strong as Death*.⁶ Day included an editorial comment highlighting his work during the war which stated that Hugo had "led the way among Catholics in the struggle for peace."⁷ In 1976, Day made what would be her final retreat with Hugo at a convent outside of Pittsburgh, an experience that she later recalled had left her "refreshed and strengthened."⁸ And in 1981, Hugo delivered the homily at a Memorial Mass for Dorothy Day celebrated at Marquette University. He titled his sermon: "Dorothy Day: Driven by Love."

Hugo spent the last few years of his life as chaplain to a community of sisters, as well as writing a two-volume work on the retreat. Indeed, he was still editing the second volume of *Your Ways Are Not My Ways: The Radical Christianity of the Gospel* when he died in car accident on October 1, 1985. He had also just finished giving a retreat two days earlier.⁹ Hugo was buried on the grounds of the convent of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth in Bellevue, Pennsylvania, where he had been chaplain.

This Project

While Hugo's entire life was certainly a full one, though perhaps cut short, the scope of this dissertation will be the decade or so between when he attended his first Lacouture-retreat in 1938 and when the last of writings involved in the "retreat controversy" was published in 1948. This was an interesting period of time. The Second World War was certainly the defining event. This was also an important period for Day and the Catholic Worker. Day's embrace of the Hugo-retreat and her introduction of it

⁶ John Hugo, *Love Strong as Death: A Study of Christian Ethics* (published by author, 1969). Hugo dedicated the book to Onesimus Lacouture, S.J. The articles in *The Catholic Worker* appeared from October 1968-June 1969.

⁷ *The Catholic Worker* (December 1968): 4.

⁸ Day, "On Pilgrimage" *The Catholic Worker* (September 1976): 2.

⁹ Aquilina and Scott, *Weapons*, 22.

into the movement coincided with her very public pacifist stand in the war which had had such an effect on the Catholic Worker and on Day herself. Within Catholic theology, these were the years just before the promulgation of *Humani Generis* in 1950, with its attempt to bring the nature-grace debates of the previous decades to some sort of conclusion. It was also the time that would mark the beginning of the end of a theological perspective that had dominated Catholicism at least since the turn-of-the-century, if not before –neo-Thomism.¹⁰ Needless to say, a lot was going on during the time Hugo was giving his retreat and defending its theology and his work should be understood within this historical context.

This dissertation presents three main arguments. First, the perception in much of American Catholic scholarship that Hugo was a rigorist and the retreat theology tended toward a world-denying Jansenism is false. This was certainly not the way Day and many others who made the retreat understood its theology. Indeed, Day provided a beautiful illustration of that theology in *The Long Loneliness*. Not only are these charges a caricature, but they are rooted in a neo-Thomist reading of Hugo's theology that emerged in the 1940s. Second, while Hugo's theology of nature and grace was not Jansenist, but in fact was rooted in Ignatian spirituality, it did have many similarities with some of the major emerging currents in Catholic theology at the time, particularly the work being done by Henri de Lubac, S.J (1896-1991). These similarities included Hugo's understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship, his efforts at *ressourcement*, and

¹⁰ The terms neo-Thomism and neoscholasticism have often been used somewhat interchangeably. Gerald McCool, S.J. explained that while the neoscholasticism referred to the theological tradition rooted in scholastic thinkers broadly understood, neo-Thomism was based in the writings of Aquinas and the tradition of "Thomistic" commentators. Neo-Thomism is the term that will be used here to describe the theological tradition that dominated the early twentieth-century. More will be said about this theology in Chapter IV. Gerald McCool *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 29

his challenge to early twentieth-century neo-Thomism. Hugo's work and the reaction to it, therefore, should be understood in light of these broader theological movements developing in Catholicism. Finally, it will be argued that Hugo's theological argument remains relevant to contemporary Catholic discourse. This is particularly true in American Catholic social ethics, since his theology offers a corrective to the dominant perspective of today, as it once did for a perhaps not so different social ethic that was pervasive in American Catholicism over seven decades ago. And charges made against more recent American Catholic radicals seem to be rooted in a theology not all that unlike the one out of which the charges against Hugo had been made.

This dissertation is made up of six chapters. Chapter one presents a survey of how Hugo has been portrayed in American Catholic scholarship. While not exhaustive, this survey, which includes Day's description of Hugo and the retreat, highlights some of the main ways in which Hugo has been depicted by scholars. The second chapter provides a day by day account of the Hugo-retreat, with descriptions of each of the twenty-six sessions based on Hugo's *Applied Christianity*, as well as Day's own retreat notes. This account, while sometimes tedious, does give a sense of what the retreat entailed, and how its theology was presented and received. In chapter three, the focus turns to the theological roots of the retreat in St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. It also describes Hugo's attempt to place Lacouture's reading of the *Exercises* within a particular tradition of Jesuit spiritual writers. This attempt can be seen as Hugo's efforts at *ressourcement* to justify his theological arguments. Chapter four offers an examination of the historical context within which Hugo was working. As noted earlier, this was a time shaped by major events not only in Hugo's life, but also in the Catholic Worker, in

American Catholicism, and in the Catholic theology. Chapter five examines the controversy that surrounded the Hugo-retreat, particularly in the back and forth between Hugo and several prominent American theologians. The final chapter presents a summary of Hugo's theology, as well as an argument for why it remains relevant in Catholic theological discourse today.

Over the course of this research project, an image of Hugo came into focus that was not always flattering. Hugo had his detractors, and he often seemed to do little to discourage them from not liking him. At times, he even came across as uncharitable. Also, the way in which he presented his theology was often mechanical, heavy-handed, and sometimes even uncomfortable. Despite this, Hugo did seem to have grasped (or at least had been grasping at) some very important theological truths. And for this reason, he was unique in the American Catholicism of his day and is significant for American Catholicism today.

CHAPTER I

JOHN HUGO IN AMERICAN CATHOLIC STUDIES

Hugo had learned his retreat theology from French-Canadian priests imbued with the bitterly mystical, “gloomy Catholicism” which wedded the Jansenism of Port Royal to the harsh struggle for Catholic survival in Canada... The ethnic Jansenism of the priests blended potently with Day’s aesthetic Jansenism.

-James T. Fisher¹

Ro: You know, people have said that Father Hugo was quite Jansenistic.

Dorothy: That unfortunately was the impression, I guess, in the way some people responded to his call to live Christianity. And that’s totally untrue. If you really listened to Father Hugo, he was talking about the cross. It was John of the Cross. That’s who he was following.

-Dorothy Gauchat²

In 1933, Dorothy Day (1897-1980), under the encouragement of her “first spiritual director” Paulist Father Joseph McSorley C.S.P. (1876-1963), began attending what were then known as “lay retreats.”³ Such retreats were part of the broader “retreat movement” taking place in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴ Four years earlier, Pius

¹ James T. Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America 1933-1962* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 59.

² *Voices from the Catholic Worker*, ed. Rosalie Riegle Troester (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 19.

³ William Portier, “Dorothy Day and her first spiritual director, Fr. Joseph McSorley, C.S.P.” *Houston Catholic Worker*, (September-October 2002): 5.

⁴ Joseph Chinnici, O.F.M., *Living Stones* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1996), 166. In the growth of the lay retreat movement in America, Chinnici highlighted the crucial role of Terence Shealy (1863-1922), a New York Jesuit and first dean of Fordham’s school of sociology and social science, was instrumental in the

X's encyclical *Mens Nostra* (1929) stressed the importance of retreats for the Christian life and emphasized the retreat as the spiritual component or the "soul of Catholic Action."⁵ For the pope, there was a very clear separation between the retreat's focus upon the spiritual and Catholic Action's activity in the world. This reflected the neo-Thomistic theology of the day with its two-tiered view of the Christian life. Such a view separated the mystical or supernatural from the temporal or natural.⁶ Along these same lines, there was understood to be a very clear separation between an extra-ordinary Christian life focused upon the mystical or supernatural, a life reserved (or quarantined) to the cloister, and a more ordinary Christian life involved in the world, the life lived by laity and secular clergy. As Joseph Chinnici, O.F.M. has noted, the lay retreats of the early twentieth-century offered lay men and women a brief respite from world, a chance to listen to speakers and relax in a quieter setting before they returned to the world.⁷ The idea that these retreats would cause some type of mystical or spiritual fervor and therefore have some sort of practical implication in the lives of retreatants was not part of the theology behind these retreats. Catholic Action, which took place outside of and separate from the retreat, dealt with such worldly activity.⁸ Despite this two-tiered theology that supported these retreat, or perhaps because of it, Pius's call was well received. By 1936, there were twenty-six permanent retreat houses which had hosted 267 retreats to over 11,000 women; and in 1939, a survey taken indicated that 59 of the 110

Laymen's Retreat League which saw the lay retreat as a source of social reform. It is also important to note that in an apostolic constitution *Summorum Pontificem* (July 25, 1922), Pius X named St. Ignatius of Loyola the patron of retreats. The Hugo-retreat was a version of the Ignatian *Exercises*.

⁵ In *Mens Nostra* (8), Pius wrote, "There is a need for elect groups of men, both of the secular and regular clergy, who shall act as faithful dispensers of the mysteries of God. In addition to these we must have compact companies of pious laymen, who united to the Apostolic Hierarchy by close bonds of charity, will actively aid this devoting themselves to the manifold works and labors of Catholic Action."

⁶ Chinnici, 168.

⁷ Chinnici, 167.

⁸ Chinnici, 167.

retreat houses for lay men reported that over the previous decade a total of 2,340 retreats had been given to some 131,000 men.⁹

Not surprisingly, Day was not impressed with the first such retreat she attended, and called it “too rarified.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, she continued to make retreats, a practice she would continue throughout her life. In July, 1941, on the advice of Pacific Roy, Day and a small group of Catholic Workers attended a Hugo-led retreat in Oakmont, Pennsylvania. Day was greatly moved by the week-long, silent retreat and asked Hugo to lead what would be the second Catholic Worker annual retreat at Maryfarm in Easton, Pennsylvania the following month. Paul Hanly Furfey (1896-1992) had led the annual retreat the year prior. Hugo agreed, and thus began his long association with Day and the Catholic Worker movement as Day’s spiritual director, theological resource, as well as a frequent contributor to *The Catholic Worker* throughout the 1940s.

This first chapter will examine Hugo’s association with Day and the Catholic Worker as that association is chronicled in Day’s writings, as well as in various scholarship on Day and the Catholic Worker. Such an examination is important for two reasons. First, Hugo’s historical significance has been largely based on his connection with Day and the Catholic Worker. Indeed, that John Hugo appears at all in American Catholic studies is because of his association with Dorothy Day. His connection with Day, therefore, is the obvious starting point for any study of Hugo. While Day often peppered her writings with quotes from Hugo, her own description of Hugo in *The Long Loneliness* was brief. Hugo’s chief importance for Day, though, seemed to be as her primary resource for the theology of the retreat –the use of which Hugo did not limit to

⁹ Chinnici, 158.

¹⁰ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 244.

the retreat itself. While her account of Hugo and the retreat in *The Long Loneliness* reveals some of their influence on Day, it was in the very way Day structured her autobiography that the real influence of the retreat theology emerged. For *The Long Loneliness* was written as and can be read as an illustration of the retreat theology in the life a Christian. As David O'Brien observed upon her death, Day was "the most significant, interesting, and influential person in the history of American Catholicism."¹¹ Recognition of the influence Hugo and the retreat theology had on her is necessary, therefore, not only for understanding Hugo, but for better understanding Day as well.

This examination of accounts of Hugo and his retreat is also important for recognizing the way in which Hugo and his retreat have generally been portrayed by scholars of American Catholicism. This portrayal has largely been unflattering, and often describes Hugo and the retreat theology in terms of excessive perfectionism, rigorist, and tending toward Jansenist theology. Such a portrayal is a simplistic caricature of Hugo's theological perspective. As later chapters will show, such a portrayal of Hugo's theology originated from his theological critics who themselves were working out of a certain form of neo-Thomism which dominated early twentieth-century Catholicism. That this portrayal of Hugo is rooted in such a two-tiered theology has been missed by contemporary scholars even as they have continued to propagate this portrayal of Hugo. Such accounts of Hugo and the retreat theology, as it will later be pointed out, have also been a major factor behind the charge made by many contemporary scholars that Day and other Catholic radicals were "perfectionists" and "apocalyptic sectarians." And so it is for these reasons that an examination of how Hugo has been portrayed in American Catholic studies is our starting point.

¹¹ David O'Brien, "The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Day," *Commonweal* 107 (1980): 71.

Dorothy Day's Account of Hugo and "The Retreat"

In her autobiography, Day recounted that the first time she heard about "the retreat" was when her friend, the publisher Maisie Ward, informed her of a retreat given to workers in Montreal:

They bring their own lunch and eat it right there in the church and share it with others who come. They spend the day in silence, walk the streets between conferences, go home at night, and come back the next day for more. People are thronging to it. It is an *evangelical* retreat.¹²

While Day did not join Ward in attending this Montreal retreat, chiefly because it was given in French, she was able to later read a copy of the notes from a different retreat, this one led by Onesimus Lacouture, S.J. himself, which were given to her by her friend Missionary Servant Sister Peter Claver Fahy, M.S.B.T.¹³ After reading these retreat notes, Day confessed that she was not much impressed, explaining that "the written word did not have the life and vitality of the spoken word, and perhaps it was the personality of the retreat master that made the teaching so powerful."¹⁴ Day recalled that Fahy, herself a devout follower of the retreat, then brought such a retreat master to meet Day -Father Pacifique Roy, S.S.J (d. 1954).¹⁵ Roy, a French-Canadian Josephite priest working in Baltimore at the time, was responsible for bringing Lacouture to Baltimore to lead the priest-retreats in 1938 and 1939, both of which Hugo had attended.¹⁶

¹² Day, *Long Loneliness*, 245.

¹³ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 245. According to Sr. Brigid O'Shea Merriman, Fahy had been given the notes by her confessor, Father Frank Giri, who attended a priest only retreat led by Lacouture held in Baltimore either in September 1938 or 1939. Brigid O'Shea Merriman, O.S.F., *Searching for Christ* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 140.

¹⁴ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 246. Brigid O'Shea Merriman noted that Day was also not very impressed with Giri himself. Merriman, *Searching*, 140.

¹⁵ Merriman guesses that Roy came to New York in either 1938 or 1939.

¹⁶ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 246.

After their initial meeting, Roy quickly became a feature in the Catholic Worker and often came to the New York house to preach “the doctrine of the Lacouture retreat.” Day remembered Roy sitting in the dinning room all day talking to anyone who would listen,

Father Roy talked to us about nature and the supernatural, how God became man so that man might become God, and how we were under the obligation of putting off the old man and putting on Christ, how we had been made the sons of God, by the seed of the supernatural life planted in us at our baptism, and of the necessity we were under to see that the seed grew and flourished.¹⁷

Roy was also present at what was the first Catholic Worker annual-retreat held at the Maryfarm over Labor Day weekend 1940.¹⁸ This retreat was led by Paul Hanly Furfey, but Day described Roy as “giving a retreat within a retreat.”¹⁹

Roy soon began giving Day and the Catholic Workers days of recollection in Baltimore, where he presented more of “the retreat doctrine.” Throughout *The Long Loneliness*, Day quoted her notes from these days: “We had to aim for perfection; we had to be guided by the folly of the Cross.”²⁰ Day recalled that Roy preached about “supernatural motives” as a means of “supernaturalizing all our actions of every day,” and in doing this Christians would follow their baptismal vows “to put off the world.”²¹ She described these as “beautiful days,” in which it was as though she was listening to the gospel for the first time: “We saw all things new. There was a freshness about

¹⁷ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 246. Sandra Yocum noted that Day’s recollections of the retreat were probably of blend of those given by Roy and Hugo. Yocum Mize, “We Are Still Pacifists”: Dorothy Day’s Pacifism During World War II” in *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker: Centenary Essays*, edited by Susan Mountin, et al. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001): 469.

¹⁸ This was the retreat that Dorothy called after her declaration that the Catholic Worker was a pacifist movement, a move which many Workers disagreed with and which resulted in several houses closing and subscriptions lost.

¹⁹ Merriman, *Searching*, 140

²⁰ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 247.

²¹ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 247.

everything as though we were in love, as indeed we were.”²² She called the retreat doctrine “good bread” and “strong meat.” It was through these days of recollection with Roy, that Day first started to become attracted to the theology of the retreat.

While it was Roy who first articulated the retreat theology to her, Day wrote that Roy was never satisfied with his presentation of what he simply called “the retreat.” It is out of this dissatisfaction, that Roy told Day, “the man who can really give this retreat is Father John J. Hugo.”²³ In *The Long Loneliness*, Day recalled that at the time Hugo was a young priest from the diocese of Pittsburgh “who had amplified the retreat notes of Father Lacouture into a book entitled *Applied Christianity*” -a book which she made sure to point out had been published with an imprimatur Cardinal Spellman himself.²⁴ Such ecclesiastical approval was significant, Day noted, for Hugo had written another book on the history of the retreat movement titled *The Sign of Contradiction*, a book which she pointed out had caused something of a stir in American clerical circles as it “was widely circulated among other priests and was regarded as an extreme example of self-criticism, that is criticism of the clergy in general.”²⁵

According to Day, Hugo and Farina had been giving the retreat in an orphanage in Oakmont during the summers, “when the dormitories could be turned into classrooms

²² Day, *Long Loneliness*, 251.

²³ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 254. Merriman recounted that Sr. Peter Claver Fahy also claimed to have first introduced Day to Hugo. Merriman, *Searching*, 273.

²⁴ Day also noted that though Hugo had not written much, he had taught and preached a great deal, having taught religion at “a girls’ college in Pittsburgh” and led a “street preaching band in the Hill district of the city.” Day, *Long Loneliness*, 254. In describing Hugo in a letter from 1941, Day noted that there was “nothing namby-pamby about him.” *All the Way to Heaven*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010), 125.

²⁵ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 254. Day wrote this description of Hugo in the midst of the controversy surrounding him. Opposition to Hugo came from both priests within his own diocese who thought he was rigorist, and theologians at the Catholic University of America who thought he was a Jansenist. By pointing out that *Applied Christianity* had an imprimatur and that *The Sign of Contradiction* was self-criticism, as well as criticism of clergy in general, Day seemed to be defending Hugo against these charges.

and the gymnasium used as a conference room.”²⁶ She remembered her first week-long, silent Hugo-led retreat as “a feast indeed,” and described Hugo as “a brilliant teacher” and that she could see he was taking great joy in his work.²⁷ Each day of the retreat was made up of four conferences lasting one hour followed by prayer in the chapel. For Day the retreat was unlike any she had attended prior, for they did not meditate on the “usual meditations” of the four last things: heaven, hell, death, and judgment, and that there was not much talk of sin, either. Rather, she recalled, there was a lot of talk on “the good and the better.”²⁸ Alluding to this understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship at the heart of the retreat, Day wrote that the emphasis in the retreat was on the choice one had to make -and that choice was not between good and evil, but rather between the good and the better: “We have been given a share in the divine life; we have been raised to a supernatural level; we have been given power to become the sons of God.”²⁹ Recounting all of this in 1952, eleven years after making this initial Hugo-retreat, Day acknowledged that she still had her notes from this retreat and enjoyed taking them to church and reading them over for mediation.³⁰

In the July-August, 1941 issue of *The Catholic Worker*, the issue immediately following the Hugo- retreat, Day described the experience,

We spent this period in complete silence, the day beginning at six and ending at ten. For spiritual reading at meals, we had the entire life of St. Francis by Jorgensen, and there were five conferences a day. These were so stimulating that not a moment dragged. We read nothing but the New Testament, and we all took copious notes. It was a time of real study, to put off the old man and on the new,

²⁶ She also recalled that the sisters operating the orphanage were “quite as enthusiastic as the priests and willing to take care of the retreatants in addition to the hundred and fifty children who were in their care.” Day, *Long Loneliness*, 254.

²⁷ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 255.

²⁸ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 256.

²⁹ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 256.

³⁰ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 255.

and we came out with a real sense of renewal, a feeling that we had obtained a perspective, a point of view that gave balance to our outlook.³¹

While Day's first encounter with "the retreat doctrine" was through Roy, and she would later attend other Lacouture inspired retreats led by various "retreat priests," it was clear that Day preferred the Hugo-led retreat and considered him to be the best articulator of, and her primary source for, the retreat theology.

Day also provided an account of "the controversy" which surrounded the retreat, both in Canada and the United States. She wrote that Lacouture was charged with "inexactitude of expression, causing division among the clergy and causing people to go to extremes in the business of mortification."³² As a result of these charges, Lacouture was forbidden from giving the retreat, and sent to an Indian reservation where Day described him as "happy and at peace, sowing, as he terms it, his own interior senses, the memory, the understanding, the will."³³ She also noted that a few years later, Hugo lost permission to give the retreat from his bishop Hugh Boyle.³⁴

Day described issues surrounding the charges against Lacouture and Hugo as "the old controversy of nature and grace." She mentioned that some theologians had called the teaching on nature and grace in *The Imitation of Christ* "dangerous," even though Pope

³¹ Day, "Day After Day," *The Catholic Worker* (July-August 1941). The Pauline image of putting off the old and putting on the new man was one of the many scriptural images employed in the retreat to illustrate the understanding of nature and the supernatural, the idea that the natural was put off or renounced so that the supernatural could be put on. The image of a seed falling to the ground and dying was also often used to explain this idea.

³² Day, *Long Loneliness*, 258.

³³ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 259. Lacouture died in "exile" in 1951. Day was the only American to attend his funeral, Hugo was denied permission.

³⁴ Over the next decade, Day would make continual appeals to Boyle on behalf of Hugo. Prior to the Hugo "controversy," Day knew Boyle having dealt with him on labor issues in Pittsburgh. Kenneth Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh*. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

Pius XI had called it “that incomparable work.”³⁵ She reported that the controversy began to spread in the U.S. through a series of articles written in *The Ecclesiastical Review*, “attacking Father Hugo’s teaching.”³⁶ She also pointed out that a similar controversy was taking place in France surrounding the teachings of Henri de Lubac, S.J., whom she had read. Looking past all the problems it caused for Lacouture and Hugo, Day described all these controversies as “a wonderful thing,” revealing that priests and laity could still become excited about points of doctrine concerning nature and the supernatural.³⁷ Despite her claims to being unqualified to comment on these debates, Day appeared to have a significant grasp of the issues. This was particularly apparent in her suggestion that the controversy surrounding Hugo was similar to that surrounding de Lubac. Day seemed to recognize that the debates surrounding the retreat theology taking place in North America were part of larger nature-grace debates within Catholic theology in the early twentieth-century. *The Long Loneliness* was written in the wake of *Humani Generis* (1950)—an encyclical Pius XII wrote in hopes of bringing such debates to an end.

Reflecting on “the retreat” in the December, 1951 issue of *The Catholic Worker*, Day wrote,

I could write a great deal about that retreat, and all it brought to us, the new vistas which it opened out before us. But I will simply say that it gave us spiritual direction... The retreat gave us hope and courage, as retreats were supposed to do, and we will be everlastingly grateful for it, grateful to Father Lacouture, who made the retreat possible for us. We feel that we have been participants of a great

³⁵ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 258. *The Imitation of Christ* was an important text in “the retreat,” particularly the discussion of nature and grace in Book Three, chapter 54: “The divers moving between nature and grace.”

³⁶ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 258. In her diary entry for January 15, 1946, Day wrote “Attack in *Ecclesiastical Review*,” a reference to Joseph Clifford Fenton’s article critiquing Hugo that recently been published. Day, *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day*, Robert Ellsberg, ed. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008), 100.

³⁷ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 258.

spiritual movement which is still going on, though it is perhaps now in shadow. The seed has fallen into the ground and died. But we know that it will bear fruit.³⁸

While evidence of the deep influence Hugo and the retreat had on Day appeared throughout her writings in the 1940s and 50s, especially in the newly published collections of her diaries and letters, this influence can be seen most clearly in the way Day structured her most famous and important work, *The Long Loneliness*.³⁹

Nature and the Supernatural in The Long Loneliness

In her autobiography, Day presented the story of her conversion around the idea that in becoming Catholic she renounced much more than simply a life of sin -she gave up *the good* so that she could choose *the better*: “It is a choice, a preference. If we love God with our whole hearts, how much heart have we left?”⁴⁰ Unlike most classic Christian conversion stories, Day seemed very deliberate not to present her pre-conversion life as one simply of sin and misery, but rather as one that was in many ways good and even joyful. For Day, her conversion was a leaving behind of this good life something better -a supernatural life of holiness.

Day divided her autobiography into three parts. In Part I, “Searching,” Day described her life in the Old Left -a movement she called one of her “two great loves.”⁴¹ Her radical friends were presented as good, though very clearly lacking.⁴² Day described her old comrades as dedicating their lives to heroically caring and fighting for the poor,

³⁸ Day, “On Retreat,” *The Catholic Worker*, (December 1951).

³⁹ In an April, 2008 talk at the University of Dayton, James T. Fisher called *The Long Loneliness* “the most important book in the history of American Catholicism.” For Day’s letters, see *All the Way to Heaven*, Robert Ellsberg, ed. (Marquette University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 256.

⁴¹ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 149.

⁴² At various points in her story, Day noted the suicides and depression within radical community following the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927. See, especially the end of Part I.

unemployed, and disenfranchised. Writing decades after her conversion, she still remembered these radicals with admiration,

...the Marxists, the I.W.W.'s who looked upon religion as the opiate of the people, who thought they had only this one life to live and then oblivion –they were the ones who were eager to sacrifice themselves here and now, thus doing without now and for all eternity the good things of the world which they were fighting to obtain for their brothers. It was then, and still is, a paradox that confounds me. God love them!⁴³

Her description of those in the radical movement was definitely positive, and she saw her life within this movement as having been, in many ways, a good thing -something she still very much admired and even wished her fellow Christians would imitate.⁴⁴ Yet, it was this life that she left behind in favor of what she saw as something better.

This idea of leaving behind the good for the sake of the better was illustrated even more vividly in “Natural Happiness,” the second and pivotal section of the book, which contains Day’s account of her life just before her conversion. Presenting her life leading up to her conversion, Day recalled the happiness that she experienced with her other “great love,” her common-law husband Forster Batterham. Again, the idea that clearly dominated so much of Day’s description of life with Forester was that it was good -not something sinful. “Because I feel that this period of my life was so joyous and lovely,” she recounted, “I want to write at length about it, giving the flavor, the atmosphere, the mood of those days.”⁴⁵ Far from quickly noting a past which she was ashamed of, Day wrote a great deal about this period of her life, its simplicity and joy. And she made it clear that she was very much in love with Forster:

⁴³ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 63.

⁴⁴ The notion that the radicals sacrificed “the good things of the world” also resonated with the retreat’s notion that “the best thing to do with the best things is give them up.”

⁴⁵ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 116.

I loved him in every way, as a wife, as a mother even. I loved him for all he knew and pitied him for all he didn't know...I loved his lean cold body as he got into bed smelling of the sea, and I loved his integrity and stubborn pride.⁴⁶

That Day wrote these lines over thirty years after her marriage to Forster ended, provides evidence of the extent of her love for him -a love she still regarded as good, though lacking. She presented her life with Forster as days filled with happiness and joy, "tired with all the activities that so rejoiced and filled my days, I sat in the dusk in a stupor of contentment."⁴⁷ When Day found herself praying in the midst of her daily life, particularly when she learned she was pregnant, she was explicit as to the reason: "I did not turn to God in unhappiness, in grief, in despair- to get consolation, to get something from Him...I am praying because I am happy, not because I am unhappy."⁴⁸ Again, Day seemed to want to make it clear that her life at this time was good and her happiness real.

Yet, she also wanted to make clear that it was this very happiness -this natural happiness- was lacking and was not sufficient to fulfill her. Therefore, she recognized that it was this happiness which led her to seek something more, something better: "I was happy but my very happiness made me know that there was a greater happiness to be obtained from life that any I had ever known."⁴⁹ In one way, this affirmation that it was happiness, not sorrow, that led her to God was Day's response to many of her old radical friends, as she explained:

I had known enough of love to know that a good healthy family life was as near to heaven as one could get in this life. There was another sample of heaven, of the enjoyment of God. The very sexual act itself was used again and again in Scripture as a figure of the beatific vision...It was not because I was tired of sex,

⁴⁶ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 148.

⁴⁷ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 138.

⁴⁸ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 132.

⁴⁹ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 116. "I have always felt that it was life with him [Forster] that brought me natural happiness, that brought me to God." Day, *Long Loneliness*, 134.

satiated, disillusioned, that I turned to God. Radical friends used to insinuate this. It was because through a whole love, both physical and spiritual, I came to know God.⁵⁰

But in another way, Day was recounting one of the most painful experiences of her life through the theological perspective of the retreat. The goodness of her “natural happiness” was understood as a “sample” –good but insufficient- of the infinitely better supernatural happiness of the beatific vision. And it was that “sample” which had led her to God.

It was through this theological perspective, the preference of the supernatural over the natural, that Day interpreted and described her decision to end her relationship with Forster in *The Long Loneliness*. Day knew that having Tamar and herself baptized would mean the loss of her life together with Forster and the happiness that it brought.⁵¹ Day saw her conversion as choice of the better rather than the good, supernatural rather than the natural.⁵² And this choice was not an easy one: “I felt all along that when I took the irrevocable step it would mean that Tamar and I would be alone, and I did not want to be alone. I did not want to give up human love when it was dearest and tenderest.”⁵³ Day understood that this difficulty was caused because in choosing the supernatural over the natural -that she was even going against her “natural inclination,”

⁵⁰ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 140.

⁵¹ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 120. “Forster, the inarticulate, became garrulous only in wrath. And his wrath, he said, was caused by my absorption in the supernatural rather than the natural.”

⁵² She wrote, “To become a Catholic meant for me to give up a mate with whom I was much in love. It got to the point where it was a simple question of whether I chose God or man.” Day, *Long Loneliness*, 145. The analogy of marriage was used often in the retreat as a metaphor for this choice, and as a married woman, Day employed it to describe her decision, “I loved...and like all women in love, I wanted to be united to my love. Why should Forster not be jealous? Any man who did not participate in this love would, of course, realize my infidelity, my adultery. In the eyes of God, any turning toward creatures to the exclusion of Him is adultery and so it is termed over and over again in Scripture.” *The Long Loneliness*, 149.

⁵³ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 145.

God always gives us a chance to show our preference for Him. With Abraham it was to sacrifice his only son. With me it was to give up my married life with Forster. You do these things blindly, not because it is your natural inclination- you are going against nature when you do them- but because you wish to live in conformity with the will of God.⁵⁴

Day understood her natural happiness as good, and renouncing it was not a simple or easy decision. She did not hide the pain she felt while agonizing over this choice, “I became so oppressed I could not breathe and I woke at night choking...my heart was breaking with my own determination to make an end, once and for all, to the torture we were undergoing.”⁵⁵ That she remembered the difficulty in leaving Forster and the suffering which accompanied it only further affirms the idea that Day’s love for Forster was something that, even two decades later, she considered to be real and good. To renounce the good was not a simple matter. Dorothy recounted, “It was years before I awakened without that longing for a face pressed against my breast, an arm about my shoulder. The sense of loss was there. It was a price I had paid. I was Abraham who had sacrificed Isaac.”⁵⁶ It is certainly revealing that Day compared ending her marriage to Abraham sacrificing his son -obviously Day saw the sacrifice of her marriage as genuine.

In the third and final part of her story, “Love is the Measure,” Day illustrated something of the supernatural life which she had chosen, a life lived in clear focus on one’s supernatural final end -the beatific vision.⁵⁷ Her description of this life was one that called for a daily renunciation, or “sowing.” As Sandra Yocum has pointed out, the smells, sights and sounds of the life in the Catholic Worker house, the constant harassment by mentally unstable guests, and even the very act of living in a slum were all

⁵⁴ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 256.

⁵⁵ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 148

⁵⁶ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 236.

⁵⁷ “Love is the measure” is a quote taken from the retreat.

portrayed by Day as renouncing or sowing of attachment to the good things of nature in order to follow the will of God.⁵⁸ While Day understood the supernatural life as one of renouncing or sowing, she also recognized that giving up one's attachments to these created goods was not always a voluntary sowing. Indeed, the retreat also described involuntary suffering that is part of God's act of "pruning" or cutting away attachments to the natural so that the supernatural could grow. These notions of sowing and pruning were clearly articulated in Day's account of Peter Maurin's final days:

The fact was he had been stripped of all. He had stripped himself throughout life; he had put off the old man in order to put on the new. He had done all that he could do to denude himself of the world...He had stripped himself, but there remained work for God to do. We are to be pruned as the vine is pruned so that it can bear fruit, and this we cannot do ourselves. God did it for him. He took from him his mind, the one thing he had left, the one thing perhaps he took delight in.⁵⁹

In this way, Day presented Maurin -from his years of voluntary poverty to his humbling final days- in terms of the retreat's theology of nature and grace. For Day, Maurin was an example of one who had left behind much that was good in order to choose that which was much better.

Hugo in American Catholic Studies

William Miller

While in *The Long Loneliness* Day provided the first and primary account of the influence Hugo and the retreat had on her, subsequent studies of Day and the Catholic

⁵⁸ Yocum noted that Day thought that mortification was a way of life in the Catholic Worker: "A Worker mortifies the body through exposure to vermin, cold and dirt; sight by 'bodily exertions, diseased limbs, eyes, noses, mouth, the nose with 'smells of sewage, decay, and rotten flesh;' the ears 'by harsh and screaming voices;' and taste 'by insufficient food cooked in huge quantities.'" Sandra Yocum Mize, "We are Still Pacifists": 472.

⁵⁹ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 274.

Worker have filled out this account. Therefore a chronological examination of some of the major studies of Day and Worker will be helpful.

William Miller's *Harsh and Dreadful Love* (1973) and *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (1982) are two of the earliest, most comprehensive, and most often cited of these studies. Miller described Hugo as "the master of the Catholic Worker retreats" as well as "the *Worker's* principal theological reference for its position on war and conscription."⁶⁰ He wrote that Day asked Hugo to give the 1941 Worker retreat because Fr. Roy had told her Hugo had "the best understanding of Father Lacouture's message and methods."⁶¹ The most characteristic feature of these retreats were their rigor, and the Hugo-retreat in particular was marked by silence and fasting. Acknowledging some of the division the Hugo-retreat brought to the Worker, Miller noted that while some of the younger Catholic Worker's chafed at the austerity of the retreat - "Dorothy found it good."⁶² And she even called the six days of silence "manna from heaven."⁶³ Day was described as being attracted to the Hugo-retreat because it presented the Gospels in the full meaning of their "radical and uncompromising spirituality."⁶⁴ Day took over 300 pages of notes during the Hugo-retreats, and according to Miller, up until her death Day talked of editing these notes into a book on the retreat titled *All is Grace*.⁶⁵ After the two

⁶⁰ William Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1973), 187.

⁶¹ Miller, *Harsh*, 187.

⁶² Miller, *Harsh*, 188. This idea that Day liked the retreat while other, often younger, Workers did not emerged in other studies and speaks to importance the retreat had for Day despite opposition to it.

⁶³ William Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 340.

⁶⁴ Miller, *Dorothy*, 340.

⁶⁵ Miller, *Dorothy*, 362. In his edited volume of Day's retreat notes, *All is Grace*, Miller explained that Day never published the book, but gave Miller a folder of retreat notes that she titled, *All is Grace*. Miller edited the notes and included many of them in his book *All is Grace* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1987).

1941 retreats she attended, Miller explained that Hugo became Day's spiritual advisor, "formally and informally, for most of her remaining life."⁶⁶

Miller portrayed the retreat theology as having a great deal of influence on Day, and that she understood it as giving new meaning to what Peter Maurin had taught her. While Maurin had emphasized man's worth and that the realization of that worth was bound up with the social process, it was through the Hugo-retreats that Day had realized the "transcendent sense of the worth of man's nature."⁶⁷ In Miller's account, the retreat lifted Day's vision "more fixedly on the supernatural and with a new strength it revived for her the meaning of love"⁶⁸ He noted that through the retreat, Day also realized the necessity of striving for sainthood—that all were called to live a supernatural life of holiness. Day was quoted as stating, "We are put here to become saints... We must combat the idea that only a few are called to sanctity."⁶⁹ Through the theology of the Hugo-retreat, therefore, Day was described as seeing herself as being brought to "new levels" of spirituality.

Miller also suggested that attending the Hugo-retreats seemed to have "settled" Day more securely in some of her positions regarding the Catholic Worker movement.⁷⁰ He portrayed Day, still very sensitive to Marxist critique of religious charity, as often questioning her own motives for performing the works of mercy, and often wondering if these motives were not somewhat disingenuous, "the pandering to the weakness of others

⁶⁶ Miller, *Dorothy*, 340. Miller recounted the story that in September, 1942 when the sixteen year old Tamar surprised Day with her plans to marry David Hennessy, Day turned to Hugo for guidance: "Father Hugo said he was greatly concerned and would like to help. 'But humanly, there is so little that one can do.'" While the conditions for such a marriage may have seemed "unpropitious," Hugo counseled Day that her daughter would have to fashion her own destiny. Besides, he concluded, "if you foresee suffering for her, that is no bad thing by the divine standard of things." Miller, *Dorothy*, 360.

⁶⁷ Miller, *Harsh*, 188.

⁶⁸ Miller, *Harsh*, 189.

⁶⁹ Miller, *Dorothy*, 363.

⁷⁰ Miller, *Harsh*, 189.

in order to build up one's own holiness?"⁷¹ But, Miller explained, Day saw the retreat as providing something of an answer to this self-examination in that it was a matter of motive: "If the charity of the Workers was through supernatural love –love of God- then all natural motives, all vainglory, would be weeded out and only then would the object of the charity be truly influenced toward good."⁷² While others, particularly many of Day's friends on the Old Left, may have considered Catholic Worker hospitality as simply contributing to the delinquency of those they were serving, the Hugo-retreats allowed Day to recognize that what they were doing was something very different.⁷³ While prior to her encounter with the retreat, Day often questioned her life in the Catholic Worker, following the retreat those anxieties faded away.⁷⁴

In Miller's accounts, Hugo was depicted as being the best preacher and promulgator of the retreat theology, and his influence was understood as coming first through the retreat. But his influence was portrayed as going beyond simply that of a "retreat priest," as he was described as *The Catholic Worker's* "principal theological reference" for its positions on war and military conscription.⁷⁵ Miller quoted a note Hugo sent Day soon after their initial meeting regarding her pacifist stand in World War II:

No doubt [pacifism] is all clear to you; but then you have not tried to work it out doctrinally. If you knew no theology, it would probably be simpler to make a solution. Yet the decision must be based on doctrine. Pacifism must proceed from

⁷¹ Miller, *Harsh*, 190.

⁷² Miller, *Harsh*, 190.

⁷³ Miller explained that Day realized that "They were trying to change people, and they recognized that they might have to pay for this change with their own suffering." He wrote that it was through the retreats that Day came to see Christ "not primarily as a social reformer but as the exemplar of all-sufficient love." Miller, *Harsh*, 190.

⁷⁴ The Hugo-retreat was also described as having an effect on Day personally. According to Miller, after encountering that retreat, Day lost "something about her that might be called brassiness," she stopped smoking and drinking, and her speech even became "less salty." He also suggested that after the 1941 Hugo-retreats, in particular, Day had a "new sensitivity" to what she viewed as the truth of the Gospels, and that it gave her "a reinforced spirituality." Miller, *Dorothy*, 341.

⁷⁵ Miller, *Harsh*, 187.

truth, or it cannot exist at all. And of course this attack on conscription is the most extreme form of pacifism.⁷⁶

Miller argued that prior to 1940, Day and Maurin had been using “history-based arguments” to justify her pacifist positions –for instance, that the Treaty of Versailles was the primary cause of World War II.⁷⁷ By 1940, though, it had become clear to Day that those arguments had little direct meaning on the European situation, and she recognized that Hugo’s critique was correct -her pacifism had to “proceed from truth.”⁷⁸ And in response, she invited Hugo to write a series of articles in *The Catholic Worker* on Christian participation in war. Miller described Hugo’s lengthy articles as calling for the use of the “weapons of the spirit” in what he argued was “the real war against history’s movement toward a spiritless objectivization and violence.”⁷⁹ These articles, which will be looked in a later chapter, employed the theology of the retreat and argued that war, even a just war, must be renounced in favor of a supernatural Christian pacifism. Acknowledging that Hugo’s theology was not for everyone, Miller noted that while some readers were turned off by “such weighty fare,” Day appreciated that *The Catholic Worker*’s positions were being put to “close theological analysis.”⁸⁰

Miller concluded that Hugo, along with the Catholic University of America philosopher Barry O’Toole, provided Day and *The Catholic Worker* with much of the

⁷⁶ Miller, *Harsh*, 166. While many scholars have since quoted this note and cite Miller as its source, unfortunately, Miller did not cite where this note came from.

⁷⁷ Miller, *Harsh*, 166.

⁷⁸ Miller pointed out, “Nazi Germany was not the Weimar Republic, and to continue to base her pacifism on the points made by the revisionist historians on the causes of World War I was obviously not a position that would sustain her.” Miller, *Harsh*, 166.

⁷⁹ Harsh, 164.

⁸⁰ He quoted Day as having written that, “Father Hugo was a hard reasoner who, like Jonathan Edwards, found theology sweet to his taste. When once in the *Worker* he asked the rhetorical question why others in the clergy had not reached conclusions similar to his own, he answered by saying that they had not thought enough about the subject.” Miller, *Harsh*, 183.

theological justification for a more Gospel-based pacifism.⁸¹ That Miller portrayed Hugo as having such a formative role in Day's thinking on pacifism reveals much regarding the extent of his influence on Day and the Catholic Worker movement beyond the retreats. And since Day has been referred to as the "Mother of the American Catholic Pacifism," it also points to Hugo's significance in American Catholicism beyond the retreat movement.⁸²

Miller also noted Hugo's influence continued in the "changing prospect" of the Worker following the war. Day's desire, in 1944, to convert Maryfarm from a farming commune into a retreat center, coupled with her "year away" in 1943 under the spiritual direction of Hugo, revealed the extent of Day's embrace of the retreat theology in the 1940s.⁸³ Though the conversion of Maryfarm was not welcomed by many others in the Worker, Miller explained that Day hoped to "try to build here this training center for Catholic Workers, for apostles, for followers of the Lord."⁸⁴ Day asked Hugo to be the chaplain in residence and the retreat master, but he declined because of his "silencing."⁸⁵ Pacifique Roy moved to Easton instead, and retreats were given there until 1946.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Miller, *Harsh*, 183. Though first introduced by Miller, this idea has been picked up and expanded by other scholars of Day and American Catholic pacifism. See, Patricia McNeal's *Harder Than War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), and *American Catholic Pacifism* Anne Klejment and Nancy Roberts, eds. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing Co., 1996).

⁸² McNeal called Day the "Mother of American Catholic Pacifism." *Harder Than War*, 29. McNeal also noted that in 1935, Paul Hanly Furfey wrote an article in the *Catholic Worker* which, "foreshadowed the theological rationale that would eventually form the basis of Catholic Worker pacifism." 38.

⁸³ Miller wrote of Day's stated wish to take a year off, "from all active work, all responsibility." She also wanted to put herself under "complete obedience" to the spiritual direction of Hugo, though she later wrote "but I didn't." Miller, *Dorothy*, 367.

⁸⁴ Miller, *Dorothy*, 384.

⁸⁵ In describing the retreat "controversy," which greatly affected both Lacouture and Hugo, Miller somewhat casually quipped that "when the furor eventually subsided no one was burned at the stake." Miller, *Dorothy*, 340.

⁸⁶ Miller, *Dorothy*, 384.

Miller pointed out that his increasing influence brought Hugo into tension with others in the Worker, and in particular, Ammon Hennacy.⁸⁷ Miller noted that Hugo was one of the many people associated with the Catholic Worker concerned about Hennacy's effect on the movement. Miller quoted a note Hugo wrote to Day in 1955, in which he said that he was "concerned by the direction the paper was taking...since Ammon became a definite member of your staff." Hugo wrote that he was at first "puzzled, then disturbed" by discussions of "Catholic anarchism."⁸⁸ While he was sorry to have to write such a letter, he explained that "in departing from the truth, you depart also from genuine truth."⁸⁹ Hugo regarded Hennacy's promotion of "Christian anarchism" as a troubling theological tendency that would only cause problems within the Worker.

Miller noted that Day made a final retreat with Hugo in July, 1976, in what he called "a gesture to a meaningful part of her past."⁹⁰ After the retreat, Day is reported to have asked Hugo to give the homily at her funeral.⁹¹ Miller also recounted the story Sr. Peter Claver Fahy told of visiting Day just before her death: "For a few moments they reminisced about the retreat that Dorothy had taken with Father Hugo back in the days of World War II. Pointing to some flowers on the table, Dorothy said that she was still

⁸⁷ John Cogley pointed out that Hugo, along with Robert Ludlow and Ammon Hennacy, were the main influences on Day's post-war reshaping of the movement. John Cogley, "Harsh and Dreadful Love," *America* 127 (Nov., 11, 1972) in McNeal, *Harder than War*, 272. Miller suggested the tensions possibly existed between Hugo and Peter Maurin. Miller argued that Hugo's emphasis on "the primacy and even the exclusivity of the spiritual over the natural or material" was out of step with Maurin's notion "of a personalist action that would redeem nature itself." Such tension speaks to the growing role of Hugo and the retreat theology in Day's life, especially at a time when Maurin was becoming less of a vocal presence in the movement. Miller, *Dorothy*, 355.

⁸⁸ Miller, *Dorothy*, 426.

⁸⁹ Miller, *Dorothy*, 426.

⁹⁰ Miller, *Dorothy*, 512.

⁹¹ Miller, *Dorothy*, 512. Hugo did not give the homily at Day's funeral.

sowing.”⁹² All of which seems to imply that for Miller, Hugo remained a presence throughout Day’s life.

Despite, as Brigid O’Shea Merriman has highlighted, the errors present in his work, Miller provided two of the first studies of Day and the Catholic Worker, accounts which have been important references in most subsequent studies.⁹³ Miller, in many ways following Day’s own account, portrayed Hugo as a major influence in her life and as her primary source for the retreat theology. He also highlighted the fact of Hugo’s influence beyond the retreat itself, particularly with regard to his theological justification for Catholic pacifism and conscientious objection in *The Catholic Worker*. And in this way, Hugo was significant within the broader context of mid-twentieth century American Catholicism.

Mel Piehl

Mel Piehl’s *Breaking Bread* (1982), another early account of Day and the Catholic Worker, offered further insights into the effect Hugo and his retreat had on Day. Piehl described Hugo’s influence on Day as stemming from the fact that he and Roy, “preached the doctrine of the Mystical Body, attacked society’s individualism and materialism, and urged radical action to end race and class discrimination and war.”⁹⁴ Piehl also noted that Hugo was “a dominant intellectual influence” on *The Catholic Worker* with regard to issues of war and pacifism.⁹⁵

⁹² Miller, *Dorothy*, 517.

⁹³ In her study of Day, Merriman wrote that “Miller’s use of and interpretation of primary materials regarding the retreat and other items of interest contain a number of chronological and factual errors. This is unfortunate, because several other writers have accepted him as a reliable authority.” Merriman, *Searching*, 273 fn23. In *Your Ways Are Not My Ways*, vol. I, Hugo made positive reference to Miller’s work.

⁹⁴ Piehl, 88.

⁹⁵ Piehl, 88.

According to Piehl, though, the effects of the retreat on Day were “complex.” He argued that for a time the retreat theology even led Day into some “bewildering theological thickets” and sidetracked her with “some of the sumptuary moralist preachings” –such as attacks on cigarettes and cosmetics.⁹⁶ Day was described as eventually being able to sort out “these peripheral elements” from the valuable core of the retreat. Piehl also presented the Hugo-retreat as Day’s first encounter with what he called “the sort of radically inward Christianity” which up until that point she had known only in books –and she found the encounter exhilarating.⁹⁷ Day was quoted as saying that the retreat was what she was looking for at the time –“This is what I expected when I became a Catholic.”⁹⁸ According to Piehl, Day appreciated the intensity of the retreat, as well as its strong appeal to sources within the Catholic tradition which provided for the Catholic Worker’s applications of “the radical Gospel.”⁹⁹ In Piehl’s account, it was this “radical Gospel” and “radically inward Christianity” that defined Hugo and the retreat theology. And this was why Day was attracted to it.

Piehl pointed out that Day had encountered the Hugo-retreat in 1941, a time of “crisis and decline” for the Catholic Worker movement.¹⁰⁰ It was a time when opposition to her absolute pacifist stand in World War II caused subscriptions and support to cease. It was also a time of great division within the movement itself, as many Workers who disagreed with Day left. That Day encountered the retreat during this time of opposition and division was seen as important in understanding why Day embraced its theology.

⁹⁶ Piehl, 89. Hugo read Piehl’s book and was very critical of the claim that the retreat caused “bewildering theological thickets” and “sumptuary moralist preachings.” Hugo, *Your Ways*, vol. I, 242-244.

⁹⁷ Piehl, 89.

⁹⁸ Piehl, 87.

⁹⁹ Piehl, 88.

¹⁰⁰ Piehl, 88.

Piehl argued that the retreat theology allowed Day to interpret these painful experiences of division and loss in light of the Gospel paradoxes of “stripping of natural desire” and “taking up the Cross.”¹⁰¹ Thus Day came to understand this time in terms of the renunciations and mortifications prescribed in the retreat theology –the loss of attachment to created goods in order to live a supernatural life.¹⁰² The loss of people and support for the movement were understood by Day as goods sown in order that the supernatural practice of pacifism could be embraced. For Piehl, then, Day justified her pacifism and the division it brought to the Worker with Hugo’s theology -what Piehl called Hugo’s “radical Gospel perfectionism.”¹⁰³

With Piehl’s account, the image of Hugo and the influence he had on Day emerge in somewhat a different light from that of Miller. The Hugo-retreat was described in terms of “radically inward Christianity” and “radical Gospel perfectionism,” descriptors that would continue to appear in treatments of Hugo and the retreat. These were terms with very clear sectarian connotations. Along these same lines, Piehl noted that after her encounter with the Hugo-retreat Day began turning towards the “passive” writings of Thérèse of Lisieux and away from her earlier attraction to “activist” Teresa of Avila.¹⁰⁴ He asserted that in the Little Flower, Day saw proof “that silence and inactivity were the

¹⁰¹ Piehl, 88.

¹⁰² For example, Day explained the Catholic Worker protests to the civil defense drill in the 1950s as acts of penance. Sandra Yocum argued that for Day, the “arduous demands of the retreat provided clarification or at least reinforcement in her thinking through why those ‘baptized in Christ’s death’ must be willing to assent to absolute pacifism. Yocum Mize, “We Are Still Pacifists,” 471.

¹⁰³ Piehl, 87.

¹⁰⁴ Piehl described Teresa of Avila as “intensely religious, but also bright, gay, intelligent, attractive, and a successful writer and activist,” while the Little Flower was depicted as “a passive teenager who had suffered a debilitating illness and died in obscurity without accomplishing anything of consequences in the world.” Piehl, 89. Day’s own book on the Little Flower, *Therese*, was published in 1960.

sources of all right action.”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Hugo was portrayed as presenting this radically perfectionist theology. And Day encountered this theology at the exact time she was herself becoming more radicalized in her actions and beliefs.

Stanley Vishnewski

The Hugo- retreat not only helped Day interpret the division over her wartime stand, but it also brought its own divisiveness to the Worker. In his account of life in the Catholic Worker, *Wings of the Dawn*, (1984) Stanley Vishnewski portrayed Day’s introduction of the “basic retreat” as an act which added a great deal of division and tension within an already divided the Catholic Worker movement.¹⁰⁶

Vishnewski described the main argument of the retreat theology as the call for “a complete renunciation of everything that was in the natural order.”¹⁰⁷ Vishnewski understood this argument as revolving around the idea of supernatural motives as opposed to natural ones: “all our actions had to be done from supernatural motive, otherwise, there was no merit for these actions in the sight of God.”¹⁰⁸ To “live the retreat” meant that one had to “give up every natural affection and delight and pleasure as something alien and hostile to the love of God. One was to seek the will of God in all that

¹⁰⁵ Day was quoted as saying, “I could see clearly the difference between the two Teresas and I came to the conclusion that St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s was the loftier vocation, the harder and more intense life...From that year I spent away from my work I began to understand the greatness of the Little Flower...By doing nothing she did everything. She let loose powers, consolations, and streams of faith, hope, and love that will never cease to flow.” Piehl, 89.

¹⁰⁶ Vishnewski was a member of the New York Catholic Worker until his death in 1979. *Wings of the Dawn* was published posthumously by the Catholic Worker Press in 1984.

¹⁰⁷ Because of this, Vishnewski wrote, “I began to resent and envy pagans and the unbaptized. They could have a good time, enjoy all the creatures and comforts of this world and enjoy their eternity in Limbo. If we didn’t give up the things of this world we were headed straight for hell.” Vishnewski, 214-215.

¹⁰⁸ To illustrate this point, Vishnewski said that a priest told him that if he were to kiss a girl, even one he was engaged to, and “felt any emotion other than that of kissing a doorknob” he was committing a mortal sin. He then recounted “I kissed a doorknob once in an effort to find out exactly what a sinless action of kissing would feel like- just in case...” Vishnewski, 214.

one did, loved and thought.¹⁰⁹ For Vishnewski, this was the nature of “the retreat” that Day had introduced into the Catholic Worker.¹¹⁰

Such theology was not always embraced or welcomed. Vishnewski recalled that once Hugo began giving retreats, its theology “radiated out throughout the country and began to create dissension and disunity in many monasteries and convents.” This divisiveness was so strong that in some seminaries all reference to the retreat was forbidden and any seminarian caught advocating the retreat doctrine was subject to expulsion.¹¹¹ The divisiveness which the retreat theology caused was a central theme of Vishnewski’s recollection.¹¹²

Vishnewski remembered that Hugo had been a “chaplain of a girl’s school in Pittsburgh,” but that his preaching of the retreat theology to his students led him into controversy at the college: “The girls as far as I could learn, did not like the idea of being told that it was wrong to use lipstick, to go dancing and to go to the movies.”¹¹³ Vishnewski noted that it was this “controversy” that resulted in Bishop Boyle transferring Hugo to the chaplaincy of the prison system and forbidding the use of St. Anthony’s

¹⁰⁹ Vishnewski, 214.

¹¹⁰ Vishnewski, 215. He described the retreat as originating in Canada: “The people who made the retreats would assemble in a church for a day of prayer and fasting. Two hour-long sermons on the love of God and detachment from creatures would be preached. The only book permitted to be read was the Bible. Bread and water were a concession to those who were not strong enough to keep the strict fast.” Vishnewski, 209.

¹¹¹ Vishnewski argued that such condemnation, though, only served to affirm the retreatants’ belief that “if they followed the teachings of the retreat that the world would hate them.” Vishnewski, 210.

¹¹² Vishnewski admitted that the retreat did produce good for many people, particularly in priests who “gave up worldly goods and became spiritually oriented and ascetic.” Here again, though, division followed the retreat, since such actions by priests “provoked scorn and opposition on the part of clerics who felt that these priests were a spiritual threat to them.” Vishnewski, 212.

¹¹³ Interestingly, Vishnewski remembered that at first even Hugo himself had opposed much of the retreat theology and rejected the retreat’s the basic premise of “being completely detached from the things of this world.” Soon enough, though, Hugo became “converted” to its basic doctrine, and with “fervent zeal started to preach it in the United States.” Vishnewski, 209.

Village for the retreat.¹¹⁴ Vishnewski wrote that this controversy and division then came to the Catholic Worker with Day's "introduction" of the retreat –an action he did not seem to support. Vishnewski recalled that the Hugo- retreat split the Catholic Worker it into two camps: those who had made the retreat and those who had not. The former, claimed that "no one could be a true Christian who did not live up to the teachings of the retreat," while the later retorted by saying that "the retreat was nothing else but a revival of Jansenism in its worst form."¹¹⁵ It should be noted here that the Hugo-retreat was, and still is, labeled by many as "Jansenist." While this label itself technically referred to the five propositions condemned in 1653 by Pope Innocent X in *Cum occasione*, contemporary critics of the retreat seemed to use the label to mean any theological tendency that appeared to disparage or denigrate the abilities and goodness of human nature.¹¹⁶ Vishnewski wrote that this division was most vividly illustrated by what he said was "the most controversial part of the retreat" -its call for retreatants to quit smoking. "Theological and abstract questions made little appeal to the average Catholic" Vishnewski stated, "but cigarettes were a concrete fact and could be touched and smoked."¹¹⁷ Those who made the retreat and gave up smoking as a result became a kind of "spiritual policemen" persuading others to quit as well. Besides the obvious tension

¹¹⁴ Vishnewski, 210. Vishnewski said that when he was younger he felt grateful to grow up in a period of history when all theological or philosophical problems had been resolved. But then "I joined the Catholic Worker, a good Catholic boy from Brooklyn, and as a result found myself living right in the storm of theological controversy on the nature of Grace. Shades of St. Augustine." Vishnewski, 214.

¹¹⁵ Vishnewski, 211.

¹¹⁶ The five condemned propositions include: 1. Some of God's precepts are impossible to the just, who wish and strive to keep them, according to the present powers which they have; the grace, by which they are made possible, is also wanting. 2. In the state of fallen nature one never resists interior grace. 3. In order to merit or demerit in the state of fallen nature, freedom from necessity is not required in man, but freedom from external compulsion is sufficient. 4. The Semipelagians admitted the necessity of a prevenient interior grace for each act, even for the beginning of faith; and in this they were heretics, because they wished this grace to be such that the human will could either resist or obey. 5. It is Semipelagian to say that Christ died or shed His blood for all men without exception. Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (1957), 1092-1096.

¹¹⁷ Vishnewski, 211.

this caused, Vishnewski joked that the anti-smoking fervor meant that these retreats became good places to collect packs and even whole cartons of cigarettes.¹¹⁸ He even suspected that many of these anti-smoking “police” were themselves in it for the free smokes.

The retreat theology was also presented as harsh and rigorist. Vishnewski remembered that some of those who initially embraced the retreat soon had difficulties following its teachings since the retreat “produced spiritual aberrations among lay people who could not handle the rather harsh and unyielding doctrine.”¹¹⁹ He recalled that while many people finished the retreat in “a stage of spiritual exaltation,” giving up so-called worldly pleasures, they soon found that they could not “live the retreat” for any sustained period. As a result, a few of these former retreatants even became extremely bitter and critical of the retreat, arguing that they had been “soul washed.”¹²⁰

Vishnewski pointed out that division also emerged within the Worker when Day decided to transform Maryfarm from a farming commune into a center for preaching the “basic retreat.”¹²¹ Vishnewski remembered that some of the Catholic Workers objected to the imposition of a retreat house on the farming commune, but that Day argued that giving retreats was a spiritual work of mercy and fit into the larger Catholic Worker “program.”¹²² Day’s defense of the retreat did not end the criticism, and Vishnewski noted that Workers believed that Day’s move “had perverted the original idea of the

¹¹⁸ Vishnewski, 211.

¹¹⁹ “Most lay people,” Vishnewski argued, “did not have the theological and philosophical knowledge ‘to be able to find the spiritual loopholes that permitted one to enjoy life and also to enter heaven with a ‘scorched behind.’” Vishnewski, 212.

¹²⁰ He even recounted that a “young Benedictine was so embittered that he made it a personal crusade to travel around the country preaching against the harm caused by the retreat.” Vishnewski, 213.

¹²¹ He also recounted that some in the movement felt that Roy and Hugo were “exerting undue influence on the thinking and direction of the Movement.” Vishnewski, 210.

¹²² Vishnewski, 210.

movement.”¹²³ All of this, of course, was coming to a movement already divided over Day’s declaration that the Catholic Worker was a pacifist movement.

Vishnewski’s account highlights the degree to which Hugo and the retreat were divisive for the young Catholic Worker movement. We have already noted that the early 1940’s were a tense and difficult time in the Catholic Worker, and Day’s continued support of Hugo and the retreat theology, despite this opposition, appears even more telling. Far from easing tension or reconciling the losses her pacifist declaration caused, Day’s introduction and support of the retreat only caused further division.

Vishnewski also portrays Hugo and the retreat theology in terms of a “harsh” and “unyielding” doctrine, with excessively rigorist –even “Jansenist”- teachings.

Vishnewski’s account seemed to be based less on the retreat theology itself and more on how the retreat was received and perceived by the Catholic Worker retreatants themselves. In any case, Vishnewski clearly did not have positive memories of the Hugo-retreat and its aftermath for the Worker.

James T. Fisher

In *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933-1962*, (1989), James Fisher also recognized the significance Hugo and the retreat had for Day. He described Hugo as Day’s mentor and as having directed her conversion toward its “final logic.”¹²⁴ The Hugo-retreat, he stated, introduced Day to “an interior landscape which vindicated her withdrawal from the American demand for measured productivity in the world” and Day with “spiritual analogues to the deconstructivist ethos of the houses of hospitality.”¹²⁵ In

¹²³ Vishnewski, 210.

¹²⁴ Fisher, 59.

¹²⁵ For Fisher, this withdrawal was part of Day’s antriumphalist “downward path to salvation” that was the reversal of the Weberian Protestant work ethic which so dominated the American landscape. Fisher, 55.

other words, Hugo provided Day with the theological resources for what Fisher argued was her quest for a “downward path to salvation.” In this sense, Hugo was portrayed as sharing in Day’s “bitter hostility to middle-class religiosity” and its exaltation of worldly ambitions, and his retreats were described as offering a “consistent jeremiad” against American Catholics’ desire for such worldliness.¹²⁶

Ramping up the tone in the Piehl and Vishnewski accounts, Fisher described the Hugo-retreat as presenting “one of the most abject brands of self-abnegation in American religious history.”¹²⁷ And that Hugo’s theology was excessively scrupulous, fostering “a radically personal spirituality” unlike anything ever encountered by the American laity.¹²⁸ According to Fisher’s account, the theology Hugo learned from the French-Canadian Lacouture was a “bitterly mystical” and “gloomy Catholicism” – a combination of seventeenth-century French Jansenism and the harsh struggle for Catholic survival in Canada.¹²⁹ Day was attracted to this theology, Fisher suggested, because its “ethnic Jansenism” blended well with her “aesthetic Jansenism” -her embrace of the Baudelarian downward path to salvation.¹³⁰ For Fisher, Day’s Jansenism was part of the reason she did not take a more affirming, or what Eugene McCarragher called a more “sacramental,” view of the materialist bourgeois culture in America to which many of her fellow

¹²⁶ Hugo was portrayed as repeatedly driving home the point that “salvation would only come through an assent to the suffering and folly of the Cross.” This was the essence of the Baudelarian “downward path to salvation” that figured prominently in Fisher’s book. Fisher, 56.

¹²⁷ Fisher, 1.

¹²⁸ This was especially true in the retreat’s use of nuptial imagery, and because of her encounter with the Hugo-retreat, Fisher argued that Day was the first American Catholic who could have called God, “a sensitive lover.” Fisher, 57. The retreats were seen as stressing “the seemingly advanced view that marital sex offered a ‘foretaste,’ or ‘sample’ of union with God, ...[while also that] it could never be enjoyed for its own sake.” Fisher, 63.

¹²⁹ Fisher argued that like Peter Maurin, Hugo had an “intense hostility to Anglo-American liberalism, to the point of suggesting that the English (and now the heathen French) deserved the punishment of World War II because ‘they had been faithless to Christ.’” Fisher, 60.

¹³⁰ Fisher, 60.

Catholics were aspiring.¹³¹ Because of this, Fisher and McCarraher have both suggested that a certain elitism existed in Day and other American Catholic radicals that ultimately made them “irrelevant” for American Catholicism.¹³²

Fisher also described the “controversy” surrounding the Hugo retreat as essentially Hugo’s “private battle with the entire theology faculty of the Catholic University and their organ, the *American Ecclesiastical Review*.”¹³³ He argued that the critiques were based on these theologians’ perception that the Hugo retreat smacked both of “Jansenism” and “Protestantism.”¹³⁴ The retreat theology’s imperative to live the supernatural life, he pointed out, was understood as expanding the definition of what it meant to be a Christian far beyond the juridical understanding of Hugo’s Neo-Thomist critics.¹³⁵

With Fisher’s account, the contention that Hugo’s theological perspective was abject, gloomy, and Jansenist emerged clearly. While this was not necessarily a negative perception within Fisher’s narrative of American Catholics’ embrace of the downward path, the idea that Hugo was a Jansenist has become somewhat of a given in American Catholic studies.¹³⁶ By pointing out that the controversy surrounding the retreat involved

¹³¹ Fisher, 71-99. Eugene B. McCarraher, “The Church Irrelevant: Paul Hanly Furfey and the Fortunes of American Catholic Radicalism” *Religion and American Culture* 7 (Summer, 1997): 172, 176.

¹³² McCarraher: 186.

¹³³ Fisher, 58.

¹³⁴ Fisher, 59.

¹³⁵ Fisher argued the critics’ primary concern was over the question of ecclesiastical authority. The retreat theology was described as confirming Day’s conviction that the Mystical Body of Christ was not only a “reality in the moral order, but a genuine reality,” and this conviction was precisely the sort of “antinomianism which barrels of theologians’ ink had been spilled in dreaded anticipation.” Thus, Fisher concluded, “Hugo had to be silenced, especially after ‘Mystici Corporis’ reaffirmed the priority of church membership to salvation.” Fisher, 59. Scott Appleby and John Haas similarly argue that the opposition to Hugo revolved mainly around his notion of what it meant to be a Christian. “The Last Supernaturalists: Fenton, Connell, and the Threat of Catholic Indifferentism,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 13/2 (Winter, 1995).

¹³⁶ J. Leon Hooper, S.J. provided an even more recent example in “Dorothy Day’s Transposition of Thérèse’s ‘Little Way’” in *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 76, fn 23, and “Murray and Day: A Common Enemy, A Common Cause?” in *Theological Studies* 24 (Winter 2006): 57.

complex theological issues and involved Catholic University of America faculty, Fisher also highlighted the fact that the Hugo-retreat elicited and involved real theological debate. For whatever else can be said, the Hugo-retreat was not insignificant in American Catholic theological circles at the time. The existence of this kind of debate has often been overlooked in studies of early twentieth-century American Catholicism.

Brigid O'Shea Merriman, O.S.F.

In her study of Day's spirituality, *Searching for Christ* (1994), Brigid O'Shea Merriman, O.S.F. -who actually interviewed Hugo and attended one his retreats- offered not only the fullest account of Hugo and the retreat to date, but also a much more nuanced portrayal of his theology than appeared in previous accounts.¹³⁷ She began by placing Day's encounter with the Hugo-retreat in the context of her earlier retreat experiences. She highlighted some of the weekend retreats Day attended and advertized in *The Catholic Worker* beginning in late 1930s. These retreats included ones led by a group of former Furfey students called the Campions, as well as ones led by Fulton Sheen in 1937, Missionary Servant Father Joachim Benson from 1937-1939, and Furfey himself in 1940.¹³⁸ As Day herself noted, these retreats were often "too rarified." But after encountering "the retreat" through Roy and Hugo, Day was quoted as saying she was inspired "to see all things new."¹³⁹ Merriman highlighted, in particular, the almost immediate effect that the July, 1941 Hugo-retreat had on Day. Upon returning to New York from Easton, Day wrote to the other Catholic Worker houses to inform them of a

¹³⁷ I am grateful to Sister Merriman for generously donating a great deal of Hugo material, including her interview notes, to this research project.

¹³⁸ Merriman, 138. J. Leon Hooper, S.J. noted that Day made a retreat led by Father Joseph Clifford Fenton, a later critic of the Hugo retreat, in 1938 –the only year Fenton led retreats. Hooper, "A Common Enemy": 56.

¹³⁹ Merriman took this quote from obituary Day wrote for Roy in November 1954. 141.

change in the annual Catholic Worker retreat, from a weekend retreat to a full weeklong retreat.¹⁴⁰

After attending the two Hugo-retreats that summer, Merriman pointed out that Day began to incorporate the language of the retreat into her writings and to make “serious efforts” to promulgate it in *The Catholic Worker*.¹⁴¹ Over the course of the next year, Day frequently brought the retreat to her readers’ attention with references to Hugo, with the publication of a letter on war by Lacouture, and by sharing her own thoughts and interpretations of the retreat.¹⁴² On this last point, Merriman observed that in her writings on the retreat it was clear that Day had accepted and employed the notions of renunciation and detachment preached by the retreat, but within a context that was “positive” for her own spiritual development.¹⁴³ Day’s attraction to the Hugo-retreat was that it ultimately provided her with a larger theological vocabulary to express the beliefs and insights she already held.¹⁴⁴ In this way, Merriman presented the retreat theology as offering Day “a practical body of instruction” which enabled her quest for continued growth in holiness. It was this call to live a life of holiness -the supernatural life- that Merriman highlighted as the central theme of the Hugo-retreat and as what made it so influential for Day.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Merriman, 144. Merriman noted that Day specified that unlike the 1939 and 1940 Catholic Worker weekend retreats, the 1941 retreat would be a week long and held in strict silence. She also noted that, contrary to Day’s account in *The Long Loneliness*, Sister Peter Claver Fahy claimed that she introduced Day to Hugo.

¹⁴¹ Merriman, 144.

¹⁴² Merriman, 145.

¹⁴³ Merriman, 145.

¹⁴⁴ Merriman, 165. Merriman argued that the retreat’s chief importance lay in the fact that it served as confirmation rather than as a source of insight for Day. She quoted Sr. Peter Claver Fahey who said that the retreat “only gave consent to all the things she had in her own heart.” Merriman, 145.

¹⁴⁵ Merriman, 166.

In describing Hugo, Merriman noted that while over the years there were various “retreat-priests” Hugo was considered its best articulator.¹⁴⁶ She also acknowledged that he was the key figure in the promulgation of the Lacouture-inspired retreat in the U.S., as well as in the controversy that surrounded it.¹⁴⁷ Merriman, who interviewed Hugo in 1984, noted that after attending the 1938 retreat led by Lacouture in Baltimore, Hugo felt that he had been given “a new perspective on Christian life.”¹⁴⁸ She wrote that Hugo “dreamt of being the counterpart of his adopted mentor, Lacouture” –but while Lacouture had been giving retreats exclusively to clergy, Hugo wanted to “devote his life to preaching the retreat doctrine to the laity.”¹⁴⁹ Again, the idea was that Hugo’s emphasis was on the retreat’s claim that supernatural holiness was central to lives of all Christians –not only a cloistered elite.

Merriman highlighted the particular importance Hugo had for Day, as was revealed when Hugo could no longer preach the retreat after 1942. For despite the fact that other priests continued to lead the retreat, the “largeness” of Hugo’s presence in the retreat movement had been so important for Day, that his geographic removal caused her to become uncertain about the retreat’s future.¹⁵⁰ Merriman described this uncertainty as releasing “an energy, determination, and internal freedom” in Day that otherwise might not have been utilized.¹⁵¹ This determination became particularly evident in her many appeals on Hugo’s behalf to Bishop Boyle and his successors over the course of the next

¹⁴⁶ Merriman, 165.

¹⁴⁷ Merriman, 141.

¹⁴⁸ Merriman, 141.

¹⁴⁹ Merriman, 141.

¹⁵⁰ Merriman 146. According to Merriman, Hugo was transferred to St. Mary’s in Kittanning, PA in October 1942, thus beginning his “exile.” She also noted that in some of his accounts, like *Your Way Are not My Ways*, vol. 1, Hugo mistakenly gave the year as 1944. Merriman, 274, fn 36.

¹⁵¹ Merriman, 155.

two decades.¹⁵² But the controversy also took a toll on Day. For, while at first she regarded it as an opportunity “for clarification of thought,” as the controversy continued, Merriman noted, “assurance gave way to discouragement.”¹⁵³ Day became distressed that a movement so vital to her own spiritual growth had become the cause of so much dissension both and in and outside of the Worker.¹⁵⁴

From Merriman’s account, then, the Hugo-retreat appeared to have a much more positive and encouraging role in Day’s life. The retreat theology itself also emerged in a more nuanced way than in previous accounts. Holiness and the “practical” efforts to live a life of holiness were main focus of the theology. The claim that the retreat promoted “radical perfectionism” or had Jansenist theological tendencies is absent. In fact, according to Merriman, one of the chief concerns Day had of the retreat was that many of its promulgators –including Hugo- did not always embody its path to holiness, especially as the controversy surrounding the retreat increased.¹⁵⁵

Rosalie Riegle

In *Voices from the Catholic Worker* (1993) and *Dorothy Day: Portraits by Those Who Knew Her* (2003), Rosalie Riegle presented two collections of interviews with various people involved with the Catholic Worker over the years. Within these interviews, much like in Vishnewski’s book, appear several first-hand accounts of how Hugo and the retreat were received and understood by Catholic Workers. Also like

¹⁵² Merriman, 155.

¹⁵³ Merriman, 157.

¹⁵⁴ Merriman cited an article Day wrote in July-August 1947 issue of *The Catholic Worker* in which she highlighted three moments of conflict in the history of the Worker: precedence given to the works of mercy over indoctrination and organization, the fallout following Day’s pacifist stand in WWII, and the retreat controversy. Day called the controversy “one of the wars in our midst.” Merriman, 157.

¹⁵⁵ Merriman, 283, fn.72.

Vishnewski's account, these interviews provide some sense of the divisiveness the Hugo-retreat brought to the movement.

Riegle herself described the Hugo-retreat as providing Day with "spiritual armor" that allowed her to continue even after the euphoria of the early years of the Catholic Worker faded.¹⁵⁶ Riegle followed the argument made by others that Hugo provided Day with exactly what she was looking for at the time. For Riegle, the retreat "solidified [Day's] identity and gave her spiritual practices that delineated her relationship to a Christianity she deeply loved but whose compromises with the world she could not condone."¹⁵⁷ She stated that the effect of retreat was significant, initiating what Day herself termed a "second conversion."¹⁵⁸

The interview with Father Harvey Egan, a priest from Minneapolis and who lived in a Catholic Worker house as a seminarian, offered insight into this idea of Day's second conversion. Egan explained that,

Dorothy really had two conversions. Her second conversion, after she started making the retreat, added the interior life to her exterior life, I guess you'd say. She had been in her first conversion from 1933, when the Worker was established, until she made the retreat. What she was doing was the works of mercy, the exterior life. After she made the retreat, she continued with that. She did not diminish, didn't become the solitary or live aloof from the house. But she began to read the scriptures everyday. She loved the word of God. She went to Mass, read the lives of the saints, really latched onto the traditional religious experiences.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Rosalie Riegle, *Dorothy Day: Portraits by Those Who Knew Her* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2003), 86.

¹⁵⁷ Riegle contended that after meeting Maurin and founding the Worker, Day forged a Catholic identity, "but it was not with joy and not with surety of faith and righteousness, in the best sense, that she needed to carry on through a long and productive life." Riegle, *Portraits*, 86.

¹⁵⁸ Riegle, *Portraits*, 83.

¹⁵⁹ Riegle, *Portraits*, 84. Egan was a priest from Minneapolis who lived in a Catholic Worker house as a seminarian.

The idea that the retreat brought about a “conversion” in Day similar to the one caused by Peter Maurin says much about the influence of the retreat. As noted, this conversion took place during an already difficult period in Day’s life. And the retreat theology was seen as offering her sources from the Catholic tradition to understand and articulate these difficulties caused by her declaration that pacifism was a necessary part of a supernatural life of holiness.

Also as noted before, not everyone within the Worker embraced the Hugo-retreat. Jim O’Gara, an early Worker from Chicago who would go onto become an editor at *Commonweal*, described what he regarded as the real difference which existed between the theological perspective offered in Furfey’s 1940 Catholic Worker retreat and that presented in Hugo’s 1941 retreat: “There was a definite difference between the two...Some of us felt that Father Hugo was more of a Jansenist.”¹⁶⁰ Egan remembered that those who did like the retreat were a clear minority in the movement, and strong feelings were held on both sides of the division.¹⁶¹ Betty Doyle, another Catholic Worker from Minnesota, recalled that much of the division was over the retreat’s call for detachment from created goods: “People were detachers. [Hugo] was very much a detacher and a lot of us didn’t think we should be detached from the world in that way, giving up all these beautiful things and living such a strict, bare kind of life.”¹⁶² Like Vishnewski, Ruth Heaney, an early Milwaukee Catholic Worker, remembered smoking being a particularly divisive issue,

I remember once Father Hugo said, “If you smoke, you love God just this much – the length of a cigarette- if you won’t quit smoking for his sake.” Some of the

¹⁶⁰ O’Gara was clear that he was not sympathetic to Hugo’s theology. Rosalie Riegle Troester, ed., *Voices from the Catholic Worker* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 32.

¹⁶¹ Riegle, *Portraits*, 84.

¹⁶² Riegle, *Portraits*, 86.

healthier ones among us...well, they either had sufficient education or enough spiritual insight to recognize that this was another kind of spirituality and not one they wanted to buy into.¹⁶³

Heaney also remembered, though, that indeed Day was one of the ones who embraced this retreat “asceticism.”¹⁶⁴

Riegle’s interviews pointed out, though, that not all Catholic Workers differed with Day over the retreat. Dorothy Gauchat, from Cleveland Worker, recalled while a lot of people got “carried away on the cigarette thing,” Hugo’s discussion of smoking was always within the context of his larger discussions on notion that created goods were “samples” of God. They are good things, she remembered Hugo explaining, but they’re only “samples” of God’s goodness and one’s life can’t be directed towards satisfying the desire for such created goods.¹⁶⁵ Gauchat suggested that the claim that Hugo’s teachings were “Jansenistic” probably had more to do with the way some retreatants responded to the Hugo-retreat, than with what the retreat theology actually taught. She recalled once sitting down to a delicious meal during a Hugo-retreat and seeing many of her fellow retreatants refusing to eat the more delectable of the foods offered -to sacrifice it. But Gauchat remembered Hugo sitting at the table saying, “Hey! That’s not the message. If

¹⁶³ Riegle Troester, *Voices*, 19. Heaney later became a Benedictine nun.

¹⁶⁴ Riegle Troester, *Voices*, 19. Julian Pleasants, a long-time Catholic Worker from South Bend, who attended the Hugo retreat with Day in July, 1941, recounted that while the Hugo retreat was impressive and helpful in encouraging his own prayer life, neither he nor Day accepted it wholeheartedly: “I didn’t agree with the giving up things at all. Father Hugo said that the best thing to do with good things was to give them up. And I just didn’t think that was Dorothy’s attitude at all. She didn’t want to give them up, she wanted to give them away. It was a totally different approach. Dorothy liked her good literature, her good music, and she never really felt that obligated. I think she got out of the retreat only the notion that you had to be *ready* to give them up. She took what worked for her and hoped other people would take what worked for them.” Riegle Troester, *Voices*, 20.

¹⁶⁵ She remembered Hugo further explaining that “We can use them, you know, to reach the goal of really living the way Christ wanted us to live. Living the Sermon of the Mount. Not let those things get in the way. That’s all.” Riegle Troester, *Voices*, 19.

somebody puts a good steak in front of you, you don't say you can't eat it. You eat it.”¹⁶⁶

While Hugo stressed that attachment to such things could, and usually did, become obstacles to loving God, steaks and cigarettes were regarded as good and indeed as images of the infinitely better that was God.¹⁶⁷ Such stories certainly challenge the portrayal of Hugo as simply a “rigorist,” and suggest that the theology of the retreat was much more complex and nuanced than the Jansenist caricature would imply.

The testimonies in Riegle's collections, both positive and negative, attest to the significance and influence that Hugo and the retreat had on Day and many of the early Catholic Workers. The Hugo-retreat was not irrelevant nor was it ignored. It had an impact on people, they felt strongly about it, and the division it caused within the Catholic Worker was real.

Conclusion

From both Day's writings and those of other scholars, therefore, a few conclusions can be drawn about Hugo and the retreat. First, it is clear that the Lacouture-inspired retreat had a profound effect on Day. The retreat theology was particularly influential in how Day interpreted and described her own conversion in *The Long Loneliness*, and so any reading of her autobiography must take that theological perspective into account. While Hugo was not the originator of the retreat, he was certainly the most prominent and theologically articulate of its promulgators in the United States, and employed the retreat theology to issues beyond the retreat itself such as war and pacifism. He was also the crucial figure in Day's embrace of that theology. Through

¹⁶⁶ Riegle Troester, *Voices*, 20.

¹⁶⁷ Gauchat stated that one of her favorite quotations from Dorothy Day was, “You must receive as humbly as you give.” So, she explained, “if somebody puts a steak in front of you, you thank God. On the other hand, if having steaks every day and having all the extras and niceties in your life is your consuming drive, then you're on the wrong track.” Riegle Troester, *Voices*, 20.

these various accounts, it is also clear that what Vishnewski called Day's "introduction" of Hugo and the retreat into the Worker was hardly benign. The division that the Hugo-retreat caused within an already-divided movement was real and felt by many. The "controversy" that surrounded Hugo's writings beyond the Worker was also real, and very much challenged the dominant perspective of early twentieth-century Catholic theology. From all of this, it can be concluded that Hugo was not only influential for Day and the early Catholic Worker movement, but that beyond his association with Day, Hugo was a significant figure in American Catholicism.

A few questions also emerge from this review of the literature. There clearly seems to be some debate over how to portray Hugo and interpret the retreat theology. Many scholars, like Piehl and Fisher, have promoted the image of Hugo as a radical perfectionist and even a Jansenist—a view that finds support in Vishnewski's recollection as well as those some of the other early Catholic Workers. At the same time, other scholars like Miller and to a much greater extent O'Shea Merriman presented the Hugo-retreat in terms of a call to holiness and portray Hugo as a key figure in developing the theological foundation for *The Catholic Worker's* pacifist stance in WWII. Was Hugo a rigorist or radical perfectionist preaching a Jansenist retreat theology? If this was not the case, as will be argued in later chapters, then from where do these charges stem? Was it the case, as Dorothy Gauchat suggested, that these charges had more to do with the ways in which many retreatants understood the Hugo-retreat rather than the retreat theology itself? Opposition to the retreat, both within the Catholic Worker and within the major Catholic theological journals at the time was very real. Many intelligent people had serious problems with what Hugo and others were teaching. The question is to what

extent was this criticism valid and within what theological context was it being made?

One of the arguments of this dissertation will be that these charges emerged out of a very particular theological perspective –early twentieth-century neo-Thomism. But before any of these questions can be addressed, the Hugo-retreat itself must be presented -not only to understand the theological perspective it offered, but also to get some idea of to what exactly Day and others were so attracted. What was “the retreat”? And so it is to the Hugo-retreat that we now turn.

CHAPTER II

THE RETREAT

I am completely sold on this retreat business. I think it will cure all ills, settle all problems, bind up all wounds, strengthen us, enlighten us, and in other words make us happy.

-Dorothy Day¹

Dorothy's introduction to Fr. Hugo, a young priest from Pittsburgh, was among the most important encounters of her life...Fr. Hugo's strong emphasis on holiness as the defining goal of Christian life struck a chord with Dorothy, and in some ways it powerfully realigned her spiritual outlook.

-Robert Ellsberg²

In the Dorothy Day-Catholic Worker Archives at Marquette University, there are two small, well-thumbed notebooks. These "little notebooks," as they were described in *The Long Loneliness*, contain the notes Day recorded from a Hugo-retreat in August, 1942.³ These notes were handwritten, and their fragmented form indicate the fact that they were written quickly –the jotting down of main thoughts and examples as the retreat was taking place. At the beginning of her notes, Day offered the following description of the location of the retreat -St. Anthony's Village in Oakmont, Pennsylvania:

¹ In a letter to Gerry Griffin dated June 18, 1941 in *All the Way to Heaven: The Selected Letters of Dorothy Day*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010), 125.

² Ellsberg, ed., *All the Way to Heaven*, 134.

³ Day was no doubt describing these notebooks in *The Long Loneliness* when she wrote, "I have the retreat notes in two little notebooks and I still enjoy taking them to church with me and reading them over for meditation." Day, *Long Loneliness*, 255.

St. Anthony's Village is in Oakmont, an hour's ride by bus northeast of Pittsburgh. You get off the bus and walk a mile or so uphill – a long climb on a hot day.

The Village is one of children, and nuns, and in the summer a few visiting priests and forty or so retreatants. It is here members of the CW groups also had their retreat this summer. There are 10 acres of grounds, a salad and herb garden a little orchard –and many weeping willow trees. They are the kind of trees neither goats nor children can hurt. Down one side of the grounds there is even a hedge of these trees.

Surrounding a statue of St. Anthony in the center of the front lawn are flowers, at his feet in boxes and at the foot of the pedestal in a circular bed –a border of some fragrant herb, petunias, geraniums. There is nicotiana and phlox in other beds around the grounds and at night the fragrance comes into the chapel during night prayers. Small boys were cutting grass and there were additional smells of cut grass and the exhaust from the gasoline motor. There was also the smell of Italian cooking which reminded us of Mott St.

Where St. Anthony's once stood, today stands luxury condominiums and across the street is the Oakmont Country Club where the U.S. Open is routinely played. But in the 1940s, when Day wrote her description, the Village was an orphanage staffed by a community of sisters called the Missionary Zelatrices of the Sacred Heart -now the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Beginning in 1940, it was also the place where Hugo and Father Louis Farina, the orphanage director, led “the retreat.”

The retreat Onesimus Lacouture, S.J. developed and preached in the 1930s was based on the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. The French-Canadian Jesuit condensed the thirty-day *Exercises* into a series of three, one-week retreats.⁴ For various reasons, the first retreat in this series was the one preached the vast majority of times by Lacouture and the other “retreat priests,” including Hugo.⁵ This “first series” was centered on the

⁴ Merriman, *Searching*, 133.

⁵ Merriman suggested that reasons for this were that Lacouture favored the first series, that most retreatants were attending their first such retreat, and that the first series was very popular making it impossible to

first week of the *Exercises* which was devoted primarily to the purification of the retreatant's heart and spirit.⁶ This "first series" was the source from which Hugo wrote *Applied Christianity*, and thus it was the material which his critics would later attack.⁷ It was also "the retreat" Day recorded in the two little, red notebooks. These notebooks provide some of the earliest records of Hugo's version of the Lacouture retreat -how it was structured, preached, and received.⁸

As the previous chapter pointed out, differing portrayals of the retreat and of Hugo have been made by various scholars. That being the case, the retreat itself, with its twenty-five conferences over the course of seven days, has yet to be laid out and examined. The various accounts that have been made of the Hugo-retreat have raised questions regarding its theological perspective as well as the theological perspective of those who, like Day, embraced it. But to understand the theology of the retreat and its advocates, some understanding of what "the retreat" actually was becomes necessary. This chapter will provide such an understanding by presenting the Hugo-retreat itself as it was presented by Day and Hugo. While a similar structure can be seen between Day's 1942 retreat notes and the chapters in *Applied Christianity* written two years later, Hugo did add some chapters and rearranged the order of others in his book. Because Day's notes recounted the daily schedule Hugo employed to structure his retreat, these notes form the basis for the following description of the retreat. Day's notes were sporadic,

schedule the next two. Merriman noted that out of 142 retreats, Lacouture appeared to have led the second series only thirteen times and the third series not at all. Merriman, *Searching*, 133.

⁶ Merriman, 133. Merriman noted that the second and third weeks of the *Exercises* comprised the "second series" of the retreat, while the week four formed the basis of the "third series" of the retreat.

⁷ Hugo, *Applied Christianity*, (New York: Catholic Worker Press, 1944). *Applied Christianity* had a cover designed by Ade Bethune.

⁸ Day also wrote a 300-page yet unpublished manuscript, titled "All is Grace," that recounts a series of retreats she made in 1943 led by Farina. Hugo provides another, later version of the retreat in *Your Ways are Not My Ways*, vol.1 (1984).

though, written quickly during the conferences or at the end of very full days, and so much of the content of the retreat conferences was gleaned from Hugo's book.

The Retreat

According to Day's notebooks the retreat opened with a conference on Sunday evening and ended with conferences the following Saturday. Each day began with Mass at 8:30am followed by breakfast and then a conference at 9:45am and another at 11:45am. After lunch and time for private reflection, Father Louis Farina, a priest from the Pittsburgh diocese who also attended the 1939 Lacouture-retreat in Baltimore, gave a series of conferences on prayer each day at 3pm. Hugo then led a conference at 5pm followed by Benediction and supper. The day ended with a final conference by Hugo at 8:30pm. It was full day, and one in which silence was maintained throughout –Hugo and Farina did all the talking.⁹ Day noted that the sisters had turned classrooms into dormitories for the retreatants to sleep and prepared delicious Italian meals throughout the week.¹⁰

Natural and the Supernatural¹¹

***Sunday Evening, Conference 1: "The Two Principles of Activity"*¹²**

The retreat opened with a Sunday evening conference in which the understanding of nature and the supernatural -an understanding which formed the basis of the entire

⁹ Early in Day's notes she described the conditions for a good retreat: "1. Silence. The Holy Ghost, Retreat Master, 'I will lead you into the desert and then I will speak to you.' 2. Solitude. In the desert. Physical. Ten acres here. Interior. Put aside secular activities. Even from thoughts. 3. Prayer. Lifting of mind and hearts to God. Walk with him."

¹⁰ According to Day, a free will offering was asked for from the retreatants, with some contributing enough the pay for those that who could not afford it. Interestingly, she also noted the names of some of those from New York who were also making the retreat, including her daughter Tamar and Fr. Roy.

¹¹ Hugo divided *Applied Christianity* into five parts. This examination of the retreat will follow Hugo's division.

¹² In Day's notes, this conference was titled "Two Ways of Life."

retreat theology-was introduced.¹³ In the coinciding chapter in *Applied Christianity*, Hugo presented the idea that in every person there was a “twofold principle of activity,” the natural and the supernatural, each of which corresponded to a particular way of life.¹⁴ A “natural life” was lived in accord to what was known from natural reason alone and so proceeded from “purely natural powers.”¹⁵ In contrast, a “supernatural life” was lived in accord with what was known from divine revelation and enabled to be lived by “supernatural means” that exceeded all natural human powers.¹⁶

Hugo explained that the natural life could be distinguished from the supernatural life in terms of what it entailed, what guides it, and its final end.¹⁷ For instance, the natural life was made up of “natural actions,” actions enabled by a person’s “purely natural powers” [and motivated by “natural motives” -a desire for natural or created goods]. In contrast, the supernatural life was composed of supernatural actions, actions that required grace, grace which became operative in faith and charity. [In other words, a person could perform supernatural actions, and therefore begin to live a supernatural life, by corresponding with grace. Such correspondence occurred when that person acted out

¹³ In her notes on this conference, Day began to describe something of the distinction between the natural and the supernatural: “How shall we enter, live in the Kingdom of God? We must be born again. Born again of water spirit. Physical –human birth. Rebirth –baptism. New creature. Share divine life. Regeneration. Now we have natural life and supernatural. Unless you live [supernatural] life we cannot enter Kingdom of God. Grace is share of divine life. Cornerstone of retreat. Baptism is like blood transfusion. I possess blood of my parents, their life. So also children of God, heirs of Heaven. Last Gospel. John 1. Sons of God. Raised up to supernatural plane. Natural. Conforming to human powers. Supernatural. What we cannot do by ourselves. We are given powers to become sons of God.”

¹⁴ Hugo, *Applied*, 10.

¹⁵ Hugo explained that “Purely natural powers” included: senses, bodily powers, will, imagination, reason. Hugo, *Applied*, 10.

¹⁶ “Supernatural means” were charity, faith, grace. In other words, a natural life was “proportioned to man’s natural abilities” while a supernatural life was “simply beyond all human ability and would be completely impossible without God, who gives us both the knowledge of this higher way and the necessary means to pursue it.” Hugo, *Applied*, 10.

¹⁷ Hugo, *Applied*, 10.

of “supernatural motives” –a love for God].¹⁸ No action, Hugo stated, no matter how good, which did not proceed from such a supernatural motive –and therefore correspond with grace- could be considered “supernatural” or “meritorious.”¹⁹ Furthermore, while unaided human reason alone was capable enough as a guide for natural life, faith was needed as a guide for the supernatural life.²⁰ In this sense, Hugo pointed out, “Faith, then, is the headlight of the supernatural, as charity is its engine.”²¹ And as final point of distinction, the destination of a natural life was a “merely” natural happiness -the satisfaction of the natural powers, such as the senses, the intellect, and the will.²² While in contrast, the ultimate destiny of the supernatural life was a supernatural final end -the beatific vision.²³ For Hugo, this was the final end of human nature, and therefore all were called to live a supernatural life –a life of holiness.²⁴ In her notes on this point, Day wrote, “Unless [we] live the supernatural life, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”

¹⁸ Hugo, *Applied*, 11. While natural actions were good because they proceeded from human nature, Hugo wrote, “we are not to leave this natural activity on the merely natural level...we must graft our natural activity on to the supernatural life; so that the latter, animating our natural activity, will enable us to produce supernatural works.” Hugo, *Applied*, 26.

¹⁹ Hugo argued that “An action is supernatural when grace is its principle; and grace becomes operative in faith and charity. Nature, even at its best, cannot merit supernatural happiness apart from grace.” *Applied*, 12.

²⁰ Hugo qualified this idea, since to live by faith did not mean to abandon reason, instead it meant that, “we follow reason illuminated by faith; i.e. no longer does our reason depend on purely natural principles, arrived at by study, but on principles and truths revealed by God.” Hugo, *Applied*, 11. Although there is no contradiction between the truths of faith and those of reason, Hugo explained, nevertheless, the former truths were “much higher” than the latter; and when we live by faith “we break away, as it were, from our human moorings and follow a line of conduct that we cannot understand.” An example of this would be when, instead of defending yourself against injury, you practiced Christ’s injunction to “turn the other cheek.” Hugo, *Applied*, 26.

²¹ Hugo, *Applied*, 11.

²² Hugo, *Applied*, 11.

²³ Hugo, *Applied*, 11. Hugo explained that while “the full fruition of the supernatural life” belonged in the next world, the grace and the life of grace on earth are “a beginning of the life of glory in heaven.” For in this life God already invites us to correspond with grace –to enter into “the friendship of the Trinity.” Indeed, only those who have availed themselves of the invitation in this life may enjoy this friendship in eternity. Hugo, *Applied*, 10.

²⁴ Hugo listed various passages from scripture to support this understanding of humanity’s supernatural destiny: John 1:12, John 3:5, John 12:46, Romans 8:14-18, Ephesians 1:11-14. Hugo, *Applied*, 12. “By grace we are deified, divinized,” Hugo stated, “and, once baptized, God expects us to act as divinized

Even though the natural life was seen as distinct from -and indeed infinitely less than- the supernatural life, Hugo clearly affirmed the goodness of the natural life and therefore distinguished it from a sinful life. Hugo presented these distinctions in a graphic of the “three possible levels of life.”²⁵

	I	II	III
	Make –Up	Guide	Destination
Supernatural	Charity	Faith	Heaven
Natural (limbo)	Natural Activity	Reason	Natural Happiness
Sin	Disobedience to God	Appetite	Hell

These distinctions between the supernatural, the natural, and the sinful were at the core of the retreat theology, and Hugo employed them in support of various theological positions he would -such as his defense of pacifism. Central was the idea that human nature and the natural life existed distinctly from what was supernatural and what was sinful. It was understood as that which was good but inherently insufficient in its ability to attain its supernatural final end.²⁶ This understanding of human nature as good but always lacking –and therefore as distinct but not separate from its supernatural final end- set the retreat theology apart from the more dualist, two-tiered accounts prevalent in the neo-Thomism of the early twentieth-century.

beings and no longer as mere men.” He turned to biblical notion of putting off the old man and putting on the new (Eph.4:22). Hugo, *Applied*, 13.

²⁵ Hugo, *Applied*, 14. “In each of us, therefore,” Hugo asserted, “there are three possibilities of action: one may act as an angel, a pagan (a natural human being), or a devil. We can act in any of these three ways. To go to heaven, we must act as angels. But, even though baptized, we are still capable of acting like pagans; when we do so, our actions do not reach heaven, although there may be no sin in them.” Hugo further clarified these distinctions by saying that “of course, there is in each of us only one soul, one life, one person. But this person is free to conduct himself in any of these three ways. The reason is that grace, nature, and concupiscence – though on different levels and in differing ways – are all distinct principles of activity.” *Applied*, 14.

²⁶ While human nature itself was from God and therefore good, it was limited in that it could not attain supernatural happiness –its final end. And though in order to attain our destiny, our nature must be penetrated by grace or “divinized” and thus transformed, our nature always remains essentially the same. Hugo noted that this divinization transformed human nature, making it ready to follow the impulses of grace. Hugo, *Applied*, 25.

Hugo was clear that something like a natural end or natural happiness for human nature was only “a theoretical possibility” -human nature was called to a supernatural final end far beyond such a merely natural end. Nevertheless, he argued that the idea of such a hypothetical natural end remained necessary in order to recognize this distinction between the sinful, the natural, and the supernatural –the supernatural was not simply that which was not sinful. He noted that the error of the fifth-century Pelagians was to lose this distinction and therefore to blur or confuse nature with the supernatural -believing that humans, unaided by grace, could live holy lives and merit salvation.²⁷ As a result of this blurring, the supereminence of the supernatural would be lost -heaven would be only regarded as “just beyond” hell.²⁸ In other words, Hugo argued that the hypothetical natural end or natural happiness helped to illustrate the fact that while a natural life was good and not sinful, at its best it could, theoretically, only attain an end far less than the supernatural.²⁹

Hugo further pointed out that without some recognition of the theoretical possibility of natural happiness, the rest of the natural life would also be forgotten. And with this loss, only two “levels of life” –the sinful and the supernatural- would appear. The supernatural life of holiness would be understood as simply a life spent avoiding sin –something that Hugo claimed was actually the mark of a natural life at its best.³⁰ In short, because it helped to recognize that the natural existed between the sinful and the

²⁷ Hugo, *Applied*, 16. Hugo paraphrased Pius XI in *Miserentissimus Redemptor* (1928), where the pope argued that in there was a resurgence of Pelagianism taking place in the modern world, “men have become again so confident of their human powers, so little appreciative of the incomparable dignity conferred on them by divine grace, that they think to obtain eternal happiness by their own human efforts and their own native goodness.” Hugo, *Applied*, 14. See Pius XI, *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, 8.

²⁸ Indeed, he argued, that in order to attain that holiness one must “rise above nature, that is, above natural standards of conduct.” Hugo, *Applied*, 15.

²⁹ Hugo wrote that to put natural happiness “into our thinking gives us a true picture of the immense height of heaven.” Hugo, *Applied*, 16.

³⁰ Hugo, *Applied*, 17.

supernatural, the hypothetical natural happiness or natural end illustrated the truth that the supernatural life of holiness entailed something much more than simply the avoidance of sin.

Monday, Conference 2: “The Two Principles of Activity: Practical Implications”

Monday morning opened with a conference (*Applied Christianity*, chapter 2: “The Two Principles of Activity: Practical Implications.”) which presented the implications of the nature-supernatural understanding discussed the previous night.³¹ Here Hugo argued that the distinction between the supernatural and the natural life implied that the supernatural life could not be lived by “the mere avoidance of sin” –what he called a natural action which could be practiced through adherence to the natural law.³² The “mere obedience to the commandments of the natural law” did not make one a Christian, Hugo argued, but rather, Christianity takes “natural morality” as a starting point and then goes far beyond –“it is essentially a supernatural religion.”³³ Beyond simple avoidance of sin, Hugo suggested that indifference to the world –“spiritual detachment”- must be at the heart of the Christian life.³⁴ Such indifference to, or even at times “contempt” for, the created things of the world was necessary for the Christian life, not because the world was evil, but because detachment from it helped to remove the obstacles to loving God and thus allowed for correspondence with the grace necessary to attain the supernatural

³¹ Hugo explained that Lacouture structured his retreat in such a way that a doctrine was presented in one conference, which was then followed by a conference describing the implications of that particular doctrine. Hugo seemed to employ a similar structure throughout his retreat and in *Applied Christianity*.

³² “If I seek only to avoid sin and aim at nothing higher, ignoring the requirements of charity and the impulse of grace, then I live as a pagan rather than as a Christian –a good pagan, no doubt, such as described by Aristotle, but a pagan, nevertheless, having a natural and rational standard of conduct.” Hugo, *Applied*, 18.

³³ Hugo, *Applied*, 18-19.

³⁴ Hugo, *Applied*, 19. “It is only by raising ourselves above the whole natural order that we become Christians.”

final end.³⁵ Hugo asserted that, indeed, such indifference or detachment was one of the primary “practical implications” of the retreat theology of nature and the supernatural.

Monday, Conference 3: “The Harmony Between the Natural and the Supernatural”

In the next conference, this notion of detachment from the created goods of the world was further developed in terms that one must “die” to one’s attachment to these goods through mortification. Hugo opened this chapter with the explanation that because human nature has a supernatural final end, “we are called by God to leave the plane of natural living; we are to give up the merely human way of life and act henceforth in accordance with our now divinized humanity.”³⁶ For Hugo, this giving up of the “merely human way of life” was a form of mortification. And he made it clear that the need for such mortification did not stem from some denigrating notion that the human nature was evil or sinful. Rather, it was from the recognition that human nature was inherently lacking in its ability to attain the supernatural final end to which it was called.³⁷ This mortification was needed, then, to bring about a transformation in human nature by removing the obstacles to its correspondence with grace. Hugo called this transformation a “process of divinization” of human nature.³⁸

Sin was a reality, though, and to understand its effects on human nature another important distinction was made: one between human nature in the abstract and human

³⁵ Hugo acknowledged that the idea of contempt for created goods could be problematic, but he asserted that this contempt did not imply these goods were evil or that love of them was sinful, in fact their very goodness (and attractiveness) makes indifference to them even more imperative for Christians. Rather, it implied that, “since we must love God wholly, we ought to rid ourselves of all sensual, selfish and merely natural love for creatures apart from God.” He pointed out Aquinas had defined sin as an aversion from God and a conversion to creatures (*ST*, II II, 104,3,c), and that contempt for creatures was a sign that one’s soul was in a state of grace (*ST*, I II,112,5). Hugo, *Applied*, 20.

³⁶ Hugo also clarified that to mortify the natural man did not mean destroying our entire human nature, but only those elements of our nature in conflict with our supernatural destiny. Hugo, *Applied*, 24.

³⁷ Hugo, *Applied*, 24.

³⁸ Hugo, *Applied*, 25.

nature in the concrete. In the abstract, human nature was considered in itself (*in se*) –“in its essential stuff and properties” which were from God, and so therefore good.³⁹ In itself, human nature did not need to be injured or destroyed in order to live a supernatural life. But even in this abstract sense, Hugo clarified that human nature had an inherent need to correspond with grace in order attain its supernatural destiny.⁴⁰ In other words, human nature in itself was inherently insufficient and not somehow capable of reaching its supernatural final end without the assistance of grace. And correspondence with this grace required the giving up the “merely human way of life,” even in the abstract.⁴¹ But, as Hugo pointed out, human nature did not actually exist in the abstract. Instead it always existed in the concrete (*in re*).⁴² In this sense, human nature was understood as always hindered by the historical effects of sin, and thus even more in need of transformation by grace.⁴³

Again for Hugo, such distinctions were important. While human nature did not exist in the abstract, as was the case with the idea of natural happiness, the notion of human nature in an abstract sense became helpful in recognizing the implications of the supernatural final end on human nature apart from sin. To recognize that the need to give up or rise above the natural was not because it was sinful, and that even apart from sin, such mortification was necessary. This distinction was also helpful in recognizing that while sin was not the primary reason for mortification, concupiscence did indeed have a

³⁹ Hugo, *Applied*, 25.

⁴⁰ Hugo, *Applied*, 25.

⁴¹ Hugo argued that “Of itself human nature, although good, cannot merit supernatural happiness; for this it must be penetrated by a higher principle. Still, it always will remain essentially the same nature, no matter how far this process of divinization goes on.” Hugo, *Applied*, 25.

⁴² Hugo, *Applied*, 25.

⁴³ Hugo explained that while the guilt and the eternal punishment of original sin were removed by baptism, the effects remain: “And if these do not injure the substance and powers of human nature, nevertheless the damage that they do is real and serious, wounding all its activities.” Hugo, *Applied*, 25.

disordering effect on human nature and so the need to give up or renounce attachments to the natural became doubly necessary. Thus, Hugo asserted that the primary task of the Christian life –a life seeking holiness- was to give up attachments to the natural in order to rise above our nature (both in the abstract and concrete) and reach our supernatural destiny.⁴⁴

To justify this notion of the need for renouncing attachments to created goods, Hugo turned to St. John of the Cross. For the seventeenth-century Doctor of the Church, one's spiritual progress was like a bird trying to fly,

It makes little difference whether a bird is tied by a thin thread or by a cord. For even if tied by thread, the bird will be prevented from taking off just as surely as if it were tied by cord –that is, it will be impeded from flight as long as it does not break the thread. Admittedly, the thread is easier to rend, but no matter how easily this may be done, the bird will not fly away without first doing so.⁴⁵

And for John of the Cross, it was the same for a person with attachments to the things of the world. Any attachments to the things of the world, no matter how few or how minor, were as obstacles or impediments to the supernatural life.

Monday, Conference 4: “The Conflict Between the Natural and the Supernatural”

The following conference (*Applied Christianity*, chapter 4), introduced what were called the “two principles of sanctification” –grace and the human will- which were necessary to live a life of holiness. Grace was the chief means of sanctification and was superabundant, and its availability could be assumed by those who desired to correspond

⁴⁴ In her notes, Day wrote, “ Keystone of retreat. Raised above ourselves. Heart of the supernatural life is love. Most important commandment. Love demands renunciation. Official meditation during the paschal season: Seek things that are above. Col:3...All this is the starting point of Christianity”

⁴⁵ Hugo, *Applied*, 121. John of the Cross, *The Ascent to Mount Carmel*, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D.(Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1979) Bk 1, ch.11, 97.

with it.⁴⁶ Hugo preached to his retreatants that their role in the salvation process was not to worry about the availability of this grace, but rather to act out of a desire to be in correspondence with grace –to act out of a “supernatural motive.”⁴⁷ He taught that a practical implication of our supernatural destiny was that we were called and even expected by God to act in accordance with grace –especially in the elevating action of grace (*gratia elevans*). But since this grace did not destroy our freedom, we could choose whether or not to act in such accordance.⁴⁸ To act out of supernatural motives –the love of God- was to act freely in correspondence with grace and to “supernaturalize” our actions. To act out of any other (natural) motive –like the love of created goods- while not sinful, was not to act in accord with grace. The desire to correspond with grace, therefore, was crucial for living a supernatural life of holiness.⁴⁹ It was the human aspect in the sanctification process.

According to Hugo, when a person acted out of a supernatural motive, harmony existed between her nature and her supernatural destiny.⁵⁰ But conflict arose when she

⁴⁶ Hugo pointed out that in *Mystici Corporis* (1943), Pius XII condemned certain tendencies of contemporary Christians (“a certain unhealthy quietism”) to be so preoccupied with the efficacy of grace that they forget and almost deny their need to correspond with that grace. Hugo argued, “Many people excuse their own mediocrity by doubting whether the Holy Ghost is there to help them, instead of blaming the deficiencies of their own wills. Others, who are sincere in their quest for knowledge concerning the spiritual life, nevertheless occupy their attention too much with the work of grace and not enough with the work that they have to do.” Hugo, *Applied*, 37.

⁴⁷ Hugo explained that, on our part, progress in holiness revolved around our motives: “God the Holy Ghost, of course, sanctifies us, but He does not do so without our cooperation; and there is no other way that we can cooperate except by the supernatural motive. Of the two principles of sanctification –God and our own will- God is far and away the more important; but our part is indispensable. The supernatural motive is like the contact of wires effected by an electrician –it does not create the current, but it is indispensable for the passage of the current.” Hugo, *Applied*, 33.

⁴⁸ Hugo argued that grace raises us to the supernatural and then leaves us free: “By grace God has given wings to our nature; and we can still refuse to use these wings. Raised to the supernatural, we can still live on the natural plane, as pagans.” Hugo, *Applied*, 31.

⁴⁹ Hugo, *Applied*, 33.

⁵⁰ *Applied*, 31. He explained that supernatural motives cleared “imperfection from our heart and our intention, thereby allowing the divine grace to provide the impulse for our actions.” Hugo noted spiritual writers, such as St. Alphonsus Liguori, the purity of supernatural motives was more important than their frequency. Hugo, *Applied*, 28.

acted out of natural motives and not in accord with grace.⁵¹ For to act out of a natural motive was to act for love of something other than God and this, therefore, placed a person in conflict with her supernatural final end. For Hugo, the love of God must be exclusive,

God created the world, and the world is good; God and the world are, as it were, friends. But when I give my love to the world, God is jealous; or if I give it to God, the world is jealous: God and the world now become rivals, not because of evil in the world, but because of my affection.⁵²

This conflict arose first and foremost, because natural motives, even at their best, only desire worldly things, and not the beatific vision. To act out of such a motive, even in an abstract sense, would be to act in conflict with human nature's supernatural final end.⁵³ And in the concrete or historical sense, this conflict has only been deepened by sin, for now natural motives "habitually bear the taint of concupiscence."⁵⁴

Monday, Conference 5: "The Pagan Mentality"

In the fifth conference (*Applied Christianity*, chapter 5) it was pointed out that while acting out of natural motives was not itself sinful, it did pose a real obstacle to the supernatural life. Hugo contended that a "pagan mentality" emerged from the habitual acting out of natural motives or intentions rather than supernatural ones.⁵⁵ Hugo listed several "worldly maxims" that, when accepted, would develop this pagan mentality.

⁵¹ Hugo, *Applied*, 31.

⁵² Hugo, *Applied*, 34. Hugo likened this exclusive love to marital love: "When John marries Martha, he must relinquish his affection for Mary."

⁵³ According to Hugo, "God has raised us to the supernatural plane; and now He wants us to live there and to leave the natural plane of life. It is not that the natural life is evil –it is good and created by God. But it is not supernatural, and God wants us to be supernatural. Accordingly, when we live natural lives, even though they may be naturally good, we are in conflict with our supernatural destiny. Natural motives at best –i.e., even if they are purified of the sensuality and egotism which spoils them in all except perfect souls– are infinitely lower than the supernatural order." Hugo, *Applied*, 34.

⁵⁴ Hugo, *Applied*, 34. With regard to this "taint of concupiscence," Day wrote, "To enjoy things of this world and try to avoid mortal sin [is] as impossible as to jump from the Empire State and expect to stop before we get hurt."

⁵⁵ Hugo, *Applied*, 37.

These included the notion that all actions –that is, natural actions- performed in a state of grace were meritorious. This assertion would later be defended by Francis Connell, CSSR in his critique of *Applied Christianity* in a 1945 issue of *The Ecclesiastical Review*.⁵⁶ Sensing its significance, Hugo dedicated all of “Appendix II” in *Applied Christianity* to the question “Are Natural Actions Meritorious?” In this appendix, he argued that while this was a common interpretation of the “Thomistic view,” it was in fact a misinterpretation of Aquinas and had led to the belief that all actions which were not sinful were indeed supernatural and meritorious. Hugo contended that this misinterpretation of Thomas did not recognize the important distinction which existed between nature in the abstract and in the concrete. He explained that when Aquinas stated that all natural actions performed in a state of grace were meritorious, he was speaking of nature in the abstract. For, in the concrete, this idea was false and would even amount to “an axiom of paganism.”⁵⁷

Interestingly, Hugo, though initially charging that Aquinas had been misinterpreted by his “Thomistic” commentators, then went onto contrast Aquinas’s own teaching with that of St. Alphonsus de Liguori in *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*. Aquinas, he explained, had taught that in the abstract (or formally) a good natural motive –something possible only for saints- was enough for an action to be meritorious. But Liguori, Hugo noted, had contended that a supernatural motive was necessary for an

⁵⁶ Francis Connell, review of *Applied Christianity*, by John J. Hugo, in *American Ecclesiastical Review* 113 (July, 1945): 69-72.

⁵⁷ Hugo, *Applied*, 39.

action to be meritorious. And he pointed out that Liguori's position was also shared others with the Christian tradition, particularly Jean Pierre de Caussade, S.J.⁵⁸

Though it revolved around a somewhat minor theological point, this questioning of Aquinas, let alone the suggestion that the teaching of another Doctor of the Church might be preferable to the Angelic Doctor, was noteworthy given the central place that Aquinas held in Catholic theology in the early twentieth-century. This passing critique of Aquinas, as well as the much harsher one made against the "Thomistic view," should therefore be understood as part of Hugo's broader challenge to the neo-Thomism that dominated Catholicism at the time.⁵⁹

Hugo also listed the following assertions as similar "worldly maxims": that a single discreet action performed with natural motives was not problematic,⁶⁰ that not all natural motives led to sin,⁶¹ and finally, that all actions could be viewed abstractly (in themselves), and thus all actions which in themselves were morally indifferent would also be permissible.⁶² He argued that having accepted these "maxims" as true, many

⁵⁸ Hugo also mentioned that this was the view the modern French Cisterian spiritual writer Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard (1858-1935) in *Soul of the Apostolate*, trans. J.A. Moran (Gethsemani Ky: Mission Press, 1941), Hugo *Applied*, 208.

⁵⁹ Hugo, *Applied*, 202.

⁶⁰ While he acknowledged that in one sense this assertion was true, Hugo stated that the problem was that "such acts of self-indulgence" were not performed individually, but habitually. In this way, he argued, they became harmful for, "Habitual indulgence in sensuality nourishes concupiscence and lessens the influence of grace." Hugo, *Applied*, 39.

⁶¹ Hugo argued that just as it would be impossible to breath in only good germs in a room recently vacated by a tuberculosis patient, so also it would be "impossible to distinguish good from selfish natural motives in practice" and therefore, it was best "to get rid of them all." He quoted the modern Irish spiritual writer Blessed Columba Marmion, O.S.B. (1858-1923): "To destroy these roots in us (i.e., sin), to keep ourselves from all infidelity, from loving any creatures for itself, to remove from our actions not only every culpable motive, but even every motive that is merely natural; to keep our hearts free, with a spiritual freedom, from all that is created and earthly: such is the first element of our holiness." Abbot Columba Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1939), 291. Hugo, *Applied*, 39.

⁶² Hugo countered that in the concrete sense no action could be morally indifferent, since if "the morality of an action is not determined by its object, like theft or murder, then its morality is determined by its end (motive) and circumstances." He argued that in the concrete every action "takes us either closer to God, or further away from Him." Hugo, *Applied*, 40.

Christians had developed a pagan mentality or “naturalism.”⁶³ And as a result, these Christians were having difficulty recognizing the importance of, as well as corresponding with, the ever-abundant grace needed to progress in the supernatural life.

Monday, Conference 6: “Jesus Speaks of the Supernatural Life”

Monday closed with a conference (*Applied Christianity*, chapter 7), in which it was suggested that the Sermon on the Mount itself was a call to renounce the natural life in favor of the supernatural life.⁶⁴ Hugo argued that natural actions were rejected when Jesus renounced the goods pursued by natural actions when he stated “Blessed are the poor in spirit,”⁶⁵ “Blessed are the meek,”⁶⁶ and “Blessed are those that mourn.”⁶⁷ Natural motives were also renounced in the admonishment, “When you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do...” (Matt.6). Finally, renunciation of the natural life could also be seen when Jesus declared, “Unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of God” (Matt.5:20).⁶⁸ According to Hugo, while the scribes and Pharisees were good men, their goodness was

⁶³Hugo turned to Archbishop John Ireland, the late archbishop of St. Paul and a central figure in the late nineteenth-century “Americanism” debates, to sum up this notion: “There is not much practical Christianity in the world. The danger of today is that of living a purely natural life as the good old pagans did. Naturalism, materialism, worldliness possess the world. Everything is done for fame or money or the honor that is in it, else you are a fool and have no purpose in life. We should lead a supernatural life. Our works are dead and have no merit unless we are in the state of sanctifying grace and do them from a supernatural motive. On the supernatural plane elevated above the natural the just man lives by faith. We should have a supernatural motive in all that we do. The true happiness of the Christian soul lies in the heavenly regions on the supernatural plane above the merely natural life.” [Hugo cited Ireland’s quote from an article by John F. Duggan, in *The Ecclesiastical Review*, (December, 1939)] Hugo, *Applied*, 38.

⁶⁴ Hugo, *Applied*, 49. In her notes, Day wrote that the Sermon on the Mount, “Does not institute sacraments, does not talk about Mass. [Rather, it is a] Christian Manifesto, elementary statement, basic principle. Like Communist Manifesto, Constitution. Summed up in one sentence, You must cease to be human, begin to be divine.”

⁶⁵ (Matt.5:3) Here, Jesus was seen as condemning goods or ends pursued by pagans.

⁶⁶ (Matt.5:4) Here, he was seen as condemning bodily goods.

⁶⁷ (Matt.5:5) Here, he was seen as condemning the goods of the mind.

⁶⁸ Hugo, *Applied*, 50.

“natural” -following only the commandments of the natural law- and therefore did not merit entrance into the Kingdom of God.⁶⁹

In the place of the natural life, Jesus called his followers to live a supernatural life of holiness.⁷⁰ For when Jesus proclaimed, “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill” (Matt.5:6), Hugo contended that he was presenting the supernatural life -one of justice and holiness- as a life to be pursued by all who heard him.⁷¹ When his followers were instructed to give alms, pray, and fast in secret “because your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Matt.6), Jesus was calling them to act out of supernatural motives. And finally, Jesus called all who would be Christian to pursue a supernatural final destiny when he taught that they, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” And such perfection, Hugo pointed out, was not merely that of the saints, but of God.⁷²

Tuesday, Conference 7: “The Law of the Flesh”

Tuesday morning opened with the seventh conference of the retreat (*Applied Christianity*, chapter 6), during which Hugo made explicit the link between natural motives and sin. To do this, he introduced the concept of “imperfect actions” -actions that were motivated by both the love of God and the love of created goods. Because these acts were motivated to some extent by natural motives, they were less than supernatural and therefore were lacking or imperfect.⁷³ While these imperfect actions were not in

⁶⁹ Hugo, *Applied*, 50.

⁷⁰ Hugo, *Applied*, 50.

⁷¹ Hugo explained that here justice means holiness and sanctity, and therefore that Jesus was calling all people to a life of holiness. *Applied*, 50.

⁷² “He sets up an absolute and divine standard of sanctity... This is addressed to all men.” Hugo, *Applied*, 51.

⁷³ Hugo described this lacking or “spiritual undernourishment” as similar to a man who decides only to eat one biscuit a day, and when told that because of this he will die soon, he protests that he is eating regularly. Hugo, *Applied*, 43.

themselves sinful, they inevitably would become habitual and, in this way, eventually would lead to sin.⁷⁴ Hugo argued that this idea of imperfect acts becoming habitual and then ultimately leading to sin flowed out of the notion that living a supernatural life was a process -in the spiritual life there was no standing still, one either progressed or regressed.⁷⁵ Thus, natural motives which motivated natural and imperfect actions would inevitably cause a person to turn away from her supernatural final end –or as Hugo put it, they would “starve the supernatural life.”⁷⁶ Each natural action strengthened one’s desire for the things of this world and, in turn, weakened the desire for the supernatural.⁷⁷

Again, while natural motives were not sinful in themselves nor did they all result in sin, Hugo contended that it was indeed the case that sin did result from these natural

⁷⁴ For support, Hugo quoted Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange, O.P. as saying that such an act “which is too weak is an imperfection disposing to venial sin, as the latter disposes to mortal sin.” Garrigou-LaGrange further described the weakness of imperfect acts: “these acts dispose us to positive retrogression, for by reason of their weakness they permit the rebirth of disordered inclinations which lead to venial sin, and may end by overcoming us or leading us to spiritual death.” Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, trans. Sr. M. Timothea Doyle, O.P. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co. 1937), 189. Hugo, *Applied*, 44.

⁷⁵ Hugo pointed out that this was the teaching of the Church Fathers and was common among theologians and spiritual writers: “If one’s love of the world is slight, and gradually diminishes under the growth of charity, then one can be saved. But if the love of the world is great, continuous, and unmortified, it will, in the course of time, lead to sin, repeated sins, and hell.” Hugo cited several passages from scripture to support this idea: James 1:14-15, James 4:4, Phil. 3:18-19, Rom. 8:5-14, Matt. 7:24-27, Gal. 5:16-17. Hugo, *Applied*, 45.

⁷⁶ Hugo likened natural motives to termites which get into a house and undermine it. While the collapse of the house may be occasioned by a bad storm, the cause of the collapse was the fact that it had been undermined by the bugs. “So also sin may be sudden and violent, but it is nevertheless the result of a long process of undermining; and this has happened through pampering the appetites of fallen nature in little things.” Hugo, *Applied*, 46.

⁷⁷ This process of regression brought on by natural motives was what Paul intended in his description of the “law of the members” (“law of the flesh”), “fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members” (Rom. 7:23). Hugo quoted from this Pauline idea of the law of the members: “According to St. Paul, there is a law working in us resulting in acts and desires which are not in themselves sinful, but which prepare the way for sin. We know well enough what is definitely right and what is wrong, but there is something else, in itself neither right nor wrong, belonging to a debatable land, the borderland between right and wrong. The region neither of light nor darkness, but twilight.” B.W. Maturin, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Discipline* (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony’s Guild Press, 1939), 95. Hugo, *Applied*, 49.

motives.⁷⁸ And so, in order to cultivate a desire for God, a person had to try to cease acting out of natural motives –to renounce them.⁷⁹

Tuesday, Conference 8: “The Christian Mentality”

Having earlier described the “pagan mentality,” the eighth conference (*Applied Christianity*, chapter 8), defined the “Christian mentality” as one dominated by God - one’s mind, one’s will, one’s whole life permeated with the idea of God.⁸⁰ Hugo described the development of this mentality as “the science of the supernatural,” which he likened to the science of architecture using the Apostle Paul’s “temple of God” metaphor (1Cor.3:16) Just as an architect first had to decide to build a building, so too one must first decide to build a “temple of perfection” -that is, one must decide to be perfect.⁸¹ Having made this decision, a person then laid out plans for building this temple, plans which Hugo suggested could be found in various sources within the tradition such as the spiritual writings of St. John of Cross, as well as in the practice of contemplation.⁸² With these plans in hand, one would then need to dig out “the sand of natural motives” in order to build a temple of perfection on “the rock of the supernatural.”⁸³ Having thus set

⁷⁸Hugo, *Applied*, 47.

⁷⁹ Hugo, *Applied*, 47. Again, the reason for this opposition or conflict between nature and the supernatural was twofold insufficiency of human nature: first, in the abstract, even at its best, human nature was still inherently lacking and could only attain natural happiness on its own; second, in the concrete, human nature was limited even more so by the historical effects of concupiscence.

⁸⁰ Hugo, *Applied*, 52.

⁸¹ Hugo contended that no one said, “first I will get rid of mortal sin, then venial sin; and finally, if I am successful so far, I will work to remove imperfections.” Instead, a person must desire to be perfect first (in the order of intention) even though that perfection will be achieved last in the order of execution -directing all subsequent work. Hugo, *Applied*, 53.

⁸² Hugo noted that the John of the Cross offered plans or rules for living a supernatural life of holiness: “First, let him have an habitual desire to imitate Christ in everything that he does, conforming himself to His life... Secondly, in order that he may be able to do this well, every pleasure that presents itself to the senses, if it is not purely for the honor and glory of God, must be renounced and completely rejected for the love of Jesus Christ... Strive always to choose, not that which is easiest, but that which is the most difficult... Strive thus to desire to enter into complete detachment and emptiness and poverty, with respect to that which is in the world, for Christ’s sake.” St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, trans. E. Allison Peers (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1933) Bk I, ch.15. Hugo, *Applied*, 53.

⁸³ Hugo, *Applied*, 53.

the supernatural foundation, a person would build the temple with “first rate” materials - supernatural actions.⁸⁴ And like a good architect, she would have to keep everything in her temple straight, and “the plumb line” of the supernatural life was Christian perfection. The Christian mentality (the temple of perfection), therefore, did not arise primarily through great works, but rather by acting out of the supernatural motive of the love of God.⁸⁵

Tuesday, Conference 9: “Christian Perfection”⁸⁶

Having illustrated the development of this Christian mentality, the next conference (*Applied Christianity*, chapter nine) began with the assertion that the purpose of Christ’s mission on earth and of the Church he founded was the sanctification of souls –to make saints.⁸⁷ Building on the call for all to live a supernatural life of holiness in the Sermon on the Mount, Hugo argued that this call to holiness was not two-tiered –it made no distinction between the vowed life and that of the laity. He explained that there was “just one kind of Christianity for all,” and that while religious orders and congregations were human institutions, “the obligation to perfection [did] not come from them, but from Christ.”⁸⁸ For Hugo, there was then nothing inferior or second rate about the Christianity of the laity -the vocation of a Christian was before all other vocations.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Hugo again pointed out that it was not so much the frequency of supernatural motives that was important, as was their purity in the perfecting one’s actions, though the frequency of supernatural motives did help. For support, Hugo turned to St. Alphonsus de Liguori’s suggestion that one renew his supernatural intention prior to every important action. *True Spouse of Christ*, trans. Fr. Eugene Grimm (Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1929). Hugo also noted that Dom Chautard called for habitual vigilance of one’s motives through “custody of the heart” in *Soul of the Apostolate*, Pt.5, sec. 4. Hugo, *Applied*, 54.

⁸⁵ Hugo, *Applied*, 54.

⁸⁶ Day’s notes titled this conference, “Obligation to be Saints.”

⁸⁷ Hugo, *Applied*, 56. Hugo again turned to Jesus’ admonition in Matthew 5: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

⁸⁸ Hugo, *Applied*, 56.

⁸⁹ Hugo, *Applied*, 56. In her notes on this conference, Day wrote: “Jesus spoke in a scene of pastoral quietness, peacefully; he dismisses all our efforts to excuse ourselves. “This is not for me.” Who was Jesus

Every Christian, then, was called to pursue perfection by the very fact that they are Christians.⁹⁰ And, as Aquinas stated, this perfection consisted essentially in the virtue of charity.⁹¹ Since charity was an infused virtue and inseparable from grace, ultimately the degree to which perfection was attained depended upon the always available gift of grace. The Christian's primary concern, then, should be to desire to be perfect –to correspond with grace. With this intention, the Christian would then seek the “proper means” necessary to reach this perfection: the precepts of charity and counsels of perfection.⁹² And in employing these means she would come to live a life of holiness –the life of a saint.

Summary

To sum up, the first part of the retreat presented an understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship that formed its theological foundation –the natural life understood as distinct from both the supernatural and the sinful. The implication of this understanding was that all people needed to become detached from the things of the world -to mortify their desires for these created goods and the motives which these desires informed. Hugo was clear that the necessity of this renunciation was twofold: first

talking too. No Carmelites, no Carthusians. Ordinary people, fisherman, farmers, shepherds, housewives. This legislation was for all, lay people or religious.”

⁹⁰ Hugo pointed out that in *Rerum Ominium Perturbationem* (1923), Pius XI's encyclical marking the third centenary of St. Francis de Sales, the pope had stated: “Christ has constituted the Church as holy and the source of sanctity, and those who take her for guide and teacher must, by the divine will, tend to holiness of life...Let no one think that this is addressed to a select few and that others are permitted to remain in an inferior degree of virtue” *Applied*, 58. In her notes, Day even wrote that according to St. John Chrysostom, God will be more severe with lay people for not pursuing holiness because they have “natural supports.”

⁹¹ Aquinas, *ST II II*, 184, 1. Hugo, *Applied*, 57. Day wrote in her notes, “Perfection is love. God is love...Perfection means love of God and love of neighbor.”

⁹² As will be seen, critics of the Hugo-retreat later charged that it confused the precepts of charity with counsels of perfection. The precepts could be understood as either commandments from God that bound us under the pain of sin or, in stricter sense, as conditions that were necessary for salvation. Because of this, Hugo argued that since “charity is a precept in this stricter sense, so also perfection can be no mere counsel, but is a precept, and that in the stricter sense likewise.” All were called to seek perfection, and so the precept of charity was “universal, absolute, and equal.” *Applied*, 59.

and foremost, because human nature was inherently insufficient and infinitely less than the supernatural, and second because of the historical effects of concupiscence on human nature. The importance of renouncing natural motives emerged from the idea of the two principles of sanctification -grace and our will. Because motives or intentions were so crucial for the life of holiness, acting out of natural motives threatened one's sanctification and eventually even led to sin. Natural motives, therefore, needed to be renounced and replaced with supernatural motives so that a person could begin to correspond with the ever-abundant grace needed to live a supernatural life of holiness -to attain her supernatural final end.

But above all these sometimes tedious discussions of motives and mortification, it must be recognized that it was the understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship presented in this early part of the retreat –that they were distinct but not separate- which formed the theological foundation of the retreat, and made the retreat theology significant. While the natural was not sinful and was indeed good, it was not enough. Only union with God –the supernatural final end- could fulfill human nature. A supernatural life, one which recognized the “practical implications” of this final end, was a life that required much more than simply avoiding sin –it also necessitated the giving up of attachments to the world. And in the retreat, Hugo offered what he believed was a blue-print for such a life.

The Supernatural World

Tuesday, Conference 10: “The Glory of God”

Tuesday night’s final conference (*Applied Christianity*, Part Two, chapter one) presented one of the more central points in the retreat theology’s understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship -the notion that “the divine motive” of creation was to communicate the goodness and glory of God. And therefore, in a very Ignatian sense, the final end or purpose of creation was to receive, possess, and manifest that goodness, and thereby to glorify God.⁹³ Since God has fixed this final end into the very creation and being of human nature, Hugo explained, it was not an arbitrary or external end “imposed on us from above,” but rather its pursuit and attainment fulfilled “the deepest needs of human nature.”⁹⁴ To work toward any other final end, he continued, was to act not only contrary to the will of God, but contrary to “the deepest laws of his own being.”⁹⁵ Human nature was created with a supernatural final end, one infinitely beyond its ability to attain on its own. Yet it was not an end extrinsically placed upon human nature, but rather it was an end intimately related to it –the fulfillment of human nature was obtainable only through the glorification of God.⁹⁶ These notions not only separated the Hugo-retreat from the two-tiered, extrinsicist, theology of the neo-Thomists, but, as will be pointed out

⁹³ Hugo, *Applied*, 64. The retreat’s Ignatian roots clearly appear here.

⁹⁴ In this way, Hugo described humanity as being able to use the rest of creation to glorify God: “The universe exists that it may be gathered up by man in a hymn of praise to Almighty God. For lower nature glorifies God itself only objectively, i.e., unconsciously, necessarily, and without merit [objectively]; man does it consciously, freely and meritoriously; and since he uses all creation, he may be said to take up all creation within himself to glorify God formally.” Hugo, *Applied*, 68. Hugo later elaborated on this notion in his account of the “Doctrine of Assimilation.”

⁹⁵ Hugo, *Applied*, 64. Day’s notes quoted the very Augustinian line from Francis Thompson’s *Hound of Heaven*: “Our hearts were made for Thee O God, and never rest until they rest in Thee.”

⁹⁶ “In fulfilling God’s purpose,” Hugo wrote, “man likewise fulfills the deepest purpose of his own nature; he thus perfects his nature and achieves happiness.” Hugo, *Applied*, 68.

later, they revealed many of the similarities it had with the arguments being made by de Lubac at the same time.

Wednesday, Conference 11: “The Doctrine of the Samples”⁹⁷

The next morning’s conference (*Applied Christianity*, Part 2 chapter 3), opened with a description of one of the main ways one could begin to glorify God -what Hugo termed the “Doctrine of the Samples.”⁹⁸ The account of the samples began with a description of the paradoxical condition of our human nature: while we live in the world and have a “taste” for the things of the world, we also have a supernatural destiny that demands we leave these things behind as we move toward union with God. But while these things of the world must inevitably be renounced, Hugo suggested that because they were created by and so reflected God, they could properly -albeit temporarily- be used as “stepping stones” in our journey to God.⁹⁹ This idea that created goods could be properly used was the idea of the samples. It was the very non-rigorist notion that the things of the world were not evil, and that they could and should not be completely rejected. In fact, one could come to know something of God through these goods of creation.¹⁰⁰ In this way, created goods could be understood as samples of God. And in a clear affirmation of

⁹⁷ Day titled this conference: “Means to Glorify God: The Samples.”

⁹⁸ Hugo noted that while God was “an infinitely simple Being,” whose essence and action were joined in “an incomprehensible and perfect unity.” But because of the limits of human thinking, divine essence and divine action had to be distinguished, and therefore how we glorify divine essence is distinct from how we glorify divine action. God is glorified in essence by means of the samples, and in activity by means of the doctrine of “Supreme Dominion” which would be described later in the retreat. Hugo, *Applied*, 70.

⁹⁹ He explained: “For all creatures are made by God, all proceed from the divine mind, and, therefore, all represent in some degree the perfections of this mind.” Hugo, *Applied*, 70. In her notes, Day wrote, “As an artist leaves mark of his genius on his work, bears mark of his divine perfection. Every creature reflects God.”

¹⁰⁰ Hugo pointed out that both Aquinas and Augustine troubled themselves about knowledge, because knowledge of creatures was “a highway to God.” He also noted that this notion was also found in scripture: Psalm 93, Wisdom 13, Romans 1:18-20. Hugo, *Applied*, 70.

the goodness of nature, Hugo stated that it was only because of their goodness that these created goods could even be samples of God.¹⁰¹

Like any sample, though, these creatures were not meant to be enjoyed for themselves, but rather as an image or reflection of something much better.¹⁰² And indeed, when given the choice between a mere sample and the real thing, Hugo pointed out that one would be foolish not to choose the genuine article. This idea was affirmed in Garrigou-LaGrange's oft-quoted admonition that, "The best thing that one can do with the best things is to sacrifice it."¹⁰³ While created goods could be properly used to come to a better knowledge of God, their use was only temporary in order to avoid attachment to them. One would be foolish to choose such samples instead of God.

Wednesday, Conference 12: "The Doctrine of the Samples Applied"

The practical implications of the "doctrine of the samples" were laid out in the following conference, (*Applied Christianity*, Part Two, chapter four). For by understanding created goods as samples of God, and no longer as ends in themselves, Hugo argued that attachment to them would gradually lessen. Giving up these things would become easier. And in so doing, the exterior life of the senses would "dry up," and the interior life of contemplation focused on the mystical or supernatural would

¹⁰¹ Hugo pointed out that the doctrine of samples did not deny the goodness of creatures, for "it is precisely because they are good that they must be given up." Hugo, *Applied*, 73.

¹⁰² Day wrote, "More you get of natural pleasure less you want; more of spiritual you get, more you want. No satiety. No revulsion." Hugo noted that John of the Cross spoke of creatures as mere crumbs that fall from the table of God in *Ascent*, I, 6. He also referred to several Gospel passages which seem to demonstrate this idea of the samples: John 7:37, John 4: 34, John 6, Matthew 2:28, Luke 12:37.

¹⁰³ Garrigou-Lagrange did make the qualification that such sacrifice was only acceptable on the condition, "that we safeguard the hierarchy of the gifts of God and of the virtues, and that we do not sacrifice something superior to what is inferior.", Garrigou-Lagrange, 132. Interestingly, this was the quote that critics of the retreat within the Catholic Worker, like Ade Bethune, Stanley Vishnewski, and Julian Pleasants often negatively referred to, and to which Day often approvingly quoted.

develop.¹⁰⁴ The doctrine also offered a way to re-interpret the temptation for the created things of the world, as these temptations could now be understood as opportunities to love God by revealing one's preference for God.¹⁰⁵

Again, in what was clearly part of his broader critique of the neo-Thomist theology of the day, Hugo contended that the lackluster results of much of American Catholic religious education was due of its presentation of the Christian life as a life focused almost exclusively on the avoidance of sin, rather than as a life lived with a proper understanding of the created things of the world.¹⁰⁶ The emphasis was on the natural law (avoiding sin), and not on striving for holiness. He also noted the failure of Catholic youth organizations to bring forth spiritual fruit was rooted in a "Catholic Action" that consisted in sprinkling a brief discussion of religion onto a recreational program.¹⁰⁷ The supernatural was regarded something to be added (or not) onto a somewhat sufficient natural world. In both instances, according to Hugo, the centrality of the supernatural and its practical implications on the Christian life were ignored.

¹⁰⁴ Hugo, *Applied*, 76. In her notes, Day vividly illustrated this process of drying up exterior senses: "Doctrine will help to dry up life of the senses... Whenever you love anything you become like unto it –or its slave: St. John of the Cross. Tyrannized over by our senses. Great difficulty is we live in the world of sense. Hence difficulty! We are smothered by the world of senses, but the doctrine of samples shows us an escape. We are as though trapped in a submarine. Samples are like a submarine valve where there is attachment there is union. Shows us these things are not to be used for our enjoyment but as a means of getting to God." Day also explained the benefits of detachment for developing an interior life of prayer: "Develops life of spirit. Shows us how to meditate... Do we have to give up music etc. No, God [did] not put creatures here to give them up. No, to teach us about God. 'Best thing to do with the best things is to give them up.' St. John [of the] Cross: If anything leads you immediately to contemplation of God, go ahead. But if it causes you to become attached, give up."

¹⁰⁵ Hugo, *Applied*, 79. Day further explained this in her notes, "Minimum degree of love: we must prefer him above every creature. Love of preference. Temptation is an opportunity to make an act of living love... We are in this world to be tried. Devil is like a general trying to take a city, St. Ignatius said. Watch and pray."

¹⁰⁶ Hugo argued that the consequence of this "false premise" was that the young students' minds were filled with "worldly things, and not with God." Hugo, *Applied*, 77.

¹⁰⁷ These organizations, he argued, were founded on the assumption that young people should be appealed to through worldly things like sports, dancing, and recreation - "everything except religion." Hugo, a college professor at the time, asserted that, in fact, "religion is one of the most discussed topics of college students." Hugo, *Applied*, 77

Wednesday, Conference 13: “The Folly of the Cross: Doctrine”¹⁰⁸

Understanding created goods as mere samples enabled a person to gradually leave them behind in the pursuit of his supernatural final end. This was the concept espoused in the doctrine of “the Folly of the Cross,” introduced in the thirteenth conference (*Applied Christianity*, Part Two, chapter 7).¹⁰⁹ Hugo stated that two main points made up this doctrine:

- a. In order to possess ourselves of supernatural happiness, we must give up all natural affections; or, in other words, the supernatural rises out of the destruction and death of the natural man, just as the phoenix of old was said to arise out of its own ashes.
- b. This death of the natural takes place independently of sin, whether original or personal sin. The necessity of dying to nature derives from the very fact that we have a supernatural destiny. Our supernatural destiny requires that we abandon the merely natural plane of living.¹¹⁰

The Folly of the Cross, then, centered on the renunciation of not only sin, but the “natural self” –specifically the natural motives or love of creatures and the natural life these informed- in order to correspond with grace and attain union with God.¹¹¹ Again, such renunciation was regarded as necessary even apart from sin.¹¹² For, as Hugo again asserted, Christ came not only to overcome sin, but to call all of humanity to the

¹⁰⁸ In Day’s notes, she numbered this the fourteenth conference since she sometimes included Farina’s prayer conferences in her numbering.

¹⁰⁹ While sacrifice for one’s country is regarded as heroic, Hugo pointed out that sacrifice (renunciation of created goods) for God was considered foolish, hence “The Folly of the Cross.” *Applied*, 88.

¹¹⁰ Hugo, *Applied*, 87.

¹¹¹ Hugo clarified what he meant by our dying to the natural self: “The corruption that we must be rid of is that element in our nature which we have seen is in conflict with the supernatural; it includes not only sin, but love of creatures, the use of them for their own pleasure, and the egotistic pursuit of personal ends in preference to the glory of God.” *Applied*, 89.

¹¹² To emphasize the reality that this renunciation was needed even apart from sin, Hugo argued that Adam, prior to the Fall, needed to renounce his natural self –to follow practice the Folly of the Cross- in order to attain his supernatural end. Jesus, likewise, had to follow the Folly of the Cross. Hugo *Applied*, 91. Day explained this in her notes: “Christ’s humanity was crushed. He did not have to give up sin. Mortified. Our mother too. Our Lady had to die to natural. Physically she was put to one side. Naturally he [Jesus] would have stayed at home and taken care of her. “Who are my brethren? My mother, my sister and my brother are those that do my will.”

supernatural life of holiness –to be saints.¹¹³ In short, practicing the Folly of Cross was the practical implication of human nature’s supernatural final end.¹¹⁴

Indeed, Jesus was seen as calling his followers to the Folly of the Cross when he taught: “If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me,” (Luke 9) –a passage Day described in her notes as the “Best short summary Jesus gave of Christianity.” For in this passage, Jesus was seen as teaching the renunciation of one’s self, seemingly without limitation, and as a daily (and possibly endless) practice. For Hugo, this was confirmation that such renunciation and mortification were not to be considered an “occasional indulgence” for Christians, but rather as “co-extensive with Christian life.”¹¹⁵ For it was only after this call to daily renunciation that Jesus then taught that one could follow him –ultimately a call to union with God. From this, Hugo concluded that while the “essence” and final end of Christianity was the love of God, that love was only possible after the renunciation of the natural self for which Jesus demanded.¹¹⁶

Wednesday, Conference 14: “The Folly of the Cross: Application”

The last conference on Wednesday ended with a discussion of the implications of the Folly of Cross (*Applied Christianity*, Part Two, chapter eight). In this discussion,

¹¹³ Hugo explained, “Even if there were no sin in us, we could not, by our natural powers, merit supernatural life. For supernatural life exceeds our greatest natural powers by an infinite distance. Before our actions could *not* be meritorious on the supernatural plane, it was necessary for God Himself to elevate them to that plane. Now God chose to do this through His Son Jesus Christ; so that our actions can be supernatural only if they are bathed in the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, if it had not been for the merits of Jesus, even if we lived the Folly of the Cross in the fullest measure, denying ourselves in all things, we could never merit supernatural happiness.” Hugo, *Applied*, 91.

¹¹⁴ Hugo stated, “aside from sin, God planned to elevate man to the divine level. For this privilege, man would have to renounce a merely human happiness. This is why the practice of the Folly of the Cross is necessary apart from sin.” Hugo, *Applied*, 91.

¹¹⁵ Hugo, *Applied*, 87.

¹¹⁶ Hugo stated to be holy, “we must love and choose God’s goodness and all His other infinite attributes, which must accordingly penetrate into our lives...The consequence is that sanctity, absolutely necessary to enter God’s presence, is obtained only at the price of all our cravings for creatures and love of self.” Hugo, *Applied*, 89.

Hugo introduced two concepts gleaned from John's Gospel which were key to the retreat theology: "pruning" and "sowing." First, emerged the notion of being pruned -the idea that just as a farmer pruned a living branch that is not bearing fruit, so to God pruned us through mortifications and afflictions, cutting away our natural selves that we may bear fruit.¹¹⁷ This notion offered a way to see involuntary mortification -suffering- as part of the Folly of the Cross. This notion would be expanded upon in later conferences. A second Johannine concept, that of sowing our attachments to created goods and pleasures in order to live a supernatural life, just as a farmer sowed his seeds in order to reap a greater harvest in the future.¹¹⁸ Hugo, who expanded upon this idea of sowing in later conferences, suggested that a person sow all her goods -including her time- with faith in a greater harvest in return.¹¹⁹ And like a farmer who sowed his grain anticipating the harvest soon to be reaped, one should be cheerful, even joyful, about this work.¹²⁰ To practice the Folly of the Cross, the dying to the natural self, was indeed *agere contra* -to act contrary to our natural inclinations. As Hugo explained, it was to act contrary to "the dictates of mere human wisdom, which bids us 'eat, drink and be merry,'" and to sow the pleasures of this life in order to enjoy life eternal.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ John 15:1. Hugo, *Applied*, 94

¹¹⁸ John 12:24. Hugo pointed out that while the farmer could keep his seeds and eat them, getting some pleasure from them. It is only when he sows them, throwing them to the field, that they will produce a much greater harvest. Hugo, *Applied*, 94.

¹¹⁹ Hugo saw prayer as a way to sow time, a practice the natural world saw as wasting time. Hugo, *Applied*, 95. Commenting on sowing time through prayer, Day wrote in her retreat notes, "Can you not spend one hour with me? St. Francis de Sales, 1hr. St. Teresa, minimum 1 hr. not including Mass, No Bible, no rosary, no stations, no prayer book. St. Ignatius says don't let devil cheat you out of one minute. Without prayer soldiers without weapons."

¹²⁰ Hugo suggested that when we sow, we should cheerfully remember that "the sacrifice of the moment will grow into a great harvest for us. So that we should not be at all sad about giving up the natural affections and desires that we must give up to reap supernatural goods." Hugo, *Applied*, 97. "This is the Folly of the Cross: to act contrary to the dictates of mere human wisdom, which bids us 'eat, drink and be merry,' and to sow all the enjoyments of this life in order to enjoy life eternal." Hugo, *Applied*, 97

¹²¹ In doing so, he argued, "we must want very much to do the things that we don't want to do." Hugo, *Applied*, 97.

The Samples

Thursday, Conference 15: “The Love of God”

While much of the previous discussion had centered on the need to renounce the love of creatures, Thursday morning’s conference (*Applied Christianity*, Part Three, chapter 1) opened with the question of how to increase one’s love of God.¹²² Hugo answered that the first step in loving God came in knowing God, and that knowledge of God came through God’s creation –the samples- particularly other people. In this way, one could come to know and love God by knowing and loving one’s neighbors, or as Hugo argued, “the measure of the one love is the measure of the other.”¹²³ And as this love for God developed and increased, desire for the divine would also grow -God would be preferred more than the samples.¹²⁴ Having turned aside from love of the samples – and “dried up” the external senses- one could then more fully love God through contemplation and prayer. In other words, love of God increased through both love of neighbor and prayer. And it was this love, Day wrote in her notes, which was “the measure by which we shall be judged.”

Thursday, Conference 16: “The Contempt for the World: Doctrine”

This love for God was indeed exclusive, and the implications of that exclusivity were the topic of the next conference (*Applied Christianity*, Part Three, chapter 2). In her

¹²² Hugo, *Applied*, 105.

¹²³ Hugo defined the reasons for this love of neighbor even further: “It is not merely because man is an image of God that we must so love our neighbor. In addition to this we and our neighbors are members of the Mystical Body of Jesus, living with His divine life; and he that hurts the member hurts Jesus.” Hugo, *Applied*, 103.

¹²⁴ To justify this claim, Hugo turned to a quote from John Henry Cardinal Newman: “A smooth and easy life, an uninterrupted enjoyment of the goods of Providence, full meals, soft raiment, well-furnished homes, the pleasures of sense, the feeling of security, the consciousness of wealth –these, and the like, if we are not careful, choke up the avenues of the soul, through which the light and breath of heaven might come to us. A hard life is alas! no certain method of becoming spiritually minded, but it is one of the means by which Almighty God makes us so.” (“Love, the One Thing Needful,” *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol.V, 23), Hugo, *Applied*, 104.

notes, Day wrote that the love of God implied “contempt of the world,” which she described as the “Opposite to love of God, like convex and concave go together cannot be separated. Must have right idea of this harsh world. Holy indifference. When we compare creatures to God, they are contemptible.”¹²⁵ Hugo justified this “contempt of the world” as a notion found in sources throughout Christian tradition. It was rooted in the idea that the love of God involved a certain “withdrawal” of love from the world, and the development of an indifference and detachment from the things of the world. Then, in comparison with the infinite excellence and “lovableness” of God, such worldly things would eventually become regarded as worthless and even contemptible.¹²⁶ St. Francis of Assisi was then held up as the embodiment of this contempt for the world. For while no one had ever loved the things of the world more, so too, Hugo declared, no one had ever lived a more mortified life than the Poverello.¹²⁷

But this contempt *of* the world, Hugo further pointed out, would inevitably bring contempt *from* the world.¹²⁸ Day illustrated this point in her notes when she wrote that, “Our enemy is not sin, it is the world. The world will oppose you.”¹²⁹ In short, respect and acceptance by the world should be regarded as a warning for a Christian -a sign that one was marching in tune with the world’s preference for creatures rather than God.

¹²⁵ Day’s notes became even more pointed on the subject: “Adulterers. Do you not know that friendship of this world is enmity with God. We are adulterers when we love the world. Fornicators, idolators...Jesus used even more vehement language: Unless a man hate his father, mother, sister, brother, children.”

¹²⁶ Hugo once again made clear that this contempt of the world did not imply that the things of the world are evil, but rather it is that precisely because they are good and desirable that they must be rejected otherwise there would be no merit in renouncing. Hugo suggested that this notion of contempt for the world could be found in scripture: 1Cor.7:29-31, 1 John 2:15-16, James 4:4, Gal.6:14, Phil. 3:7. Hugo, *Applied*, 110.

¹²⁷ Hugo, *Applied*, 111.

¹²⁸ Hugo quoted the nineteenth-century English Catholic spiritual writer and member of Newman’s Oratory, Frederick Faber (1814-1863): “To give ourselves up to the spiritual life is to put ourselves out of harmony with the world around us.” Faber, *Growth in Holiness* (Baltimore: John Murphy [1854]) ch. 10. Hugo, *Applied*, 115.

¹²⁹ Day wrote, “When world no longer persecutes the church, the church is no longer preaching the truth.” She attributed this quote to Newman.

Instead, a Christian should try to become indifferent to her “place” in the world, as well as to the opinions and respect of others.¹³⁰ Again, this was not because the world was evil, but because it was lacking –both inherently and historically- and therefore not focused on human nature’s supernatural final end.

Thursday, Conferences 17 and 18: “The Contempt of the World: Application”

Friday, Conference 19: “Forbidden Samples”

In the next three conferences (*Applied Christianity*, Part Three, chapter 3 and chapter 4), how this idea of contempt of the world could be practiced was fleshed out a little more with the distinguishing of four different types of samples: necessary, captivating, indifferent, and forbidden. According to Hugo, “necessary samples” were those things that a person could not completely live without -like food, clothing, and shelter- and therefore were things which could not completely be sown. However, he warned that one must not indulge in these created goods, but instead regard them as a farmer regarded the seeds he did not sow -as that much less he will harvest.¹³¹ Beyond such things as food and shelter, each person also had his or her own attraction to particular creatures, and thus each of person must sow or be pruned of these particular “captivating samples.”¹³² Hugo explained that “indifferent samples,” like imperfect actions, were not sinful in themselves, but their repeated use would inevitably cause a person to become attached to the sample, and would lead to the love of the sample for its

¹³⁰ Hugo wrote, paraphrasing B.W. Maturin, that human respect was synonymous with moral cowardice. *Applied*, 116.

¹³¹ Hugo, *Applied*, 117.

¹³² According to Hugo, being able to overcome the attachment to one’s captivating sample was particularly crucial to being filled with the love of God. For example, it was only after Francis of Assisi overcame his aversion to lepers that his conversion was complete. Hugo, *Applied*, 118.

own sake and thus ultimately to sin.¹³³ Hugo listed dancing, drinking, and smoking as examples of such samples which when used too often would hinder the love for God. As will be noted in a later chapter, in his *Catholic Worker* articles written during World War II, Hugo described participation in a just-war in similar terms. Finally, Hugo turned to “forbidden samples,” created goods whose misuse was always forbidden. Sexual intercourse was highlighted as a particular instance of a sample that was good, but the misuse of which was prohibited.¹³⁴

The point in making all of these distinctions was, in one sense, to further illustrate that the Christian life was more than simply avoiding sin while still enjoying the things of the world.¹³⁵ The Christian life was a supernatural life of holiness—a life of renunciation, charity, and prayer.¹³⁶ In another sense, though, Hugo’s account of the samples offered a very pastoral -non-rigorous- approach for a way to live a supernatural life of holiness. The retreat did not call for a blanket rejection of worldly pleasures out of some sense that they were all evil. Rather, the samples provided a constant and critical, yet flexible, means of discernment for what ordinary Christians encountered in American culture and society. It offered a way to evaluate American culture in light of their ultimate destiny, and to live in that light.

¹³³ Hugo pointed out that, therefore, a sample could only be indifferent in the abstract sense, for in the concrete the use of samples was always either good or bad depending upon one’s motive in using them. Hugo, *Applied*, 119.

¹³⁴ Hugo, *Applied*, 122.

¹³⁵ Hugo graphically illustrated this point, arguing that a man who loved his mother would never say “I have a new hammer, which I desire to amuse myself with. I am going to strike you, but I don’t want to kill you. You tell me when I have hit hard enough and often enough—so that you will not die!” Hugo argued that such an example is tantamount to a person saying, “I have the divine life in me by grace [state of grace]. Now I do not wish to destroy that life by mortal sin; but I wish to enjoy creatures, even though this means venial sins and imperfection.” Hugo, *Applied*, 123.

¹³⁶ Hugo, *Applied*, 130.

The Supreme Dominion of God

Friday, Conference 20: “The Supreme Dominion: God’s Intention”

Earlier in the retreat, Hugo had pointed out that the practice of the Folly of the Cross glorified the *essence* of God. In the twentieth conference (*Applied Christianity*, Part four, chapter 1), he suggested that the *action* of God was gloried through belief in “The Supreme Dominion of God.” Day described this as the belief that God governed “all things in the world that they may accomplish its purpose. God’s providence is universal... Nothing happens except thru the providence of God.”¹³⁷ According to Hugo, this notion of supreme dominion was essential, in that the Folly of Cross -the striving to die to the natural self- could never be fully completed by human effort alone.¹³⁸ Ultimately, God had to intervene and assist in this purification –we needed to be pruned by God. And this purification or pruning took place within creation over which God held supreme dominion.¹³⁹

This process of purification and its necessity was presented within the concept of “Doctrine of Assimilation” –the idea that all of creation came from God and tended by its nature to return to God.¹⁴⁰ But only human nature was able to return to God directly, all other creatures did so through humanity.¹⁴¹ And, as the rest of creation had to become

¹³⁷ Day further wrote “God’s providence is universal: birds of the air, grass of field, hairs of your head. Nothing too small. Every action in human life. All we need to know that it is universal. Very beautiful and consoling. It is efficacious, powerful. It is sweet. Does not force anyone. Does not destroy our freedom, intelligence.”

¹³⁸ Hugo argued that our self-love and unconscious imperfections prevented us from completely dying to our natural self on our own. Hugo, *Applied*, 141.

¹³⁹ Hugo, *Applied*, 141.

¹⁴⁰ In Day’s retreat notes she wrote that this “doctrine of assimilation” was from Aquinas.

¹⁴¹ Hugo illustrated the process of “assimilation” in this way: “Inorganic substances do not return to God immediately. They are gathered up into the vegetative order just above them; for plants nourish themselves on the various elements that are in the earth. Then plants, by providing nourishment to the animal kingdom, are gathered up, or assimilated, into this higher order of creatures. Finally, man uses all three of the lower orders of creatures to sustain himself.” Hugo, *Applied*, 142. Day described assimilation in *The Long Loneliness*, 248.

“assimilated” into humanity, humans had to ultimately be assimilated into God -to become “divinized”- in order to reach their supernatural final end. As Hugo explained, in order to possess the beatific vision, “we must be made like unto God.”¹⁴² Just as the rest of creation became transformed into something different through this process of assimilation, so too humans were transformed into “new creatures” as they were more fully assimilated into the divine through this purification.¹⁴³ Understood in this way, injustices, reproaches, humiliations, afflictions, and any other forms of suffering were understood as potential means by which God transformed us and brought about our sanctification.¹⁴⁴ God employed these means to purify us of all that obstructed us from our true happiness –a notion, Hugo noted, that was not foreign to the Christian tradition.¹⁴⁵ And in all this pruning, the retreatants were assured, the divine intention was always love -“Affliction is a sign of divine love.”¹⁴⁶ Therefore, just as one sowed attachments to created goods with joy, one should also try to understand this process of being pruned with a sense of gratitude and even joy.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Hugo, *Applied*, 142.

¹⁴³ Hugo continued, “In order that we may enter the divine companionship we must be wholly purged. We must be purged of the desires of the natural man (flesh and blood) with his merely human ambitions; we must be purged of the ‘corruption’ in us, that is, of egotism and the tendency to use creatures for ourselves.” Hugo, *Applied*, 143

¹⁴⁴ Hugo, *Applied*, 143.

¹⁴⁵ Hugo pointed out that St. John of the Cross compared the soul being sanctified in this way to a statue being carved by several workers: “So our neighbors have been selected by God as workmen to carve us into saints: one neighbor mortifies us in one way, another in another way; until we are wholly stripped of the Old Man and the life of Christ appears resplendent in us.” According to Hugo, the Spanish saint also compared this divine action on the soul to fire that consumes wood: “So the divine love also burns the impurities from us, blackens us by suffering, then transforms us into itself, i.e., unites us to itself.” Hugo, *Applied*, 145.

¹⁴⁶ On this point, Day wrote, “‘One reason why many souls do not become saints, no patience, generosity.’ St. John of Cross. We struggle and complain too much.”

¹⁴⁷ Hugo compared this divine pruning to a surgeon cutting out cancer from a body, and just as one would thank the surgeon for this work, so too one should thank God. Hugo, *Applied*, 151. He also cited scriptural support for this concept: Judith 8-10; Tobias 3:21, 12:13, 13:1; Ecclesiasticus 2:1-10; Hebrews 10:32-39; II Cor 12: 9. Hugo, *Applied*, 144.

Friday, Conference 21: “The Supreme Dominion in Persons: Blind Instruments”

The tools which God used to carry out this loving purification were further described in conference twenty-one (*Applied Christianity*, Part Four, chapter 2). Here, Hugo suggested that people were the primary instruments -blind instruments with freedom intact- that God employed in the pruning process.¹⁴⁸ He explained that such purification was total –occurring in all human faculties. Therefore these blind instruments were used in various ways: our lower appetites were pruned by physical afflictions,¹⁴⁹ our reason by encounters with human foolishness,¹⁵⁰ our memory through our disappointments in other people,¹⁵¹ and our will was pruned through the malice of others.¹⁵² While these evils or malice did not come from God, nevertheless, the supreme dominion of God could, and did, employ them for bringing about sanctification.¹⁵³

Friday, Conference 22: “The Supreme Dominion in Superiors: Obedience”

The human will, Hugo explained in the following conference (*Applied Christianity*, Part Four, chapter 3), was the final and most important aspect of human

¹⁴⁸ Hugo pointed out that for God was “closer to man than man is to himself,” and thus there was “no difficulty in penetrating to the root of human will and freedom.” While exactly how God used people as blind instruments without destroying their free will was ultimately a mystery, Hugo suggested that God could be understood as directing human actions through human “antecedents” - temperament, talents, sensibility, environment, background, opportunities- and, thus, arrange every situation, all the people in it, and all its moves for the good. Hugo, *Applied*, 149.

¹⁴⁹ These are “the desires of the flesh,” which, as a consequence of concupiscence, tend toward creatures. Hugo argued that God purified these desires through afflictions and sickness –for instance, if a person was vain, God may send sickness or old age to spoil her beauty. Hugo, *Applied*, 146.

¹⁵⁰ Hugo illustrated this idea by noting that while keeping the Israelites wandering in the desert for forty years seemed foolish, it was through that foolishness that God taught them about divine power. Hugo, *Applied*, 146.

¹⁵¹ Hugo argued that memory was the “storehouse” in which we kept the pleasures of the world, and therefore the memory had to be emptied of these pleasures in order to make room for the hope of heavenly joys. Hugo, *Applied*, 147.

¹⁵² So that we may be filled with charity, God prunes us of creaturely love by allowing us to be surrounded by the malice and hatred of others. And in our search for love, we (our will) only will find only hatred, and thus will begin to realize that true and lasting love can only be found in God. Hugo, *Applied*, 147.

¹⁵³ Hugo, *Applied*, 151.

nature which needed to be purified.¹⁵⁴ Our desire to love God was ultimately a desire to be in union with the divine will –our supernatural final end- and to attain this union our will first had to be pruned.¹⁵⁵ And, no doubt in an allusion to his own struggles with ecclesial authority, Hugo suggested that God’s “favorite tool” for pruning a person’s will was his or her superior.¹⁵⁶

Duty of the Present Moment

In *Applied Christianity*, a further account was provided as to how this union with the divine will could be achieved. According to Hugo, there were two main ways to reach such a union: directly through contemplative prayer, which marked the contemplative life, and indirectly through the “duty of the present moment” -what Caussade called “the sacrament of the moment”- which was more suited for the active life.¹⁵⁷ While making this distinction, Hugo was careful not to fall into the two-tiered account of the Christian life of which he was so critical. For, though these two kinds of union were distinct, they were not to be separated. The indirect union of the duty of present moment presupposed

¹⁵⁴ Again, Hugo turned to the tradition for support, quoting St. Alphonsus de Liguori as stating: “They who give to the Lord their worldly goods by alms-deeds, their honor by embracing contempt, and their body by mortification, by fasts and by works of penance, make only a partial consecration of themselves to Him. But he that offers to God the sacrifice of his own will consecrates all that he possesses to God’s glory, and can say: Lord, after having given to Thee my will, I have nothing more to present to Thee.” Liguori, *The True Spouse*, quoted in Hugo, *Applied*, 154.

¹⁵⁵ Hugo, *Applied*, 155. Hugo defined our will as “the rational appetite,” which desired what the mind presented to it as the good. Both love of God and love of creatures proceeded from what the will desired, therefore making the purification of the will necessary in order to unite it with God. Hugo, *Applied*, 170.

¹⁵⁶ To illustrate this point, Day wrote in her 1942 notes that if Catholics had followed Pius XI’s call for peace in 1937, “there would be no war today.” On the importance of such obedience, Hugo again quoted Liguori: “Obedience to rule and to the commands of superiors is the greatest sacrifice that a Christian can offer to God.” Hugo, *Applied*, 154.

¹⁵⁷ Pierre de Caussade, S.J. *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, ed. J. Ramiere, S.J., trans. E.J. Strickland (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1921). Hugo stated that Caussade’s book, “a classic on the subject,” which brought together the thought of St. Francis de Sales (*Treatise on The Love of God*) with that of “another important writer of self-abandonment” –and as will be noted later, a central figure in the Quietist controversy- the seventeenth-century French bishop Bossuet. Hugo, *Applied*, 165. Day did not record any of this in her retreat notes, though she did write about the duty of the present moment elsewhere, having been introduced to Caussade by Joseph McSorley. See, William Portier, “Dorothy Day and Her First Spiritual Director, Fr. Joseph McSorley, C.S.P.” *Houston Catholic Worker* 22 (September/October 2002), online edition.

the direct union of contemplative prayer –or as Hugo explained, “the active life is energized by prayer; and activity that is not so energized is supernaturally sterile.”¹⁵⁸ In other words, contemplative prayer could not be exiled or quarantined from the ordinary, “active” Christian life –the contemplative or mystical (or supernatural) was a necessary aspect of all Christian life.

Having taken its connection with contemplative prayer into account, Hugo presented the duty of the present moment as a viable way for his retreatants -ordinary, “active” Christians- to seek union with God. He described this “duty” as twofold, involving both any command that proceeded from “the signified will of God” and every event which emerged from “the divine will of good pleasure.”¹⁵⁹ In the “signified will of God,” the divine will was revealed explicitly through direct precepts such as the commandments, the counsels of the Gospels, the precepts of the Church, and “the duties of one’s state in life.”¹⁶⁰ Through obedience to these precepts and commands, a person could begin to unite her will with that of God. The “divine will of good pleasure,” a concept similar to that of “the supreme dominion of God,” was the notion that the will of God could be manifest in every event in creation. In this way, a person could unite her will with that of God “at every moment and in every occurrence” throughout her day-to-day life.¹⁶¹ While obedience was the virtue exercised in following the signified will, Hugo stated that self-abandonment must be exercised in response to divine will of good

¹⁵⁸ Hugo, *Applied*, 169.

¹⁵⁹ Hugo, *Applied*, 167.

¹⁶⁰ Hugo, *Applied*, 167.

¹⁶¹ Hugo further stated that, “These events may be sickness and afflictions, consolations, criticism, interior trials, etc., -in a word, all events whether they happen in the interior of the soul or exteriorly.” Hugo, *Applied*, 168.

pleasure. He defined this form of self-abandonment as a complete surrender of one's will to the divine will from one moment to the next.¹⁶²

For Hugo, then, the entire process of renunciation of attachments and desires for the natural -both by sowing and being pruned- came to a climax with this union of the human will with that of God. With this final renunciation of one's will, the person's transformation or assimilation became total –the correspondence with the grace needed to attain the supernatural final end made full.¹⁶³ This was the Folly of the Cross.

The Folly of the Cross

Saturday, Conference 23, 24, 25: "Almsgiving," "Mortification," "Death"

The final three conferences of the retreat (*Applied Christianity*, Part Five, chapters one, two, and four) left retreatants with some further tangible ways to the practice of the Folly of the Cross. Almsgiving, for instance, was described as the "sowing of external goods" by giving them to the poor –or as Day wrote, "Poor are porters of the rich. Give them your possessions. They will carry them into heaven for you."¹⁶⁴ As with all renunciation, Hugo argued that the measure to determine how much should be sown was found in the Paul's admonition, "He that sows sparingly reaps sparingly" (Romans

¹⁶² Interestingly, Hugo also made clear that there is no taint of Quietism in self-abandonment: "by obedience to the signified will of God, the soul actively does all that is required of it for salvation; self-abandonment is practiced on in regard to the will of good pleasure." Hugo, *Applied*, 168.

¹⁶³ Hugo summed up this idea of the duty of the present moment, and, in a sense, the entire the retreat, when he stated that: "This teaching shows us the significance of the supernatural motive and the reason for insisting on it. For the supernatural motive is the means of uniting our will to the divine will; and, as we see, it is only through this contact that we receive grace. By doing my present duty for the love of God I unite myself to His holy will and graces enter my soul. As we said when dealing explicitly with the subject of motives, the supernatural motive is the means by which the soul is nourished with grace; it is the point of contact at which grace enters the soul; it is the sole means of nourishing the supernatural life within us; it is the valve through which, alone, charity can enter into us. The practice of uniting one's self to the divine and keeping all motives supernatural thus finally resolves itself into the same thing." Hugo, *Applied*, 166.

¹⁶⁴ Hugo noted that such almsgiving perfectly fulfills the duty of charity –a withdrawal of love from creatures and then union with God. Hugo, *Applied*, 177.

8:9).¹⁶⁵ Physical mortifications were presented as the sowing of bodily goods, and again it was emphasized that these mortifications, both voluntary (sowing) and involuntary (pruning), should be practiced with a sense of joy.¹⁶⁶

The retreat ended with the conference: “The Sowing of Everything: Death.” In it, Hugo suggested that Christians should regularly think about death since their “everlasting destiny” depended on the condition of their soul at the moment of death.¹⁶⁷ Christians should prepare for death by performing each action as though it were their last. And they could even “rehearse for death” by practicing what in the Christian tradition has been called a “mystical death” – to become completely detached from the things of the world, particularly one’s own selfishness and egotism.¹⁶⁸ And in dying so completely to the world, Hugo concluded, one became united with Christ, for, “even the greatest mortification is of no value except when it is joined to Christ’s suffering and thereby made meritorious.”¹⁶⁹

Conclusion

As the previous chapter indicated, many of those who attended a Hugo-retreat did not like it. They heard its call for renunciation and dying to the natural self as rigorist and

¹⁶⁵ Hugo, *Applied*, 178.

¹⁶⁶ Hugo, *Applied*, 180. In her notes, Day described mortification of the eyes: “most sins enter thru eye. Eye should be inward. We have a divine guest” -the mortification of the ear: “not to listen to gossip. Practice interior solitude” -the mortification of the tongue: “Let your speech be yea, yea, nay, nay...Practice periods of silence and solitude” -the mortification of smell: “Put up with offensive odors. Do not be fastidious: Sow perfume” -the mortification of taste: “Eat what is set before you. Jesus’ rule” –and the mortification of one’s imagination: “thru sight, hearing, seat of hope.”

¹⁶⁷ Throughout the retreat, Hugo emphasized the point that “death changes nothing” in our spiritual quest, and therefore we must strive to live a supernatural life before death.

¹⁶⁸ Hugo, *Applied*, 193. Day described this death in her notes: “React to world, its joys, its sorrows, as dead men do. Indifferent. Mystical Death.”

¹⁶⁹ Moreover, Hugo continued, “as Christ the Head has suffered and died, so also must the members of His Mystical Body; the members cannot be separated from the Head. Thus, the soul must say: ‘With Christ I am nailed to the Cross.’ (Gal. 2:19) And when it strives to ‘put on Christ’ the soul must understand that, to do this, it must ‘know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable to His death.’ (Phil. 2:10).” Hugo, *Applied*, 194.

extremism. And the idea that the natural created things of the world should be given up as much as possible, struck many as denigrating to nature and smelling of Jansenism. Many smart, holy people understood the Hugo-retreat in these terms. The critiques of Hugo's theology that appeared in prominent American Catholic theological journals in the 1940s echoed many of these sentiments.

Yet this was not the way Hugo, and other retreat proponents like Dorothy Day, saw the retreat. For them it was “the bread of the strong.”¹⁷⁰ Its theology was not seen as Jansenist, but rather it was understood as a theology which recognized that human nature was distinct from both that which was sinful and that which was supernatural. Human nature was good, but it was inherently and historically insufficient. The retreat theology understood that while nature was distinct from the supernatural, it was not separated from it but intimately connected with its supernatural final end. This was the understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship at the heart of the retreat theology. And, therefore, the retreat was not regarded as rigorist, but instead it sought to take seriously the “practical implications” of the supernatural in the Christian life. The supernatural life of holiness, to which all Christians were called, entailed something much more than following the natural law and avoiding sin.

For Hugo, the retreat offered a way for ordinary, lay Christians to strive to live this supernatural life of holiness –to take seriously the implications of their supernatural final end- in the context of early twentieth-century American culture and society. The Hugo-retreat provided a means to discern what was holy and to renounce or transform what was not in light of the beatific vision. In this way, the Hugo-retreat can be understood as providing an ongoing and critical evaluation of what Christians

¹⁷⁰ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 263

encountered in American culture, not to reject it outright, but to assess it in light of their ultimate destiny and to chart how to negotiate the complexities of their lives in that light. Hugo saw himself as a spiritual director pastorally assisting his retreatants in their engagement with American society. Such an interpretation of the retreat not only challenges oft-repeated caricatures of Hugo's theology, but it enables some recognition of why it was so influential for those who embraced it and why it may still be important for American Catholicism today.

In response to the criticisms of the retreat, Hugo argued that its theology was rooted in the Christian tradition, and he justified its theological perspective by highlighting the various sources from the tradition which formed the theological foundation for the retreat. Many of these sources, including passages from Scripture, already emerged in the above presentation of the retreat: John of the Cross, Alphonsus de Liguori, Francis de Sales, Thomas Aquinas, Pierre de Caussade, and Francis of Assisi. It is such sources, particularly Ignatius of Loyola and his *Spiritual Exercises*, that will be looked at next.

CHAPTER III

THE THEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF THE RETREAT

For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in all that is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it; so that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.

-St. Ignatius of Loyola¹

In the December 1951 issue of *The Catholic Worker*, Dorothy Day included an obituary for Onesimus Lacouture, S.J., in which she noted that the originator of “the retreat” was born in a little town north of Montreal, called St. Ours, on April 13, 1881. And that he was the nineteenth of twenty-one children -his father had married twice. With this, she continued,

Doesn't that sound like the beginning of the life of a saint? Peter Maurin was one of twenty-three children. These two men who had most influence on my life (and so in a way on the life of the **Catholic Worker**) were both French peasants, of France and French Canada. They both knew the life of the land and of the city. Both were men of the poor.²

In his own account of the retreat, Hugo quoted one Quebec bishop as having declared that the Lacouture-retreat was the “most supernatural and the most efficacious awakening of

¹ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Elder Mullan (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 22.

² Dorothy Day, “Death of Father Onesimus Lacouture, S.J.” *The Catholic Worker* (December 1951):1.

Christian and priestly life ever recorded in the religious history of Canada.”³ Indeed, between April, 1931 and December, 1939, Lacouture led some 142 retreats to over 6,000 participants -mainly priests, but also several bishops and even the cardinal-archbishop of Quebec.⁴ Such numbers led Hugo to proclaim that, “No comparable work has ever been done by any Jesuit, either in this country or in Canada, and scarcely by any priest anywhere.”⁵ If nothing else, Lacouture and his retreat were not insignificant.

To understand the significance of the retreat, as well as Hugo’s appropriation of the retreat theology, its theological roots –specifically within the Ignatian spirituality of Lacouture- must be examined.⁶ This chapter, which is focused on the theological foundations of the retreat, will present three main points. First, that Lacouture was a Jesuit -a loyal son of St. Ignatius- and his retreat was an interpretation of the Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*. While Hugo turned to many other sources from the Christian tradition to justify and support the retreat theology, these were all secondary to the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. Therefore an understanding of the *Exercises* and how Lacouture interpreted them is necessary to understand the theology of the retreat. Second, it will be shown that Lacouture’s interpretation of Ignatius brought him

³ Hugo cited Bishop Philippe Desranleau of Sherbrooke, Quebec. Hugo, *Your Ways Are Not My Ways: The Radical Christianity of the Gospel, Volume.1*, (Pittsburgh: Encounter With Silence, 1986), 4. This book was published after Hugo’s death in 1984.

⁴ According to Merriman, the apostolic delegate to Canada, a dozen bishops, and even Cardinal Rodrigue Villeneuve, the Archbishop of Quebec (1931-1947) attended Lacouture retreats. Some Canadian bishops even reportedly made attendance mandatory for the priests in their dioceses. Brigid O’Shea Merriman, O.S.F., *Searching for Christ*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 136, fn16. Merriman also indicated that some laity may have attended Lacouture led retreats. Merriman’s material on the Lacouture retreat was not only from Hugo, but also from Anselme Longpré, *Un Mouvement spirituel au Québec (1931-1962): au retour à l’Evangile* (Montreal: Fides, 1976) and Jean-Claude Drolet, “Un Mouvement de spiritualité sacerdotale au Québec au XXe siècle (1931-1965): Le Lacouturisme,” *Canadian Catholic Historical Association: Study Sessions*, 1973 (Ottawa, 1974), 55-87.

⁵ Hugo went to write that “And yet the Society in Canada, celebrating an anniversary several years ago, and listing proudly all the great works they had undertaken, never mentioned this one!” Hugo, *A Sign of Contradiction: As the Master, So the Disciple* (published by author, 1947), 61.

⁶ Brigid O’Shea Merriman described the retreat as “one of the most noteworthy early twentieth-century developments of the Ignatian retreat in North America.” Merriman, *Searching*, 132.

into conflict with many of his contemporaries within the Society of Jesus. But, as Hugo pointed out, it also placed him within a tradition of Jesuit spiritual writers dating back to the sixteenth-century. This tradition will be identified in order to locate Lacouture and the retreat theology within the history of Jesuit spirituality. And finally, Hugo's own attempt to certify the theology of the retreat by turning to early modern spiritual writers – particularly sixteenth and seventeenth-century Jesuits- will be looked at within the context of other such efforts at *ressourcement* taking place in early twentieth-century Catholicism.

Onesimus Lacouture, S.J.

While Canadian by birth, Lacouture moved with his family to the United States when he was six years old.⁷ After graduating from Wayland High School in Massachusetts in 1900, Lacouture returned to Canada to attend College de l'Assumption near Montreal. And in 1902, he entered the Jesuit novitiate at Sault-aux-Recollets. After studying at the Jesuit seminary in Poughkeepsie, New York -St. Andrews-on-the-Hudson- and at Immaculate Conception Seminary in Montreal, Lacouture began four years of teaching Latin at St. Mary's College in Montreal, followed by another three years teaching children on a Jesuit mission in Alaska. It was during his time in Alaska -an experience which he remembered as being initially a miserable one- that Lacouture began to develop what would become the theology of retreat.⁸ In 1913, Lacouture left Alaska to resume his studies at Immaculate Conception and was ordained in 1916 on the feast of St. Ignatius. After various assignments, including as a chaplain in France during World War I and a Tertiary year in Belgium (with Raoul Plus), Lacouture was made pastor of another

⁷ All biographical information on Lacouture comes from Hugo's *A Sign of Contradiction*, chapter 5. Hugo did not provide any sources other than his own conversations with Lacouture.

⁸ Hugo, *Sign*, 55.

Jesuit Indian Mission –near Montreal- where he began to give conferences on the spiritual life to local religious communities. The popularity of these conferences led to an assignment on a Jesuit mission band in 1927. Lacouture was working on the mission band, headquartered at the Jesuit novitiate in Sault-aux-Recollets, when he led his first retreat to fifteen priests at the novitiate in 1931.

Lacouture led retreats in various locations throughout Canada and the United States until December, 1939, when his Jesuit superiors forbade him to continue and assigned him to posts on various missions.⁹ Lacouture eventually ended up on St. Regis mission in Hogansburg, New York in 1942, and died there in November, 1951. Day reported that the funeral Mass was said at St. Regis and that Lacouture's body was then driven back to Montreal in a procession thirty cars full of St. Regis Indians. She described it as "a small funeral, considering how great a man Fr. Lacouture was. Just a few years ago he was famous. Now he is anonymous."¹⁰ Day was the only person from the United States to attend the funeral; Hugo had not been allowed to attend.

The Origins of the Retreat

In *A Sign of Contradiction: As the Master, So the Disciple* (1947), Hugo offered an account of the history and origins of the Lacouture-retreat. This book was also Hugo's attempt to justify and certify the retreat theology, in the face of much criticism, by situating it within broader Christian tradition -particularly within Jesuit spirituality. And

⁹ According to Hugo, Lacouture spent a few years in Southern California, but lost his faculties to preach after his American superior disapproved of a copy of notes from a Lacouture retreat given to him by a young priest.

¹⁰ Dorothy Day, "Death of Father Onesimus Lacouture, S.J." *The Catholic Worker* (December 1951): 1. Day's quote was from someone she described as a friend of Lacouture's also at the funeral. She then quoted a passage from scripture that was central to the Lacouture-retreat and one that she saw as capturing a sense of Lacouture's life, "Unless the seed fall into the ground and die, itself remaineth alone. But if it dies it beareth much fruit." (John 12:24)

in this sense, *A Sign of Contradiction* can be regarded as Hugo's effort at *ressourcement* - an effort in many ways similar to that of other Catholic thinkers at the time.

According to Hugo's account, the origins of the retreat dated back to Lacouture's time in the Jesuit missions in Alaska (1910-1913). Lacouture had had a difficult time upon his arrival in Alaska due to the mission's rough conditions and the inhospitable reception from his fellow Jesuits.¹¹ These factors only increased the aspiring academic's disappointment in not being sent to a teaching position at a Jesuit university in Japan. And it was in such a despondent state, Hugo reported -having spent an entire day weeping in the woods- that Lacouture read a passage from *The Imitation of Christ*:

Every man naturally desireth to know, but what availeth knowledge without the fear of God? A meek husbandman that serveth God is more acceptable to Him than is a curious philosopher who, considering the course of heaven, willfully forgetteth himself...Let us therefore cease from the desire of such vain knowledge, for oft times is found therein great distraction and deceit of the enemy, whereby the soul is much hindered and withheld from the perfect and true love of God... The most high and the most profitable learning is this, that a man have a soothfast knowledge and a full despising of himself.¹²

According to Hugo, reading this passage was a moment of conversion for the young Jesuit -like Augustine's "*tolle lege, tolle lege*." His passion for "secular and natural learning" dried up, and a new passion began to rule his soul -Lacouture became a "new creature."¹³

While it was a passage from Thomas À Kempis that brought about Lacouture's initial "conversion," it was to the spiritual writings of Ignatius of Loyola that the young Jesuit quickly turned. Lacouture made Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* in the Alaskan

¹¹ Lacouture, a French-Canadain, was stationed to live with three Italian Jesuits. Hugo suggested that this was a source of tension for Lacouture. Hugo, *Sign*, 57.

¹² Thomas À Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, I, 2, in Hugo, *Sign*, 55.

¹³ "So does the grace of God work." Hugo stated, "And so it worked in the soul of Brother Lacouture, S.J., while still a scholastic and far off in the remote wilderness." Hugo, *Sign*, 55.

wilderness twice after his “conversion” experience.¹⁴ And it was in the midst of these wilderness retreats that what would later become “the retreat” began to gradually emerge. As Hugo explained it, one day Lacouture began to recognize the proper use of creatures, while on another day he came to understand the Folly of the Cross. It was in this manner, Hugo wrote, that “God was pleased to enlighten Onesimus.”¹⁵ Such truths were “imprinted so deeply on his soul” that they became the foundation of his entire life.¹⁶

Thus, it was while meditating on the Ignatian *Exercises* -trying to conform himself to “the mind of Christ”- that Lacouture began to develop his basic theological perspective. It was the *Exercises*, then, which formed the primary theological foundation of the Lacouture-retreat. This was particularly true of what Lacouture interpreted as Ignatius’s understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship -an understanding that soon became “the guiding principle of [Lacouture’s] life and the central point of his subsequent spiritual teaching.”¹⁷ Hugo argued, then, that whatever other theological influences came to bear on him, Lacouture was above all, “a true disciple of St. Ignatius” and clearly manifested the marks Ignatian spirituality.¹⁸ And so while Lacouture did not actually put together his famous retreat for another two decades, it was during his experience in Alaska reading the *Exercises* that its theological seeds were planted.¹⁹

¹⁴ Hugo described Lacouture setting out into the frozen wilderness each morning carrying only a walking stick and his copy of the *Exercises*, “After walking a few miles he would stop under a bunch of hemlocks, sit on a stump, and make his meditation...[at time even] in the midst of great storms and blizzards.” Hugo, *Sign*, 56.

¹⁵ Hugo, *Sign*, 57.

¹⁶ Hugo, *Sign*, 57.

¹⁷ Hugo, *Sign*, 57.

¹⁸ Hugo, *Sign*, 203.

¹⁹ In Hugo’s account, upon leaving Alaska, Lacouture returned to Montreal for four years of theological studies. These years were marked by tensions between Lacouture and many of his neo-Thomist professors, who “treated theology as a system of abstractions rather than as an actual approach to a living God.” Hugo, *Sign*, 58.

Reaction to the Lacouture-Retreat Within the Society of Jesus

As was noted earlier, Lacouture led retreats from 1931 until 1939 when his superiors abruptly ordered him to stop. According to Hugo, because of the stir that the retreat was making, Lacouture was asked by his Jesuit superiors to write down his retreat notes and submit them for review by a Jesuit censor in Rome. In 1943, four years after Lacouture had ceased giving retreats, the anonymous censor returned his report.²⁰

The censor opened his review of Lacouture's theology by stating that having "maturely and most diligently" examined the retreat notes, it was clear to him that "the work labors under many and grave faults (*vittis*), which so pervade and infect it that its emendation would be wholly impossible."²¹ He then went on to identify several of these "grave faults," most prominent of which were that Lacouture confused evangelical counsels and precepts of charity, and that he misrepresented the nature-supernatural relationship.²² All of this led the censor to conclude that ultimately Lacouture's version of the *Exercises* had incorrectly interpreted the thought of Ignatius, and that Lacouture had dismissed and even ridiculed "the deservedly proved writings of the commentators on the *Spiritual Exercises*."²³ As Hugo read this report, it was this final charge that was at the heart of Lacouture's problems in the Society of Jesus.

²⁰ Hugo printed the report, dated August 12, 1943, in *A Sign of Contradiction*, 67.

²¹ In reply to this charge, Hugo wrote, "Here is something amazing indeed –a situation worth looking into: that thirty-five hundred priests and bishops had been unable to detect these great and manifold errors! Only those who had not attended the retreat had the requisite perspicuity and critical acumen. Not a situation, surely, to inspire confidence in the many priests and members of the hierarchy in Canada, or the cross-section of the American clergy, who had made these retreats!" Hugo, *Sign*, 69. Throughout his responses to critics, Hugo had pointed out that none of the retreat's critics had ever actually attended a retreat.

²² Interestingly, the censor also noted that although "there is absent in these notes the comparison of sexual union with the Beatific Vision which we read with horror in others, nevertheless sexual life and marriage are the source of almost all his comparisons." Hugo, *Sign*, 67. For an account on the emergence of "nuptial theology" in early twentieth-century Catholic theology, particularly in the theology of de Lubac, see Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

²³ Hugo, *Sign*, 68. Hugo noted, therefore, that charges against Lacouture were not that he taught false doctrine, but that he abandoned the methods peculiar to the Society of Jesus. Hugo, *Sign*, 93.

According to Hugo, the censor was essentially criticizing Lacouture for suggesting that the supernatural final end of human nature had practical implications -the Folly of the Cross- for the “ordinary” Christian life.²⁴ For the recognition of these implications meant the recognition of a “continuity of the Christian life” –that their supernatural final end implied that all Christians, not just cloistered spiritual elites, were to live a supernatural life of holiness. Such continuity between nature and the supernatural was not embraced by the two-tiered, neo-Thomist theology underlying “the deservedly proved writings of the commentators on the *Spiritual Exercises*,” let alone the perspective of the censor himself. Thus, as Hugo saw things, the retreat theology was “attacked” for emphasizing the interior life, prayer, and mortification as essential practices of the Christian life. For its neo-Thomist critics, such claims were dangerous in that they would “tempt those in the active life to neglect their duty, by giving them doctrines that belong only to contemplatives.”²⁵ In short, Hugo charged the neo-Thomist critics with having quarantined the supernatural or mystical into the arena of a few cloistered spiritual elites. But it was a universal call to live a supernatural life of holiness -as a synthesis of the active and contemplative- that Lacouture recognized to be at the heart of the Ignatian *Exercises*.

Ignatius’s Exercises

St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) probably wrote his *Exercises* during the year he spent at Manresa (1522-1523) following his conversion.²⁶ Ignatius spent the time in

²⁴ Hugo, *Sign*, 132.

²⁵ Hugo, *Sign*, 132.

²⁶ Details on Ignatius and his writing the *Exercises* come from John O’Malley, “Early Jesuit Spirituality: Spain and Italy,” in *Christian Spirituality III*, ed. Louis Dupre and Don E. Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1989). O’Malley noted that most scholars believe that Ignatius was profoundly shaped by the *Imitation of Christ*. He also pointed out though, that in “its concepts, images, and directives, the book of the *Exercises*

mortification and prayer, during which he reported experiencing temptations and desolation of spirit, as well as profound mystical insights. The *Exercises* were based upon this spiritual journey and were written as a means to help others make a similar journey.²⁷ To this end, Ignatius divided the *Exercises* into four parts or “weeks”: the first of which focused on the purpose of life and “the consideration and contemplation on the sins;” the second on “the life of Christ our Lord up to Palm Sunday inclusively;” the third on “the Passion of Christ our Lord;” and the fourth and final week on “the Resurrection and Ascension, with the three Methods of Prayer.”²⁸ Ignatius also included a number of directives, guidelines for directors or “Annotations”, as well as various “rules” including one for “the discernment of spirits”²⁹ (*Spiritual Exercises*, 313-336), and another “for thinking with the Church” (*SE*, 352-370).³⁰ Ignatius soon began guiding some of his fellow students through his *Spiritual Exercises* during the years he studied theology in Spain and Paris (1524-1535). In 1548, eight years after Pope Paul III recognized the Society of Jesus, he officially approved the *Exercises*.

stands squarely within the Christian spiritual tradition, so much so that the search for its sources has consistently been frustrated by the very commonplace nature of its ideas.” O’Malley, 5.

²⁷ The *Exercises* have been described as “the systematized, de-mysticised quintessence of the process of Ignatius’s own conversion and purposeful change of life, and they were intended to work a similar change in others.” H. Outram Evennett, *The Spirit of the Counter Reformation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 32.

²⁸ Ignatius described this division in the Fourth Annotation. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Elder Mullan, S.J. trans (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978) [1909], 6.

²⁹ In these rules Ignatius provided direction concerning the movement of spiritual consolation and desolation. “It is here that we catch some glimpse of the author’s own spiritual journey and the temptations and confirmations in spiritual growth that he underwent.” O’Malley, 5. In the second of these rules, Ignatius wrote, “It belongs to God our Lord to give consolation to the soul without preceding cause, for it is the property of the Creator to enter, go out and cause movements in the soul, bringing it all into love of His Divine Majesty. I say without cause: without any previous sense or knowledge of any object through which such consolation would come, through one’s act of understanding and will.” (330)

³⁰ O’Malley noted that these rules were no doubt Ignatius’s response to Erasmus and the Protestant reformers, as they set the *Exercises* squarely within an ecclesiological context. He also pointed out that these rules “though often interpreted in a narrowly Roman Catholic sense...are susceptible of a less rigorist reading.” O’Malley, 5

John O'Malley, S.J. has highlighted two key features of the *Exercises*. One feature was its clear design, aimed at carrying out Ignatius's stated purpose: "to conquer oneself and to order one's life without being influenced in one's decision by any inordinate affection" (*SE*, 21). O'Malley noted that "with a laconic, understated style and with a mass of seemingly disparate elements," Ignatius constructed a course of discernment and preparation to respond in "a new way to an inner call for intimacy with the divine."³¹ A second feature of the *Exercises* was what O'Malley called its "nonprescriptive character" which was best embodied in Ignatius's advice that the director of the *Exercises*, "permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature with directly with his Creator and Lord" (*SE*, 15). According to O'Malley, Ignatius had great confidence in the direct inspiration of God and that the chief purpose of the *Exercises* was to "facilitate the reception of such inspiration and make it effective for the future direction of the retreatant's life."³² In other words, with his *Exercises*, Ignatius sought to open the retreatant to being led by God, and therefore he allowed for as much "liberty of spirit" as possible.³³ This quest for an almost absolute submission to God can be clearly seen in the famous prayer Ignatius placed at the conclusion of the section "Contemplation for Obtaining Divine Love" (*SE*, 234):

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. Dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.

³¹ O'Malley, 5.

³² O'Malley, 6.

³³ O'Malley summed up this somewhat paradoxical nature of the *Exercises*, "I would stress that the book, and with it Jesuit Spirituality, while being rationalistic in its language and arguments, is more profoundly concerned with right affectivity; while being logical in the organization of its parts, it is more profoundly psychological in its movement and design; and while being methodical in the aids it provides to prayer and spiritual discernment, it is more profoundly nonprescriptive in the outcome it foresees for the direct divine intervention that is its basic premise." O'Malley, 6.

Despite this clear orientation toward a contemplative, mystical, or supernatural spirituality of subordination to the divine will, Ignatius was also clear that he did not want *Exercises* to form members of a monastic or contemplative order. Instead, as O'Malley pointed out, the goal of the *Exercises* was an "election" or ordering of life "for the greater service and praise of God."³⁴ Service to the Church thus became an essential component of Ignatian spirituality -making it, in one sense, what has been called a "spirituality of service."³⁵ For Ignatius, the spirituality of the Jesuits was to be "ordered" to service or active ministry, and anything that would interfere with that ordering was to be removed.³⁶ The *Exercises* themselves consist of various meditations –active, discursive, mental prayer- in which the retreatant was an active participant.³⁷ One of Ignatius's aims was to get his Jesuits to use their imagination (their memory) to place themselves within the events of the life of Christ, or the reality of the divine order of the world.³⁸ They were then to use their mind (their understanding) to reflect on what they were imagining in order to bring their active life in accord with the divine will. And finally, the retreatant was to try to motivate his will to carry out the activities that God wanted him to undertake. In such a way, this method of discursive prayer in the *Exercises* became regarded as the foundation for the apostolic life of the Jesuits.³⁹

³⁴ O'Malley, 6.

³⁵ Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1964), 176-181.

³⁶ Ignatius's refusal to allow Jesuits to pray the Office in choir was an example of this "ordering," as time for prayer and ascetical practices was limited so as not to interfere with the Jesuit's ministry. O'Malley, 7.

³⁷ McKeon, Robert, "Introduction" in Jean Pierre Caussade, S.J., *A Treatise on Prayer from the Heart* trans. Robert McKeon (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1998), 10.

³⁸ McKeon, 10.

³⁹ According to O'Malley, Jesuit spirituality took on a "decidedly activist character" and promoted an "activist piety," O'Malley, 7. This piety can be understood was part of its historical context: "The spirituality of the Counter-Reformation sprang from a triple alliance, as it were, between the Tridentine clarification of the orthodox teaching on Grace and Justification, the practical urge of the day towards active works, and certain new developments in ascetical teaching and practice which promoted this outlook." Evennett, 32.

Ignatius's insistence that active service not be subordinated to hours spent in daily contemplative prayer also had roots in the historical context out of which he was writing - early sixteenth-century Spain. For Spanish Catholicism at the time was flooded with an indigenous mystical movement whose followers were known as *Alumbrados* or *Illuminati*.⁴⁰ Emerging from the previous century, this movement advocated a method of prayer consisting in "abandonment to the love God" which would place a person in union with God –it was claimed that such a method offered the safest and quickest means to achieve such a mystical union.⁴¹ For the *Alumbrados*, the Christian practices of vocal prayer, meditation, fasting, penances, rituals, images, and the vowed religious life in general were all considered to be hindrances and useless to achieving Christian perfection.⁴² And their critics perceived them as giving undue prominence to visions, raptures, and revelations.⁴³

A heightened vigilance brought about by the Spanish Inquisition led to St. Ignatius himself even being investigated for *Illuminati* tendencies, and even being forbidden from preaching for three years.⁴⁴ This event remained with Ignatius, and indeed

⁴⁰ Kieran Kavanaugh has pointed out that as Lutheranism quickly spread through Germany, the Inquisition sought to uncover it in Spain. Inquisitors suspected that Lutheranism and Illuminism were closely connected in that both emphasized internal religion at the expense of outward ceremony. In 1525, forty-eight *Illuminati* propositions were condemned. In 1559, the Inquisitor General, Valdes, published an extremely severe index of forbidden books which included works by Tauler, John of Avila, and Francisco de Osuna –mystical writers who greatly influenced later Jesuit writers such as Balthasar Alvarez and Louis Lallemant. Kieran Kavanaugh, "Spanish Sixteenth Century: Carmel And Surrounding Movements," in *Christian Spirituality III*, ed. Louis Dupre and Don E. Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 73.

⁴¹ Kavanaugh, "73.

⁴² Kavanaugh, 73.

⁴³ O'Malley, 15.

⁴⁴ Kavanaugh, 73.

for the rest of his life he was careful to distance himself from any sense of false mysticism.⁴⁵

The Two Wings of Jesuit Spirituality

All of this is to say that at the center of Ignatius's vision is a correlation of spirituality and ministry -a synthesis of the contemplative and the active. Avery Dulles, S.J. has called this "the practical mysticism of St. Ignatius." He observed that, sensitive as Ignatius was to the "interior leading of the Holy Spirit," the Spanish saint dedicated his energies "unswervingly to the service of the Church militant."⁴⁶ Throughout the four and a half centuries of their existence, Dulles continued, Jesuits have drawn inspiration from the practical mysticism of Ignatius –"his gift for synthesizing contemplation and action."⁴⁷

Not long after Ignatius's death, though, this synthesis began to break apart within Jesuit spirituality.⁴⁸ In 1609, a Spanish Jesuit, Alonso Rodriguez (1526-1617), published *Ejercicio de perfeccion y virtudes cristianas*. Rodriguez's book was extremely influential

⁴⁵ O'Malley suggested that Ignatius's exhortation that Jesuits "find God in all things" (*Constitutions* 288) and not just in quiet prayer or the solitude of their rooms could be seen as coming out of this fear of false mysticism. O'Malley, 15

⁴⁶ Dulles noted that this synthesis –"the practical mysticism of St. Ignatius"- has its roots squarely in the *Exercises*: "The rules laid down in the *Spiritual Exercises* on the discernment of spirits (313-36) and on the choice of a state of life (169-89) have given Jesuits a sense of the immediate presence of God, who calls each individual to union with Himself. The director of the *Exercises* is admonished to let 'the Creator and Lord in person communicate Himself to the devout soul' and 'permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature' (15). But this personal mysticism was balanced in the case of Ignatius by intense devotion to the institutional Church. For him it was axiomatic that 'In Christ our Lord, the bridegroom, and in His spouse the Church, only one Spirit holds sway, which governs and rules for the salvation of souls' (365). In the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* and in the 'Rules of Thinking with the Church' (352-70) he stressed the need for unquestioning obedience to the hierarchy and especially to the pope as vicar of Christ on earth. In the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius wrote affectionately of the 'hierarchical Church' (170, 353, 355) –a term which he apparently was the first to use." Avery Dulles, "Jesuits and Theology: Yesterday and Today" *Theological Studies* 52. 3 (September, 1991): 252.

⁴⁷ Dulles, 525.

⁴⁸ O'Malley pointed out that "the insistence on the practice of the virtues, the importance attached to sacramental confession of sins and the 'reform of life,' and the insistence in Ignatius's writings to his fellow Jesuits on the practice of obedience could easily lead, in less expansive minds, to moralism and a behavioralism that were far from the true intent of the saint." O'Malley, 14.

and quickly became a standard in Jesuit houses of formation.⁴⁹ Rodriguez emphasized Ignatius's more "activist" insistence that "love ought to manifest itself in deeds" (*Exercises*, 230). While appreciative of "higher forms of prayer," he insisted that any interior inspiration must be tested by the deeds it produced –if the deeds were virtuous, the inspiration was holy. Therefore, the highest states of "mystical" prayer were regarded as suspect and even unacceptable if they did not pass this test.⁵⁰ What was not seen as suspect –and therefore what was truly authentic- was the avoidance of sin, the observance of the duties of one's state in life, the adherence to the traditions of the Church, and respect for authority.⁵¹ Following Rodriguez's emphasis, O'Malley pointed out that a great deal of Jesuit spirituality soon became reduced to "conventional practicality."⁵² While Rodriguez did not represent the entirety of Jesuit spirituality, his influence and legacy did greatly de-emphasize the more mystical or supernatural tendencies of the *Exercises*.

By the seventeenth-century, as O'Malley noted, two "strains" in Jesuit spirituality could therefore be distinguished. From writers like Rodriguez and his disciples emerged a strain that could be described as "cautious and soberly ascetical, favorable almost exclusively to a methodical and even moralistic style of prayer, suspicious of contemplation and other higher forms of prayer as inimical to the active ministry to

⁴⁹ By 1626, there were seven Spanish editions of Rodriguez's book, as well as translations in English (partial, 1612), French (1617), Italian (1617). Latin (1621), German (1623), and Dutch (1626). The book continued to be printed well into the twentieth century, and has gone through three hundred editions in twenty-three languages. O'Malley, 14.

⁵⁰ O'Malley, 15.

⁵¹ O'Malley, 15.

⁵² O'Malley, 14. O'Malley highlighted Jerome Nadal, S.J. (1507-1580) as an example of an early disciple of Ignatius who had correctly articulated this spiritual synthesis. O'Malley, 7.

which the order was committed.”⁵³ While this was the strain or tendency which came to dominate Jesuit spirituality, a second strain also existed. This strain O’Malley described as “more expansive, more syncretistic within the broad tradition of Christian spirituality, and intent on developing the implications of the affective and even mystical elements in the life of the founder.”⁵⁴ Both strains remained operative within Jesuit spirituality well into the twentieth-century.

Following along the lines of O’Malley’s identification of these two strains, Dulles suggested that two major tendencies in Jesuit interpretations of the *Exercises* existed by “the age of Vatican I” –with adherents of each considering themselves faithful to the Ignatian sources.⁵⁵ Dulles argued that while there never existed a Jesuit theology *per se*, there was definitely a Jesuit spirituality rooted in the Ignatian *Exercises*.⁵⁶ One of the tendencies of this spirituality favored a preference for the “Rules of Thinking with the Church” (352-370) in the *Exercises* and certain passages from the *Constitutions* which stressed obedience to the hierarchical Church. According to Dulles, this tendency was generally made by certain late nineteenth and early twentieth-century neo-Thomist Jesuits. These Jesuits, continuing in the long tradition of Counter-Reformation dogmatics, based their theology on “natural reason and on the authority of the papal and conciliar documents.”⁵⁷ Like O’Malley’s first “strain,” this tendency was the dominant one through which the *Exercises* were read well into the early twentieth-century -the

⁵³ O’Malley asserted that this strain “ran the danger of reducing Loyola to a small-minded master of hackneyed precepts.” O’Malley, 17.

⁵⁴ O’Malley pointed out that this strain “bordered at times on the Illuminism that Loyola had so emphatically eschewed and wanted to exclude among his followers.” O’Malley, 17.

⁵⁵ Dulles, 531.

⁵⁶ Dulles, 525.

⁵⁷ Dulles included neo-Thomist Jesuits like Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio, Matteo Liberatore, Joseph Kleutgen, and Louis Billot -“the dominant theologian at the Gregorian University.” Dulles, 531.

“proved” tradition of Jesuit commentators that Lacouture was accused of ignoring can certainly be understood as working out of this tendency.

Dulles also highlighted a second tendency, out of favor in Rome at the time, which preferred “The Rules for the Discernment of Spirits” (313-336) and the more mystical aspects of Ignatius. Jesuits operating out of this tendency “sought to connect theology more intimately with prayer and the experience of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁸ Lacouture’s reading of the *Exercises* can be seen as operating out of this tendency.

Lacouture’s Interpretation of Ignatius

1. The Structure of the Retreat

As noted earlier, Lacouture’s retreat, or at least the version most commonly preached -and the version Hugo laid out in *Applied Christianity*- focused primarily on the first week of the *Exercises*, though he seemed to have planned other retreats focusing on the remaining three weeks. The reason Lacouture gave Hugo for this emphasis was that the truths learned in this first week through the consideration and contemplation on the sins were crucial and necessary before any consideration of the life of Christ could be made.⁵⁹ Indeed, these lessons were so necessary, especially in the early twentieth-century, Lacouture felt that not only did they warrant a full week-long retreat, but that that retreat could be -and generally should be- made several times.⁶⁰ Lacouture felt empowered to structure his retreat this way and still remain true to *Exercises* because of

⁵⁸ Included here were George Tyrrell, Henri Bremond, and Pierre Rousselot. Dulles, 531.

⁵⁹ Hugo explained that for Lacouture this focus on sin was necessary at the present time because of the prevalence of a pagan mentality, a spirit of naturalism among Catholics. Therefore, retreatants must be led to, “meditate seriously on the fundamental maxims and rules of the Christian mentality, in order that they may have *the mind of Christ*; then, and only then, will they be ready to study the life of Christ with some insight.” Hugo, *Sign*, 96.

⁶⁰ According to Hugo, Lacouture’s reason for this recommendation was that he did not consider one retreat enough for “fully assimilating all the elementary truths it contains.” With only one retreat, the retreatant was still “insufficiently disposed to go to the study of Our Lord’s life.” Hugo, *Sign*, 97.

the “Annotations” that Ignatius included for guidance in leading the *Exercises*.⁶¹ For instance, he pointed to Annotation 18 where Ignatius recommended that,

...should he who is giving the *Exercises* observe that he who is receiving them has little ability or little natural capacity, from whom not much fruit is to be hoped, it is more expedient to give him some of these easy *Exercises*, until he confesses his sins. Then let him be given some Examens of Conscience and some method of going to Confession oftener than was his custom, in order to preserve what he has gained, but let him not go on into the matter of the Election, or into any other *Exercises* that are outside the First Week...⁶²

With such passages as justification, Hugo contended that while Lacouture could be criticized for focusing so much attention on the first week, he could not be said to have strayed from Ignatius’s thinking.⁶³ For it seemed clear that Ignatius allowed such freedom for the director.

Though he may have been within Ignatius’s proscriptions for structuring the retreat, Lacouture was not in line with most of his fellow Jesuit retreat leaders. For, as Hugo noted, a not uncommon practice among Jesuit retreat leaders at the time was to lead a retreatant through the entire four weeks of the *Exercises* over the course of just one week, or sometimes even less. He suggested that one of the reasons why the anonymous censor and others had charged Lacouture with departing from tradition of Jesuit interpretation of the *Exercises* was that he ignored this practice -“and of course his persistent policy of ignoring it lends color to their charge.”⁶⁴ But it was this practice,

⁶¹ At the beginning of the *Exercises*, before the opening of the first week, these twenty Annotations were offered, in order, Ignatius wrote, “to give some understanding of the spiritual exercises which follow, and to enable him who is to give and him who is to receive them to help themselves.” Mullan, 4. According to Hugo, in these Annotations Lacouture read Ignatius as providing a certain amount of freedom to the director of the *Exercises* in how he structured them. Hugo, *Sign*, 97.

⁶² Mullan, 16. Hugo also pointed out Lacouture turned to Annotation 4 for similar support. Hugo, *Sign*, 97.

⁶³ Hugo stated that Lacouture had indeed obeyed Ignatius both in spirit and according to the letter, “whereas his brethren...are really ignoring the prescriptions of St. Ignatius and are giving a rigid, material obedience to a custom that has grown up contrary to the mind of the saint.” Hugo, *Sign*, 97.

⁶⁴ Hugo, *Sign*, 95.

Hugo contended, not Lacouture's concentration on the first week of the *Exercises*, that was contrary to the mind of Ignatius.⁶⁵

While the structure of his retreat may have broken with what was at the time a common Jesuit practice, Hugo argued that it was Lacouture's reading of Ignatius's theology that truly separated him from the "deservedly proved writings of the commentators" on the *Exercises*. And in this case, again, it was Lacouture who was seen as being in line with Ignatius's thought.

2. "Principle and Foundation"

For Lacouture, the essential theological perspective of the first week, and indeed of all of the *Exercises*, was found in the "Principle and Foundation" with which Ignatius opened the first week. Ignatius's "Principle and Foundation," Hugo declared, was also the "Principle and Foundation of Father Lacouture's Exercises."⁶⁶ In fact, Lacouture focused over half his retreat -sixteen conferences over four days- upon the theological truths found in the four-sentence "Principle." For Lacouture, the importance of the "Principle" lay in the two fundamental theological truths which it presented: that humanity had a distinct supernatural purpose corresponding to its supernatural final end, and that as a direct consequence of that purpose detachment from the created goods of

⁶⁵Hugo argued that such a practice made a "hodge-podge" of a retreat: "In St. Ignatius' plan the weeks are divided logically, and there is a visible unity dominating the whole design. Each week marks off a particular subject matter as its own. But when the meditations of all four weeks are thrown together in a few days, the divisions are obscured, the plan is lost, the unity disappears; and the retreat is simply a jumble of conferences without any discernible connection -unless one has privately studied the *Exercises*. So that, in fact, preaching the *Exercises*, as this duty is materialistically interpreted, means simply that the preacher rifles the treasures of the *Exercises* to put together a series of conferences of his own, a procedure that does not carry out the intent of St. Ignatius or accomplish the purpose that the *Exercises*, rightly handled, are capable of realizing. No doubt, the saint, in the passage quoted above [Annotation 18], allows the First Week to be shortened as well as lengthened where circumstances suggest such a policy. But it would be shortened in favor of well-disposed or advanced souls. In the case of most groups -of beginners, imperfect souls, or those who are unmistakably worldlings- it would rather have to be lengthened. And, in any case, there is nothing in St. Ignatius' words to suggest that all the *Exercises* may be compressed with profit to a retreat of a few days." Hugo, *Sign*, 98.

⁶⁶ Hugo, *Sign*, 203.

this world became necessary. Lacouture regarded these as the basis for the *Exercises*. These Ignatian truths were at the heart of Lacouture's spirituality and, as Hugo described, they became "a rock that steadied him and a beacon that guided him in the midst of the doctrinal difficulties proposed and the numerous criticisms fiercely made."⁶⁷ A closer examination of these two truths is therefore in order.

a. Nature and the Supernatural

In the opening lines of the "Principle," Ignatius identified the final end of human nature, an end that in turn also determined the means by which that end could be attained:

Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.

And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he is created.⁶⁸

When Ignatius stated that a person must praise, reverence and serve God, and by this means to save his soul, he was understood as affirming that a person's final end was to save his or her soul. And this was a final end that was indeed supernatural, for to save one's soul was "to enter into supernatural happiness with God."⁶⁹ By identifying this supernatural final end, Lacouture understood Ignatius as having made explicit the fact

⁶⁷ Hugo, *Sign*, 203.

⁶⁸ Mullan, 22. Hugo explained that the "Principle" was dealing in fact with the "End of Man, the final cause of his life" and the directive principle of all of his activity was made clear in its description of that end: primarily, to glorify God, by praising, reverencing and serving Him, and secondarily, by so doing, to save our souls. These were the primary and secondary ends of creation. In the *Exercises*, all the subsequent glorious meditations –The Reign of Christ, the Two Standards, the Three Classes of Men- thus referred explicitly to these truths stated in the "Principle." Indeed, he continued, all these *Exercises* together "'constitute' the Foundation that supports the entirety of this spiritual edifice" established in the "Principle." Hugo, *Sign*, 110.

⁶⁹ Hugo reiterated the retreat's claim that the reason God created the world was primarily to manifest God's glory. Secondarily, it was to communicate God's life and happiness to humanity –a happiness that was supernatural. He argued that Ignatius had both these purposes in mind: first when he spoke of praising, reverencing, and serving God; and second when he spoke of saving one's soul. And, Hugo argued, the latter offered "the key to his meaning, as well as the key to the whole Christian life: our supernatural destiny." Hugo, *Sign*, 110.

that human nature had a final end distinct, but not separate, from itself -a distinction he regarded as key to properly interpreting the *Exercises*.⁷⁰

Having established that human nature had a supernatural final end distinct but not separate from itself, Ignatius was then read as indicating the means by which that final end could be attained.⁷¹ Because humanity's final end was supernatural, humanity's purpose –“to praise, reverence and serve God”- was therefore also supernatural. Thus, as Hugo indicated, human nature was called to praise, reverence and serve God, not according to “the dictates of reason or of a merely natural religion,” but because that purpose was supernatural -in correspondence with its supernatural final end.⁷² This correspondence of purpose and final end was what Hugo identified as the continuity in the Christian life -the practical implications of the supernatural final end. And he explained this continuity in a way that –as will be later argued- closely resembled the arguments de Lubac was making at the same time in France. According to Hugo,

Man was not merely created and left in the order of nature; he was re-created and raised to the order of grace. Man does not live and never has lived, in the state of nature. The state of pure nature is a hypothesis, an abstraction. Although in his present state man retains his human nature and all his natural activity, *he does not retain his purely human or purely natural end: this has been replaced by a supernatural end*. Now an end determines the means that are needed to attain it...So, the fact that man has a supernatural end, determines that the means for attaining this end must also be supernatural. A natural end of man –which does not exist, having been replaced by another- cannot be the Principle and Foundation for Christian living, which is an immediate and urgent duty.⁷³

With this understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship and its “implications” made clear in the opening “Principle,” Hugo described Lacouture as having read the rest

⁷⁰ Hugo, *Sign*, 104.

⁷¹ Hugo asserted that while to praise, reverence and serve in themselves could be understood as describing activities that were either natural or the supernatural –“immediately of the natural order, analogically and supereminently of the supernatural order”- to save one's soul could only be understood as a supernatural action. Hugo, *Sign*, 110.

⁷² Hugo, *Sign*, 104.

⁷³ Hugo, *Sign*, 104.

of the *Exercises* as an effort to help retreatants live out their supernatural purpose –a supernatural life directed toward their supernatural final end.⁷⁴ In short, Lacouture read the *Exercises* as training and guidance for living a life of holiness –the life of a saint. And so, while Lacouture may indeed have been inconsistent with “deservedly proved writings” of Jesuit commentators, Hugo contended that by thus understanding the nature-supernatural relationship and its implications found in the “Principle,” Lacouture was in fact in line with the thinking of St. Ignatius himself.⁷⁵

b. Detachment

The second fundamental truth that Lacouture recognized in the “Principle” was the necessity of detachment from the things of the world. Having already established the supernatural final end of human nature, as well as the supernatural means for attaining that end, Ignatius articulated the proper understanding of use of created goods that resulted,

And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he is created.

From this it follows that man is to use them as much as they help him on to his end, and ought to rid himself of them so far as they hinder him as to it.

For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in all that is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it; so that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.⁷⁶

For Lacouture, this passage clearly indicated that the saint recognized that Christian detachment must be more than simply detachment from sin, but also detachment from

⁷⁴ Hugo, *Sign*, 107.

⁷⁵ Hugo, *Sign*, 107.

⁷⁶ Mullan, 22.

created goods –including oneself.⁷⁷ For these goods were made by God to assist human beings in pursuing their final end, and therefore should be used only in so far as they helped in this end and renounced when they became a hindrance. Indeed, Hugo observed, the “Principle” clearly required the renunciation of a great deal more than sin, for all the things from which Ignatius mentioned were good: riches, health, honor, life.⁷⁸ The desire for riches or health or honor or even life was not sinful, yet for Ignatius one’s desires for them became “disordered tendencies” when they were no longer properly used as means rather than ends in themselves.⁷⁹ These motives or desires became disordered, Hugo explained, because they were motivated by “self-love, or by affection for some merely natural good, rather than by the love of God.”⁸⁰

In Ignatius’s “Principle,” therefore, sin was not the primary reason for renunciation and detachment, but rather, in Hugo’s words, “the nothingness of the creature before the Creator” and “the transcendence of nature by the supernatural” to which humanity was raised by grace.”⁸¹ In this sense, Ignatius was read as clearly calling

⁷⁷ Hugo, *Sign*, 117.

⁷⁸ Hugo, *Sign*, 117.

⁷⁹ Hugo pointed out that Ignatius made similar descriptions of the use of created goods throughout the *Exercises*. For instance, in the “Prelude for Making Election” (169) in the Second Week, Ignatius discussed choosing a state of life. He wrote that “In every good election, as far as depends on us, the eye of our intention ought to be simple, only looking at what we are created for, namely, the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of our soul. And so I ought to choose whatever I do, that it may help me for the end for which I am created, not ordering or bringing the end to the means, but the means to the end: as it happens that many choose first to marry –which is a means- and secondarily to serve God our Lord in married life – which service of God is the end. So, too, there are others who first want to have benefices, and then to serve God in them. *So that those do not go straight to God, but want God to come straight to their disordered tendencies, and consequently they make a means of the end, and an end of the means.* So that what they had to take first, they take last; because first we have to set as our aim the wanting to serve God, –which is the end,- and secondarily, to take a benefice, or to marry, if it is more suitable to us, –which is the means for the end. So, nothing ought to move me to take such means or to deprive myself of them, except only the service and praise of God our Lord and the eternal salvation of my soul.” Mullan, 102 [italics added]. Hugo identified other examples of this idea of detachment in the *Exercises*: The Sixteenth Annotation (16), a Note attached to the Fourth Day of the Second Week (157), the First Rule (338) and the Fifth Rule “In the Ministry of Distributing Alms” (342). Hugo, *Sign*, 117.

⁸⁰ Hugo, *Sign*, 118.

⁸¹ Hugo, *Sign*, 194.

his Jesuits to renounce the “merely natural” foremost out of a motive or desire for the supereminence of the supernatural.⁸²

Other Jesuit Readings of the “Principle”

As with his structuring of the retreat, Hugo acknowledged that Lacouture’s interpretation of the “Principle and Foundation” was not common among Jesuit commentators at the time. For instance, he highlighted the work of a French Jesuit named H. Pinard de la Boulaye, S.J., who had written extensively on the *Exercises* and its interpretation. Boulaye had identified three ways in which the “Principle” could have been read. One way, he suggested, was to read Ignatius as taking for his point of departure “some truths of natural philosophy” and therefore as intending to base the Christian life “primarily on rational evidence.”⁸³ Another way was to understand that Ignatius took his “fundamental truth” from the Christian faith and placed his theology “on the supernatural plane.”⁸⁴ A third way argued that in the “Principle,” Ignatius laid down as the basis of the *Exercises* “the first certain truths of reason regarding the origin and end of man.”⁸⁵ These truths, Boulaye explained, were also confirmed by faith or “what amounts to the same thing, the first truths of faith on these essential points, truths also immediately justifiable by reason.”⁸⁶ Boulaye, it was noted, only provided arguments in favor of the first and third interpretations, and asserted that the third reading was

⁸² Again, Hugo affirmed this idea of the renunciation of attachments to the natural: “nature is in the first place to be mortified –and annihilated- quite apart from all sin, [but] because it is the design of God that Christians should live on the supernatural plane.” And this renunciation was of attachments and motives, and therefore accomplished “in the moral (not the ontological) order.” Hugo, *Sign*, 193.

⁸³ H. Pinard de la Boulaye, S.J., *Exercices spirituels selon la methode de saint Ignace*, (Paris, 1944), 45-47, translated in Hugo, *Sign*, 105

⁸⁴ Hugo, *Sign*, 106.

⁸⁵ Hugo, *Sign*, 106.

⁸⁶ Hugo, *Sign*, 106.

indeed the “best founded.”⁸⁷ But it was the second interpretation, Hugo suggested, that was the one closest to that of Lacouture.

Hugo saw Boulaye as representing the tradition of Jesuit commentators who interpreted the “Principle” as simply containing truths which could be known from reason alone, and only later (if at all) confirmed by faith. He argued that such commentators did not take into account, “the specifically supernatural character of the Christian life, its supernatural end, the supernatural means necessary to realize this end.”⁸⁸ Nor did they recognize the practical implications of that the supernatural end on the Christian life.

Hugo also pointed to another commentator, Joseph Rickaby, S.J., an English Jesuit who offered a similar reading of the “Principle.” According to Rickaby,

On reading the above [Principle and Foundation] your natural impulse, and impulse which years of acquaintance will not obviate, is to cry *Impossible!*...No man is bound to the impossible. And yet this Principle and Foundation *follows logically from a truth of natural reason*, the existence of God, our Creator and Lord (Rom.1,20; Conc. Vat. Sess.3, Can. I. *de revelatione*). *It is a theory of natural religion*. But nature of itself, in our present state, cannot carry into effect all its own prescriptions, even of commandment, still less of counsel, without the aid of grace. To the grace of God in Christ we must look for the realization of this theory.⁸⁹

Hugo read Rickaby as regarding the “Principle” as a theory of natural religion: “Grace is mentioned, but not its specifically supernatural character; from this account we might

⁸⁷ Hugo, *Sign*, 106.

⁸⁸ Hugo, *Sign*, 106.

⁸⁹ Joseph Rickaby, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola: Spanish and English, with a Continuous Commentary*, (London, Burns Oates, 1915), 19. Hugo provided other examples of Jesuit commentaries on the *Exercises* that made similar emphases. For instance, Pierre Bouvier, S.J., had argued that “the Foundation supposes neither our elevation to the supernatural order, nor the degradation and disorder resulting from the Fall, nor the teachings, examples, and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.” Pierre Bouvier, S.J. *L’interprétation authentique de la Méditation fondamentale dans les Exercices spirituels de saint Ignace*, (Bourges, 1922), 77, [translated in Hugo, *Sign*, 111]. Other examples included: Aloysius Belleccio, S.J., *Spiritual Exercises, According to the Method of St. Ignatius Loyola*, trans. Wm. Hutch, (London: Burns Oates, 1883), Hugo Hunter, S.J., *Sketches for the Exercises of an Eight Days’ Retreat*, trans. John B. Kokenge, S.J. (St. Louis: Herder, 1919). Hugo *Sign*, 103.

easily infer that the only function of grace is to help nature to keep the commandments of the natural law.”⁹⁰ Any acknowledgement of *gratia elevans* –the grace that elevated us above our nature- was left out. In other words, human nature’s purpose to praise, reverence and serve God was portrayed as a duty “already enjoined by reason” -simply part of its creature-hood. These actions were therefore regarded as natural actions. Such a portrayal, Hugo explained, seemed to suggest that Christianity was “a merely natural religion” and that human nature had only a natural end.⁹¹

For Hugo, such interpretations of the “Principle,” which he saw as avoiding any mention of the supernatural, stemmed from a concern for apologetics. And while these arguments may indeed have had some of apologetic value against the irreligious, he contended that they were of ‘little value in showing a Christian his supernatural duties as a son of God.’⁹² In short, they did not seek to inspire holiness. Hugo (and Lacouture) read these commentators as not sufficiently taking into account the implications that human nature’s supernatural final end –the elevation by grace that end presupposed- had for the Christian life.⁹³

According to Hugo, the result of this interpretation –understanding our purpose to praise, reverence and serve God as natural -having derived from our creation rather than our elevation- was to set a tone for the rest of the *Exercises* to be read as “a merely natural standard of conduct,” rather than tool for inspiring holiness. He argued that the problem was not so much that these Jesuits denied the existence of the supernatural, but

⁹⁰ Hugo, *Sign*, 103.

⁹¹ Hugo stated that “No doubt, natural religion is all well and good in its own order. God *might* have been content with it. But in fact He was not. He raised us to a supernatural plane, has given us, in His grace, a share in His own divine life, has placed before us the privilege of supernatural union with Himself, and requires of us supernatural holiness as the condition of realizing this privilege.” Hugo, *Sign*, 102.

⁹² Hugo, *Sign*, 102.

⁹³ Hugo, *Sign*, 101.

rather that they ignored humanity's elevation by grace (*gratia elevans*) to the supernatural as "the practical determinant" of its supernatural final end and therefore of the kind of life which lead to that end.⁹⁴ As Hugo explained,

Man's supernatural elevation must not merely be dutifully mentioned and praised; it must be taken as the decisive fact in determining the meaning of the Christian life and the manner of living it. It is man's elevation to grace that fixes his end –a supernatural end; and this end in turn prescribes that the praise, reverence, and service due to God must be performed in the supernatural order: -otherwise there is no proportion between end and means. To do less than is to misrepresent the Christian life.⁹⁵

Thus by not emphasizing the supernatural, these Jesuit commentators were not only relegating the *Exercises* to the "merely natural," but they were also ignoring the basic distinction underlying all of Christianity –the distinction between nature and the supernatural.⁹⁶ For, the most wonderful thing about a Christian was not that "he was created in the order of nature, but that he was *re-created* in the order of grace."⁹⁷ And it was this "second creation" which determined –"in God's design"- the supernatural final end. It was this nature-supernatural distinction and its implications that Lacouture and Hugo recognized as so central to Ignatius's "Principle" and the *Exercises*.

⁹⁴ Hugo pointed out that even though the commentators may mention the supernatural order, they failed to make it "the decisive function in our lives, the origin of our special duties as Christians, the basis of all spiritual effort and conduct." They missed the fact that the "determinant" of one's conduct was not the fact that one was created, but rather that one was elevated by grace –"the responsibilities of a prince are higher than those of a peasant. So the duties of a child of God are higher, holier, and more urgent than those of a child of nature." Hugo, *Sign*, 115.

⁹⁵ Hugo, *Sign*, 105.

⁹⁶ Hugo pointed out that "the essential purpose of Christianity is to elevate man, by the grace of Jesus Christ, to participate supernaturally in the life of the Trinity." Hugo, *Sign*, 105.

⁹⁷ Hugo, *Sign*, 104.

Hugo's Appeal to Tradition

Lacouture saw the theology in his retreat, therefore, as firmly rooted in Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*. The Folly of Cross -the dying to one's natural self in order to live a supernatural life- emerged out of the understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship and detachment he found in the *Exercises*, particularly in the "Principle and Foundation." As suggested earlier, Lacouture's reading clearly fell into one of the strains or tendencies through which the *Exercises* have been read -a tendency identified by both O'Malley and Dulles as having a long history in Jesuit spiritual writing. Hugo seemed to have recognized something of this fact -a recognition which was significant in itself- and he sought to justify and certify the theology in the Lacouture-retreat by looking to the tradition of this tendency within Jesuit history. In short, Hugo identified this often overlooked tradition in the history of Jesuit spirituality and attempted to locate Lacouture within it.

Balthazar Alvarez, S.J. (1533-1580)

After looking for continuity with St. Ignatius himself, Hugo turned to another sixteenth-century Spanish Jesuit for support -Balthazar Alvarez, S.J. In 1558, Alvarez became the confessor and spiritual director of Teresa of Avila, an assignment that introduced the twenty-five year old Jesuit to the methods of contemplative or mystical prayer which he had not encountered during his years of formation.⁹⁸ While at first opposing the practice of such forms of prayer, Alvarez gradually recognized their significance and soon began to encourage the future saint to continue in them. In 1567, Alvarez himself began to practice contemplative prayer -a form of silent prayer in which

⁹⁸ Pierre Pourrat, S.S., *Christian Spirituality vol. III: From the Renaissance to Jansenism*, trans. W.H. Mitchell (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd. 1926), 113.

one placed oneself in the presence of God and remained in this state of quiet repose before the divine- and eventually even reported reaching certain mystical states.⁹⁹ He also began teaching this type of prayer to others within the Society.¹⁰⁰

Such prayer, though, was seen as out of step with the method of discursive meditative prayer which dominated the *Exercises* and Jesuit spirituality at the time. From about 1573 on, Alvarez was repeatedly scrutinized by his Jesuit superiors who were suspicious that he was teaching a form of prayer that deviated from the *Exercises*.¹⁰¹ Alvarez's responses to this scrutiny did not satisfy Everard Mercurian S.J., the superior general of the Society (1573-1581), and in 1577, Alvarez was ordered to cease teaching such methods of prayer -an order to which he quickly submitted.¹⁰² According to O'Malley, Mercurian's fear was that the form of prayer Alvarez was teaching would turn Jesuits away from the active apostolate.¹⁰³ Mercurian was also wary of the still lingering accusations linking St. Ignatius with the *Alumbrados*.¹⁰⁴ In 1578, Mercurian even banned contemplative practices from the Society all together.¹⁰⁵ The discursive method of prayer, advocated by Rodriguez and others, was affirmed as *the* Jesuit method of prayer. It should be noted that Mercurian's successor, Claudio Aquaviva, S.J. (1581-1606), lifted the ban in 1599 and tried to recover and give life to the more mystical strain in Ignatian

⁹⁹ O'Malley noted that for Alvarez this resulted in an "interior sense of the corporeal presence of the humility of Christ. This experiential and mystical sense of Christ's presence within was at the heart of his teaching." O'Malley, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Pourrat, 115. Alvarez was the rector and master of novices several times throughout his life, and in the last year of his life was even named superior of the Aragon province. O'Malley, 16.

¹⁰¹ O'Malley, 16.

¹⁰² O'Malley, 16.

¹⁰³ O'Malley, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Pourrat observed, "Did not prudence counsel this? There were so many and such dangerous errors about prayer, and they were to be met with...at every turn! Lastly the Inquisition was on the watch, and woe to anyone whom it set upon!" Pourrat, 118.

¹⁰⁵ McKeon, 12. According to Pourrat, "The religious of the society were bound still more firmly to the method of prayer of the *Exercises*, which many of them appeared to disdain. They were also forbidden to read certain mystics, and especially Tauler and Harphius, without special authorization." Pourrat, 118.

spirituality -as did the future saint, Robert Bellarmine, S.J. (1542-1621) who around the same time had been speaking on the “liberty of the spirit.”¹⁰⁶

Louis Lallemant, S.J. (1587-1635)

Not surprisingly, none of Alvarez’s writings were published during his lifetime. Instead, it was his disciple (the Venerable) Luis de la Puente, S.J. who secured Alvarez’s place in the history of Jesuit and the broader Christian spirituality. In 1615, Puente published a biography of his teacher, *Vida del Padre Baltasar Alvarez*, which went on to become a classic spiritual work, influencing the likes of the English Benedictine Augustine Baker (1588-1685) and St. Alphonso de Liguori (1696-1787).¹⁰⁷ Alvarez’s biography also greatly influenced a seventeenth-century French Jesuit named Louis Lallemant.¹⁰⁸ And it was on Lallemant that Hugo focused a great deal of attention, arguing that it was his particular “school” of spirituality to which Lacouture belonged.

Lallemant entered the Society of Jesus on 1605 and spent almost his entire Jesuit life working at the Jesuit College in Rouen in Northern France, where he served as spiritual director, rector, master of novices, and tertian-master.¹⁰⁹ Many young Jesuits passed under Lallemant’s guidance at Rouen including Jean de Brebeuf, Antoine Daniel, and Isaac Jogues -three Jesuits who would go on to be martyred in the North American missions and then later canonized. Like Alvarez, Lallemant left no published materials behind after his death. But two of his former tertians, Jean Rigoleuc, S.J. (1595-1658)

¹⁰⁶ O’Malley, 17.

¹⁰⁷ Modern editions of Alvarez’s writings have since been published. O’Malley, 16.

¹⁰⁸ O’Malley, 16.

¹⁰⁹ Details of Lallemant’s biography are taken from Michael Buckley, S.J., “Seventeenth-Century French Spirituality: Three Figures,” in *Christian Spirituality III*, ed. Louis Dupre and Don E. Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

and Jean Joseph Surin, S.J. (1600-1665),¹¹⁰ kept their notes from Lallemant's lectures.¹¹¹

These notes eventually made their way to Pierre Champion, S.J. (1631-1701) who published them in 1694 under the title, *La vie et la doctrine spirituelle de Père Louis Lallemant*.¹¹²

As was the case with Alvarez in Spain,¹¹³ Lallemant was at the forefront of Jesuit spiritual writing taking place during a time in Jesuit history -and indeed Christian history- not commonly associated with mystical writing, especially in France.¹¹⁴ On the much overlooked significance of this "school" of Ignatian spirituality, Henri Bremond (the sometimes Jesuit) later wrote:

¹¹⁰ Surin was one of the more famous of Lallemant's "tertains." His legacy largely surrounded his involvement, beginning in 1635, with a community of Ursuline nuns in Loudon and the demonic possession occurring that the convent. For the next twenty-five years, Surin suffered severe mental imbalances that he attributed to demonic possession. It was in this state that Surin also wrote one of the great classics in spiritual writing, the *Spiritual Catechism* (1657). The *Catechism*, which gained the approval of Bishop Bossuet in 1661, carried the influence of both Surin and Lallemant into the eighteenth century where it helped shape the spirituality of Jean Pierre Caussade, S.J., Jean Grou, S.J. in the nineteenth-century, and even into the twentieth-century where it had a "decisive effect" on Raissa and Jacques Maritain. Buckley, 63. Surin's involvement at Loudon was memorialized in Aldous Huxley's *The Devils of Loudon* (1953) which was later made into a play and movie. And Surin was the subject of Michel de Certeau's dissertation and factored heavily in *Mystic Fable* (1982).

¹¹¹ François Courel has noted the significance of the audience for which Lallemant's teaching was aimed : young Jesuit priests in their third year of novitiate ("tertianship") which followed years of novitiate, studies, and ministry. Jesuits in this stage of formation would have been much more open to Lallemant's doctrine, Courel explained, since at "the heart of the Doctrine, in order to work that radical reform, there is the spiritual discernment which commands all of the thought of Lallemant, as it commands all the advance of the *Exercises*... One is not able to comprehend Lallemant, we believe, if one does not place at the center of every interpretation this discernment, this 'guidance of the Spirit,' which leads to the 'service of Christ.'" François Courel, "Introduction" *La vie et la doctrine spirituelle de Père Louis Lallemant* (nouvelle ed., Collection Christus 3; Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1979), 24. [trans. Buckley, 56.]

¹¹² Alan McDougall, ed., *The Spiritual Doctrine of Father Louis Lallemant of the Society of Jesus of the Society of Jesus, Preceded by an Account of his Life by Father Champion, S.J.* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Book Shop, 1946). Buckley noted that a great deal of speculation surrounds the authorship of the *Spiritual Doctrine*, with many scholars believing it to have been written by Surin himself. Buckley, 55.

¹¹³ In the short biography he added to the *Spiritual Doctrine*, Champion wrote: "Some have considered with much reason that Fr. Louis Lallemant held the same place among the Jesuits of France which Fr. Alvarez occupied among those of Spain. He certainly, united in an eminent degree, as did that celebrated director of St. Teresa, the knowledge and the practice of mystical theology, and like him, numbered among his disciples the most spiritual and interior men whom the Society has ever had amongst us." Champion, 17

¹¹⁴ On the Society of Jesus in seventeenth-century France, Buckley observed, "Moralists, educators, savants, Molinists, and, yes, missionaries. Such is the constellation of the French Jesuits of the period, one dipped in blood through the martyrdoms in North America and in poison through the devastating satire of Pascal." Buckley, 54.

More integral, more original, twenty times more sublime and twenty times more austere, more demanding than Port-Royal, the school which we are going to study made little noise. Its contemporaries scarcely suspected that it existed; Saint-Beuve did not speak of it; and for the most part, the Catholic of today knows nothing about it except its name. Its founder, the Jesuit Louis Lallemant died in 1635 without having written anything. Among the disciples of that great man, only one, Father Surin, has achieved recognition [*glorie*], but a recognition that was contested, for a long time suspect, and one of infinite sorrow.¹¹⁵

With such a legacy -or lack thereof- the fact that Hugo was even aware of Jesuits like Lallemant was noteworthy, as was his claim that Lacouture should be understood as part of his “school” of spirituality.¹¹⁶

The Spiritual Doctrine

Following the structure of Ignatius’s *Exercises*, Lallemant’s *The Spiritual Doctrine* opened with a discussion of the final end of human nature:

There is a void in our heart which all creatures united would be unable to fill. God alone can fill it; for he is our beginning and our end. The possession of God fills up this void, and makes us happy. The privation of God leaves in us this void, and is the cause of our wretchedness.

Before God fills up this void, he puts us in the way of faith; with this condition, that if we never cease to regard him as our last end, if we use creatures with moderation, and refer to his service the use we make of them, at the same time contributing faithfully to the glory which it is his will to draw from all created beings, he will give himself to us to fill up the void within us, and make us happy. But if we are wanting in fidelity, he will leave in us that void which, left unfilled, will cause our supreme misery.¹¹⁷

Thus, as with his spiritual father’s “Principle,” Lallemant began his *Doctrine* by clearly identifying God as the final end of human nature. In Lallemant’s spirituality, the nature-supernatural relationship was understood as one of union while yet always remaining

¹¹⁵ Henri Bremond, *Histoire*, v 5, 4 [trans. Buckely, 54].

¹¹⁶ The bulk of Hugo’s familiarity of Lallemant and these other Jesuits seems to have come from Bremond’s *Histoire*, Pourrat’s *Christian Spirituality*, and Lallemant’s *The Spiritual Doctrine* itself. Dorothy Day also had a familiarity with Lallemant, and credited her first spiritual director, Joseph McSorley, with introducing her to Lallemant’s writings. See, William Portier, “Dorothy Day and her first spiritual director, Fr. Joseph McSorley, C.S.P.” *Houston Catholic Worker*, (September-October 2002): 5.

¹¹⁷ McDougall, 28.

distinct -a contrast of void and fulfillment, or of the emptiness of our nature to the plenitude of God. Indeed, human nature itself was recognized as being inherently marked by this void or emptiness. As Michael Buckley, S.J. has noted, Lallemant's spiritual doctrine, therefore, centered on this notion of theological anthropology –one of a progression from the emptiness of human nature to the fullness of God.¹¹⁸

Following from this distinction, Lallemant cautioned that creatures (natural goods) were often temptations which led one away from God.¹¹⁹ For it was the habitual love for these created goods -particularly love for oneself (“we desire to be our own last end”)- which would deceive and divert a person from his final end in union with God.¹²⁰ And so, detachment from all desire for these creatures became necessary. Lallemant taught the renunciation of all interests, satisfactions, designs, and choices in order to be dependent only on “the good pleasure of God” and to be resigned “entirely into his hands.”¹²¹ Again following Ignatius, these created goods were not regarded as sinful, but neither were they supernatural. And the habitual attachment or desire for them was a distraction from loving God.

¹¹⁸ As Buckley noted: “The spirituality of Lallemant opens with an antithetical dynamic contrast. It is not that of contradiction but of privation and its fulfillment.” Buckley, 56.

¹¹⁹ Lallemant explained that “A creature says to us, ‘Come to me; I will satisfy thee.’ We believe it, and it deceives us. Then another and another holds the same language to us, deceives us in like manner, and will go on deceiving us all our life long. Creatures call to us on all sides, and promise to satisfy us. All their promises, however, are but lies; and yet we are ever ready to let ourselves be cheated. It is as if the bed of the sea were empty, and one were to take a handful of water to refill it. Thus we are never satisfied; for when we attach ourselves to creatures, they estrange us from God, and cast us into an ocean of pain, trouble, and misery –elements as inseparable from the creature, as joy, peace, and happiness are inseparable from God.” McDougall, 28.

¹²⁰ Lallemant observed that, “We fight against God for whole years, and resist the movements of his grace, which urge us interiorly to rid ourselves of a part of our miseries, by forsaking the vain amusements which stop our course, and giving ourselves to him without reserve and without delay. But burdened with our self-love, blinded by our ignorance, deterred by vain apprehensions, we dare not take the step; and for fear of being miserable, we continue in our misery, instead of giving ourselves fully to God, who desires to possess us only to set us free from our miseries.” (*SD*, II.1.1.2.3) McDougall, 37.

¹²¹ (*SD*, II.1.1.2.3) McDougall, 37. Also see (*SD*, I.1.5) McDougall, 29.

All of this took shape in what Lallemant termed *la vie spirituelle*. Such a life was made up of two paths along which Christian perfection could be reached: the purification of the heart and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.¹²² Buckley pointed out that on these two paths Lallemant's understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship became operative: the void or emptiness of human nature was seen in the call to purify the heart, and the fullness of grace was revealed in the need to correspond with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.¹²³

Through the first path, human nature was purified of love for created goods in order to be filled by the love of God.¹²⁴ For Lallemant, this purification was a gradual process, and he spelled out four "degrees" of purity which could be attained.¹²⁵ The first, attained mainly through penance, freed one from actual sins and the penalty due to them. The next degree, reached through mortification and the virtues, rid the person of evil habits and disordered attachments or affections. The third, attained in the sacraments, delivered a person from the ailments of sin -*fomes peccati*. And the final degree, reached through contemplative or mystical union with God, removed that "weakness which is natural to us" as creatures taken out of nothingness -what he termed human nature's "defectibility."¹²⁶ This process included the purification of a person's motives and even

¹²² (SD, IV.2.1.1) Buckley, 57.

¹²³ Buckley, 57.

¹²⁴ For Lallemant, the end at which one must aim, through a long training in purification of the heart, was to be so "possessed and ruled by the Holy Spirit that He alone directs our powers and our senses and governs our movements, both interior and exterior." One must aim to "renounce self altogether by a spiritual surrender of our own will and our own gratifications." In this way one should cease to live for one self, but rather live "in Christ Jesus, by faithful correspondence with the workings of His divine Spirit and a perfect subjection of all our stubbornness to the might of His grace." Pourrat, 53.

¹²⁵ (SD, III.1.3.2) McDougall, 83.

¹²⁶ Buckley, 59. In *The Devils of Loudun*, Aldous Huxley included a lengthy section on Lallemant -Surin was one of the main characters of the book. Huxley wrote that "Purification of the heart is to be achieved by intense devotion, by frequent communion and by an unsleeping self-awareness, aimed at the detection and mortification of every impulse to sensuality, pride and self-love. Of devotional feelings and imaginings, and of their relations to enlightenment, there will be occasion to speak in a later chapter. In this

his own consciousness –ultimately leading him to become the work of God.¹²⁷ For Lallemand, such purity of heart sought to restore the emptiness that marked human nature –restore what he called *la parfaite nudite d’esprit* (“the perfect nudity of the soul”)- so that it could be filled with the superabundance of grace.¹²⁸ He wrote that when one’s heart had been thoroughly cleansed, “God fills the soul and all its powers, memory, understanding, will- with His holy presence and His love.”¹²⁹ In other words, the grace of God was always waiting to take possession of and correspond with a “purified soul” and the task of the spiritual life was to remove any obstacles to that correspondence. And it was in this way that the person was transformed and made perfect.

While the purity of heart made operative the idea of the lacking or emptiness in human nature, the second path of the *vie spirituelle* –the guidance of the Spirit- worked out of the notion of the plenitude of the supernatural. According to Lallemand, when a person had given himself up to correspondence with grace, the Holy Spirit would raise and direct him. While initially the person may not know what was happening, gradually an “interior light” would enable him to recognize the governance of the Spirit and allow God to work in him.¹³⁰ As with the process of purification, Lallemand spelled out the steps by which one developed the “docility” necessary for this guidance: first, by being

place our themes are the process of mortification and the ‘natural man,’ who has to be mortified. The corollary of “Thy kingdom come” is ‘our kingdom go.’ Huxley, 77.

¹²⁷ For Lallemand, “A soul may attain to a degree of purity at which it has such complete dominion over its imagination and its powers, that they have no longer any exercise, except in the service of God. In this state it can will nothing, remember nothing, think of nothing, hear nothing, but what has to do with God.” (*SD*, III. 1.3. 2) McDougall, 83.

¹²⁸ (*SD*, II.1.1.2.3) McDougall, 37.

¹²⁹ (*SD*, III. 1.2. 1) McDougall, 81. According to Lallemand, “We can never do good works of virtue without abounding grace, and fullness of grace can never be ours until the heart is thoroughly cleansed.” Pourrat, 53.

¹³⁰ (*SD*, IV.1.1.1) McDougall, 108. Lallemand likened this guidance to the pillar of cloud and fire leading the Israelites in the desert: “They followed the movements of this pillar, and halted when it halted; they did not go before it, they only followed it, and never wandered from it. It is thus we ought to act with respect to the Holy Spirit.” (*SD*, IV.1.1. 2) McDougall, 108.

faithful to this guidance as it was offered; then, through the purification of sin and imperfections which “clouded” one’s view of the Spirit’s working; next, by not allowing oneself to be governed by “exterior senses” so that the “interior senses” could be opened instead; fourth, through an “awareness” of one’s interior life and its movements; and finally, in the consistent use of spiritual direction.¹³¹ Lallemant described the guidance attained through this process of docility in terms of “the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”¹³² And chief among these gifts was contemplation.¹³³

For all his teaching on purification, docility, and the spiritual life, though, it must be remembered that Lallemant spent his life working primarily in the formation of Jesuits like St. Isaac Jogues –men engaged in the active apostolic life. As Buckley has noted, the two paths of Lallemant’s *vie spirituelle* composed a life given over in apostolic service, but a “service whose underlying determination [was] toward God as motive and in union with the Spirit as configuring guide.”¹³⁴ In other words, Lallemant recognized the contemplative and mystical as integral parts of the Jesuit apostolate.¹³⁵ Far from inhibiting active ministry as Mercurian and Rodriguez worried, Lallemant saw contemplative practices -and the mystical or supernatural union they sought- as necessary for such work. For he wrote that without contemplation,

¹³¹ (SD, IV.1.3.5) McDougall, 112, Buckley, 59.

¹³² (SD, IV.3.2.1) Buckley, 60. Lallemant understood these “gifts of the Holy Spirit,” along with the infused virtues (both theological and moral) to be given to purified souls who are guided by the Holy Spirit. According to Pourrat, Lallemant’s use “a theology of the gifts of the Holy Spirit” to explain contemplation was not Ignatian, but rather was from the Rhenish and Flemish mystics like Tauler and Ruysbroeck. These “Northern mystics” were the first to employ the Thomist doctrine of the gifts to expound mystical states. While Lallemant distinguished between “ordinary” and “extraordinary” contemplation, he regarded both as infused and mystical. Pourrat also pointed out that in Lallemant’s time, Teresa of Avila’s clear and precise classification of distinguishing the degrees of contemplation had not yet been adopted. Pourrat, 55.

¹³³ According to Lallemant, this contemplation was “altogether pure from the alloy of nature” and “it perfects faith and all the virtues, elevating them to the highest degree to which they are capable of rising.” (SD, VII. 1.4. 2) McDougall, 264.

¹³⁴ Buckley, 60.

¹³⁵ Lallemant described contemplation as “an awareness and presence of God and of things divine which is simple, free, penetrating, certain and proceeds from love and tends to love.” (SD, VII.4.5.1) Buckley, 61.

we shall never make much progress in virtue, and shall never be fitted to make others advance therein. We shall never entirely rid ourselves of our weaknesses and imperfections. We shall remain always bound to earth, and shall never rise much above mere natural feelings. We shall never be able to render to God a perfect service. But with it we shall effect more, both for ourselves and for others, in a month, than without it we should accomplish in ten years.¹³⁶

Following in the Ignatian tradition of “practical mysticism,” then, Lallemant can be seen as trying to hold together the active-contemplative synthesis.¹³⁷ And it was this spiritual doctrine that Lallemant taught to the young Jesuits at Rouen.¹³⁸

Lacouture and the Jesuit Mystical Tradition

Having read both the multi-volume works on sources of spiritual writing within the Christian tradition by Pierre Pourrat, S.S. and Henri Bremond, Hugo seemed to recognize Jesuits like Lallemant and Alvarez as being part of a tradition or school of Ignatian spiritual writers who recognized and emphasized the mystical or supernatural elements of the Christian life.¹³⁹ They were part of O’Malley’s second “strain” and Dulles’s tendency for thinking with the “rules for the discernment of spirits.” And it was within this tradition that Hugo argued Lacouture belonged: “He is their heir, related at least by affinity...their son, begotten through a mysterious spiritual atavism.”¹⁴⁰ For the Jesuit writers within this tradition understood the nature-supernatural relationship to be

¹³⁶ (SD, VII.4.4.2) McDougall, 264.

¹³⁷ According to Michel de Certeau, S.J., rapid expansion of Jesuit colleges in France at the time demanded so much active ministry that it threatened the interior life which Ignatius saw as necessary to sustain such work. Buckley argued that therefore one must presuppose “the dominant experience behind the *Doctrine spirituelle* to be that of apostolic call, and the rest of Lallemant falls easily into place.” Buckley, 62.

¹³⁸ Louis Cognet noted that Lallemant’s teaching did not go without controversy. In 1629, Mutius Vitelleschi, the Jesuit superior general, censured Lallemant’s spirituality as being contrary to the “spirit of the Society.” Louis Cognet, *Post-Reformation Spirituality* trans. P. Hepburne Scott (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1959), 85.

¹³⁹ In his list of seventeenth-century Jesuit disciples of Lallemant, Cognet included, in addition to Rigoleuc, Surin and Champion: Jean-Baptiste Saint-Jure (1588-1657), Jacques Nouet (1605-1680), Vincent Huby (1603-1693), Julien Maunoir (1606-1683), Francois Guilloire (1615-1684), Jean Crasset (1618-1692), and Claude de la Colombiere (1641-1682) who was the spiritual director of St. Mary Margaret (1647-1690). Cognet, 107.

¹⁴⁰ Hugo, *Sign*, 163.

one of distinction but not separation -an inner dynamism working from void to fulfillment or from the merely good to supremely better. They recognized that human nature's supernatural final end had practical implications for the Christian life, implications that involved detachment and purification from the love of this world as well as seeking to attain mystical union with God. These Jesuits, influenced by Ignatius's "practical mysticism," also realized that because of this supernatural final end, all Christians -not only the spiritual elites- were called to live such a supernatural life of holiness.¹⁴¹ Hugo saw this as the core of Lallemant's *Spiritual Doctrine*, as well as of Lacouture's "Folly of the Cross."

Despite its popularity in the seventeenth-century, by the late eighteenth-century, with a few notable exceptions, Lallemant and this Jesuit mystical tradition were largely forgotten or ignored within the Society of Jesus. According to Hugo, it was Rodriguez's interpretation of the *Exercises*, not Lallemant's, that the Society put in the hands of its novices and it was Rodriguez's works that these novices would later place in the novitiates and libraries of many other Jesuit communities.¹⁴² Hugo saw this neglect as a deliberate move within the Society in opposition to Lallemant's teachings. And the result of this neglect was clear,

That a tradition like that inaugurated by Lallemant, wholly supernatural and carrying on admirably the general tradition of Christian spirituality, would be formally outlawed, or excluded, or set aside—they all amount to the same thing- at the reconstitution of the Society [in 1814] will perhaps help to explain why so many of the modern Commentators have removed the supernatural from their version of the *Exercises*: when essential elements of the supernatural order are

¹⁴¹ Hugo wrote while Lacouture was an ascetical teacher first and foremost: "he is not an asceticist, not an anti-mystic; he would not allow with the asceticists (the term of Bremond's) that concern with asceticism is impractical or opposed to the spirit of active virtue...He knows the school of Lallemant, and it is perhaps from their teaching that he had learned that all may desire and dispose themselves to mystical graces." Hugo, *Sign*, 164.

¹⁴² Hugo, *Sign*, 155.

lost –liberty of spirit, the unity of prayer, the continuity of the Christian life, the doctrine that all may aspire to the highest perfection, which is mystical union with God- the others are likely to go also.¹⁴³

For Hugo, then, Lacouture not only shared in the theology of these Jesuits, but also in the opposition they incurred from the Society of Jesus.

While Hugo's assertion of deliberate neglect by the Jesuits may be merited, it must also be acknowledged that Lallemant and his Ignatian "school" were part of a much larger group of sixteenth and seventeenth-century spiritual writers –including St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, Cardinal Pierre Berulle,¹⁴⁴ and St. Frances de Sales.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Hugo, *Sign*, 163.

¹⁴⁴ Berulle was a remarkable figure in seventeenth-century France both in the ecclesial and political worlds (Berulle was an archrival of Cardinal Richelieu). Berulle is considered the founder of seventeenth-century "The French School of Spirituality," which included Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, Jean-Jacques Olier, and St. John Eudes. Berulle was also the founder of the French Oratory. For more on Berulle, see Raymond Deville, *The French School of Spirituality* trans. Agnes Cunningham (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994) and *Berulle and the French School: Selected Writings* trans. Lowell Glendon, S.S., William Thompson ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989).

The extent of Berulle's influence on these seventeenth-century Jesuits has been debated. In his volume on the period, Bremond used the term "Berullian Jesuits" to categorize many of these Jesuits including Lallemant. Pourrat disputed this claim, arguing that themes of mysticism and detachment are in fact Ignatian. Cognet and Buckley both seem to agree that Lallemant, though sharing much in common with Berulle, was essentially Ignatian at heart.

Perhaps more interestingly, the Ignatian influence on Berulle has also been noted. Berulle was a student at the Jesuit College of Clermont and made the *Spiritual Exercises* in 1602 in Verdun. One of Berulle's earliest spiritual writings was *Bref discours de l'abnegation interieure* (1597) which was a "translation" of an Italian work *Breve compendio intorno alla perfezione cristiana*, a work attributed to the visionary and mystic Isabella Bellinzaga, but whose true author was understood to be her spiritual director, the Italian Jesuit Achille Gagliardi (1537-1607). Gagliardi wrote one of the earliest commentaries on the *Spiritual Exercises*. Gagliardi's writings led to him being charged with introducing a monastic spirit into the Society of Jesus, and the succeeding controversy required Claudio Aquaviva (the Jesuit superior general) as well as Pope Clement VIII to intervene on Gagliardi's behalf. O'Malley, 21.

¹⁴⁵ De Sales was one of the key figures in the seventeenth-century French mystical tradition. Central to his theology was the notion of the universal salvific will of God that extended to all people, a universality that called all human beings from every state in life to live a life of holiness. Buckley, 35. This universal call to holiness, which would be placed at the heart of Catholic theology by the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium*, was also central to the Lacouture-retreat. For more on de Sales, see *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction*, trans. Peronne Marie Thibert, V.H.M. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988).

Like Berulle, de Sales attended the Jesuit College of Clermont. Both Berulle and de Sales were also part of an extraordinary group of French religious thinkers that gathered around the salon of Madame Barbe Acarie. This group was deeply influenced by the writings of a sixteenth century French Capuchin named Benoît de Canfield (aka William Finch) whose masterwork was *Règle de perfection réduite au seul*

These luminaries wrote during the period between the Reformation and the controversy surrounding Quietism in late seventeenth-century. And in fact it was the Quietist controversy which brought about the abrupt end of this amazing flourish of spiritual writing. It should be noted that while the Lacouture-retreat was rooted in Ignatian spirituality, in its exposition in *Applied Christianity*, Hugo relied a great deal on spiritual masters like John of the Cross and Frances de Sales. That Hugo turned to these early modern -pre-Quietism- writers, in addition to Jesuits like Lallemant, was significant. For in the aftermath of Quietist controversy, a view of all things mystical or supernatural was established that would come to dominate Catholic thinking well into the twentieth century -including the time when Lacouture and Hugo were giving their retreats and facing criticism. And so, to understand the significance of the Lacouture-retreat and of Hugo's implementation and defense of its theology, an understanding of the Quietist controversy is necessary.

Quietism

The controversy surrounding Quietism began to emerge in the latter half of the seventeenth-century, with the growing popularity of the teachings of a Spanish priest named Miguel de Molinos (1628-1696).¹⁴⁶ In his teachings, Molinos suggested that a state of disinterested or "pure love" (*pur amour*) was not only possible for all Christians, but was even somewhat easy to attain through forms of contemplative prayer. Once in this state, a person would become totally passive or "quiet" and therefore completely

point de la volonté divine (1609). Bremond called Canfield "the master of the masters themselves." Canfield is regarded as opening this "great age of French spirituality." Buckely, 30.

¹⁴⁶ Molinos's work was printed in both Spanish and Italian. For an account of "pre-quietists" and their influence on Molinos and , see Pourrat chapters 5-7. Pourrat also noted some the similarities between Quietist teachings and those of the *Alumbrados*. Pourrat, 159.

opened to the workings of God.¹⁴⁷ Since while in such a state the person was completely passive to the workings of God, Molinos taught that any human activity would disturb that spiritual quiet and thereby resist the divine action. In short, human activity was seen as the enemy of grace.¹⁴⁸

As a result of this teaching, Molinos and his followers regarded liturgical practices and sacraments as somewhat pointless –if not detrimental- for those in a state of *pur amour*.¹⁴⁹ They also taught that a person in this state should give up any resistance to sin, for, as the papal bull condemning these teachings summarized, “God allows and wills the Devil to violate the bodies of some perfected souls and make them do wicked things, with all their wits about them and without feeling any scruple.”¹⁵⁰ Not surprisingly, in 1687, sixty-eight propositions taken from Molinos’s writings were condemned by Innocent XI in *Coelestis Pastor*. Any teachings associated with these proposals soon began to be called “Quietist.”

In 1685, just prior to the promulgation of *Coelestis Pastor*, a French mystic and lay woman named Madame Jeanne Guyon (1648-1717) published *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer*.¹⁵¹ In it she instructed her readers on how to “quiet” their emotions and other mental faculties through contemplative prayer in order to be brought into the presence of God in a state of disinterested or “pure love” –a love of God so pure that all

¹⁴⁷ Pourrat described this state: “The activity of God takes the place of the soul’s own activity; and in this state of mystical death she can will only what God wills, for her own will has been stripped away from her...She is then completely purified, the passions trouble her no more, and she has become incapable of sin, even venial sin.” Pourrat, 166.

¹⁴⁸ Pourrat, 166.

¹⁴⁹ William Portier and C.J.T. Talar, “Mystical Element of Modernist Crisis,” in *Modernists & Mystics*, ed. C.J.T. Talar (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2009), 3.

¹⁵⁰ *Coelestis Pastor*, Proposition 41, trans. Pourrat, 167.

¹⁵¹ Pourrat suggests that one of the concerns with the teachings of Guyon and Molinos, was not that they pointed to the possibility that such mystical states could be achieved in contemplative prayer, but that such states could be achieved rather easily and even quickly.

love of self faded away, including the love of one's own salvation.¹⁵² Guyon's book and teachings soon became very popular throughout elite circles in France and attracted many disciples,¹⁵³ most notably François Fénelon (1651-1715), a member of the royal court and the future archbishop of Cambrai.¹⁵⁴ Appearing as it did in the midst of the controversy surrounding Molinos's teachings, many in France saw Guyon's advocacy of contemplative and quiet abandonment to the divine as leading down the same path as the propositions condemned by the pope. Chief among these critics was Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), bishop of Meaux. While Bossuet was reportedly not well read in the Christian mystical tradition, he did recognize that such a tradition existed within Christianity. But he was –perhaps not without warrant- suspicious of it, and regarded it as almost exclusively the concern of cloistered monks and nuns –the spiritual elites.¹⁵⁵ For

¹⁵² Talar has described this kind of love in terms not foreign to the Lacouture-retreat: "The mystical language of self-abandonment, death to self, and allied terms form a matrix for understanding disinterested love. Spiritual death does not occur without mortification. But asceticism remains rigorously a means. A desire to derive satisfaction for its successful exercise can paradoxically lead to a more subtle form of self-attachment just as one may become attached to consolations that can accompany prayer, and mistake those for love of God. Hence the experience of aridity, even to the point of feeling abandoned by God, that emerges with advancing stages of prayer. In these respects disinterested love stands in continuity with the spiritual tradition...When joined with an Augustinian anthropology that gives primacy to the will, such love entails radical adherence to the will of God, the replacement of the self-will by the divine will, and the forgetfulness of self, of all that prevents or hinders becoming one with God." C.J.T. Talar, "Prayer at Twilight: Henri Bremond's *Apologie pour Fénelon*," in *Modernists & Mystics*, ed. C.J.T. Talar (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2009), 58.

¹⁵³ For a time Madame de Maintenon, wife of Louis XIV, was enamored with Guyon's teachings. In fact, in *Apologie pour Fénelon*, Henri Bremond placed Maintenon at the center of a conspiracy that led to the Quietist controversy. Talar, 50.

¹⁵⁴ While Fénelon and Guyon shared much in common, Fénelon tended to emphasize purification (spiritual death) over transformation (spiritual resurrection), while Guyon regarded the two with more balance. One scholar noted that on this point, "Madame Guyon's thought is more nuanced, for it, with her also, our self is destined to die, its true destiny nevertheless is to come to life in God afterward. This resurrection, to which Madame Guyon willingly pays attention in her writings, remains a blindspot in Fénelon's doctrine, whose spirituality insists nearly uniquely in the 'annihilation' of the self. The mystical night which for John of the Cross represents a stage in the ascension toward God, tends to become with him an end in itself." Henk Hillenaar, "Madame Guyon et Fénelon," in *Madame Guyon*, 145-171 [trans. Talar, 59].

¹⁵⁵ Talar, 41. Talar has noted that Bossuet's concern over the teachings of Guyon and Fénelon were twofold. First, unlike Fénelon, Bossuet did not believe that such love could be truly disinterested –i.e. purified of all self-interest. For Bossuet, "to acknowledge and affirm God as good in himself necessarily encompassed loving God as good for the self." Bossuet also thought that Guyon and Fénelon had taken the

the bishop of Meaux, contemplative practices and mystical unions were not part of the “ordinary” Christian life.

In 1695, at Guyon’s request, Bossuet called together a conference at Issy, outside of Paris, to evaluate her spiritual teachings. Fénelon was present to defend Guyon. Despite such a defense, the conference issued the “Articles of Issy” which condemned thirty-four propositions in Guyon’s writings having to do with disinterested love and contemplative prayer.¹⁵⁶ These propositions were considered to be too similar to those of Molinos. Though Guyon submitted to Issy, she would nevertheless later be imprisoned at various times throughout her life because of her teachings.¹⁵⁷

In response to Issy and what he perceived to be Bossuet’s direct attack on the Christian mystical tradition, Fénelon, the recently installed archbishop of Cambrai, published *Explication des maxims des saints sur la vie intérieure* (1697), which highlighted various mystical writers within the Christian tradition in order to defend and justify Guyon’s teachings. For Fénelon, at issue was not so much the particularities of Guyon’s teachings, but rather the basic soundness of the mystical tradition expressed by early-modern writers like Francis de Sales, Balthasar Alvarez, Teresa of Avila, Pierre Berulle, John of the Cross, Catherine of Genoa, and, as Fénelon asserted, Guyon herself.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, it was this tradition itself that Fénelon regarded as having been condemned at Issy. A literary back and forth ensued between Fénelon and Bossuet, ending with Pope

idea of pure love to the point where holy indifference could become holy passivity: “so great becomes the emphasis on God’s work in the soul that the active exercise of virtue can become lost to view.” Talar, 60.

¹⁵⁶ Portier and Talar, 3

¹⁵⁷ In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: New York American Library, 1958), 227, William James held up Madam Guyon’s apparent indifference to her imprisonment as an example of an active form of “resignation” can take in more optimistic” religious temperaments.

¹⁵⁸ Talar, 52. English translation in *Fénelon: Selected Writings* trans. Chad Helms (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006).

Innocent XII censuring twenty-three propositions in *Explication des maxims* in 1699.¹⁵⁹

Fénelon's quick submission brought the Quietist controversy to an end.

Fallout From the Quietist Controversy

While the Quietist controversy itself was relatively small –taking place within a span of a dozen years (1687-1699) and mainly involving French ecclesiastical elites- its repercussions were significantly much broader. Almost immediately, an “anti-mystical” attitude descended upon the Church, and more mystical spiritual writing, already in decline by this time, largely disappeared from the public arena.¹⁶⁰ This decline left a clear void in Christian spirituality. Not surprisingly, then, the period following the Quietist controversy was marked by a resurgence of Jansenism through the work of Pasquier Quesnel (1634-1719) and others. Indeed, this Jansenist revival was in many ways brought on and enabled by the Quietist controversy, filling as it did the spiritual void left in its aftermath.¹⁶¹ As scholars have pointed out, this eighteenth-century form of Jansenism - which strongly promoted a rigorist asceticism coupled with the notion that only a few predestined souls would ever be able to attain mystical union- thrived in the anti-mystical atmosphere that the censure of Fénelon had engendered.¹⁶² For, as Pourrat explained,

¹⁵⁹ Six weeks after *Explication des maximes* was published, Bossuet published *Instruction sur le les états d'oraison*, a book he had, in fact, written before Fénelon's book and which Bossuet actually sent Fénelon a manuscript. Indeed, Pourrat suggested that Fénelon's view that Bossuet disregarded mystical writers was influenced by what Fénelon read in Bossuet's book. In response, Fénelon wrote *Instruction pastorale* in September, 1697 in defense of the criticized passages in his book. Bossuet replied in February, 1698 with *Préface sur l'Instruction pastorale* and again in June, 1698 with *Rélation sur le quiétisme*. In this second statement Bossuet ridiculed Guyon, and called Fénelon “the Montanus of this new Priscilla.” Pourrat, 217.

¹⁶⁰ Talar, 39.

¹⁶¹ As Pourrat noted, “A more effective way of depreciating mysticism was the spreading of rigorist spirituality, austere, pure asceticism. It is plain that Jansenism could utilize and exploit this; and by the second half of the eighteenth century the Jansenist spirit, bringing out whatever is forbidding in Christianity so much more forcibly than what is consoling, had crept in almost everywhere.” Pourrat, 266.

¹⁶² In their introduction to Maurice Blondel's *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, Alexander Dru and Illtyd Trethowan summarized this important moment in Catholic theology: “And if, as Claudel says, the influence of Jansenism persisted –surviving a persecution which did not stop at desecrating the graves of Port-Royal- and if its spirit pervaded the theological manuals of the nineteenth

It was the right moment for [Jansenism] to come back and give free reign to its hostility to mysticism, confounding true and false in a single reprobation. The Jansenists had been most violent in their criticism of the Quietists, who had dared claim that they provided an easy way for everybody to attain a close and happy union with God.¹⁶³

And following this resurgence, the emphasis on the love of God –seen in the writings of Lallemant- quickly gave way in popular spiritual writings to a Jansenist emphasis on the fear of God.¹⁶⁴

The upshot of all of this was that in reaction to Quietism, all spiritual or mystical writing became suspect. As Michel de Certeau, S.J. pointed out in *The Mystic Fable*, by the end of the seventeenth-century, the adjective “mystical” (*mystique*) had become the noun “mysticism” (*la mystique*).¹⁶⁵ And packaged as such, the mystical or supernatural became neatly marginalized and quarantined within the tradition.¹⁶⁶ Thus, within Catholicism, the understanding of mystical or contemplative prayer largely followed Bossuet’s notion that it was an extraordinary phenomenon reserved for the spiritually elite alone.¹⁶⁷ Mystical or supernatural union with God quickly came to be seen as a

century, this was because, once the true spiritual tradition had been driven underground and silenced, the choice lay between an official religion, l’hyocrisie majestueuse (Maritain) of the Gallican Church, relying on the secular arm, and, on the other hand, a private, puritanical, and anti-mystical religion reacting against it –the religion of the Jansenists, the declared enemies of Fénelon. Alexandre Dru and Iltyd Trethowan, “Introduction” in Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma* trans. Alexander Dru and Iltyd Trethowan (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 23.

¹⁶³ Pourrat, 265.

¹⁶⁴ Robert McKeon described this legacy as being that “mysticism seemed like something remote from what ordinary Christians could aspire to. Inner peace and intimacy with God, which are achieved through prayer from the heart, just don’t fit the pessimistic view of the human being who always remains unsure of where he stands in God’s eyes.” Robert McKeon, ed. Pierre Caussade, *A treatise on prayer from the heart: A Christian mystical tradition recovered for all* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1998), 28.

¹⁶⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, vol.1, *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 16, 76-77, 107-113.

¹⁶⁶ Portier and Talar noted that, while *mysticism* “portrayed the quarantine of the interior life from embodied forms of Christian reading and praying, the separation of piety from theology,” *mystical* “had been used to modify ‘theology’ became a separate noun that demarcated a new area or field of knowledge with its own discourse.” Portier and Talar, 17.

¹⁶⁷ Talar affirmed that well into the twentieth-century Bossuet’s characterization of mysticism as an extraordinary phenomenon –the province of an elite- held sway. “Though mystical experience could not be denied, forming as it did part of the accepted tradition of the Church, still there was the sense that it needed to be kept under surveillance, subject to theological scrutiny and supervision. Certainly, mystical

phenomenon outside of the life of “ordinary” Christians -clergy or laity alike- an understanding that prevailed well into the twentieth-century.¹⁶⁸ The “renaissance” of spiritual writing that flourished at the start of the seventeenth century -with its emphasis on the mystical or supernatural in the Christian life, and of which Lallemant and his students were certainly a part- all but slipped away by the end of that century.

This legacy of the Quietist controversy and the Jansenist revival lingered on well into the twentieth century, up through the time that Lacouture and Hugo were preaching their retreats. And recognition of this legacy puts to question the assertions made by both Hugo’s neo-Thomist critics and by many contemporary scholars that the retreat theology was in some way Jansenist. For if anything, the retreat –with its similarities to Lallemant and his “school”- fell more on the Fénelon-Guyon side of this controversy.

Jean Pierre Caussade, S.J. (1675-1751)

While the repercussions of the Quietist controversy ran far and wide, a few spiritual writers continued to teach that mystical or supernatural union with God was a necessary part of the Christian life and accessible to ordinary Christians. In noting this, Hugo highlighted Jean Pierre de Caussade, S.J. as an example of a Jesuit spiritual writer who sought to continue the Ignatian mystical tradition of Alvarez and Lallemant into the eighteenth century. Hugo placed Caussade within Lallemant’s “school.” Indeed, Caussade was portrayed as one of the few Jesuits, along with Jean Nicholas Grou, S.J. (1731-1803), to extend Lallemant’s theology into the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries.

experience continued within Catholicism but it was largely confined to convent and cloister and so remained for the most part hidden, a marginal phenomenon.” Talar, 42.

¹⁶⁸ McKeon, 28. Auguste Poulain’s *Des Graces d’oraison* (1901) [*The Graces of Interior Prayer*], provided an excellent example of Quietism’s lingering legacy. For despite having “popularized mysticism” in the early twentieth century, Poulain essentially repeated Bossuet’s view of contemplation -as the exclusive domain of the spiritually elite. Talar, 42. Portier and Talar argued that according to Poulain’s view, “The ‘abyss’ separating ‘ordinary prayer from the mystic union’...differentiates ascetic from mystical states and is consonant with the conviction that the latter tend to be exceptional.” Portier and Talar, 14.

These Jesuits, he noted, “bear the same characteristics as their spiritual ancestors in the Society... [and] suffer the same trials.”¹⁶⁹ Caussade, as was pointed out earlier, also influenced Hugo’s *Applied Christianity*, particularly in the idea of “the sacrament of the present moment.”¹⁷⁰

Caussade was born in 1675, joined the Society of Jesus in 1693, and was ordained in 1705. He spent most of his Jesuit life in various teaching assignments, and was often labeled by superiors as “lacking good sense.”¹⁷¹ From 1730-39, though, Caussade worked as a spiritual director for the sisters of the Order of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Nancy in the Northeast of France. It was during this period that Caussade wrote the bulk of his surviving works, most of which were copied and compiled by the Visitation sisters.¹⁷²

Scholars have classified Caussade’s writings into three main clusters: his letters, mostly written to the sisters at Nancy,¹⁷³ his *Treatise in Which One Finds the True Doctrine of Perfect Salvation*,¹⁷⁴ and his *Treatise on Prayer from the Heart*. Throughout

¹⁶⁹ Hugo wrote that Lallemant’s “school does not end in the seventeenth century. It continues, clearly recognizable, in the eighteenth. Its two great names then are Jean Nicolas Grou and Jean Pierre de Caussade.” Hugo, Sign, 161. As was noted, much of Caussade’s knowledge of Lallemant’s teaching has been credited to his reading of Surin’s *Spiritual Catechism*.

¹⁷⁰ Hugo, *Applied Christianity*, 168.

¹⁷¹ According to McKeon, “His master of novices had expressed the hope that he was endowed with good sense (“prudentia spe magna”); but his superior for the next two years rated him as having little good sense for his age (“prudentia parva pro aetate”), and four years later in Saint-Flour, his superior credited him with hardly any good sense (“prudentia vix ulla”)!” McKeon, 29.

¹⁷² McKeon, 30.

¹⁷³ McKeon, 32. McKeon pointed out that *Abandonment to Divine Providence* [or *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* as the 1966 edition was called] revealed notions already present in Caussade’s letters, and if it was not written by Caussade himself, it was at the very least produced by the Sisters on the basis of his letters. McKeon, therefore suggested that “we infer that Caussade wrote the two treatise [*Perfect Salvation* and *Prayer from the Heart*] and that his letters furnished the draft elements for these treatises.” McKeon, 32.

¹⁷⁴ In 1861, Henri Ramière, S.J. published *Perfection of Salvation* under the title *Abandon à la providence divine*, a title that would go through nine editions. McKeon argued that none of these editions presented *Perfection of Salvation* as Caussade wrote it, but rather that it was a text which Ramière heavily modified to remove any hint of Quietism. In 1966, Michel Olphe-Galliard published the unmodified text of

these writings, he looked to restore and preserve contemplative prayer, or what he called “prayer from the heart,” as a practice to which all Christians were called.¹⁷⁵ Such prayer required silence or “attentive pauses,” as well as purification in order to attain union with God. Caussade taught that one of the major concerns of this type of prayer consisted in working to destroy “natural activity” which, if it opposed the gentle peace of the Spirit of God, was “a great imperfection.”¹⁷⁶

To certify and justify the worth of the mystical prayer he was encouraging, in the face of suspicion and opposition, Caussade not only turned to Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Jane de Chantel, and Frances de Sales, but also to his fellow Jesuits Lallemant, Rigoleuc and Surin.¹⁷⁷ For like Lallemant, Caussade saw continuity in the Christian life – a life in which one’s supernatural destiny (union with God) called one to live a supernatural life. This life required renunciation of the self so that one could abandon oneself to the divine will. This was the idea behind Caussade’s notion of the “sacrament of the present moment” -letting God control one’s life by letting the present moment govern one’s lives.¹⁷⁸ And it was through this renunciation, Caussade stated –in terms later echoed by Lacouture and Hugo- that the heart would become free from every attachment, “not only from evil ones but even from those that we call innocent, because in truth these never can be fully innocent, since the heart, which is only made for God,

Perfection of Salvation under the title, *Abandon à la providence divine*, and in 1981 Kitty Muggeridge’s translation of this edition was published, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*. McKeon, 32.

¹⁷⁵ McKeon, 6. Caussade described purity of conscience, of mind, of heart, and of action. McKeon 7

¹⁷⁶ McKeon, 103.

¹⁷⁷ McKeon, 15.

¹⁷⁸ According to Caussade, “It is necessary to be detached from all that one feels, and from all that one does, to follow this method, by which one subsists in God alone, and in the present duty. All regard to what is beyond this should be cut off as superfluous. One must restrict oneself to the present duty without thinking of the preceding one, or of the one which is to follow...In the state of abandonment the only rule is the duty of the present moment...Yes! give to God what belongs to Him, and remain lovingly passive in his hands.” Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, trans. Ramière, 58.

leaves room for creatures.”¹⁷⁹ For Caussade, as for the other Jesuits within this tradition, a Christian was called to much more than simply the renunciation of sin.

Following in the tradition of Lallemant and Lacouture, Caussade’s teachings were not entirely welcomed within the Society of Jesus. A draft of *Prayer from the Heart* was submitted to two Jesuit censors at the Collegium Romanum in 1737 for review.¹⁸⁰ While the censors were generally in approval of Caussade’s work, they were wary of the importance he gave to “attentive pauses.” They admonished Caussade to promote the practice of discursive meditation found in the *Exercises* rather than such “silent” prayer.¹⁸¹ They also directed Caussade to clearly state upfront that the form of prayer he taught was only for those whom God had called to a higher level of prayer –the spiritual elites.¹⁸² In this way, the enduring legacy of Bossuet continued.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Caussade, *Prayer from the Heart* in McKeon, 133.

¹⁸⁰ The draft was titled, *Spiritual Dialogues on Different Kinds of Prayer, Based on a Methodical and Rational Analysis of the Thought and Doctrine of M. Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux*. While no copies of this draft have been found, the censor’s letters indicate that it contained two dialogues on prayer. This text was further reworked by Caussade’s colleague, Paul-Gabriel Antoine, and was allowed to be published (under Antoine’s authorship) in 1741 under the title, *Instructions spirituelles en forme de dialogues sur les divers états d’oraison suivant la doctrine de M. Bossuet, évêque de Meaux*. Henri Bremond published the *Instructions* under the title *Bossuet, maître d’oraison*, and it was republished in 1891 and again in 1895. The 1895 version was published in English in 1931, *On Prayer: Spiritual Instruction on the Various States of Prayer According to the Doctrine of Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux*, trans. Algar Thorold. McKeon, 34. Joseph McSorley, who was fluent in French, published a critical edition of Caussade’s *Instructions* in 1904 as: *Progress in Prayer*, translated from *Instructions spirituelles*, par le R.P. Caussade, S.J. by L.V. Sheehan. Adapted and edited, with an Introduction by Joseph McSorley, C.S.P. (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1904). In his introduction, McSorley casts Caussade as trying to preserve “the finest flower of Catholic spirituality” which “lay in danger of being crushed utterly out of existence.” McSorley, 11.

¹⁸¹ McKeon, 34. This criticism was in spite of the fact that, as McKeon argued, this draft was a heavily edited version of *Prayer from the Heart*, “Caussade’s practical mystical advice was purged and transformed into a theological treatise on mystical prayer...another intellectual exposition on prayer destined for the perusal of theologians.” McKeon, 34.

¹⁸² While the placing Caussade’s work under the mantle of Bossuet sought to remove any suspicion of Quietism, interestingly, the Jesuit censors regarded the bishop of Meaux as a poor authority on prayer and even saw this attribution as offensive to the memory of Fénelon: “Everyone knows that [Bossuet] hadn’t learned from his own personal experience nor from that of other people and...that throughout his life he was busier with polemic theology than with mystical theology...It wouldn’t be proper...for any hint...of attacking the reputation of [Fénelon]...so celebrated for his piety and knowledge.” McKeon, 34.

¹⁸³ Portier and Talar point out that despite this opposition mysticism did not disappear. Within the Church, however, “mystics were left to their spiritual directors, and the study of their experiences to a restricted

The Legacy of the Quietist Controversy in the Twentieth-Century

The controversy surrounding Quietism marked a significant turning point in the Catholic tradition.¹⁸⁴ For it was in its aftermath that “a narrowing, suffocating, and hyper-intellectualization” of the tradition began.¹⁸⁵ And this narrowing of the tradition, as Maurice Blondel suggested, came to a culmination in the neo-Thomism of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century.¹⁸⁶ Thus the legacy of Quietism can be seen in the two-tiered account of the nature-supernatural relationship maintained in this once dominant theological perspective. For the quarantining of anything mystical or contemplative from the life of ordinary Christians –let alone from “serious theology”– fostered the exiling the supernatural which de Lubac was calling attention to in his work.¹⁸⁷ It was this two-tiered account of neo-Thomism that Lacouture and Hugo –along with de Lubac and others– were clearly challenging in the 1930s and 40s.

circle of specialist theologians. Outside the Catholicism, mysticism tended to be identified with abnormality or assimilated to the occult.” Portier and Talar, 9.

¹⁸⁴ Alexander Dru noted that in philosophy, “the victory of Bosseut (who was no philosopher as Bremond points out) led to what Blondel calls Extrinsicism, to an utter contempt for *le fait intérieur*, to a fear and suspicion of Pascal himself, to the divorce between thought and feeling and will which explains the impotent rationalism of nineteenth-century scholasticism: the scholasticism Blondel rightly regarded as the *lingua franca* of official theology.” Alexander Dru, “Introduction” in Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History of Dogma*, 24.

¹⁸⁵ Portier and Talar, 4. Dru explained that the Quietist controversy marked “the great caesura and is at the origin of the divorce between Catholicism and living thought, genuine art and honest scholarship.” Dru, 24

¹⁸⁶ Dru pointed out for Blondel “two Catholic mentalities” emerged from the Bossuet-Fénelon dispute – mentalities that set the positions in the major conflicts within nineteenth and early twentieth-century Catholicism. “The two parties make their first appearance in the struggle between the theocrats and classicists (Bonald, Maistre) and the romantic liberals (Chateaubriand, Balanche), the former harking back to Bossuet, the latter to Fénelon; but they soon narrowed and hardened into the Ultramontane party (Veuillot) and the liberal Catholics (Acton, Montalembert). As long as the intellectual life of Catholicism was dormant, the conflict was insoluble because it remained superficial and appeared to be a matter of *policy* – the participants were yet unconscious of the philosophical and theological problems it concealed. By the end of the reign of Leo XIII...the conflict spread to every sphere and led to a crisis without precedent...The ‘diplomacy’ of Leo XIII had been as ineffectual in dealing with the situation as the intransigence of Pio Nono, and he left the ‘crisis’ to explode in the inexperienced hands of his successor, Pius X.” Blondel saw this crisis as also having emerged in both the Modernism controversy and debate over Catholic participation in *Action Française*. Dru, 25.

¹⁸⁷ This was one of the central claims in de Lubac’s *Surnaturel* published in 1946.

Ressourcement in the Early Twentieth-century

In response to this form of neo-Thomism, some early twentieth-century writers began to look back into the Christian tradition, to “return to the sources” and find examples of orthodox writings which emphasized the mystical or supernatural. Prominent among these was Henri Bremond (1865-1933) and his eleven-volume work, *Histoire Litteraire du Sentiment Religieux en France depuis la Fin des Guerres de Religion jusqu’à Nos Jours* published in 1921, in which he sought to recover and reclaim the mystical tradition from its forced exile.¹⁸⁸ Bremond, who was associated with the Roman Catholic modernist writers, certainly recognized the importance of reclaiming this tradition.¹⁸⁹ His appeal to this tradition of mystical writing reached for all that had been marginalized from Catholicism since the end of seventeenth-century –that which “an overly intellectualized theology” had obscured.¹⁹⁰ Bremond’s work highlighted the numerous mystical writers throughout the Catholic tradition such as Catherine of Genoa and Fénelon, as well as various Jesuit writers from the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries like Lallemant, Surin, and Caussade- who he described as “Berullian Jesuits.”

Bremond’s work was significant, not only in that it initiated a renewed interest in Catholic mystical writers, but also because it challenged the overly objective and often ahistorical theology of the day. It did this by appealing to particular “sources” within the Christian tradition. William Portier and C.J.T. Talar have noted that Bremond and other writers making such an appeal to “the sources,” desired to recover a fuller and deeper Catholicism than the “rigidities” of neo-Thomism allowed, and that this desire led them

¹⁸⁸ Bremond published works on Jane de Chantal (*Sainte Chantal* in 1912), Fenelon (*Apologie pour Fenelon* in 1910) and the concept of “pure love” (*La querelle du Pur Amour au temps de Louis XIII* in 1932).

¹⁸⁹ Bremond presided at George Tyrrell’s gravesite burial.

¹⁹⁰ Portier and Talar, 20.

to “serious spiritual *ressourcement*” –the turning to particular early-modern writers rather than a “vacuous, universal mystic essence.”¹⁹¹ And this effort at *ressourcement*, in the work of Bremond and especially Blondel, was passed onto de Lubac and thereby into one of the main currents of what has been called the “rich and fruitful renaissance of Catholic life, thought, and spirituality” which occurred just after the mid-twentieth-century.¹⁹²

Hugo’s work to situate the Lacouture-retreat within the tradition of Alvarez, Lallemant, Surin, and Caussade was also an effort at such *ressourcement*.¹⁹³ Indeed, Hugo relied heavily on Bremond in writing *A Sign of Contradiction* –not an unimportant fact given Bremond’s connection with the Modernist controversy that led to the “Oath against Modernism” which Hugo himself would have been required to take. And like Bremond, Hugo appealed to writers from the early-modern period to justify and certify the retreat theology in the face of neo-Thomist criticism.¹⁹⁴ Writing in the period between *Pascendi* (1907) and *Humani Generis* (1950), Hugo’s appeal to these sources –while by no means as sophisticated– must be seen within the context of the broader *ressourcement* taking place in Catholic theology.

While such efforts have generally been associated with European theologians like de Lubac, Congar, and Rahner, Hugo highlights the fact that efforts at *ressourcement* also took place in the U.S. Indeed, similar efforts had been made by the Paulist writer, and

¹⁹¹ Portier and Talar, 22.

¹⁹² Portier and Talar, 22.

¹⁹³ In describing Lacouture’s work in putting the retreat together, Hugo seemed to acknowledge such *ressourcement*: “I did not say that he *discovered* anything, but only that he *recovered* something – something, indeed, that ought never to have been lost but has in fact been lost to many through the treacherous entrance of modern paganism into the Church, yes, in the very sanctuary of the Church.” (italics in original) Hugo, *Sign*, 15.

¹⁹⁴ Hugo accused his critics of supporting their arguments with “textbooks,” while he relied on sources within the tradition such as St. Francis de Sales, St. John of the Cross and St. Thomas Aquinas, as well as “stars of secondary magnitude” such as Lallemant, Caussade and à Kempis. These spiritual masters, he proclaimed, understood “not only the structure of Christianity, but its dynamism.” Hugo, *Nature*. 162.

another of Day's spiritual directors, Joseph McSorley, C.S.P.¹⁹⁵ In fact, already in the nineteenth-century, Isaac Hecker had made Lallemand and Caussade staples of his own spiritual life and his spiritual direction. McSorley was introduced to these writers by Hecker, through Walter Elliot's 1891 biography of Hecker, and in turn passed them to Day.¹⁹⁶ An appeal to early-modern mystical sources within Christian tradition was also made by Thomas Merton in *Ascent to Truth* (1951), where he argued that John of the Cross was a fundamental theologian and that Thomas Aquinas was a mystical theologian.¹⁹⁷

Conclusion

A few important points, then, have emerged from this examination. First, the theological roots of the Lacouture-retreat run deep into the Christian tradition. The sources of its theology were not a world-denying Jansenism, but rather were first and foremost Ignatian –particularly Ignatius's *Exercises*. The understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship which was so central to the retreat theology grew out of Ignatius's thinking. And Lacouture's reading of Ignatius was part of a tradition of Jesuit writers which dated back to sixteenth-century. This tradition, and the strain or tendency of Jesuit spirituality that it emphasized, was never dominant within the Society of Jesus – yet it always endured. And it tried to maintain the importance of the mystical and supernatural in the Christian life.

¹⁹⁵ Day recounted that McSorley had given her texts from Lallemand and Caussade to read. Day, *Houses of Hospitality* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939), 103. For more on McSorley, see William Portier, "Dorothy Day and her first spiritual director, Fr. Joseph McSorley, C.S.P." *Houston Catholic Worker*, (September-October 2002), online edition.

¹⁹⁶ Portier, "Dorothy Day". See, fn, 179. Walter Elliott, *The Life of Father Hecker* (New York: 1891).

¹⁹⁷ Thomas Merton, *Ascent to Truth* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951).

Opposition to the retreat theology –which will be examined more fully in the next chapter- can also be seen as coming out of a much longer history. It was a history which revolved around how Christians viewed the supernatural or mystical within the Christian life –a view based in the understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship. The particular opposition to Lacouture’s reading of Ignatius stemmed from an alternative and dominant reading of the *Exercises* within Jesuit spirituality. It was also fueled by a suspicion and even hostility to any emphasis on the supernatural which existed within the broader Catholic psyche since at least the end of the seventeenth-century. Critics of the retreat would have been shaped by all of this history.

A third point to emerge is the idea that Hugo, in his attempt to defend and justify the retreat theology, provided an example of *ressourcement* which took place in the United States in the early twentieth-century. While Hugo was certainly not in the same league as Bremond, Blondel or de Lubac, he did seem to make similar efforts at returning to the sources –and in fact returned to some of the same sources as these other Catholic *ressourcement* writers. This final point helps to further highlight the significance of Hugo beyond Day and the Catholic Worker. Hugo clearly seemed to be someone in tune with some of the more important emerging currents in Catholic theology at the time. As has been suggested –and which will be further argued in the following chapter- Hugo can be seen as offering a critique and challenge to the neo-Thomism which dominated Catholic theology. And like his efforts at *ressourcement*, his challenge to this form of neo-Thomism brought Hugo into a growing and important discourse within Catholic theology. Therefore, to recognize the broader significance of Hugo’s work, an

understanding of how and where he fit into the larger context of Catholic theology at the time is necessary. And so, it is to an examination of that context that we now turn.

CHAPTER IV

EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY THOMISM: THE CONTEXT OF HUGO AND THE RETREAT

On this side of the Atlantic controversy began and spread through articles in the *Ecclesiastical Review* attacking Father Hugo's teaching. In France there was controversy about the teaching of another Jesuit, Father de Lubac...It seemed a wonderful thing to me that priests and laity could still become excited about points of doctrine, about nature and the supernatural, nature and grace, about forces, spiritual capacities far more powerful than the atom bomb.

-Dorothy Day¹

As was mentioned in the "Introduction," the period within which Hugo was preaching the retreat, developing its theology, and defending that theology in the midst of the "controversy" which surrounded it, was eventful. It was a period defined around the Second World War. The war-years certainly included many heroic and often solitary acts of witness by Catholics, but for many in the Church it was a time in which the dueling threats of Communism and Fascism made for uncertain and confused political options - choices between the lesser of two evils. And the prevailing Catholic social ethic guiding much of the discussion was one in which national loyalty and obedience to civic authority were largely encouraged.

Within the particular context of Catholic theology, these years were also the period just before the promulgation of *Humani Generis* and its effort to bring to some

¹ Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), 258.

conclusion the nature-grace debates that had persisted for decades. As will be shown, these debates were not unrelated to the broader political situation, and they had very real implications for Catholic social ethics at the time. Catholic theological discourse during this time was largely dominated by a certain form of Thomist thought -one which presupposed a particular two-tiered understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship, with the supernatural building a kind of superstructure upon a self-contained nature.² This was a theological perspective that had clear implications on Catholic social engagement. But it was also a perspective that was waning in its dominance within Catholicism, and indeed these years marked the final period just before its collapse in the 1960s.

Thus, it is within this historical-theological context that both Hugo and the retreat controversy must be viewed. Hugo's significance beyond Day and the Catholic Worker lay largely in the fact that in his presentation and defense of the retreat theology, as well as in his other writings, he was clearly criticizing and challenging this two-tiered theology. The reaction of prominent defenders of this neo-Thomism, largely on the

² Frederick Bauerschmidt, "Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic: Five Theses Related to Theological Anthropology," *Communio* 31 (2004): 70. Henri de Lubac provided an historical sketch of the emergence of the dualism in *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1969 [1965]). Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., in noting the reaction to de Lubac's work, suggested that such a dualism was operative in much of early twentieth century Catholic theology. Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., "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, revised by Matthew Levering (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2009). Gerald McCool, S.J., *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977) offered an account of the role this two-tiered account of nature and the supernatural played in the nineteenth century neo-Thomist revival. Stephen Schloesser's *Jazz Age Catholicism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) described the context within which it dominated Catholic theology in turn of the century France, and out of which the challenge to it emerged.

It should be noted that a growing number of scholars are attempting to nuance claims of the degree to which this dualism existed in theology. See Ralph McInerny, *Praeambula fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010). For more on these scholars, see William L. Portier, "Thomist Resurgence" *Communio* 35, (Fall 2008): 494-504. This debate aside, Hugo and many others at the time clearly understood this two-tiered account as dominating the theological perspective.

faculty at The Catholic University of America, provided evidence of Hugo's challenge. But for Hugo, this was not simply an academic dispute. For during these years, he provided one of the lone clerical voices in defense of American Catholic conscientious objectors to "the Good War." This public defense not only brought him into direct opposition with American neo-Thomists, but it also challenged the dominant social ethic which they supported. Hugo was not alone in this challenge, though. Indeed, this chapter will suggest that, as Day implied, Hugo's theology and the controversy which emerged in reaction to it should be understood in light of the theology of Henri de Lubac, S.J. and the controversy which surrounded his challenge to this form of Thomism during the same period.

This chapter will make three main points. First, a description will be offered of this theology that dominated late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Catholicism. This was the theological context within which Lacouture and Hugo, as well as their admirers and critics, were immersed. And so to understand why the retreat theology elicited the reaction it did—either as a relief or a threat— an understanding of this theology is necessary. Next, this chapter will highlight the challenge to this neo-Thomism that was being made by Maurice Blondel, de Lubac, and others in Europe. It is here that the argument will be made that Hugo's theology should be recognized in light of this broader challenge. Finally, the American form of this neo-Thomism will be identified and outlined. While emerging from the broader early twentieth-century Thomist currents, this American neo-Thomism took on some unique qualities. And it was out of this American Catholic theological perspective that Hugo's critics were largely operating.

Catholic Theology in the Early Twentieth-Century

The theology which dominated Catholicism in the first half of the twentieth-century had its roots in the Thomist revival of the nineteenth-century. This revival was itself a response to both the political and intellectual situation that the Church found itself in at that outset of that century.³ For the nineteenth-century had opened with “imprisonment” of Pius VI by Napoleon, and went on to witness revolutions throughout Europe which challenged the Church’s political position on the continent, including the 1848 revolution in Italy which ended the Vatican’s rule of the Papal States. It was also a period which saw the continued rise of a positivist rationalism within modern philosophy –what historian Stephen Schloesser, S.J. termed a “naturalist realism.”⁴ All of this contributed to a sense of besiegement for many nineteenth-century Catholics.

An initial, and aggressive, response came in the form of the French Traditionalism promoted by Rene-François de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), Félicitié-Robert de Lamennais (1782-1854), Louis Bautain (1796-1867), and others.⁵ These traditionalists sought to create a “new apologetic” for Catholic theology that appealed to the beauty of Catholicism, as well as its essential role in the modern world.⁶ This apologetic countered the revolutionaries’ claim –and a claim heavily promoted by Protestant historians at the

³ This historical sketch of nineteenth-century Catholicism is based on the accounts provided in McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, and Bernard Reardon in *Liberalism and Tradition: Aspects of Catholic Thought in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

⁴ Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933* (Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 19.

⁵ McCool distinguished between a strict Traditionalism of Lamennais and a more moderate Traditionalism of Bautain. And he suggested that Bautain’s thinking can be seen in Blondel’s work at the end of the century. McCool, 272, fn. 50.

⁶ For more on this “new apologetic” in Europe, see McCool and Reardon, as well as Alec Vidler, *Prophecy & Papacy: A Study of Lamennais, The Church & Revolution* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1954). John T. McGreevy provides an account of the effect of this new apologetic in the U.S. in *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003), as does Thomas Wangler in “John Ireland’s Emergence as a Liberal Catholic and Americanist, 1875-1887,” *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia*, 81 (June 1970), 67-82.

time- that the Catholic Church was the enemy of human freedom and human flourishing. Advocates of this “new apologetic” asserted that, in fact, the Roman Catholic Church was the true protector of such freedom and flourishing, working as the bulwark against the anarchy of the revolutionaries on the one side and the totalitarianism of the modern state on the other.⁷ They also challenged the very foundation of the positivist rationalism that dominated modern philosophy by distinguishing “discursive reason” from “intuitive reason.”⁸ The argument was made that human (discursive) reason was limited in its abilities, particularly its abilities to know the truths of faith including the so-called “preambles of faith” (*preambula fidei*) – knowledge of the existence of God and other essential characteristics of the divine nature. Faith, associated more with intuitive reason rather than understanding, therefore, was regarded as the initial step in this epistemological understanding.

While all of this did revive Catholic life and thought at the time by offering a vigorous response to the charges made against the Church both politically and philosophically, it was not a uniform revival, but rather was marked by an “eclecticism” in Catholic thinking.⁹ The result was a lack of a unified system of thought for the Church to face its challenges. And the qualifications made on the abilities of human (discursive)

⁷ This was a central claim in the nineteenth-century Spanish priest and historian Jaime Balmes’s (1810–1848) very influential history *Protestantism and Catholicity compared in their Effects on the Civilization of Europe*, which was published in 1844, in English in 1859.

⁸ “Discursive reason” described the empirical thinking which could not transcend the level of the phenomenal and therefore could not obtain any real knowledge of God, neither proof of divine existence nor first principles of metaphysics or morals. “Intuitive reason” was defined as knowledge revealed by God which alone gave access to the metaphysical world of divine ideas. Bautain, for example, argued that metaphysical truths -including ideas about the existence of God- were beyond the abilities of human (discursive) reason alone to grasp. McCool explained that Bautain’s “moderate Traditionalism” was essentially a version of Augustine’s apologetics of “divine illumination,” and that it could be seen in nineteenth century Ontologism and the Catholic Tübingen School. McCool, 49.

⁹ This included Ontologism, the Catholic Tübingen School, Georg Hermes’s Catholic Kantianism, and the Catholic Hegelianism associated with Anton Günther. William M. Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment 1920-1940* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 14. McCool, 18.

reason seemed to open Catholicism to charges of “fideism.” In light of this, many nineteenth-century Catholic thinkers worried that such charges would be used by the Church’s enemies, both political and intellectual, to dismiss it.¹⁰ In response to this fear, Joseph Kleutgen, S.J. (1811-1883), Matteo Liberatore, S.J. (1810-1892), and other nineteenth-century Thomists sought to establish that the Catholic faith was indeed rooted in sound reason.¹¹ It is noteworthy that many of these Thomists were Jesuits whom Dulles had identified as working out of the Ignatian tendency toward the “Rules of Thinking with the Church,” and thus had concerns which were largely apologetical.¹² They asserted, using Thomistic categories, that certain metaphysical truths were rational and that human reason on its own could come to know such things as “preambles of the faith.” It was asserted that such truths or preambles could even be proven “scientifically” through Thomistic philosophy. This assertion supported the claim, used in defense of Catholicism, that Catholic thought was rational. This was a claim very much at the heart

¹⁰ McCool has pointed out that for Kleutgen, the various nineteenth-century philosophical systems within Catholic theology shared a common theory of knowledge: the intuitive knowledge of God that all of these systems required to ground the necessary first principles of knowledge. For Kleutgen this compromised both the freedom of humanity and the gratuity of grace. He also saw the distinction made between intuitive reason (*vernunft*) and discursive reason (*verstand*) as problematic, and as an example of post-Kantian idealism with divine knowledge intuited through *vernunft* as the necessary pre-condition of scientific reflection. He argued that this denial of metaphysical knowledge through *verstand* was indeed a denigration of human reason. Kleutgen and others saw this denigration as fueling the mid-century attacks on Catholicism both intellectually and politically. For modern philosophers would read such denials of the abilities of human reason as proof that Catholicism was simple fideism, irrational and anti-modern. And such charges were seen as not unrelated to attacks on papal authority that continued throughout the mid-nineteenth century. Kleutgen’s argument was presented in his two-volume work *Die Philosophie der Vorzeit* which appeared in 1863 and 1870. McCool, *Catholic Theology*, 181

For a thorough biographical account of Kleutgen, including his supposed involvement in a sex-scandal turned murder plot in an Italian convent (of which he was the spiritual director and confessor) and his subsequent incarceration in a Vatican prison, see Alan Vincelette *Recent Catholic Philosophers: The Nineteenth Century* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009).

¹¹ McCool vividly described the swift rise and dominance of this Rome-backed Thomism within the Catholic theological world: “Thus, in eleven years between 1855 and 1866, traditionalism, ontologism, Gunther’s dualism, and Frohschammer’s rationalism had all been condemned. Seldom, if ever, has as massive a Roman intervention in the development of theology occurred in so brief a time.” McCool pointed out that almost “every major force in Catholic theology” had been condemned except neo-Thomism. McCool, *Catholic Theology*, 132.

¹² Avery Dulles, “Jesuits and Theology: Yesterday and Today” *Theological Studies* 52 (September 1991): 531.

of the nineteenth-century Thomist revival in which many of these thinkers figured importantly.¹³

These issues were front and center when the First Vatican Council opened in 1869. In light of both the continued political chaos in Europe and Catholic intellectual eclecticism, the Council focused its attention both on the teaching authority of the Church, particularly the pope, and on these issues of faith and reason. And it was the hope of charting a path between rationalism and fideism that led to the Council's Dogmatic Constitution on revelation and faith, *Dei Filius* (1870).¹⁴ For in *Dei Filius*, its authors, including Kleutgen, looked to describe the faith in such a way that would not call into question its basic rationality, while at the same time maintaining its supernatural origins and character.¹⁵ To this end, they distinguished the "preambles of faith" from the act of faith itself (*actus fidei*) – a distinction which figured importantly in this type of neo-Thomism.¹⁶

Aeterni Patris

All of this helped set the stage for the promulgation of Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* in 1879 -a document which emerged out in the wake of Vatican I and thus reflected both the papacy's new found sense of teaching authority, as well as a desire to provide more secure and rational moorings for Catholic theology.¹⁷ In *Aeterni Patris*, Leo called for the

¹³ McCool provided excellent accounts of this revival in chapter 6 of *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, as well as in chapter 2 of *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Gabriel Daly, O.S.A. *Transcendence and Immanence: A Study in Catholic Modernism and Integralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 9.

¹⁵ Daly, 8.

¹⁶ Daly, 8. McCool pointed out that Kleutgen helped draft *Dei Filius*, and that indeed the document very reflected his theological approach. He also noted that while the Jesuit may or may not have helped draft *Aeterni Patris*, he considered the encyclical an endorsement of this theology. McCool, "Kleutgen, Joseph" in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians*, ed. Patrick Carey and Joseph Lienhard (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 304.

¹⁷ McCool highlighted the influence nineteenth-century neo-Thomists had on Leo XIII. McCool, 227

return of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas as the system of thought to be used in Catholic institutions. But this was a very particular form of Thomism that relied heavily on the Thomistic tradition of commentaries on the Angelic Doctor's writings. Gerald McCool, S.J. distinguished it as a "traditional Thomism," and referred its advocates "Cajetanian Thomists" after the influential sixteenth-century Thomistic commentator.¹⁸ It was also a form of Thomism that differed from that in *Dei Filius*.¹⁹ For while *Dei Filius* had focused its teaching on the harmony which existed between faith and reason *de jure*,

¹⁸ McCool distinguished this form of Thomism from "Transcendental Thomism" and "Historical Thomism." McCool, *Catholic Theology*, 257-9.

As will be discussed below, the argument that the sixteenth-century Dominican commentator Thomas Cajetan played a central role in the Thomistic tradition which eventually led to the two-tiered neo-Thomism of the early twentieth-century was prominently made by Henri de Lubac in *Surnaturel* (1946). But de Lubac's historical analysis has been challenged recently by the so called "Ressourcement Thomists." Many of these twenty-first century Thomist thinkers have sought to distinguish the form of Thomism rooted in Cajetan's commentaries and that of Francisco Suarez, S.J. (1548-1617) in the seventeenth-century. They argue that it was "Suarezian Thomism" that took on the more two-tiered qualities that many in the twentieth-century, including de Lubac and Hugo, were reacting against. Such a distinction is important for these Ressourcement Thomists, including Reinhard Hüter, Matthew Levering, and Thomas White, O.P., for they want to read Aquinas through commentaries like those of Cajetan, John of St. Thomas, and others, and thus want to salvage them from de Lubac's critique. In this sense, the Ressourcement Thomists are similar to the nineteenth and early twentieth-century neo-Thomists in that both groups read Thomas "forward" through Thomistic commentaries: the former, through the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commentaries of Cajetan, et al, while the latter read Aquinas through the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commentaries of the manuals. Both groups, therefore, differ from the reading of Aquinas made by de Lubac and others which read the Angelic Doctor "back" through the Christian tradition to the Patristics. For more on "Ressourcement Thomism," see Reinhard Hüter and Matthew Levering, ed., *Ressourcement Thomism* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010). At the same time, the Jesuit historical theologian Peter Bernardi, S.J. has argued that Suarezian Thomists, many of whom were Jesuits such as de Lubac's seminary professor Pedro Descoqs, S.J., were not really as two-tiered in their theology as de Lubac, and Maurice Blondel before him, had depicted them. Peter Bernardi, S.J., *Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, & Action Française* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2009). McCool had noted that Joseph Kleutgen and many other Jesuits at the time were also "Suarezian Thomists." McCool, *Catholic Theology*, 213. All of this having been said, like the other "traditional Thomists," these Suarezian Thomists read Aquinas "forward" through later commentaries.

While certainly important, this historical debate is somewhat secondary to the fact that such two-tiered theology did exist and dominate early twentieth-century Catholic theology. The question of whether this theology was historically rooted in sixteenth century commentaries or was the result of a "watering down" process in its mass translation into the nineteenth- and twentieth-century manuals does not challenge the fact that it was very real and had very real implications for Catholicism at the time. It was these implications that Blondel, de Lubac, and Hugo saw as problematic.

¹⁹ Daly described this form of neo-Thomism as an unambiguous "a summons to return to the philosophy of Aquinas *simpliciter*." Daly, 10.

Leo had proclaimed that, according to Aquinas, such harmony existed *de facto*.²⁰ Indeed, Vatican I had affirmed that reason, “illuminated by its lights,” *could* know the preambles of the faith in principle, but it had not stated that reason ever actually *did* know them.²¹

Following *Aeterni Patris*, papal pressure was brought to bear on the Gregorian University and other Roman colleges (as well as the Catholic University of Louvain) to only teach this type of Thomism.²² The pope’s chief concern was on the education of priests and thus it was in seminaries that the promotion of this neo-Thomism was largely focused -an emphasis which itself reflected a two-tiered account of the Christian life.²³ Despite such pressures coming from Rome, Catholic scholars did not immediately embrace the pope’s vision. Indeed, Phillip Gleason has described the “considerable foot-dragging” and even active resistance to its imposition.²⁴ Thus, it was not until *Pascendi* in 1907, and the “Oath Against Modernism” which followed in 1910, that the vision of *Aeterni Patris* really began to take hold.²⁵ But as it was “imposed” in this manner, it was a theological perspective that was accepted largely on authority.²⁶ And outside of Roman

²⁰ Day, 10. Hans Urs von Balthasar provided an excellent discussion of nature and grace in *Dei Filius* in the chapter “Nature in the Decrees of Vatican I” *The Theology of Karl Barth* trans. Edward Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 302-325.

²¹ *Dei Filius*, 4.10. Balthasar, 306. Also see, McCool, *Catholic Theology*, 219.

²² For example, Désiré Mercier, a leading neo-Thomist, was appointed “Professor of Philosophy according to St. Thomas” at the Catholic University of Louvain. Daly, 10

²³ Daly noted that this theology was itself clerical: “Rome, while not explicitly approving of Mgr. Talbot’s view that the laity should stick to hunting, shooting, and entertaining, was undoubtedly happier when they did so. ‘Lay’ theology was apt to be a trifle adventurous and its practitioners insufficiently molded by the methods of the Schools.” Daly, 11.

²⁴ Gleason reported that in the United States, for example, John Lancaster Spalding “spoke condescendingly of the thought of Aristotle and St. Thomas” in a speech given at the cornerstone-laying of the Catholic University of America. Phillip Gleason, *Keeping the Faith: American Catholicism Past and Present* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 167.

²⁵ Gleason, *Keeping*, 167.

²⁶ Daly described this neo-Thomist theology as very much ultramontane in ecclesiology and cultural assumptions, filtering out any regional variations as it spread throughout Catholic seminaries of the world. Daly, 12.

institutions of higher learning, it was a perspective widely spread through the medium of the “manuals.”²⁷

The Two-Tiered Account of Nature and the Supernatural

As has already been pointed out, central to this form of neo-Thomism was a two-tiered account of the nature-supernatural relationship, with the supernatural building a kind of superstructure onto a self-contained nature. Two thinkers in particular, Giovanni Perrone (1794-1876) and Louis Billot, S.J. (1846-1931), have been highlighted as figuring prominently in the development of this account. Perrone, “the foremost Roman theologian of his age,” taught at the Roman College between 1824 and 1853.²⁸ It was from this position that he was able to articulate much of theological foundation for the understanding of faith-reason (nature-supernatural) relationship embraced by many neo-Thomists.²⁹ He did this chiefly through a particular theology of revelation, one which followed a strict logical sequence: revelation was possible; its occurrence could be demonstrated by external and supernatural signs such as miracles and prophecies; and these signs could, in turn, be proven possible.³⁰ Like other nineteenth-century Thomists, Perrone’s concern was chiefly apologetical, and he hoped to provide an argument which sought to secure the authority of Church –an authority that could be historically and rationally proven.

²⁷ Daly described the theological manuals as capturing “the character, quality, and particularly, the limitations of Catholic theology between the two Vatican Councils.” Daly, 12.

²⁸ Daly pointed out that it was Perrone who worked out the triple proof -*ex Scriptura, ex Traditione, ex ratione*- a proof employed in manuals well into the second half of the twentieth century. Daly, 13.

²⁹ Daly stated that “The Thomistic revival which took place during the last quarter of the nineteenth century tightened [Perrone’s] argument at several points, without however altering its structure in any essential respect.” Daly, 14.

³⁰ From this sequence, Perrone’s argument then moved from “*a prioristic* abstractions” to what it claimed to be historically verifiable fact: that Jesus Christ by his miracles, especially by his resurrection, had proved the authenticity of his claim to be sent by God. Perrone presented this sequence in *Praelectiones, Tractus de vera religion* (1883). Daly suggested that, with only some minor variations, this sequence would dominate the presentation of revelation theology down to the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum*. Daly, 13-14.

In 1888, at the specific request of Leo XIII, Louis Billot, S.J. was made chair of dogmatic theology at the Gregorian University, a post he held until 1911.³¹ Billot was “a Thomist by conviction rather than by conscription,” and another Jesuit who clearly fell within the tendency for the “Rules of Thinking with the Church.”³² For, he sought to present a theological account of faith which avoided both rationalism and fideism.³³ And like his fellow neo-Thomists at the time, Billot rested much of his theology on the distinction between the preambles to faith and the act of faith itself.³⁴ Building on Perrone’s sequence of revelation, Billot argued that the preambles were accessible to human reason through external signs (*argument seu signa*) -apart from divine revelation- and therefore had a certainty and rational credibility. The act of faith itself, in contrast, was understood as the direct result of divine revelation. In this way, human reason, unaided by revelation, was portrayed as being able to know these preambles, while still needing supernatural assistance for the act of faith itself. In short, the credibility of the faith was regarded as *extrinsic* to the faith itself.³⁵ Again, Billot’s hope was to confirm the rationality of the faith without compromising its supernatural character.³⁶

³¹ Billot, who was made a cardinal in 1911, was not only an enthusiastic supporter of the *Aeterni Patris*, he was also an avid opponent of the “modernists” and an active supporter of Catholic participation in Action Française. In fact, after Pius XI forbade Catholic membership in the organization in 1926, Billot resigned from the college of cardinals and vowed to live out his days in silence. David G. Schultenover, “Billot, Louis” in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians*, ed. Patrick Carey and Joseph Lienhard (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 75.

³² Dulles described Billot as having exemplified “rationalistic tendencies of neo-scholasticism.” Dulles, 531.

³³ Daly, 15.

³⁴ Daly, 16. Billot presented this argument in *De ecclesia Christi* (2nd ed., Rome, 1903).

³⁵ Billot, *De ecclesia Christi*, 47 in Daly, 16.

³⁶ Daly summed up Billot’s theological argument: “By faith I sign a blank cheque the detailed sum of which is to be filled in by the issuing bank, which is utterly trustworthy. I do not need to postulate any intrinsic relationship between *what* is revealed, on the one hand, and the sort of being I am, on the other. This evidence which prepares me to believe must of necessity be miraculous (by definition *praeter naturam*) precisely because I lack the sort of *interior*, sheerly human, preparation for what God reveals to me.” Daly, 17.

Despite this desire, Gabriel Daly, O.S.A. has argued that the theological vision promoted by Perrone, Billot, and Leo XIII also presupposed and promoted “a very strict parallelism” or two-tiered account of the nature-supernatural relationship.³⁷ Indeed, rather than recognizing the twofold insufficiency that marked the account of human nature in the Hugo-retreat, or the empty void imagery in Ignatius and Lallemant, these neo-Thomists presented human nature as fairly self-sufficient and self-contained. Nature was related to the supernatural, but only in an extrinsic manner. It was through such an extrinsic view that the preambles of the faith were presented as capable of being rationally deduced through external signs by human reason.³⁸ Thus, both the “preambulatory” movement toward faith and faith itself were presented as supernatural additions to human nature.³⁹ Again, the image was that of the supernatural building on and adding, perhaps unnecessarily, to a self-contained nature.⁴⁰ This was the two-tiered account of the nature-supernatural relationship that came to dominate Catholic theology in the early twentieth-century.⁴¹ It was the theology of Lacouture’s Jesuit censor, as well as the “deservedly proved writings of commentators on the *Spiritual Exercises*.” And as

³⁷ Daly 17.

³⁸ Daly explained that this neo-Thomist theology was, “constructed on the conviction that God’s existence can be demonstrated by speculative reason through the principle of causality; that the essential characteristics of the divine nature can be discerned by the same means, thorough the medium of the doctrine of the analogy of being; that the possibility of revelation has first to be vindicated by pure reason and its actual occurrence demonstrated by historical investigation; that the content of revelation is expressed, not symbolically, but analogically; and that this content is guaranteed as authentically divine in origin by empirically verifiable facts. Daly, 18.

³⁹ On this point, Daly noted that Billot simply had no problem with the idea of a “transcendent Being who is himself the motive of belief in what he reveals.” Daly, 17.

⁴⁰ One scholar has likened this to chocolate Jesus sprinkles dropped on the vanilla ice-cream of the world.

⁴¹ Michael Baxter has suggested that the long held institutional separation of the study of theology from other areas of study, especially philosophy, played a major role in maintaining this two-tiered understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship. As fewer and fewer students went on to study theology, something which was generally done in isolated seminaries rather than on university campuses, the significance of theology in the life of ordinary Catholics was gradually forgotten. Michael Baxter, “Notes on Catholic Americanism and Catholic Radicalism: Toward a Counter-Tradition of Catholic Social Ethics,” in *American Catholic Traditions: Resources for Renewal*, ed. Sandra Yocum Mize and William Portier (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997), 53-71.

will be shown, it was the theology embraced by the critics of Blondel and de Lubac, as well as the American critics of Hugo.⁴²

The Blondelian Challenge

Maurice Blondel (1861-1949)

Even before *Pascendi*, criticism and challenge of this theology had begun to emerge.⁴³ One of the main protagonists of this challenge was the French philosopher Maurice Blondel.⁴⁴ Beginning with the publication of his dissertation *L'Action* in 1893, Blondel wrote in opposition to the notion of a “separate philosophy” (*philosophie séparée*) – a self-contained philosophy which could demonstrate the existence of God (the preambles of the faith) without revelation.⁴⁵ He recognized that such an understanding of philosophy and the abilities of human reason presupposed the two-tiered dualism that had become the norm within Catholic thinking –what he termed “extrinsicist monophorism.”⁴⁶ The central thrust of Blondel’s philosophical argument was that human

⁴² Komonchak also provided an account of the emergence of this “modern Roman Catholicism” and its unique features in “The Enlightenment and the Construction of Roman Catholicism” in *Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs Annual Volume* 1985: 31-59.

⁴³ Schloesser has argued that both the Natural Realism that dominated secular thought and the neo-Thomism –what he called the Supernatural Eternalism– that dominated theology were both dualist, excluding the sacred from the secular, the supernatural from nature: “They imagined the world as a struggle between enormous forces set in opposition to one another: Republic v. Church, Science v. Religion, Realism v. Truth (or Superstition). Each was marked by a melodramatic opposition between virtue and villainy, or a Manichean one between good and evil, or an apocalyptic one between light and darkness. In this logic of an excluded middle, there seemed to be no possibility of a dialectical synthesis mediating the mutually exclusive poles.” Schloesser argued that neither of these poles were able to adequately address the sense of “bereavement” that defined French thinking following the horrors of the First World War. He suggested that this void encouraged the beginnings of a challenge to both positions from within the late nineteenth-century literary scene with writers like J.K. Huysmans and Léon Bloy. Both of these Catholic writers employed a “Supernal Realism” that sought to bring the real (natural) into a synthesis with the mystical (supernatural). Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, 35.

⁴⁴ For the central place of Blondel in twentieth-century Catholic theology, see William Portier, “Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel” *Communio*, (forthcoming).

⁴⁵ Oliva Blanchette noted that while writing his dissertation, Blondel often read *The Imitation of Christ*, and regularly practiced Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*. Oliva Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel: A Philosophical Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2010), 48.

⁴⁶ Blanchette described Blondel’s idea of “monophorism” as a view of the supernatural that understood it as purely external, and that it was in the “Testis” articles that Blondel developed this term to describe the view

nature was inherently insufficient and open to the supernatural.⁴⁷ The supernatural, therefore, was not an extrinsic addition to human nature, but rather was its gratuitous inner dynamism.⁴⁸ It was in this sense that Blondel explained the nature-supernatural relationship,

Absolutely impossible and absolutely necessary for man, that is properly the notion of the supernatural. Man's action goes beyond man; and all the effort of his reason is to see that he cannot, that he must not restrict himself to it. A deeply felt expectation of an unknown messiah; a baptism of desire, which human science lacks the power to evoke, because the need itself is a gift. Science can show its necessity, it cannot give it birth.⁴⁹

Blondel described this “deeply felt expectation of an unknown” in terms of the “willing will” (*volonté voulue*) which he contrasted with the “willed will” (*volonté voulante*).⁵⁰

Blondel, who held a teaching position at the University of Aix en Provence from 1896-1927, worked to inspire his students to take a more “intrinsic” approach to the nature-supernatural relationship, and to recognize the practical and political implications of human nature's supernatural destiny. Blondel's influence soon became evident. One of

of his critics. Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 246. Peter Bernardi described this “extrinsicist monophorism” as an account which claimed that nature was sufficient unto itself, and then unavoidably presented the supernatural as “a sort of counternature.” Peter Bernardi, S.J., *Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, & Action Française* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2009), 86. It was in the “Testis” articles that Blondel developed this term to describe his critics. Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 246.

⁴⁷ Blondel wrote that “It was impossible not to recognize the insufficiency of the natural order in its totality and not to feel an ulterior need.” Blondel, *Action* (1893), trans. Oliva Blanchette (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984), 297. Blondel wrote a two-volume work also titled *Action* (1936-37), which was a new work and not simply a re-issuing of the 1893 book. Bernardi, 49.

⁴⁸ According to Michael Kerlin, Blondel's argument “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.” Michael Kerlin, “Maurice Blondel, Philosophy, Prayer, and the Mystical,” in C.J.T. Talar, ed. *Modernists and Mystics* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2009), 76.

⁴⁹ Blondel, *Action*, 357.

⁵⁰ Bernardi described Blondel's idea of the “willing will” as the “inexhaustible aspiration to attain the infinite that is never permanently quenched by the ‘willed will,’ that is, the specific, concrete instances of willing.” Bernardi, 49. Blondel wrote: “Between what I know, what I will and what I do, there is always an inexplicable and disconcerting disproportion. My decisions often go beyond my thoughts, my acts beyond my intentions.” Blondel, *Action* (1893), 4.

his students, Marc Sangier (1873-1950) helped form the political movement called the “greater” *Sillon* (“The Furrow”), a group with which Peter Maurin was associated before coming to North America.⁵¹ Other former students joined in “*semaines sociales*” – periodic study weeks focused around the growing tradition of Catholic social thought and encyclicals.⁵² In a similar manner to Hugo and other American Catholic radicals of the 1930s and 1940s, these French “social Catholics” wanted to make evident the practical implications of the supernatural for the Christian life -to become a “leavening presence” through whom a holiness would circulate and renew French secular society by spiritual means.⁵³

Blondel’s own challenge to the “monophorist” mentality took on concrete and political form in a series of articles he wrote in defense of these social Catholics. In his “Testis” or “Witness” articles -they were published anonymously between October 1909 and May 1910- Blondel not only defended social Catholics, but he also attacked Catholic participation in the *Action française* movement led by the atheist intellectual Charles Maurras (1868-1952).⁵⁴ In response to Blondel’s articles, Pedro Descoqs, S.J., (1877-1946) a French neo-Thomist, wrote a series of articles in defense of Catholic association with Maurras and *Action française*. Over the course of their debate, Blondel argued that Descoqs’s defense was founded upon an *extrinsicist* and two-tiered approach to nature and the supernatural which asserted that Catholics could be in common cause with

⁵¹ *Le Sillon* was a French political and religious movement (1894 -1910). Sangnier advocated the idea that democratic values were the evolutionary fruits of Christianity and that such democracy was the only political system in accord with the Gospel. Sangnier and his group were harshly criticized by Charles Maurras, and *Le Sillon* was eventually condemned by Pius X in 1910. Blondel supported the group, and included it among the social Catholics he defended in the “Testis” articles. Bernardi, 97.

⁵² Blanchette, *Blondel*, 234.

⁵³ Portier, “Twentieth-Century,” 12. Peter Bernardi suggested that similarities existed between Blondel and American Catholic radicals like Paul Hanly Furfey. Bernardi, 264.

⁵⁴ Blanchette, 235.

Maurras's movement in the natural realm of politics, while disapproving of his atheism in the supernatural. Blondel argued that if nature and grace were separate and only related extrinsically, then the alliance with Maurras's group would lead to an authoritarian use of violence to impose the faith, resulting in a kind of "sacralized paganism."⁵⁵ The supernatural end had become so separated from any account of human nature, and so isolated in the supernatural order, that its practical consequences were not recognized. But such separation misunderstood the nature-supernatural relationship. Blondel argued that the supernatural was "destined to penetrate and to assume" nature in itself without becoming "confused with it."⁵⁶ In short, the supernatural remained distinct without becoming separated from nature.

In what was a clear challenge to the type of theology of revelation proposed by Perrone and the other neo-Thomists, Blondel also contended that the supernatural was not extrinsic to nature –as simply facts to observe and mysteries to believe- but rather it reached souls "invisibly" by grace. In words that would later be echoed in the Hugo-retreat, Blondel explained that the supernatural acted upon all human beings to enable them to "break out of all the enclosures in which they would like to confine themselves, *to raise them above themselves, to burst every merely natural equilibrium*, to put them on a level, and require them to be in accord with the plan of providence."⁵⁷ The supernatural, while remaining distinct from and not confused with nature, nevertheless called humanity to move beyond and break out of the "merely natural" –transforming it and bringing it to

⁵⁵ Blanchette, 252.

⁵⁶ Blondel, *Catholicisme sociale et monophorisme*, trans. Bernardi, 73.

⁵⁷ Second "Testis" essay: 33. Translated in Bernardi, 74, italics added.

perfection. And in this way, Blondel also challenged the neo-Thomist claim that unaided human reason was sufficient to know the preambles of the faith.⁵⁸

This Blondel-Descoqs debate was, indeed, significant. First, it highlighted the fact that how the nature-supernatural relationship was understood had very real political and social implications. For the debate over Catholic participation in *Action française* was essentially a debate over nature-supernatural relationship.⁵⁹ Likewise, it revealed that in the first half of the twentieth-century, debates over nature and grace also had very real consequences for their participants. Even after Blondel's final "Testis" article appeared in May, 1910, Descoqs continued to defend Catholic participation in *Action française*, and with the help of *Pascendi* (1907), the condemnation of *Le Sillon* (1910), and the "Oath against Modernism" (1910), he was able to paint Blondel with the dangerous label of modernism—a label that only very recently has begun to fade.⁶⁰ As was the case in the controversy which later surrounded Hugo, Blondel's neo-Thomist opponents were powerful and challenging them came at a cost.⁶¹ Finally, the "Testis" debate also revealed the central role Blondel played in the challenge to the early twentieth-century neo-Thomism. The "Testis" articles, as well as Blondel's work in general, had a profound

⁵⁸ Responding to neo-Thomists' assertion that the "light of natural reason" as described in *Dei Filius* "really suffices" in such knowledge, Blondel quoted Aquinas as stating that even for higher truths of the rational order "we also stood in need of being instructed by the divine revelation even in religious matters that human reason is able to investigate" (ST I q1a1). Blondel, *Catholicisme sociale et monophorisme*, trans. Bernardi, 82.

⁵⁹ For a full account of this debate and its legacy, especially on how the understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship informs discussions on Catholic social thought, see Bernardi's *Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, & Action Française*.

⁶⁰ See, William L. Portier "Twentieth Century," 30.

⁶¹ Portier pointed out that Descoqs's raising the specter of "Modernism" in the overheated environment following *Pascendi* was "more like a threat than a form of intellectual exchange." A threat, he noted, which was backed up by the "unintellectual and unspiritual appeal to force" denounced by Balthasar. And such threats, "add an ominous layer of meaning to Descoqs's arguments." Portier, "Twentieth Century," 13.

effect on many young Catholics, including a French Jesuit and disgruntled former student of Descoqs named Henri de Lubac.⁶²

Henri de Lubac, S.J. (1896-1991)

De Lubac had been introduced to Blondel's philosophy while studying at the La Fourviere, the Jesuit theologate in Lyon, under the direction of Blondel's friend and disciple Auguste Valensin. The young de Lubac quickly became a central figure in a group that came to known as "*les jesuites blondelizants*."⁶³ Indeed, it was through Blondel's philosophy that de Lubac studied theology.⁶⁴ And it was de Lubac, thus shaped by Blondel, who became one the pivotal figures to challenge the dominance of neo-Thomist theology in twentieth-century Catholicism.

As Dorothy Day had pointed out, the controversies which surrounded Lacouture and Hugo in North America shared much in common with the controversies over nature-grace taking place in Europe in the 1940s –controversies of which de Lubac was very much in the middle.⁶⁵ Of course, while Hugo was leading retreats in Oakmont, de Lubac was living on the run from the Gestapo in Occupied France and actively participating in the *Résistance*.⁶⁶ And it was during this time that he wrote a number of theological

⁶²De Lubac later recounted taking "some rather nonconformist notes" in Descoqs's class, which he said were "inspired more by Saint Thomas than by my Suarezian master, whose combative teaching was a perpetual invitation to react." De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*. trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 42.

⁶³Peter Henrici, "La descendance blondelienne parmi les jesuites francais," 310, trans. in Portier, "Twentieth Century," 21

⁶⁴De Lubac later recounted "During my years of philosophy (1920-1923), I had read with enthusiasm Maurice Blondel's Action, Letter (on apologetics) and various other studies...I had heard a lot about him from Father Auguste Valensin." De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 19.

⁶⁵Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 258

⁶⁶De Lubac was not a supporter of the Vichy and took a very active-and dangerous- part in the spiritual and theological *Résistance*. He took an active roll in founding, directing and contributing to the clandestine journal *Témoignage chrétienne*. And he served as a liaison between Cardinals Gerlier and Saliege, a role that put him in serious danger and led to his eventual flight from the Gestapo in 1943. Komonchak, "Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac," *Theological Studies* 51 (December, 1990): 598.

works, most importantly *Surnaturel*, in which he discussed the “frightful lack of the sacred” that marked the modern understanding of the world.⁶⁷ De Lubac identified the underlying cause of this loss as the two-tiered understanding of nature-supernatural that dominated Catholic theology. For proponents of this theology had, “brushed aside all the supernatural...all the sacred” and thus relegated the supernatural to “some distant corner where it could only remain sterile.”⁶⁸ He asserted that in presenting the supernatural as extrinsic to nature -in a separate domain where it was to reign- neo-Thomist theologians had exiled Christianity from the world.⁶⁹ And with Christianity in this self-imposed exile, modern secular thinkers quickly began to organize, explore, and build a modern world with a “wholly secular spirit.”⁷⁰ In other words, de Lubac charged the tradition of Thomist commentators with having enabled the growth of the very positivist rationalism that the early twentieth-century neo-Thomists were attempting to address. Like Blondel, and as will be argued, like Hugo, de Lubac recognized that the result of this two-tiered account led to the loss of any sense of the sacred in the world –the recognition of the practical implications of the supernatural for daily life. Christianity was, therefore, unable to speak to the concerns and problems of the world, problems which were all too clear for

⁶⁷ De Lubac, “The Internal Causes of the Attenuation and Disappearance of the Sense of the Sacred,” in *Theology in History* trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 224.

⁶⁸ De Lubac wrote that these theologians took any notion of the supernatural and “exiled it to a separate province, which they willingly abandoned to us, leaving it to die little by little under our care.” De Lubac, “The Internal Cause,” 232.

⁶⁹ De Lubac quoted Gustave Thibon as arguing that too often, “Christians, instead of impregnating the world with God, restrict themselves to superimposing God on the world, and as a result of this split between the secular and the sacred, the things of heaven, deprived of concrete ties, slide over the surface of formalism or of dreams, while the things of earth, cut off from their eternal source, find themselves handed over to all ravages of corruption and anarchy.” De Lubac, “The Internal Cause,” 232.

⁷⁰ For de Lubac, modern secularism was clearly the unforeseen result of this voluntary quarantining of the supernatural. For the transcendence in which this theological perspective “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.” De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 313.

de Lubac in the France of the early 1940s. And likewise, Christians were no longer a leavening presence in the world.⁷¹

Throughout the decade, de Lubac's writings continued to challenge this two-tiered theology by looking to retrieve the understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship that had long been present within the Christian tradition.⁷² Indeed, de Lubac argued that the neo-Thomist's two-tiered account was a theological innovation which was rooted in the theological controversies surrounding Michael Baius (1513-1589) and Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁷³ For in an attempt to refute the problematic blurring of nature with the supernatural found in the Baian and Jansenist teachings, theologians at the time employed the hypothetical notion of a "pure nature" as a way of protecting the distinction and gratuity of the supernatural.⁷⁴

⁷¹ "In the face of powerful movements that present themselves as totalitarian conceptions of the world and systems of life" de Lubac asked, "Is a theory that tends to separate the supernatural from nature a suitable instrument for penetrating the whole reality and life of the authentically sacred?" De Lubac, "The Internal Cause," 236.

⁷² De Lubac's historical argument was laid out in *Surnaturel* in 1946, and later in the "twin books" *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (1968) and *Augustinianism in Modern Theology* (1969). Henrici noted that in the 1920s, de Lubac had been encouraged by Joseph Huby to "verify historically the theses of Blondel and Rousselot on the supernatural while studying the same problem in St. Thomas." Henrici also suggested that de Lubac's early studies of Baius and Jansen were inspired by a 1923 article by Blondel on Jansenism and anti-Jansenism in Pascal. Henrici, 312 [Portier, "Twentieth Century," 22].

⁷³ In order to illustrate the depravity of post-lapsarian human nature, Baius and Jansen argued that pre-lapsarian humans did not need any additional grace to attain their supernatural destiny. The grace necessary to attain our supernatural end was portrayed as a part of human nature –in this sense, it was owed to human nature by God at creation. In short, nature was confused or blurred with the supernatural. De Lubac pointed out that, ironically, this "optimistic idea of human nature" was at the heart of Baianism and Jansenism. De Lubac, "Mystery of the Supernatural," in *Theology in History*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 284.

⁷⁴ Robert Spaemann offered a concise description of pure nature and its origins: "All the Thomists of the sixteenth century cite Aristotle in this context: 'If nature had given the heavenly bodies the inclination to linear motion, she would also have given them the means for it.' [*De Caelo*, II, 290a] ...the thought of a '*desiderium naturale*,' which points in nature beyond nature, would, according to the theologians of the sixteenth century, make salvation a right, and grace would cease to be a gift. The consequence of this was that one superimposed a hypothetical purely natural destiny to man, a '*finis naturalis*,' onto the actual destiny given in salvation history; and thus the fateful construction of a '*natura pura*' came into being. God, so the theory goes, could have created man also '*in puris naturalibus*.' The destiny of salvation is purely accidental in relation to human nature. The ordering of nature to this destiny consists solely in the so-called '*potentia oboedientialis*,' a passive capacity to be taken up into this new destiny by divine omnipotence...The system of '*natura pura*' then became dominant in the disputations with Baius in

And this “pure nature” hypothesis, as de Lubac painstakingly mapped out, developed over the course of the next four hundred years into the two-tiered, “separate theology” of the neo-Thomists.

The Twofold End of Human Nature

De Lubac argued that in this transformation of “pure nature” from a hypothetical notion to an actual self-contained and self-sufficient understanding of nature, the neo-Thomists had misunderstood Aquinas, particularly his account of the twofold beatitudes of human nature (*duplex hominis beatitudo*). He argued that twentieth-century neo-Thomists had been largely influenced by commentaries on Aquinas that emerged from the sixteenth-century Thomist revival, especially those of Thomas Cajetan, O.P. (1469-1534) and, later, Francis Suarez, S.J. (1548-1617).⁷⁵ These Thomistic commentaries were used to interpret Aquinas in a manner that justified the concept of a separate natural end for human nature.⁷⁶ For the idea of an end or beatitude within the abilities of human nature to attain, indeed, supported the notion of a self-sufficient human nature related only extrinsically to the supernatural.⁷⁷

Catholic theology. For the sake of the gratuity of grace, the theologians made the autonomy of nature a postulate, in relation to which grace has the character of a *‘superadditum.’*” Robert Spaemann, *Philosophische Essays* (Stuttgart Reclam, 1983), 26-27, trans. Nicholas J. Healy, “Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace: A Note on Some Recent Contributions to the Debate” *Communio* (Winter 2008): 543.

⁷⁵ In *De Ultimo fine hominis*, Suarez explained that, ‘It would be necessary for man created in this way to have some natural beatitude that, if he so desires, he is able to attain.’ De Lubac, “*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo* (Saint Thomas, Ia 2ae, q62.a1),” *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948): 290-99, trans. Aaron Riches and Peter M. Candler, Jr. in *Communio* 35 (Winter 2008): 600.

⁷⁶ De Lubac, “*Duplex*,” 600.

⁷⁷ An example of such an argument was made by Victor Cathrein, S.J. in “*De naturali hominis beatitudine*,” *Gregorianum* 11 (1930): “It is therefore inadmissible to think that St. Thomas judged a perfect natural blessedness of the state of pure nature to be impossible. That blessedness which is the ultimate end of the state of pure nature must perfectly satisfy the natural appetite of man, otherwise it is not the ultimate end of nature; and although this blessedness is imperfect in comparison with supernatural blessedness, it is nevertheless perfect, if the proportion is respected of human nature and the natural end to which man through the principle of his nature is able to attain.” De Lubac, “*Duplex*,” 600.

De Lubac argued that this interpretation –what he called a “new doctrine” (*la nouvelle doctrine*)- was a misreading of Aquinas by the neo-Thomists.⁷⁸ He contended that throughout Aquinas’s writings on the two beatitudes, the beatitude which was described as “proportionate to our nature” was not understood as transcendent, or as “a final or definitive end of the created spirit in a hypothetical world of ‘pure nature.’”⁷⁹ Rather, Aquinas regarded it as an imperfect beatitude, terrestrial and temporal, immanent to the world itself.⁸⁰ In other words, this “imperfect” beatitude or natural end –within the ability of human nature to attain- was not the final end of human nature. And to emphasize its imperfection, de Lubac pointed out that Aquinas had even described this natural beatitude as necessarily mixed, unstable, and transitory.⁸¹ Indeed, as de Lubac pointed out, Aquinas had made it clear that humanity was called to another end, one higher than “human fragility can experience in this life,” a perfect, supernatural final end beyond the unaided abilities of human nature to attain.⁸²

According to De Lubac, this “new doctrine” of the neo-Thomists not only differed from the teachings of Aquinas, but indeed deviated from the understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship found throughout the Christian tradition: human nature had a supernatural final end, therefore nature was distinct but not separate from the

⁷⁸ In recounting the impact of de Lubac’s work in the 1940s, French theologian Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P. wrote: “Fr. de Lubac came up with a master stroke. In *Surnaturel*, seizing the sword of Goliath, fatal to its possessor, he denounced the excess of modern Thomism, turning St. Thomas against the Thomists of his time. Going back to the texts themselves and exploiting the perspectives of the history of doctrines, he sapped the foundation of a certain neo-Thomism by undermining its Thomistic legitimacy...the very scale of the reactions aroused among Thomists –for *Surnaturel* caused ‘a number of Scholastic eyebrows [to] pucker’ –shows the thrust hit home.” Bonino, *Surnaturel*, viii.

⁷⁹ De Lubac, “*Duplex*,” 603.

⁸⁰ De Lubac, “*Duplex*,” 603. [*ST* I-II, q3,a2,ad4; *ST* I-II, q5,a5,co; *ST* I-II, q5,a3,co; *ST* I-II,q3,a5,co; *ST* I,q62,1,co.]

⁸¹ De Lubac, “*Duplex*,” 609.

⁸² Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, lib.1, cap.5, n.2. Also see, *ST* I-II, q5, a5.

supernatural.⁸³ To illustrate this understanding of the relationship between human nature and its supernatural final end, de Lubac employed the scholastic concept of the “twofold divine gift” of the *datum optimum* and the *donum perfectum*.⁸⁴ The *datum* was the gift of created being itself, and it was marked by a capacity or longing for something beyond itself which, in a sense, defined human nature.⁸⁵ It was this capacity, de Lubac argued, that was the “natural desire” for union with God.⁸⁶ The divine gift was simply of creation, though, and the second gift of the *donum* was the gift of our supernatural finality, “the ontological call to deification” which transformed and perfected human nature into “a new creature.”⁸⁷ It was this second “perfect gift” which both directed human nature’s longing for a final end beyond itself and ultimately enabled it to attain that supernatural final end. These gifts, therefore, were not extrinsically related, but rather as de Lubac explained, “On this being that he has given me, God has imprinted a supernatural finality; he has made resound in my nature a call to see him.”⁸⁸ He called this a “two-fold ontological passage.” In short, grace was understood as twofold, both giving human nature its very being and then calling that nature to higher perfection.

It was here that de Lubac and Hugo began to sound very similar, in that both were articulating the idea that human nature was called to something beyond the natural. And this call was not an extrinsic or alien addition, but rather an inner dynamism bringing

⁸³ De Lubac, “The Internal Cause,” 231.

⁸⁴ While he employed this formula, de Lubac recognized the unavoidable inadequacy of this analogy of gift, for it lacked “that element of interiority—one could just as well say transcendence— an attribute of the Creator God who ‘is more interior to me than I am to myself.’” De Lubac, “Mystery,” 301.

⁸⁵ De Lubac made very clear that this gift was being itself, indeed no thing pre-existed this gift or received it: “through creation, God has given me to myself.” De Lubac, “Mystery,” 300.

⁸⁶ In describing this “natural desire,” de Lubac wrote: “From the moment I exist, in fact, all indetermination is lifted, and whatever may have been ‘before’, no other end is henceforth possible for me except that which is now inscribed in my nature and for which, by the very fact, I carry within me, consciously or not, the natural desire. If I lack that, I lack everything.” De Lubac, “Mystery,” 293. In his book on de Lubac, Balthasar laid out the threefold scope of this desire. Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 69.

⁸⁷ De Lubac, “Mystery,” 300.

⁸⁸ De Lubac, “The Mystery,” 300.

about a transformation and perfection of human nature into something new. Hugo called this transformation the practical implications of the supernatural in the Christian life. For it was Christians living an integrated supernatural life of holiness that would be a leavening presence in the world, something both Hugo and de Lubac saw as so necessary in the world of the 1940s. And in their integrated view of the supernatural that Hugo, Lacouture, and de Lubac can be seen as all sharing in the tradition of Lallemant's spiritual doctrine and the practical mysticism of St. Ignatius.

It is also important to note that, contrary to the recent assertions made by the Anglican theologian John Milbank, de Lubac was clear that nature (the *datum*) was distinct while not separate from the supernatural (the *donum*).⁸⁹ Like Hugo, de Lubac's challenge to the two-tiered account of the neo-Thomists was careful not to blur nature with the supernatural, for, as he explained, "unity is in no way confusion, any more than distinction is separation."⁹⁰ This was also the paradoxical understanding which he famously articulated in *Catholicism*: "unite in order to distinguish" and "distinguish in order to unite."⁹¹ Maintaining this distinction and unity in the nature-supernatural relationship was crucial for the theological perspectives of both de Lubac and Hugo, and, as will be shown, it is what continues to make their perspectives important today.

⁸⁹ In his book on de Lubac, *The Suspended Middle*, Milbank argued that the idea that the *datum* as distinct from the *donum* was a later addition to de Lubac's thinking as a concession to *Humani Generis* (1950). But I would argue that Milbank was incorrect in this reading the idea that the *datum* was distinct but not separate from the *donum* was at the heart of the idea of the "Christian paradox" that was central to de Lubac's theological project at least since *Catholicism*, which he wrote in 1938. For de Lubac, the nature-supernatural relationship was essentially paradoxical -one in which unity implied distinction and distinction implied unity. In response to Milbank's claim, I have chosen to limit my examination of de Lubac's writings to those which predated *Humani Generis*. For a sympathetic reading of Milbank, see Bernardi's *Maurice Blondel*, chapter 8.

⁹⁰ De Lubac, "Mystery," 302.

⁹¹ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sr. Elizabeth Englund. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 328. In *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 30-31, this notion was again articulated and was preceded by a reference to Blondel's *L'Action*, 29. de Lubac cited Blondel as the inspiration for this idea in *At the Service of the Church*, 183-185.

To sum up, then, just as Blondel had argued a generation earlier -and as Hugo was arguing at the same time across the Atlantic- de Lubac argued that nature and the supernatural were distinct but not separate. Human nature was inherently insufficient, created with a longing and a capacity for a final end far greater than and therefore distinct from itself. This inherent insufficiency was only further exaggerated by the historical condition of sin. And this supernatural beatitude was not separate from human nature, but was the supernatural inner dynamism of human fulfillment.

Reaction to de Lubac

As was the case with Blondel, de Lubac incurred a very real response to his challenge of neo-Thomism. From his position at the Angelicum in Rome, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., the “sacred monster of Thomism,” correctly read *Surnaturel* as having Blondelian currents which he regarded as clearly “modernist.”⁹² Indeed, Garrigou-Lagrange read de Lubac and other theologians associated with the Jesuit faculty at Fourvière as working out of a “new theology” (*nouvelle théologie*) –leading him to famously ask, “Nouvelle Théologie, où va-t-elle?” in a 1946 *Angelicum* article.⁹³ The controversy which surrounded *nouvelle théologie* came to an end in 1950 with Pius XII’s encyclical *Humani Generis*.⁹⁴ Although the pope did not mention de Lubac by name, the encyclical was seen by many at the time as a response to the perceived errors in the

⁹² In his account of Garrigou-LaGrange, Aidan Nichols, O.P. called him a “Thomist of the strict observance,” a Thomism which he defined as “over against Catholic Modernism.” Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Reason with Piety, Garrigou-LaGrange in the Service of Catholic Thought* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2008), 2. Blanchette pointed out that Garrigou-Lagrange “would remain in pursuit of Blondel both publicly and privately for the rest of his life.” Blanchette, *Blondel*, 257. Also see, Richard Peddicord, O.P., *The Sacred Monster of Thomism, An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange*, O.P. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2005).

⁹³ Susan Wood noted that the term “New Theology” was first used by Msgr. Pietro Parente in *L’Osservatore Romano* in February, 1942 in reference to M.-D. Chenu, O.P., and L. Charlier, O.P. Susan Wood, “Lubac, Henri de” in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians*, ed. Patrick Carey and Joseph Lienhard (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 331-333.

⁹⁴ For an historical account of this controversy, see Jürgen Mettepenning, *Nouvelle Theologie –New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

theology of de Lubac and others at Fourvière.⁹⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar later recounted that when *Humani Generis* appeared “a lightning bolt struck the school of theology in Lyons and de Lubac was branded the principle scapegoat.”⁹⁶ Following the promulgation of Pius’s encyclical, which Garrigou-Lagrange played a significant role in writing, de Lubac left his teaching position at Lyons and the Jesuit residence at Fourvière and moved to Paris. His books were banned and removed from Jesuit houses of study. Balthasar described the next decade as a “*via crucis*” for his mentor and friend.⁹⁷

As had been the case with Blondel earlier, the controversy surrounding de Lubac was not merely academic. De Lubac had been an active member in the French resistance during World War II, and prior to the war he was an active participant in the *semaines sociales* which Blondel had defended. In stark contrast, Garrigou-Lagrange, like Descoqs, had been a partisan of *L’Action française* until its condemnation in 1926 and was an active supporter of the Vichy in France during the war.⁹⁸ And also like Descoqs, Garrigou-Lagrange held a great deal of sway in ecclesiastical circles in Rome.⁹⁹ Indeed, as Milbank has rightly noted, de Lubac’s “*political* opponents” were also his “*theological* opponents.”¹⁰⁰ The political dynamic involved in these controversies was real and should not be overlooked. For Blondel and de Lubac, and likewise for Hugo, the neo-Thomists

⁹⁵ Wood, 331. De Lubac later recalled reading *Humani Generis* “toward the end of the afternoon, in a dark, still room, in front of an open trunk...” and found it “rather curious” when he read “a phrase bearing on the question of the supernatural...intending to recall the true doctrine on this subject.” At the time, de Lubac remembered that he wrote, “It reproduces exactly what I said about it two years earlier in an article...” De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 71

⁹⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* trans. Joseph Fessio, S.J. and Michael Waldstein (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 17.

⁹⁷ Balthasar recounted that de Lubac was “deprived permission to teach, expelled from Lyons and driven from place to place. His books were banned, removed from the libraries of the Society of Jesus and impounded from the market.” Balthasar, 17.

⁹⁸ Peddicord, ch5.

⁹⁹ Garrigou-Lagrange was considered to be one of the chief authors of *Humani Generis*. For the power dynamic that existed between de Lubac and Garrigou-Lagrange during WWII, see Komonchak, “Theology and Culture.”

¹⁰⁰ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 3.

theologians they challenged held a considerable advantage in terms of influence in Rome and challenging them came at a cost.

De Lubac and Hugo

One of the main arguments of this current project is that Hugo should be understood in similar terms as other early twentieth-century Catholic thinkers, particularly de Lubac. And indeed, as Day herself seemed to suggest, there were striking similarities between the two: both were writing at the same time, *Applied Christianity* appeared in 1944, *Surnaturel* in 1946; both were criticized by prominent neo-Thomist theologians like Fenton, Connell, and Garrigou-Lagrange; both were effectively “silenced” by ecclesiastical authorities, Hugo in 1944, de Lubac following *Humani Generis*, and both submitted. There were also similarities in their theological perspectives.¹⁰¹ Both seemed to understand human nature as being marked or defined primarily by its lacking and longing for something greater than itself. Both saw this supernatural final end as bringing about a transformation and perfection of human nature, not as an extrinsic addition, but rather very much intrinsic. Human nature, even prior to sin, was inherently unstable and insufficient -the historical condition of sin only

¹⁰¹ Some scholars have argued that de Lubac’s theology changed over the course of his life: either taking a conservative turn following what he regarded as excesses following Vatican II, or as Milbank has contended that in the aftermath of *Humani Generis* he “substantially” and “crucially” modified his argument “under pressure.” Indeed, Milbank suggested that in the wake of *Humani Generis*, de Lubac “comes across as a stuttering, somewhat traumatized theologian, only able to articulate his convictions in somewhat oblique fragments.” Milbank, *Suspended Middle*, 7. However, Susan Wood has pointed out that over the course of his scholarly life de Lubac’s writings maintained a unity and “betrayed no shifts in theological positions or fundamental convictions.” Instead, Wood noted, it was his conversation partners who changed: from the neo-Thomists in the early twentieth-century to reformers like Edward Schillebeeckx in the latter half of the century. She asserted that “If Schillebeeckx was a fair representative, the fundamental differences between de Lubac and his later interlocutors lie in their theologies of history and the necessity of Christ and the church to mediate grace.” The fundamental issue for de Lubac was always how grace was present in the world: was it present in nature by creation or was it made present through Christ mediated through the sacraments and preaching of the Church. Wood, “Lubac” 333. For de Lubac’s sometimes angry response to Schillebeeckx’s notion of “The Sacrament of the World” and what de Lubac called the “para-Council,” see *A Brief Catechism on Nature and Grace* trans. Br. Richard Arnandez, F.S.C. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 191-234.

exacerbated this insufficiency- and so it was distinguished from both the sinful and the supernatural.¹⁰² While both affirmed the intimate connection between nature and the supernatural, they also maintained the distinction between human nature and that supernatural destiny –nature was distinct but not separate from the supernatural. In their challenges to the dominant neo-Thomism, each sought to return to the sources within the tradition to justify their arguments. And both seemed to be working out of the same tendencies within Ignatian spirituality as were Lallemant and Caussade and other mystical Jesuit writers.

This is not to suggest that differences did not exist between the French Jesuit and future cardinal, on the one hand, and the American priest on the other. Indeed, Hugo did not have same extensive theological and academic training, and this was often reflected in his work. Hugo's theology was clearly not as sophisticated as that of de Lubac or others associated with *nouvelle theologie*. For instance, there was no discussion or recognition of a "natural desire" for union with God in Hugo. Instead, Hugo used much more mechanical terms like "supernatural motive" to explain human nature's longing for God. In many ways, Hugo continued to work with neo-Thomist categories he was challenging and therefore his argument lacked the nuance and dynamism present in de Lubac's theology. This was especially the case as Hugo tried to incorporate sixteenth and seventeenth-century spiritual writers like Ignatius and John of the Cross into early twentieth-century Thomistic language. And Hugo's effort at *ressourcement*, while

¹⁰² On maintaining this twofold distinction, de Lubac wrote that "this effort should consist particularly, in relation to Augustinianism, in better assuring the real consistency of the natural order in all its degrees as well as in better distinguishing this natural order from the order of sin. With respect to Thomism, it might consist in showing more explicitly that the kind of continuity shown in summary by the axiom *Gratia perficit naturam* does not exclude, from another point of view, the total transcendence and heterogeneity of the supernatural." De Lubac, "Mystery," 287.

noteworthy in itself, was also much less comprehensive than that of de Lubac. All this to say, the theological originality and importance of de Lubac's work was only hinted at and suggested by Hugo. Nevertheless, Hugo was making many of the same essential theological points as de Lubac, and should be recognized as part of the same theological impulse against early twentieth-century neo-Thomism.

American Neo-Thomism

As has already been suggested, the way in which this early twentieth-century neo-Thomism was imposed upon Catholic theology following *Aeterni Patris* and *Pascendi* had an effect upon the way it was taught and learned. This was particularly true in America, where due to the rapid expansion of Catholic colleges and seminaries in 1920s this neo-Thomism was taught on a "mass basis" and therefore inevitably became somewhat "denatured in the process."¹⁰³ For the great majority of American Catholics, this theology was simply a body of given content to be learned as well as possible. As a result, Gleason has argued that for American Catholics of the period, this neo-Thomism was more of an *ideology* than a philosophy or theology.¹⁰⁴ And at the heart of this ideology was the crucial assertion that human reason alone was sufficient to know the "preambles of the faith" -foremost of which was the certainty that God existed.¹⁰⁵ But

¹⁰³ Gleason, *Keeping*, 168. Gleason notes that the decade of the 1920s saw emergence of various American neo-Scholastic journals: *The New Scholasticism* (1927), the journal of the American Catholic Philosophical Association; *The Modern Schoolman* (1925) out of St. Louis University, and *Thought* (1926) out of Fordham. By the 1930s, "Neoscholasticism reigned supreme in the philosophy departments of Catholic colleges and seminaries." Gleason, *Keeping*, 23. For more on the effect of neo-Thomism in Catholic higher education during this period, see Gleason, *Contending with Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁴ As an ideology, Gleason explained that "it functioned primarily as an ensemble of agreed-upon answers to various kinds of speculative questions, the validity of which one accepted on authority, which provided a rational grounding for Catholic beliefs and attitudes and served as the source of organizing principles for practical action" Gleason clarified that he was not referring to the technical philosophical system of neo-Thomism, but rather to "the worldview or intellectual outlook its authoritative inculcation inspired." Gleason, *Keeping*, 168.

¹⁰⁵ For Gleason, this was a "breath taking assertion." Gleason, *Keeping*, 169.

while this assertion that their faith was rationally grounded brought particular assurance to American Catholics, in fact the vast majority of these Catholics had absolutely no idea how to actually make the step-by-step argumentation necessary to reason to God's existence.¹⁰⁶ Instead, most were comfortable simply holding the conviction that their faith was rationally grounded and that the necessary argumentation could be done by someone, somewhere.

For Gleason, this conviction became "the hallmark of the American Catholic mind" in the early twentieth-century and, indeed, even took on the quality of an article of faith itself.¹⁰⁷ This faith in the conviction that Catholicism was rationally grounded and could be proven as such, also served as the foundation for what came to be known as the "Thomistic synthesis."¹⁰⁸ But while this "synthesis" was certainly an attempt to keep the faith from being exiled from the daily life of American Catholics, it was nevertheless based upon the same two-tiered assumptions that de Lubac, Blondel, and Hugo were criticizing. For the faith at the center of this synthesis was a largely rationalistic assertion of objectivity founded upon the conviction that unaided reason could know the preambles of the faith. And it was a synthesis, Hugo argued, that did not take seriously the implications of the supernatural in Christian life.

This ideology and conviction in the rationality and reasonability of Catholicism thus became "collective assumptions" on the part of American Catholics, particularly American Catholic theologians.¹⁰⁹ As almost an article of the faith itself, the assertion

¹⁰⁶ Gleason, *Keeping*, 171.

¹⁰⁷ Gleason, *Keeping*, 170.

¹⁰⁸ According to Gleason, everything was tied up together in this synthesis and "it all rested on the assurance that human reason could establish the fact of God's existence and the implications of that fact for every sphere of life." Gleason, 171. On the extent of this Thomist synthesis in the American Catholic world, see William Halsey *The Survival of American Innocence*.

¹⁰⁹ Gleason, *Keeping*, 172.

that unaided human reason could know the preambles of faith was defended by the leading American neo-Thomists -for it was upon this assertion that their worldview and synthesis rested.¹¹⁰ Any challenge to the abilities of human reason, thus, would be seen as a challenge to the faith itself. It is in light this, then, that Hugo's confrontation with various American neo-Thomists -the "retreat controversy"- should be understood. And it is on that controversy that the next chapter will be focused.

¹¹⁰ Gleason, *Keeping*, 172.

CHAPTER V

THE RETREAT CONTROVERSY, 1942-1948

The main objection to *Applied Christianity* is the author's explanation of the relation between nature and grace, between the natural and the supernatural order, consequent on his teaching about original sin.

-Francis J. Connell, C.S.S.R. ¹

This refusal of my colleagues and me to take a "friendly smoke" or a "friendly drink" with our brethren in one of the chief reasons why we have antagonized many of them. In fact, I think this is the chief sore spot in the whole controversy...our attitude, they say -oh so often- is completely unCatholic: it is Manichean, Jansenistic, Puritanical.

-John Hugo²

In the October, 1939 issue of *The Catholic Worker*, Paul Hanly Furfey, professor of sociology at the Catholic University of America, wrote a letter to the editor in which he questioned the statement, "there is no unemployment on the land," which had appeared prominently in previous issues of *The Catholic Worker*.³ Next to this letter, the editors wrote that Furfey had opened "a controversy for the clarification of thought" and invited readers to respond. Several letters appeared in the following issue challenging the

¹ Review of *Applied Christianity*, by Francis J. Connell, C.S.S.R., *American Ecclesiastical Review*, (July 1945): 70.

² John Hugo, *A Sign of Contradiction* (published by author, 1947), 32.

³ Paul Hanly Furfey, "Unemployment on the Land," *The Catholic Worker*, (October 1939): 8. In response to Furfey's suggestion that many agrarians desired a Utopia on the land, the editors wrote they had never seen the rural life as a Utopia and indeed recognized that their fellow workers on the farm were leading "a hard life and a poor life." But they also recognized and wanted to emphasize that these agrarians were "trying to rebuild within the shell of the old, a new society, wherein the dignity and freedom and responsibility of man is emphasized. And there is no place better to do it than on the land."

perceived criticism of agrarians, including one by John Hugo who was then himself teaching sociology at Seton Hill College.⁴ In response, Furfey wrote a much longer letter in which he distinguished between “Realist Agrarians” and “Romantic Agrarians,” the latter of which did not base their view of the rural life on “facts” and “practical issues” as did the former, but rather on their “dreams” of an ideal rural life in the future.⁵ To conclude this “controversy,” Hugo was asked to write an article answering Furfey.⁶

In the piece, Hugo argued that it was Furfey’s “Realist” position that, in fact, was unreal and that the position of the Romantic agrarians was based on their very realistic view that any true social reform had to offer an alternative to the cause of both urban and rural unemployment: “industrial capitalism.”⁷ He wrote that what Furfey had dismissed as dreams were the very real objectives that agrarians had set, objectives which any true social reformers needed to guide their purposes and actions.⁸ “What we need, even more than [Furfey’s] sound, practical sense,” Hugo explained, “is complete clarity *from the beginning* as to our *ultimate* objectives.”⁹

This often overlooked exchange between Hugo and Furfey is noteworthy for a couple of reasons. First, it reveals that Hugo was already in the “Catholic Worker world”

⁴ John Hugo, “Capitalism Impractical,” *The Catholic Worker*, (November 1939): 8.

⁵ Furfey stated that for the romantic agrarians “the farm is a fetish.” He also highlighted *Free America* magazine as an example of realistic agrarians. Paul Hanly Furfey, “There are Two Kinds of Agrarians,” *The Catholic Worker*, VII, 4, (December, 1939): 7-8. Furfey’s letter appeared under the headline “Controversy Continues In Re City Versus Land.”

⁶ John Hugo, “In Defense of the Romantic Agrarians,” *The Catholic Worker*, (January 1940): 8. Hugo’s article appeared under the headline “There Is No Unemployment on the Land.”

⁷ Hugo pointed out that *Free America* published its magazine and conducted its small-farm workshops in New York city. Hugo, “In Defense,” 8.

⁸ Hugo wrote that it was lack of such clearly defined objectives that caused Catholics to “go around in circles, through grabbing hold of whatever any irresponsible person calls Catholic Action.” He suggested that such actions often led to “collectivist measures” which the Social Encyclicals had warned against.

⁹ Hugo, “In Defense,” 8 (*italics in the original*).

before he led his first Worker retreat in the summer of 1941.¹⁰ This “controversy” can also be seen as something of a precursor to the “retreat controversy” that occurred a few years later in which Furfey was one of the prominent American Catholic thinkers to criticize Hugo’s theology.¹¹ Finally, this exchange with Furfey further fills out the image of Hugo in the late 1930s, just before his work promoting and defending the retreat theology began.

Father John Hugo was an aspiring academic who was articulate and confident. He very much seemed to want to be a part of the American Catholic intellectual discourse and was not afraid to challenge more established scholars.¹² He was also a young, newly-ordained priest who had attended a retreat in the summer of 1938 that introduced him to a rich and deep theology he had not encountered before. He quickly recognized the uniqueness and worth of its vision and embraced it as his own. He not only went onto energetically promulgate the retreat itself, but he widely employed its theology within various discussions –particularly regarding Catholic pacifism in the Second World War. Hugo also defended and justified the retreat theology, both by situating its theology within the broader Christian tradition, and -as will be shown in this chapter- by challenging the neo-Thomist theology of the retreat’s very prominent and powerful critics. In doing this, Hugo tapped into theological currents which had been strengthening within Catholicism -currents that would largely shape Catholic theology in the second-

¹⁰ These articles appeared after Hugo had attended the two Lacouture-retreats in Baltimore in the summers of 1938 and 1939. Hugo’s discussion of ultimate objectives and their implications hinted at the retreat’s notions of the practical implications of one’s supernatural final end.

¹¹ This exchange also predated Hugo’s replacing of Furfey as the leader of the annual Worker retreat in 1941.

¹² In his account of American Catholicism at the time, William Halsey mentioned an article by Hugo that was published in the journal *Thought* while he was still a seminarian at St. Vincent’s. Hugo was commenting on Realism within American Catholic novels. John Hugo, “The Realism of Values,” *Thought* 9 (December, 1934). William M. Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment 1920-1940* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 111.

half of the century. All this to say that the young Father Hugo was an interesting and significant figure within early twentieth-century American Catholicism beyond his work with Dorothy Day and the *Catholic Worker*.

In this chapter, the controversy surrounding the Hugo-retreat will be examined. Starting with Hugo losing his ability to lead retreats in 1942, this controversy largely involved powerful American neo-Thomists writing articles critical of Hugo's theology in prominent journals like *The American Ecclesiastical Review* (AER) and Hugo writing responses published either by *The Catholic Worker* or on his own.¹³ Within this back and forth, the critique and challenge Hugo was making clearly emerged. And while this controversy took place for the most part following World War II, it will be pointed out that it was predated by earlier debates Hugo had with other American neo-Thomists over American Catholic participation in the war. Ultimately, this examination of the retreat controversy will reveal that the depiction of Hugo and the retreat as rigorist and Jansenist -a depiction which remains operative in American Catholic studies and has lingering effects on contemporary nature-grace discussions- originated in this controversy and the charges leveled by critics working out of a neo-Thomist theological perspective.

Prelude to the Retreat Controversy:

The “Controversy” of American Catholic CO's in World War II

As was the case with Blondel and de Lubac, though, the theological controversies surrounding Hugo in the early 1940s must be seen in the context of broader historical and

¹³ *The American Ecclesiastical Review* was a monthly periodical for clergy published by The Catholic University of America Press. It was published under various titles. From 1889-June 1905 (volumes 1-32), it was printed under the title *American ecclesiastical review*. From July 1905-1943 (volumes 33-109) it was under the title *The Ecclesiastical Review*. After 1943, it was titled *The American Ecclesiastical Review*. Joseph G. Hubbert, C.M., “American Ecclesiastical Review” in *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History*, Michael Glazier and Thomas J. Shelly, eds. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 91.

political situation at the time, namely the Second World War. Indeed, the controversy over the Hugo-retreat, particularly as it played out on the pages of *The American Ecclesiastical Review* (AER) and *The Catholic Worker*, was predated by an earlier set of articles Hugo wrote critical of positions taken in the AER regarding the war. These articles are important in that they reveal that Hugo was no stranger to challenging American neo-Thomists. They also highlight Hugo's very public stance during the war, a stance very much out step of most American Catholics at the time.

Joseph J. Connor, S.J.

In February, 1943, *The Ecclesiastical Review* contained an article by Joseph Connor, S.J., a professor at the Jesuit theologate at Weston, titled "The Catholic Conscientious Objector."¹⁴ The article was intended to offer advice to Catholic clergy on what to do if asked to sign a military questionnaire attesting to the sincerity of belief held by a Catholic applying for conscientious objector status. Connor began by summing up what he saw as the present state of the question over American Catholic conscientious objectors (CO's) in World War II. Connor noted that in the First World War, there was little movement to foster or support Catholic CO's -though he did highlight the case of Benjamin Salmon, one of the four American Catholic CO's in the war.¹⁵ Following the "Great War," Connor noted that revulsion to the horrors of the trenches and the seeming futility of the conflict itself had led many Catholics to question whether such a war met the criteria of a just war. Such examination by prominent and authoritative theologians

¹⁴ Joseph J. Connor, S.J., "The Catholic Conscientious Objector" *The Ecclesiastical Review* 108 (February 1943): 125-138.

¹⁵ Connor noted that Salmon was sentenced to 25 years in federal prison in 1917 after he was told that his Catholic religion could not have forbade him from participating since the Catholic hierarchy was actively supporting the war. Connor, 127. For more on Salmon see, Torin R.T. Finney, *Unsung Hero of the Great War: The Life and Witness of Ben Salmon* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989).

took place mainly in pages of Catholic periodicals. As a result, a much more organized conscientious objector movement emerged between the wars, with many more carefully articulated theological positions.¹⁶ For the most part, though, all of these discussions came to an abrupt end with the entrance of U.S. into World War II and the American Catholic hierarchy's subsequently quick endorsement of the U.S. war effort.¹⁷ With this, Connor noted, the conscientious objector position fell largely out of favor among American Catholics.¹⁸

Connor reported that despite its loss of hierarchical and popular approval, some American Catholics continued to object to the war and turned to the pre-war literature for theological justification of their positions. Since the positions argued in this literature had never been "officially repudiated by the Church," Connor wrote that the use of these arguments during the present war had caused something of a "controversy" for the American Church—could a Catholic be a conscientious objector?¹⁹ It was in the context of this "controversy" that Connor presented what he saw as the four main positions taken by Catholic writers in the pre-WWII discussions.

Connor labeled the first of these positions "The Perfectionists" and noted that they advocated abstention from all wars.²⁰ While this position was being popularized at the time by *The Catholic Worker*, since U.S. entrance into the war, few, if any, "professional

¹⁶ Connor 127.

¹⁷ An example of these critical pre-war Catholic discussions was the editorials written by Joachim V. Benson, M.S.S.T. (1904-1981) in the issues of *Preservation of the Faith* magazine between 1939-1941. William L. Portier, "'Good Friday in December,' World War II in the Editorials of *Preservation of the Faith* Magazine, 1939-1945," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 27.2 (Spring 2009): 25-44.

¹⁸ Connor argued that the "case for American Catholic conscientious objection seems to have been lost by default." He also pointed out that any such movement would have been very difficult in the face of "modern society's high-pressure salesmanship of war." He also noted, though, that American Catholicism had "not even wished to combat society on this issue," a fact he called significant to the present situation. Connor, 126.

¹⁹ Connor, 126.

²⁰ Connor, 127.

moralists” continued to support it.²¹ Connor summarized the perfectionist argument, which he presented as one based on the scriptural doctrine of turning the other cheek:

I have an inalienable right to practice the counsels. Practice of the counsels includes non-resistance to an unjust aggressor. Therefore, even in a just war, I can, out of supernatural love of the enemy, refuse to resort to violence against him. Therefore I am exempt from military service, on the same grounds as the religious who practice Christian perfection.²²

The idea that an ordinary Catholic lay person should follow the counsels out of a desire for Christian perfection, Connor contended, was problematic and ultimately theologically impossible to justify. For obligations to family, social dependents and fellow citizens severely restricted an individual Catholic in practicing any of the counsels, as did the fact that Catholics were “morally subject” to the State which did not practice the counsels.²³ In short, the idea that ordinary Catholics were called to Christian perfection or holiness – or, in Hugo’s terms, that their supernatural final end had practical implications in their lives- was theologically problematic. For Connor, reflecting the view which had dominated Catholic thinking since Bossuet in the seventeenth-century, such perfection and holiness was the concern of only a few cloistered religious.²⁴

Connor then highlighted two other “schools” in the pre-war discussions. While these did not base their arguments on Christian perfection, but around the principles of

²¹ Connor pointed out that adherents of this position often cited “ecclesiastical supporters” such as German exiled theologian Franziscus Stratmann, O.P., British theologians Gerald Vann, O.P. (who he called “the leading pacifist”) and W.E. Orchard, and CUA faculty Msgr. Barry O’Toole and John K. Ryan, S.J.. After the start of WWII, though, only Orchard was still writing in defense of this position in *The Catholic Worker*.

²² Connor, 129.

²³ Despite being theologically unjustified in their position, Connor conceded that most of its advocates were “genuinely holy folk” who were actively engaged in the lay apostolate, and that one could not but sympathize with them when their “magnificent work” was interrupted by the “silliness of war.” Connor, 130.

²⁴ In an attempt to even further narrow the category of Catholics who should be concerned with holiness and perfection, Connor asserted that even secular clergy were not exempted from military service out of an obligation to practice the counsels of perfection, but rather their exemption was based in “positive canonical legislation, namely Canon 141.” Connor, 130.

the just war theory, they did also conclude that Christians should not participate in the war. The first argued that no modern war could be considered just, while the second, that World War II in particular did not meet the principles of a just war.²⁵ Interestingly, he suggested that the recent U.S. government suppression of any publications which questioned the justice of the Allied cause indicated the “futility” of even trying to propagate these opinions, and it explained why little organized public promotion of these positions existed.²⁶ Active government suppression aside, Connor contended that at the root of both of these schools was an error of minimizing the authority of the state and exaggerating the authority of the individual in determining the justice of war.

As was the case with the perfectionists in *The Catholic Worker*, these positions were contrary to the American Catholic hierarchy’s support of the principle of obedience to civil authority, and therefore, Connor argued that adherents of these positions were put in the anomalous position of “being more Catholic than the Catholic Church.”²⁷ He stated that these positions also suggested “an air of exhilarating aloofness and detachment” which implied a desire to “dissociate” the Church with American secular society. But such detachment, which he likened to “Albigensian purism and Calvinist theocracy,” was as foreign to Catholic dogma as was Communist secularism, and so it was not

²⁵ Connor argued that this was the position taken the “greater majority of the pre-war Catholic pacifist intellectuals” including Nicholas Berdayev, E.I. Watkins, Donald Attwater, Eric Gill, and clergy like Luigi Struzo, Vincent McNabb, O.P., James M. Gillis, C.S.P., as well as Stratmann, Vann, O’Toole and Ryan. Despite this list of significant Catholic supporters, Connor argued that it did not include a sufficient number of “outstanding moral theologians” to warrant this position the technical note of “extrinsic probability.” Connor, 130.

²⁶ Connor, 135.

²⁷ Connor, 134. Connor quoted the U.S. Bishops’ statement “Victory and Peace”: “At times it is the positive duty of a nation to wage war in the defense of life and right. Our country now finds itself in such circumstances... From the moment that our country declared war we have called upon our people to make the sacrifices which, in Catholic doctrine, the virtues of patriotism, justice, and charity impose.” Connor cited the statement’s publication in the *New York Times* (November 15, 1942), Connor, 135. For the full text, see “Victory and Peace,” in *Pastoral Letters of the United States Catholic Bishops*, Hugo Nolan, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1984), 2:38-43.

insignificant that conscientious objectors to the two world wars had been overwhelmingly Protestant.²⁸ Connor's implication seemed clear enough: Catholic conscientious objectors and their theological supporters tended toward an extreme perfectionism that was contrary to Catholic teaching. As will be argued in the last chapter, such charges continue to be made against contemporary American Catholic radicals, particularly regarding their stance against American war efforts.

The final position, which made up the largest party in the pre-war discussions, held that Catholic conscripts could, and in "legal justice" must, enlist. And except where immorality was explicitly evident, they should presume the justice of the nation's cause. Where the previous positions had emphasized the judgment of the individual Catholic, this position emphasized that of the civil authority.²⁹ This school, Connor pointed out (apparently missing the irony), was the one taken by bishops in all the various countries involved in the war.³⁰

While the first three positions made up a small portion of the pre-war Catholic debate, Connor noted that their influence was not insignificant on American Catholics. Since these positions "extended more encouragement than [their] theological premises warranted," he argued that understandably the consciences of American Catholic CO's had been formed erroneously.³¹ Therefore, Connor recommended that a Catholic CO be treated sympathetically, but as "invincibly and therefore, inculpably ignorant" due to the

²⁸ Connor, 136.

²⁹ Connor listed prominent neo-Thomist thinkers who supported this position: Vermeersch, Genicot, Davis, and Prümmer. He noted that Vermeersch had written that conscience objectors "take their stand upon a principle which is socially untenable, a principle which would give private persons the right to pass judgment upon public measures, a right which belongs to the sovereign power. At that rate there could be neither peace nor order in the internal affairs of the state. Everyone would manufacture his own opinions, whereas in things which are not evident, the presumption of in favor of the authorities." Connor cited Vermeersch's article in the *Modern Schoolman* (March, 1935), Connor, 137.

³⁰ Connor, 137.

³¹ Connor, 137.

controversy caused by the various pre-war positions. Such a Catholic must be told that his conscientious objection claim should be based on the grounds of his private conscience and *not* on Catholic teaching. For while he may quote Catholic writers in defense of his position, he could not truthfully claim that the Catholic Church officially taught that American participation in the war was a mortal sin.³² Connor concluded by suggesting that priests sign the CO's questionnaires, not as an endorsement of the young Catholic's objection, but as an indication of the objector's sincerity.

American Catholic Conscientious Objectors

The fact that only 135 American Catholics received conscientious objector exemptions in World War II seems to confirm much of Connor's assessment of the situation, as well as the influence of his argument.³³ Gordon Zahn (1918-2007), himself one of the 135 American Catholic CO's, recounted the opposition he and other CO's faced from the American Catholic community at large: bishops who ignored the pleas of Catholics filing CO claims, priests who angrily told draft boards that a Catholic could never be conscientious objector, and a "hostile religious community" that coldly confronted CO's at Mass.³⁴ Zahn even quoted one priest at the time as having written that, "if a conscientious objector is found among our Catholics, it is not because of the

³² O'Connor, 138.

³³ It also must be noted that some 6,000 American men who did not receive CO exemptions went to prison for refusing to enlist. While the number of Catholics within this group is unknown, Gordon Zahn has suggested that it was high. Gordon Zahn's *Another Part of the War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), 28.

³⁴ Zahn, 26. Zahn also seemed to confirm Connor's assessment of the various "schools" of Catholics who objected to the war: those who argued a "Thomistic pacifism" and objected either that WWII or any modern war had not met the criteria of a just-war, the "perfectionist" Catholic Workers who "called for nothing less than spiritual perfection," and the "Catholic liberals" like himself who recognized the "logical incompatibility between the spirit of the Gospels and the spirit of war." He also noted the followers of Fr. Charles Coughlin, though their objection was essentially based on political opposition to aiding the Communists. Zahn, 14.

moral teachings of our Church but because he is afraid of his hide –he is a coward.”³⁵

While opposition to American Catholic CO's was clearly present and strong, Zahn did highlight Hugo among the few American Catholic clergy who openly defended and actively supported Catholic CO's at the time.³⁶ He pointed particularly to Hugo's 1943 two-part *Catholic Worker* article, “Catholics Can be Conscientious Objectors,” as one of the few examples of support American Catholic CO's received from their Church.³⁷

Whatever pre-war discussions took place regarding the morality of war and the idea of Catholic conscientious objection, therefore quickly disappeared following the U.S. entry into WWII.³⁸ The disappearance of these discussions, especially by American clergy and theologians, makes Hugo's response to Connor in these 1943 *Catholic Worker* articles all the more significant, and perhaps damning for Hugo.

Hugo's Defense of American Catholic CO's

Two months after Connor's article appeared, *The Catholic Worker* printed the first part of Hugo's article, “Catholics Can Be Conscientious Objectors.” This was not the

³⁵ Richard Klaver, O.S.C., in *Crozier Missionary* (July, 1941), Zahn, 25.

³⁶ Zahn also included CUA philosophy professor Barry O'Toole and Paul Hanly Furfey as the other two outspoken defenders of Catholic CO's. Patricia McNeal also pointed out that a few U.S. bishops quietly supported Camp Simon, the work camp for Catholic CO's under the auspices of the *Catholic Worker*. These included Archbishop John T. McNicholas of Cincinnati, who famously called for a “mighty league of Catholic noncombatants”, Bishop Petersen of Manchester, New Hampshire, whose diocese hosted the camp, Bishop Shaughnessy of Seattle, Bishop Alter of Toledo, and Archbishop Bechman of Dubuque. Patricia McNeal, “Catholic Conscientious Objection During World War II” *The Catholic Historical Review* 61, 2 (April, 1975): 236.

³⁷ John Hugo, “Catholic Can Be Conscientious Objectors” *The Catholic Worker* (May and June, 1943).

³⁸ In November, 1939, *America* magazine published a survey of 54,000 Catholic students at 141 Catholic colleges and universities, with 36 percent indicating that they would become CO's if the U.S. entered the war. “National Catholic College Poll,” *America*, November 11 and 18, 1939, in McNeal, “Catholic Conscientious Objection,” 225. Zahn noted the various reasons many American Catholics may have opposed U.S. entry into the war, including opposition to supporting the Communist Soviet Union or to Irish American animosity toward the U.K. Zahn, 34. For more on the various reasons which motivated American Catholic opposition to the U.S. entry into WWII, see David O'Brien *American Catholics and Social Reform: The New Deal Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

first time Hugo had written about war in *The Catholic Worker*.³⁹ The articles that appeared in the May and June issues, though, were the first time Hugo responded directly to an article challenging the pacifist position promoted by Day and *The Catholic Worker*.⁴⁰ Indeed, Day and the other editors of the *Worker* later described these articles as “the definitive and most forthright statement” on the subject of Catholic conscientious objection.⁴¹ These articles were also significant in that they were examples of Hugo employing the theology of the retreat outside of the retreat itself. Indeed, while other “retreat priests” led the Lacouture-inspired retreat, Hugo appeared to be the only one who brought its theological perspective into other discussions. These articles were also important in that, like Blondel’s defense of the social Catholics in his “Testis” articles, Hugo’s defense of American Catholic CO’s in *The Catholic Worker* was a direct challenge not only to neo-Thomism, but also to what was the dominant stance of Catholic engagement with American society and culture at the time –one held by most of the American Catholic hierarchy and, as Connor made clear, the theological elites.⁴² These articles also presented a very real and concrete embodiment of the often abstract arguments of nature and grace Hugo was making. Indeed, American Catholic CO’s were examples of Christians striving to live a supernatural life.

³⁹At the time, *The Catholic Worker* had just finished printing a six-part article by Hugo titled “Weapons of the Spirit,” which was later published by The Catholic Worker Press in book form, with an imprimatur from Cardinal Spellman –a point Day never tired of noting, John Hugo, *Weapons of the Spirit* (New York: The Catholic Worker Press, 1943). Abe Bethune illustrated the book. The articles appeared in *The Catholic Worker* between November, 1942 and April, 1943. The Catholic Worker Press had also published, with Spellman’s imprimatur, *In the Vineyard* (1942) which was made up of ten Hugo articles that had appeared in *The Catholic Worker* between September, 1941 and July 1942.

⁴⁰ It should be noted that *The Catholic Worker* was regarded as a significant Catholic periodical at the time on par with *Commonweal* and *America*. See, David O’Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform*.

⁴¹ This quote appeared in the November, 1944 issue of *The Catholic Worker*, in the editors’ introduction to another Hugo article, “The Immorality of Conscription,” CW (November 1944): 3.

⁴² For more on the Catholic hierarchy’s response to the American entrance in WWII, see Patricia McNeal, *Harder Than War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992) and O’Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform: The New Deal Years*.

Hugo opened his article by noting the shift that had occurred in American Catholicism with the U.S. entry into the war. That was a shift, he pointed out, which did not reflect any change or convergence in Church teaching on participation in war, but instead was the result of the “super-patriotism” that had encompassed Catholics during wartime.⁴³ Likewise, the scandal of U.S. government’s propaganda and suppression of dissent was only surpassed by the American Catholic hierarchy’s concurrence in it.⁴⁴ Indeed, he declared that the Church’s rejection of its role as the sanctuary of the conscience was the real “controversy” of the day, and it was “utterly preposterous to invoke her authority in refusing to accord the rights of conscience to any man.”⁴⁵ The acquiescence of the majority of Catholics to the American war-effort did not change Catholic teaching on war. As he would later do to justify the retreat theology, Hugo looked to sources within the Christian tradition for support and he noted that the tradition was full of examples of seemingly lone voices who had advocated Church teaching -St. Thomas More was one such an example.⁴⁶ Like the English saint, Hugo argued that Catholics whose consciences led them to object to following their nation’s leaders could look beyond their own local Church and instead to the broader Catholic tradition,

⁴³ In “The Menace of Propaganda,” Benson also criticized the “fever pitch of false patriotism and exaggerated Nationalism” that seemed to overtake many Americans by the late 1930s. Joachim Benson, M.S.S.T., “The Menace of Propaganda,” *Preservation of the Faith* 8.3 (June, 1939), as cited in Portier, “World War II,” 34.

⁴⁴ Hugo, “Catholics” (May 1943): 6.

⁴⁵ Hugo, “Catholics” (May 1943): 6.

⁴⁶ Hugo called More a Catholic conscientious objector. For almost all of Catholic England -except for More, one bishop and “handful of Carthusians”- had accepted Henry VIII’s innovations and had asserted in the face of More’s objections that it was inconceivable that everyone, including the priests and bishops, were wrong. Yet More’s canonization four centuries later revealed that “*all* of Catholic England was actually wrong.” Hugo, “Catholics” (May 1943): 6.

particularly the twentieth-century “Peace Encyclicals,” though he noted that these statements were generally even more ignored than the Social Encyclicals.⁴⁷

According to Hugo, a Catholic conscientious objector could ultimately appeal to the Sermon on the Mount, “the Christian manifesto” in which Jesus offered a “higher way” for bringing about peace. In contrast, Connor’s argument was seen as essentially making the Sermon and the entire Gospel message irrelevant to the problem of war -or else as somehow suggesting that the spirit and laws of the Gospels were not opposed to participation in war, and that the entire issue of war was one dealt with by the natural law.⁴⁸ Once again, Hugo argued that any practical implications of the supernatural and the life of holiness to which Christians were called were ignored by Connor. Indeed, for Connor, teachings like those in Sermon on the Mount were presented as counsels of perfection which a Christian was not obligated to practice (according to their state in life) and therefore such teachings could be easily dismissed from the life of ordinary Christians –quarantined to the arena of the spiritual elites.⁴⁹

By relegating the higher, supernatural life presented in the Gospels as counsels of perfections -counsels not obligated and therefore easily dismissed- Hugo argued theologians like Connor were separating the practical implications of the supernatural from the ordinary Christian life. Hugo contended that while a Christian may not be obligated to always perform the counsels according to his state of life that did not mean

⁴⁷ Hugo, “Catholics” (May, 1943): 7. Hugo highlighted Benedict XV’s *Ad Beatissimi* (1914), Pius XI’s *Caritate Christi Compulsi* (1932), and Pius XII’s various Christmas addresses. Hugo also suggest that a Catholic CO could appeal to the present-day German bishops “who in spite of repeated condemnation of Nazi principles and practices, had never declared the German war effort unjust and have given full support to their own soldiers.” Hugo, “Catholics” (May 1943): 8

⁴⁸ Hugo wrote that if theologians like Connor did not in fact throw out the Gospel, “they at least reason as though it did not exist; they leave to one side all specifically Christian or supernatural principles, revelation, the evangelic law.” Hugo, “Catholics” (June 1943): 6.

⁴⁹ Hugo, “Catholics” (June 1943): 6.

that he should not seek to perform them, let alone that he was not permitted to perform them as Connor seemed to suggest.⁵⁰ For the implications of the supernatural final end meant that all Christians were called to a life of holiness.⁵¹

As Hugo saw it, Connor had confused the counsels of perfection with the precepts of the Gospel which all Christians were obligated to follow: the love of God above all things and love of neighbor as oneself. And these precepts, he explained, were what made up the supernatural life.⁵² For Connor, though, love of God was not recognized as the final end to which all were called, but rather as something optional – a counsel for a select few to attain.⁵³ And since so few Christians were seen as being called to and given the grace for this counsel, Hugo noted that, in practice, issues such as war were typically discussed without reference to the supernatural, but instead according to the principles of reason and the natural law.⁵⁴

According to Hugo, this theological error also led to the view that those who desired to perfect their love of God were extremists, rigorists, or as Connor sneeringly described them, perfectionists.⁵⁵ In this way, Connor and others, “who claim the authority of moral theology for their views,” had declared that a Catholic could not refuse his duty to defending his country -a duty of his “state in life”- with an appeal to the Gospels. Thus American Catholics were being told that not only were they under no obligation to follow

⁵⁰ Hugo, “Catholics” (June 1943): 6.

⁵¹ Hugo wrote that living according to the Gospel, seeking holiness and perfection was not the “privilege” for a few “generous souls.” Rather, it was “God’s eternal and immutable decree, binding upon every last one of us.” Hugo, “Catholics” (June, 1943): 7.

⁵² Hugo likened the Gospel precepts to a traveler’s final destination, while the counsels were like the airplane he used to reach that destination. While the counsels were not the only means to reaching our final end, they are the best and refusing to employ these divinely given means was at the very least a failure to live the supernatural life. Hugo, “Catholics” (June 1943): 7.

⁵³ Hugo, “Catholics” (June, 1943): 7.

⁵⁴ Hugo, “Catholics” (June, 1943): 7.

⁵⁵ Hugo, “Catholics” (June, 1943): 7.

the teachings of Gospel, since such teachings were the counsels of perfection intended for the spiritual elite, but that in fact they were not even permitted to follow them because of their state in life.⁵⁶

The argument made by Connor was indeed a very real consequence of a two-tiered account of the nature-supernatural relationship, particularly as that account informed American Catholic social ethics, which Hugo sought to challenge. He explained that his objection to war was not based on a belief that all war was evil. Instead it was based on the notion that even a just war was at best a natural action and far less than the supernatural life.⁵⁷ As with dancing and smoking, Hugo argued that participation in a war may indeed be “ethically justified” and therefore not be sinful, but it was still not part of the supernatural life of holiness presented in the Gospels. The supernatural “higher way” of Jesus’ teachings, such as to love your enemies, did not imply that other ways were necessarily sinful, just that they were infinitely far less than to what a Christian was called.⁵⁸ Fighting in a just war was not necessarily sinful, but it was a failure to live a holy life.⁵⁹ In their contention that a Catholic could not in good conscience be a conscientious objector, Hugo saw neo-Thomists like Connor denying that the supernatural life of holiness – “the higher way” – was at least an option, if not a duty, of the Christian life.⁶⁰ In his defense of American Catholic CO’s, he contended that their objection to participating in war was a form of living this higher way of Jesus and thus a

⁵⁶ Hugo, “Catholics” (June, 1943): 7.

⁵⁷ Hugo, “Catholics” (June, 1943): 7.

⁵⁸ Hugo, “Catholics” (June, 1943): 7.

⁵⁹ Hugo, “Catholics” (June, 1943): 7.

⁶⁰ According to Zahn, Dorothy Day once appeared before a Congressional panel alongside “a church dignitary” who had come to argue for military deferment for Catholic seminarians. Day suggested that laymen might also receive such an exemption. He also noted that she was publically berated by the Church official for making such an argument, and that it was in response to this episode that Barry O’Toole committed his support to Day’s position. Zahn, 33.

concrete implication of the supernatural in his daily life.⁶¹ They were striving to live a supernatural life of holiness, a life not limited to a select few.

This entire argument in support of American Catholic CO's can be seen as flowing out of the understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship in the retreat. Nature was not sinful, indeed it was good, but it was also far less than the supernatural. While distinct, human nature was not separate from the supernatural. The supernatural was not externally or extrinsically related to a self-contained human nature, but rather was an inner dynamism of human nature bringing it to fulfillment. It was in this sense that Hugo argued that a Catholic objecting to war was not working out of some "explicit regulation," but rather from an "interior compulsion" that comes from the Spirit of Love.⁶²

Hugo continued to make this argument throughout the war.⁶³ Zahn and others have noted the significance of these articles for American Catholic CO's, and Patricia McNeal has suggested that Hugo was one of the main influences on Dorothy Day's shift to more theological justifications of pacifism.⁶⁴ This particular article is also noteworthy in that it revealed that Hugo already had a history with the neo-Thomists at *The American Ecclesiastical Review* by the time Francis Connell, C.S.S.R published his review of

⁶¹ The influence of Hugo's argument can be seen in the statement of "Fundamental Principles," passed out to every new arrival at Camp Simon: "Conscientious objection for Catholics is a precept of perfection... Those who become objectors must earnestly strive after the perfection of love..." Zahn, 47.

⁶² Hugo, "Catholics" (June, 1943): 9.

⁶³ Later that year, Hugo wrote another series of articles on war titled "Gospel of Peace," which were later published as a book by The Catholic Worker Press. In 1944, he wrote "Immorality of Conscription" for *The Catholic Worker*, which was reprinted in 1948. In 1945, two more Hugo articles on war and peace appeared in *The Catholic Worker*, "Conscience Vindicated" in April, and "Peace Without Victory" in September.

⁶⁴ McNeal, *Harder Than War*, 41.

Applied Christianity in 1945.⁶⁵ And it was a history that included Hugo's critique not only of neo-Thomist theology, but, perhaps more importantly, his critique of the political stance that theology informed -American Catholic support of the nation's war effort.

The Retreat Controversy

As was pointed out in the first chapter, Day was aware of the criticism of Hugo and the retreat from within the Worker, as well as opposition of a more formal nature that existed outside the movement. In *The Long Loneliness*, she had described some of the controversy that surrounded the retreat,

In Canada, Father Lacouture was charged with inexactitude of expression, causing division among the clergy and causing people to go to extremes in the business of mortification.

When this accusation was brought to the attention of Bishop Hugh Boyle in whose diocese Father Hugo and other young priests who gave the retreat belonged, he said glumly, "I wish someone around here were going to extremes." Nevertheless, within a few years Father Hugo and the others who gave the retreat were refused permission to give it any longer, and were told to take care of their parish duties.⁶⁶

Indeed, by the end of 1942, Hugo was no longer able to give the retreat and would not lead another for almost seventeen years.⁶⁷

In all likelihood, Hugo's "exile" was as much the result of complaints from his fellow priests as to any theological inexactitudes.⁶⁸ For, almost immediately after Hugo

⁶⁵ *Nature and the Supernatural*, included a quote that was attributed to Connell in reference to Hugo's writings during the war: "When, therefore, the bishops of an entire nation all Catholics to take part in a war and even pray for victory, etc., it is certainly rash for a private individual to declare the war unjust. This is a condemnation of the hierarchy, and (contrary to what the writer says) it does express a lack of respect and obedience to Episcopal authority." According to Hugo, this quote appeared in a mimeographed draft of Connell's critique of *Applied Christianity*, which would later be condensed into his 1945 *AER* book review. Hugo, *Nature*, 103.

⁶⁶ Day, *The Lone Loneliness*, 258.

⁶⁷ Boyle transferred Hugo from Mt. Mercy College in Pittsburgh, where he was then an instructor and chaplain following his time teaching at Seton Hill College, to St. Mary's in Kittanning, Pennsylvania. With this transfer to a rural parish, Hugo's "exile" began. This period was made up of various assignments which similarly prevented him from leading retreats.

first began to give the retreat at Oakmont, Boyle began to hear complaints of a certain rigorism appearing in seminarians and young clergy who attended the retreats. Stories spread of young clerics returning from Hugo retreats and becoming “detachers” -some were even called “Hugonuts” or “Lacouturemites.”⁶⁹ While still a young priest, Hugo was remembered by some Benedictines at St. Vincent College in Latrobe as the spiritual director to a group of seminarians who considered themselves to be more spiritually serious and were known as the “Tanq Corps.”⁷⁰ In recounting these complaints, Hugo even suggested that opposition to his retreat may have had more to do with his admonishing fellow clergy to give up smoking and drinking than any real theological concerns.⁷¹

Day also noted that more serious criticism of Hugo began to emerge in the pages of prominent theological journals like *The American Ecclesiastical Review*.⁷² That Hugo’s theology was indeed significant and noteworthy within the American Catholic theological world of the 1940s was evidenced by the fact that critiques of Hugo were written by some of the most distinguished Catholic theologians in the U.S., such as Connell, Pascal Parente, Joseph Donovan, C.M., Joseph Clifford Fenton, and the British theologian Gerald Vann, O.P. As mentioned earlier, criticism even came from Paul Hanly Furfey. Hugo and the retreat did not go unnoticed.

⁶⁸ Hugo described a typical gathering of clergy “in lavish feasts, the use of costly liquors and quantities of tobacco, attendance at ‘exclusive’ resorts and places of recreation; of luxurious apartments, private bars, costly furnishings, enervating softness, and extreme devotion to bodily comfort.” Hugo, *Sign*, 34.

⁶⁹ The late Notre Dame philosopher, Ralph McInerny, who was a seminarian in Minnesota at the time, recounted the story of another seminarian who was a great pianist, but after attending a Hugo retreat, had stopped playing.

⁷⁰ The “Tanq corps” was named after the author of a textbook of spirituality, Aldophe Tanqueray, then popular in seminaries. According to Nathan Munch, OSB, Theology professor at St. Vincent’s College: “Hugo does not seem to have been held in high estimation by the St. Vincent’s Benedictines who knew him.” Email from Nathan Munch (August 12, 2009).

⁷¹ Hugo, *Sign*, 32.

⁷² Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 258.

This entire “retreat controversy” was significant for two reasons. First, it calls into question the somewhat standard view of Catholic theology in the America from *Pascendi* to Vatican II as uniform, bland, and without debate -the notion that *Pascendi* killed all intellectual activity.⁷³ This was not the case. The debate and controversy surrounding Hugo highlight the fact that there was a lot up for debate before the Council, and indeed a lot of controversy.⁷⁴ This debate also revealed that Hugo, like Blondel and de Lubac, was very clearly challenging the dominant theology of the early twentieth-century, the neo-Thomism of his critics.

The Critics

Francis Connell, C.S.S.R (1888-1967)

The first published critique of Hugo appeared in July 1945 in Connell’s review of *Applied Christianity* for *The American Ecclesiastical Review*.⁷⁵ The war in Europe had just ended in May, and Japanese Emperor would surrender to the U.S. that August, following the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The U.S. war effort was victorious. That Connell published his critique of Hugo’s book at this moment may not have been purely coincidental, given the very public stance Hugo took during the war. At the time, Connell was the chair of moral theology at the Catholic University of

⁷³ Peter Huff noted that there remains a “lingering scholarly bias against the entire preconciliar period of twentieth-century Catholic history.” Peter Huff, *Allen Tate and the Catholic Revival* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), 18. An example of this scholarly bias can be seen in Leslie Woodcock Tentler’s description of early twentieth-century Catholicism in the U.S.: “It was –to exaggerate only slightly- a Catholicism almost bound to offend academic sensibilities, associated as it is likely to be with complacent anti-intellectualism, reflexive anticommunism, and a repressive sexual ethic.” Leslie Woodcock Tentler, “On the Margins: The State of American Catholic History,” *American Quarterly* 45 (March 1993): 113.

⁷⁴ J. Leon Hooper, S.J. linked the debates between Fenton, Connell and Hugo with those surrounding Fenton, Connell and Murray which were occurring around the time, and would eventually lead to Murray being “silenced.” J. Leon Hooper, S.J. “Murray and Day: A Common Enemy, A Common Cause?” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 24 (Winter 2006): 45-61. The controversy surrounding Leonard Feeney S.J. was another example of an American Catholic debate taking place at the time.

⁷⁵ Francis J. Connell, “Review of *Applied Christianity* by John J. Hugo,” *The American Ecclesiastical Review* 113 (July, 1945): 69-72. Connell has been described as “

America and considered “one of the most authoritative voices in moral theology in the United States.”⁷⁶ According to Hugo, Connell’s *AER* review was actually a condensed version of criticisms he earlier written regarding *Applied Christianity* which had been mimeographed and “passed around.” These unpublished criticisms had been categorized by their author into five “General Comments” and 128 “Particular Comments.”⁷⁷ Before the publication of the *AER* review, Hugo had even written and mimeographed a response to Connell which he titled *Nature and the Supernatural: a reply to a critic*, the bulk of which he would later incorporate into the book *Nature and the Supernatural* (1947).⁷⁸

In his review, Connell reported that *Applied Christianity* contained statements which resembled “teachings of heresies of old” –in particular, teachings that human nature was inherently sinful.⁷⁹ For Connell, the calls to renounce and mortify natural motives and actions in *Applied Christianity* were based upon what he perceived as its author’s understanding of human nature as entirely corrupted by sin. While Connell listed a number of instances where Hugo did not conform to Catholic teaching, his main objection was that Hugo’s explanation of the nature-supernatural relationship did not

⁷⁶ Terrence J. Moran, “Connell, Francis (1888-1967)” in *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History* Michael Glazier, Thomas J. Shelley, eds. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 371.

⁷⁷ On the effect of such a substantial list of criticisms, Hugo pointed out that “Such a long series of objections has the effect, apart from their intrinsic worth, of throwing suspicion and doubt on the competence or integrity of a writer. Superficial readers, not looking very carefully into the meaning of these criticisms, and not taking the trouble to study them in relation to the book, will be impressed, even convinced, by the sheer accumulation of ‘evidence.’” Hugo, *Nature*, 1.

⁷⁸ Fenton also reported that such a manuscript had been composed of 141 mimeographed pages bound together in book form, and had been “widely distributed to priests and seminarians along the eastern seaboard.” Fenton, “Nature,” 54, fn.2. Interestingly, there is a bound mimeographed copy of *Nature and the Supernatural: a reply to a critic* in the stacks of Roesch Library at the University of Dayton.

⁷⁹ Connell, reflecting the heightened state of vigilance in American Catholic theological circles at the time, qualified his charges saying that it was not his intention nor within his competence to assert that Hugo’s book deserved of “ecclesiastical censure.” Nevertheless he contended that the book contained “statements which, if taken in their literal sense, bear a close resemblance to propositions condemned by the Church.” Connell, 69.

fully enough affirm the abilities of human nature.⁸⁰ Perhaps most significantly, Connell concluded his review by likening Hugo's theology to that of Baius, the Jansenists and the Manicheans, and he described it as an "exaggerated supernaturalism."⁸¹

Pascal Parente (b.1890)

Connell noted that he had gleaned the term "exaggerated supernaturalism" from an earlier *AER* article by his colleague at the Catholic University of America, Pascal Parente. Parente was a professor of ascetical theology and author of the widely-read text *The Ascetical Life*.⁸² Though he mentioned neither Hugo nor *Applied Christianity* in his article, Parente did note an "exaggerated supernaturalism" which had begun to appear in recent spiritual writings. He described this as essentially a version of "an old heresy condemned many times in the past."⁸³ It affirmed that whatever humans did without the assistance of grace, or "without referring the action to the supernatural end," was sinful.⁸⁴ He stated that this was the heresy of the Manicheans and the Albigensians, of Martin Luther, Baius, and the Jansenists. Parente's contribution to the Hugo-retreat controversy was not limited to this article, though. In *The Ascetical Life*, he had also mentioned that a recent Catholic writer had said that sin was "only a secondary reason for mortification and that mortification would be necessary even if there were no actual sin, for we must

⁸⁰ Connell, 70. Hugo's other transgressions included his attitude toward natural pleasures as "samples" of the joys of heaven to be ultimately renounced. Connell asserted that while Christian asceticism called for renunciation of "from time to time, of *some* lawful pleasures," this is very different from Hugo's call to never allow voluntary pleasure to be a motive and that natural pleasures must be given up as far as possible. Connell, 72. Hugo would later call this idea of renunciation from time to time an example of a "minimalist Christianity" content with the extent of the Christian life as involving "eat, drink, and be merry...but avoid mortal sin." Hugo, *Nature*, 49.

⁸¹ Connell, 72

⁸² Pascal P. Parente, "Nature and Grace in Ascetical Theology," *The Ecclesiastical Review* (June, 1943): 430-437. Pascal P. Parente *The Ascetical Life* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1944).

⁸³ Parente, "Nature," 434.

⁸⁴ Parente, "Nature," 434.

die, not merely to sin, but to the natural.”⁸⁵ This idea, Parente argued, implied that apart from sin, human nature was still evil.⁸⁶ Hugo read both of these criticisms as directed at his writings and the retreat theology.⁸⁷

Paul Hanly Furfey (1896-1992)

Connell was not the only Catholic University of America faculty to employ Parente’s notion of “exaggerated supernaturalism.” In *The Mystery of Iniquity*, Furfey, a professor of sociology at the university, had noted that some Catholics in Canada and the U.S. had fallen into “a sort of exaggerated supernaturalism” and in so doing seemed to deny the validity of natural goods.⁸⁸ To illustrate this position, he quoted from a set of mimeographed retreat notes, “which a friend kindly made available,” according to which a priest preached, “Do not attack sin –attack the naturally good.”⁸⁹ Furfey argued that such teaching had already been addressed by the Church in the condemnation of the errors of Buis, Molinos, Jansen, and Quesnel.⁹⁰ Though Furfey did not name the retreat leader, stating that it seemed “to be the part of charity not to mention the name,” Hugo understood this as a critique of his retreat.⁹¹

Furfey’s presence in this controversy is interesting. As noted, he and Hugo had a history. Furfey had been Hugo’s immediate predecessor in leading the annual Catholic Worker retreat. No doubt, Furfey was not thrilled with Pacifique Roy’s attendance and insistence on “leading a retreat within a retreat” during his 1940 Maryfarm retreat. Hugo

⁸⁵ This quote was taken from a section subtitled: “Errors Regarding Mortification.” Parente, *The Ascetical Life*, 94.

⁸⁶ Parente, *The Ascetical Life*, 95.

⁸⁷ Hugo, *Nature*, 104. Both Connell and Fenton affirmed that Parente was referring to the Lacouture/Hugo retreat with the term “exaggerated supernaturalism.”

⁸⁸ Paul Hanly Furfey, *The Mystery of Iniquity*, (Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Company, 1944), 43.

⁸⁹ Furfey, *Mystery*, 43.

⁹⁰ Furfey, *Mystery*, 43, fn. 2.

⁹¹ Hugo, *Nature*, 115, fn. 1.

had bumped Furfey from the next year's Worker retreat. Even before that, the two had engaged in the somewhat pointed exchange over agrarianism in the pages of *The Catholic Worker*. But Furfey and Hugo were also both closely associated with Day and the Catholic Worker. And both, along with CUA philosophy professor Barry O'Toole, were also the lone American Catholic clerical voices espousing the pacifist position in World War II, and defending the rights of American Catholics to be conscientious objectors.⁹² Furfey's critique of the Hugo-retreat, which coincided with Day's embrace of it, could be seen as an instance of the post-war break-up of the "New Social Catholics" or "the Catholic Front" which had thrived between the wars, and also as an example of Day's further radicalization.⁹³ Or it is possible that Furfey simply did not like Hugo.

Joseph Clifford Fenton (1906-1969)

By 1946, the "controversy" brought on by the writings (mimeographed or otherwise) of Hugo, Connell, Parente, and Furfey, as well as the general stir caused by the retreat itself with American Catholic circles, was significant enough to warrant an article in the *AER* by Joseph Clifford Fenton.⁹⁴ Fenton was a priest from the Diocese of Springfield, Massachusetts, a professor of dogmatic theology at CUA, and the editor of *The American Ecclesiastical Review* from 1944-1963.⁹⁵ Fenton was also a former student

⁹² McNeal, *Harder Than War*, 38.

⁹³ In 1936, Furfey wrote a letter to Norman McKenna of the *Christian Front* in which he described a movement emerging in the Church that he called "New Social Catholicism." Representatives of this movement included: Day, Virgil Michel, O.S.B., John LaFarge, Joachim Benson, M.S.Ss.T., as well as Furfey himself. William L. Portier, "Paul Hanly Furfey: Catholic Extremist and Supernatural Sociologist, 1935-1941," *Josephinum* 16.1 (Winter/Spring 2009): 34. Also see, Portier, "World War II," 28. Cultural historian Anthony Smith has called this pre-war Catholic movement the "Catholic Front." Anthony B. Smith, *The Look of Catholics* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2010), ch.1.

⁹⁴ Joseph Clifford Fenton, "Nature and the Supernatural Life," *The American Ecclesiastical Review* 113 (January, 1946): 544-568.

⁹⁵ Joseph Komonchak, "Fenton, Joseph (1906-69)" in *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History*, Michael Glazier, Thomas J. Shelley, eds. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 505.

of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrangé at the Angelicum, and at the time was perhaps the most influential and eminent Catholic theologian in America.⁹⁶

Fenton began his article by summarizing the history and significance of the discussions surrounding the Hugo-retreat that had been taking place.⁹⁷ He pointed out that these U.S. discussions were part of another “lively discussion” that had been taking place over the past decade in Canada, which had produced “some noteworthy” books and articles.⁹⁸ He acknowledged that in the U.S., though, the best known statements on “this debated matter” were the exchanges between Connell and Hugo.⁹⁹ Fenton also confirmed that most Americans who had learned the retreat theology had learned it from Hugo, and that vast majority of the “often acrimonious” American debate revolved around Hugo’s writings.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Fenton acknowledged Garrigou-Lagrangé in the “introduction” to his *The Concept of Sacred Theology* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1941). Fergus Kerr, O.P. described Fenton as “the most eminent American theologian” at Vatican II. Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 7. For more on the influence and power of both Fenton and Connell, see R. Scott Appleby and Jay Haas, “The Last of the Supernaturalists: Fenton, Connell, and the Threat of Catholic Indifferentism” *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 13 (Spring 1995), 23-48.

⁹⁷ He noted that in recent years, “American priests have seen the rise and advance within our country of what must be described as an extraordinary school of Christian spirituality. Quite recently Fr. John J. Hugo has given literary expression to the characteristic tenets of this school in his book *Applied Christianity*...Fr. Hugo’s obviously high purpose and his no less patent forensic skill have contributed towards making his writings decidedly influential.” Fenton, “Nature,” 54.

⁹⁸ Noting the controversy that surrounded Lacouture in Canada, Fenton wrote that while Lacouture did not publish any writings, his student Fr. Anselme Longpre had published *La folie de la croix* in 1938. In response, a Sulpician theologian at the Grand Seminary in Montreal named Roland Fournier had written an article, “Grâce et nature,” (*Le seminaire*, August, 1941), which was critical of some of the key themes in Lacouture’s theology as they appeared in Longpre’s book. Two replies to Fournier’s article then appeared in defense of the retreat: Dom Crenier’s “Grâce et nature,” (*Bulletin de Saint Benoît*, September 29, 1941) and Canon Beaumier’s pamphlet “‘Language Spirituel’ dans la predication,” which defended a Lacouture-inspired retreat given by Abbé Saey in 1940. In *The Long Loneliness*, Day mentioned that Maisie Ward had attended a retreat lead by Saey given to workers in Montreal. Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 245. Fenton also noted *Synthèse théologique sur le renoncement chrétien* (Montreal: Grand Séminaire de Montréal, 1945), by another Sulpician, Fernand Paradis, as a valuable book which could help end what was a “singularly unfortunate controversy.” Fenton, “Nature,” 54.

⁹⁹ Fenton, “Nature,” 56.

¹⁰⁰ Fenton seemed to want to rise above all of this when he stated that because of the interest and importance of the issues, it was important that American clergy should be well informed in this field and not get caught up in the acrimony: “If spiritual leaders of our people form inaccurate or confused judgments on the points involved in the controversy occasioned by these books, a situation seriously disadvantageous

After briefly praising *Applied Christianity* for what he saw as “the ultimate purpose,” Fenton asserted that Parente’s 1943 article had provided an “obvious and forceful warning against the teaching afterwards presented in *Applied Christianity*.”¹⁰¹ He then presented a series of critiques of Hugo’s theology, arguing that ultimately it denigrated human nature –for natural motives and attachments did not have to be renounced, but instead could be “subordinated” under supernatural ones.¹⁰² For Fenton, like the other critics, the only motives or attachments that needed to be renounced were ones which were sinful. Natural motives, at least ones that were not sinful, were part of human nature and were good. They did not need to be renounced or transformed but could remain as is, albeit subordinated under supernatural motives. Again, as with other neo-Thomists, human nature was here understood to be sufficient as is, and not as inherently lacking or an empty void.

Fenton further asserted that Hugo had fallen into the “central ecclesiological error of the Lutherans.”¹⁰³ For, while according to Catholic teaching a Christian was someone united in communion with the Church, for Hugo a Christian was someone who practiced the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and charity.¹⁰⁴ Fenton charged Hugo with setting forth an “invisible Church theory” in his work of Catholic spirituality, implying that Hugo’s emphasis on the supernatural had a sectarian bent –that the practice of the

to Catholicism in the United States may well develop. Such inaccurate and confused judgments arise, for example, when opponents of Fr. Hugo’s system condemn it as ‘too strict,’ and when advocates of this teaching claim that any objection to it involves an attack on the practice of Christian mortification. Such over-simplifications tend to obscure the paramount fact that our one concern in doctrine about the spiritual life must be to give our people exactly the teaching which God gave to the world through our Lord Jesus Christ and which He presents infallibly through the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church. The only test that matters for any book or any system dealing with doctrine of faith or of morals is that of conformity with the Catholic message. ‘Strictness’ and personalities have nothing to do with the case.” Fenton, “Nature,” 56.

¹⁰¹ Fenton, “Nature,” 56.

¹⁰² Fenton argued that there are other motives besides supernatural motives which could “subordinated” to the motive of the “supernatural friendship for God.” Fenton, “Nature,” 58.

¹⁰³ Fenton, “Nature,” 67.

¹⁰⁴ Fenton, “Nature,” 67.

supernatural virtues somehow separated Christians from the Church and the world. This charge highlighted the neo-Thomist emphasis on the juridical and external aspects of the Church. It also further revealed the “post-Quietist Catholic” suspicion of any emphasis on the supernatural or mystical.¹⁰⁵

Two other prominent theologians also joined the discussions surrounding the Hugo-retreat. The English Dominican, Gerald Vann, O.P. (1906-1963) wrote “Nature and Grace” in *Orate Fratres* in 1947 and Joseph Donovan, C.M. (b.1880), a theology professor at Kenrick Seminary in St. Louis, published “A Bit of Puritanical Catholicity” in 1948.¹⁰⁶ In both pieces, Hugo’s theology was portrayed as viewing human nature as hopelessly corrupted by sin.¹⁰⁷

While each critique focused on slightly different aspects of the theology presented in *Applied Christianity*, there was clear and certain unity in the critics’ judgment. Indeed, each critic seemed to base his argument upon those of earlier critics. Throughout these critiques, Hugo was accused of depicting human nature as sinful, and in this way he shared in the “old” heresies of the Jansenists and the Protestants. Such an account of nature both denigrated its abilities and exaggerated its need for the supernatural. At the

¹⁰⁵ Hugo later called Fenton’s emphasis on the external, and not on the mystical or supernatural, “ecclesiastical materialism.” Hugo, *Nature*, 176.

¹⁰⁶ Gerald Vann, O.P., “Nature and Grace,” *Orate Fratres* 21 (January 26, 1947): 97-105. Joseph Donovan, C.M. “A Bit of Puritanical Catholicity,” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 48 (August, 1948): 807-814. Donovan’s article responded to an anonymously authored pamphlet titled “Brother Nathaniel Has a Brainstorm” which bore a resemblance to Hugo’s work. Hugo claimed that he did not write the pamphlet, but helped the author edit it. Donovan stated that after reading the pamphlet, he was struck by “a resemblance between the doctrine of this author and the early teachings and practices of that school of French thought and devotion that developed into Jansenism.” And he ended his article stating that the author of the pamphlet was wooing a “straight-laced Jansenistic spirit.” Donovan, 811, 814.

¹⁰⁷ According to Vann, Hugo’s view of human nature was “far nearer that of the Reformers who held it to be entirely corrupt than of Catholics who hold that, though sin has indeed ‘wounded’ it severely, it still remains essentially good.” While Hugo was read as allowing this in the abstract, but denying it in the concrete. Vann explained that “by the abstract he really seems to mean nature as viewed apart from all question of sin. But it is of nature in the concrete that Catholicism holds this relatively optimistic view.” Vann, “Nature,” 101.

root of this criticism was Hugo's assertion, seemingly inspired by St. Ignatius, that the Christian life entailed the renunciation of more than that which was sinful, that the supernatural final end somehow implied that attachment to created goods must also be given up. For a neo-Thomist operating out of a two-tiered account of nature and the supernatural, such claims were read as blurring human nature with the sinful. Hugo's emphasis on the supernatural and its implications on the ordinary Christian would have also sounded suspicious to a theological mindset still shaped by the legacy of Quietism.

Hugo's Reply

In addition to his mimeographed reply following Connell's 1945 review, Hugo responded to his critics with two books. The first, *A Sign of Contradiction: As the Master so the Disciple* was published in 1947, and presented the theological foundations of the retreat along with a history of the controversy surrounding it in Canada and the U.S. The second, *Nature and the Supernatural: A Defense of the Evangelical Ideal* appeared in 1949, and in it Hugo replied directly to the various critiques made against the retreat theology.

1. The Spirit of Pious Naturalism and the Sin Mentality

Throughout *Nature and the Supernatural*, Hugo maintained that his critics were caught up in a "spirit of pious naturalism" which defended nature while neglecting the exigencies of grace, and therefore rejected what he called "this doctrine of death to nature."¹⁰⁸ This naturalism and what Hugo regarded as its over-emphasis on the abilities of human nature caused his critics to lose sight of the practical implications that the

¹⁰⁸ Hugo, *Nature*, 158. Hugo actually quoted Garrigou-Lagrange (whom, interestingly, he called "truly one of the greatest spiritual writers of our time as well as a great theologian") as stating that those who embraced this naturalism "will be more attentive to nature which must be perfected than to grace which should produce this transformation in us." Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.'s *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, trans. Sr. M. Timothea Doyle, O.P. (St. Louis: Herder, 1937), 54. [Hugo, *Nature*, 222].

supernatural final end had for the Christian life. It also lead them to de-emphasize the insufficiency and instability in human nature, that were both inherent to human nature and the historical result (concupiscence) following the Fall.¹⁰⁹ This spirit of pious naturalism caused his neo-Thomist critics to maintain a false account of human nature, one that was much more sufficient for human fulfillment than it actually was. The reality of human nature, both inherent and historical, was ignored.

All of this, Hugo argued, led to his critics to develop a “sin mentality” which did not distinguish human nature *per se*, but only that which was sinful or supernatural.¹¹⁰ And the concrete effect of this mentality was to regard the Christian life as focused primarily on avoiding sin. Apart from what was sinful, all actions and attachments tended to be seen as good enough as is and not in need of any further transformation or perfection. Without a true account of nature as distinct from both the sinful and the supernatural, the supernatural became blurred with nature and, therefore, distinct only from what was sinful.¹¹¹ For Hugo, the upshot of all of this was that the Christian life came to be regarded as very minimalistic, or as he described it: “Eat, drink, be merry and avoid mortal sin.”¹¹² To say that it entailed anything more was to be dismissed as rigorist or extremist. It was through this sin mentality that Hugo contended his critics had read him.¹¹³

2. The Critique of “Modern Theology”

¹⁰⁹Hugo, *Nature*, 53.

¹¹⁰ Hugo, *Nature*, 8. Much more will be said about the sin mentality in chapter 5.

¹¹¹ Hugo pointed out the similarities between this view and that taken by the Jansenists, except that the later blurred human nature with sin. In neither instance, though, was human nature seen as distinct from both sin and the supernatural. Hugo, *Nature*, 11.

¹¹² Hugo noted that proponents of this view could not imagine “any higher ideal of conduct than the avoidance of sin or allow that any actions are blameworthy, even in souls who have been divinized by grace, other than those that are clearly sinful.” Hugo, *Nature*, 7

¹¹³ Hugo, *Nature*, 8.

For Hugo, his critics' pious naturalism and sin mentality were the result of their theology. He argued that this was a "modern theology" which separated and even segregated dogmatic theology from moral theology.¹¹⁴ While distinguishing the two was necessary, separation, he explained, was problematic,

By segregating dogmatic truth from moral teaching, the practical implications and corollaries of the former tend to be lost sight of and neglected. It is forgotten that such sublime mysteries as the Trinity and the Incarnation have immediate practical implications. They are studied speculatively, with the purpose of extending the horizons of the faith. Their relation to charity is forgotten or passed over. Moral theology, on its part, sets about its inquiries independently of the great dogmatic truths: these being left to a separate sphere, lose their formative, practical, directing importance; and moral theology, as we shall see, seeks its norms elsewhere.¹¹⁵

It was here that Hugo clearly identified the failure of the two-tiered theology of his neo-Thomist critics. For with this separation, the truths of dogmatic theology came to be understood as not applying to moral theology, and thus the practical implications of these theological truths were lost.¹¹⁶ In other words, Christian belief had become seen as segregated from Christian life.

Unfortunately, this loss was only exaggerated by the further separation of moral theology from ascetical and mystical theology.¹¹⁷ For Hugo, this separation was destructive to the understanding of the Christian life because it removed any discussion of grace, correspondence with grace, and the holiness this correspondence enabled from

¹¹⁴ Hugo observed that when a theologian wrote a *Summa*, it was likely to be "either a *Summa Theologiae Moralis* or a *Summa Theologiae Dogmaticae*." And should the same theologian write two *Summas*, one of moral theology and one of dogmatic theology, he would still observe "the separation of these branches." Hugo, *Nature*, 190.

¹¹⁵ Hugo, *Nature*, 191.

¹¹⁶ Hugo, *Nature*, 191.

¹¹⁷ Hugo continued, "And if one looks into the modern *Summas* of Moral Theology, one finds that there has usually been removed from them most of what pertains to ascetical and mystical theology, that is, the principles that regulate the application of Christian truth to practice and to growth in holiness." Hugo, *Nature*, 191.

discussions in moral theology.¹¹⁸ As a result, moral theology became focused almost exclusively on casuistry rather than on what Hugo called a “positive moral theology.”¹¹⁹ Hugo noted that Fenton himself had defined moral theology in terms of casuistry in *The Concept of Sacred Theology* (1941).¹²⁰ This understanding of moral theology was not concerned with the transformation and perfection of the Christian life, but rather was limited to discussions of what was sinful and was not.¹²¹ As Fenton himself argued, any discussion of higher ideal for the Christian life would be to confuse the counsels of perfection with the commandments or precepts.¹²² Any discussion of elevating grace and a life of holiness in correspondence with that grace –what Hugo called, “the most important practical problem in the whole theology”- was removed from moral theology and relegated to the confines of ascetical and mystical theology.¹²³

As a result of this separation, the life of holiness became associated with the counsels of perfection rather than the precepts of the faith to which all Christians were called. In this way, Hugo saw neo-Thomists like Fenton as exiling the life of holiness to the arena of the spiritual elites who were called to live these counsels somewhere far

¹¹⁸ In 1939, Hans Urs von Balthasar had made a very similar critique of this separation of dogmatic theology from ascetical and mystical theology. For Balthasar, the result was the separation of a life of holiness from the study of theology, and thus the absence in modern times of saints who were also theologians. Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Theology and Sanctity,” in *Essays in Theology: Word and Redemption*, Bk 2, trans. A.V. Littledale, 49-86 (Montreal: Palm Publications, 1965).

¹¹⁹ Hugo, *Nature*, 197.

¹²⁰ According to Fenton, moral theology “deals with the liceity and the illicit character of human acts. Because of its very nature the use of examples or cases constitutes an excellent pedagogical means for learning and explaining this discipline. For this reason the subject itself is sometimes known as *casuistic* moral.” Fenton, *The Concept*, 214.

¹²¹ Hugo further noted that in practice, “this concern for sin is usually a concern of mortal sin; venial sin is regarded as negligible; imperfections are scarcely recognized at all.” Hugo, *Nature*, 199.

¹²² Fenton, *The Concept*, 214.

¹²³ Hugo, *Nature*, 201. To highlight this, Hugo described a three-volume, 1800 page manual of moral theology he owned that contained only nine pages on the subject of grace and treated “the practical problem in a footnote.” Hugo, *Nature*, 201, fn 14.

beyond the life of “ordinary” Christians.¹²⁴ This was the same charge he had made against Joseph Connor during his defense of American Catholic CO’s.

With “modern” moral theology concerned almost exclusively with sin, particularly sins against the Decalogue, as distinguished from sins against charity, Hugo highlighted the fact that ascetical and mystical theology had come to be understood as dealing with “supererogatory piety,” and not the integral or essential aspects of theological study.¹²⁵ He pointed out that it was not surprising, then, that interest in mystical theology was often considered a “sign of mental instability,” and that when it was actually studied, the focus was typically on the accidental adjuncts of mysticism - “the mystical phenomena and charismata”- and not on the central and essential fact of mystical theology: union with God through love.¹²⁶ Likewise, he noted that ascetical theology usually carried with it certain “gloomy connotations” and tended to be regarded as “a sort of hobby for spoilsports and misanthropes.”¹²⁷ For “modern” theologians, Hugo argued,

it is quite regularly forgotten that ascetical theology is the science which studies the laws governing the growth and increase of the supernatural life infused into the soul at baptism; it is a practical discipline which investigates these laws, not only to contemplate them in a speculative way, but to apply them and make them operative, productive of sanctity; it is concerned with the dynamism of Christianity, the physiology of the Christian life.¹²⁸

¹²⁴Hugo, *Nature*, 204.

¹²⁵ To help illustrate this quarantining, Hugo contended that “seminarians are usually taught not to regard such authors as St. John of the Cross and St. Frances de Sales as serious moral theologians... The greatest masters of applying the Christian teachings to the concrete problems of living, are neglected. Certainly their works are praised; but they are not used: they are honored and unread. The reading of such books is regarded as a commendable act of piety, although it is an act of piety that is usually not greatly emphasized; in any event they are not regarded or consulted as serious works of moral theology.” Hugo, *Nature*, 201.

¹²⁶ Hugo, *Nature*, 200.

¹²⁷ Hugo, *Nature*, 200. Hugo pointed out an article in the May 1946 issue of *The American Ecclesiastical Review* which “hotly” disputed whether or not John of the Cross should be read by young seminarians or ordinary Catholics. Hugo *Nature*, 201, fn.13.

¹²⁸ Hugo, *Nature*, 200.

This confinement of moral theology to casuistry alone, therefore, resulted in the mystical or supernatural exiled from discussions of the ordinary Christian life. Any discussion of the supernatural life of holiness and union with God came to be seen as extrinsic to rather than intimately related with such a life. Thus, the supernatural became further separated from human nature. Here again, the legacy of Bossuet and the Quietist controversy can be recognized in the neo-Thomist theology of the early twentieth-century.

3. “*Modern Theology*” and *Aquinas*

All of this led Hugo, as it did de Lubac, to argue that the “modern theology” of Fenton, Connell, Connor, and the neo-Thomist manuals had indeed moved far from the teaching of Aquinas. He pointed out that for Aquinas, grace and the need to correspond to grace were moral or practical issues and were very much included in his discussions of moral theology (*ST II- II*).¹²⁹ For Aquinas, Hugo explained, “grace is an intrinsic principle of action and conduct; that is to say, it is the inner dynamism that impels supernatural conduct.”¹³⁰ To recognize grace as this “inner dynamism” of human nature was to recognize the practical implications of the supernatural for the Christian life. Grace was not extrinsically related or separated from human nature rather it was intimately related to human nature as its true fulfillment. In the “modern theology,” though, “this *intrinsic* principle of supernatural activity” in Aquinas’s thinking had been ignored, and instead the emphasis was placed on what Aquinas had called “an *extrinsic*

¹²⁹ Hugo noted that the *Secunda Secundae* of the *Summa Theologica* which dealt with moral theology, Aquinas included not only a discussion of the virtues, but also of the active and contemplative life, the duty of Christian perfection, tracts on the Beatitudes and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in relation to the supernatural life and contemplative prayer, as well as a treatise on prayer. Thus, Hugo argued that the separations made by the neo-Thomist did not exist in Aquinas, but rather there was unified theology. He pointed out that Aquinas’s discussion of moral theology “developed in close relation with his dogmatic teaching, all within the framework of a theology that he regards and treats of as essentially one [and] includes, besides casuistry, the loftiest principles of ascetical and mystical theology, bringing all together in a unified system of spiritual doctrine.” Hugo, *Nature*, 202.

¹³⁰ Hugo, *Nature*, 192.

principle of action” –his tract on law.¹³¹ The result of this emphasis was a tendency to “externalism and legalism.”¹³² In comparison with Aquinas’s “unified system of spiritual doctrine,” Hugo suggested that the “modern theology” of the neo-Thomists was legalistic, extrinsicist, and clearly out of step with the Angelic Doctor.¹³³

Conclusion

The upshot of all of this is that, indeed, Day was correct to suggest that the retreat controversy shared many similarities with nature-grace debates taking place in Europe at the same time, particularly those surrounding de Lubac. Like those other controversies, Hugo’s debate with the American neo-Thomists revolved around understandings of the nature-supernatural relationship. Like de Lubac, and Blondel before him, Hugo’s understanding clearly challenged the dominant theological perspective at the time, arguing that the relationship was not extrinsic and two-tiered, but rather was distinct without separation. Grace was not extrinsically added to nature, but was the inner dynamism driving human nature to its supernatural fulfillment –one which required transformation and perfection.

The American debate also shared a similar power dynamic with the European ones. For at the time that his critics were publishing their critiques of *Applied Christianity*, Hugo was a parish curate in rural Pennsylvania. He had been ordained for less than ten years and had a Masters degree in philosophy. He had been removed from his teaching position and was no longer giving retreats. His responses to his critics were either printed by The Catholic Worker Press or self-published. In contrast, his opponents

¹³¹ Hugo, *Nature*, 201.

¹³² Hugo, *Nature*, 201.

¹³³ Hugo wrote that “There is a need for someone to do for St. Thomas in theology what Cardinal Mercier did for him in philosophy, that is to restore him to the place of preeminence properly his, which the Church, as has been shown in many decrees, desires to have recognized.” Hugo, *Nature*, 191.

were some of the most eminent, influential, and powerful Catholic theologians in America. From their faculty positions at the Catholic University of America and the editorial offices of *The American Ecclesiastical Review* –perhaps the most prominent and popular American theological journal at the time- Fenton and Connell, in particular, held a great deal of power in Catholic theological and ecclesiastical circles. Their role in the “silencing” of John Courtney Murray, S.J. (1904-1967) in 1954 only further evidenced their power.¹³⁴ Fenton and Connell were both squarely within a tradition of neo-Thomism whose dominance of American Catholic thought was passing, but was still very powerful in the 1940s.¹³⁵ In short, the young Father Hugo’s theological opponents were the American neo-Thomist theologians at the time, tightly monitoring what Komonchak has termed a “domesticated theology.”¹³⁶ As with the “Testis” debate between Blondel and Descoqs, and the wartime build-up to *Humani Generis* involving de Lubac and Garrigou-Lagrange, Hugo’s debate with these American neo-Thomists was not a simple theological dispute between equals. Fenton and Connell, like Descoqs and Garrigou-Lagrange, had a considerable advantage in influence and prominence in the Church.

The issues debated were also not benignly academic. In the same way that Blondel had challenged Catholic participation in *Action française*, and, though somewhat less explicitly, the way de Lubac had challenged Catholic support of Vichy, Hugo’s opposition to American Catholic participation in World War II –based upon the retreat’s theology of nature and grace- challenged the dominant stance toward social engagement

¹³⁴ See, J. Leon Hooper, “Murray and Day: Common Enemies, Common Cause?” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 24 (Winter 2006): 45-61.

¹³⁵ R. Scott Appleby and Jay Haas, “The Last of the Supernaturalists: Fenton, Connell, and the Threat of Catholic Indifferentism” *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 13 (Spring 1995): 39.

¹³⁶ Komonchak noted that this theology was under the closest supervision and tightest control that theology had ever been in the history of the Church, and that it was taken seriously chiefly, if not exclusively, within the subculture of “modern Roman Catholicism.” Komonchak, “Theology and Culture,” 579.

held by many in his Church. Indeed, he questioned the basic assumptions of many American Catholics, including most of the hierarchy and theological elites, that America was good for Catholicism and that Catholics were good for America.¹³⁷

While the nature-supernatural relationship remains very much at the center of Catholic theological discourse, it plays a particularly major role in shaping Catholic engagement with particular cultures and societies, a fact highlighted by Blondel, de Lubac, and Hugo. The argument that Hugo's theology is still relevant today is founded on the assertion that it continues to offer a corrective and alternative to much of the contemporary discussions of Catholic engagement with American society and culture. These discussions have generally been dominated by proponents of a "public theology." Indeed, many recent thinkers who have challenged these public theologians by proposing a social ethic based on an understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship similar to that of Hugo, often find themselves labeled with many of the same charges that Hugo's neo-Thomist critics used to label him. Therefore, it is Hugo's theology and its relevance for contemporary discussions in American Catholic social ethics that will be examined in the next and final chapter.

¹³⁷ For more on these assumptions, see Michael Baxter, "The Unsettling of Americanism: A Response to William Portier," *Communio* 27 (Spring 2000): 161-170.

CHAPTER VI

HUGO AND CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CATHOLICISM

The general trend of Catholic theology in the twentieth century has been to seek a closer integration between nature and grace, rejecting the “dualist” approach in which nature is a self-enclosed structure upon which grace builds a kind of superstructure, and to propose instead that grace is the fulfillment of nature’s inner dynamism...However, having said this one has not said a whole lot, because the vast majority of theologians in the second half of the twentieth century would say that they reject the dualist approach, that they believe that grace and nature are integrally related, and that they believe that holiness is not the special prerogative of the vowed religious. What matters is *how* one integrates nature and grace.

-Frederick C. Bauerschmidt¹

In 2004, Hugo’s niece, Rosemary Fielding, wrote an article about her uncle’s retreat titled: “Anti-Assimilationist Retreat: Becoming Spiritually Inoculated Against Americanism.”² This provocatively titled article, written in the equally provocative *Culture Wars* magazine, recounted Fielding’s spiritual journey which eventually led her, in her twenties, to attend a Hugo-retreat in 1981. She also described the “controversy” her uncle’s retreat caused in the 1940s, and likened it to contemporary depictions of Hugo and the retreat theology.³ For Fielding, the opposition to Hugo stemmed from the fact that

¹ Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, “Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic,” *Communio* 31 (Spring 2004): 71.

² Rosemary Fielding, “Anti-Assimilationist Retreat: Becoming Spiritually Inoculated Against Americanism,” *Culture Wars* (October 2004): 22-39.

³ Fielding pointed to Patrick Jordan’s Commonweal review of anthology of Hugo’s writings, *Weapons of the Spirit*, edited by Michael Aquilina and David Scott. In it Jordan wrote that in reading Hugo he felt he had fallen into “a time warp.” He called the retreat theology “harsh,” “wooden” and having a “certain rigidity and literalness.” Fielding also quoted a letter to the editor from Mark and Louise Zwick, of the Houston Catholic Worker, which defended Hugo, arguing that he was “profoundly spiritual, full of wisdom, holy and holistic, totally unwooden and unrigid.” Fielding, 33.

his theology challenged, both then and now, Catholics' desire to assimilate into American society and culture. She remembered that her uncle often argued that Catholics should resist the temptation to divide themselves according to American political categories of liberal or conservative, and instead think in terms of being either "superficial or radical."

Indeed, Fielding explained,

Considering the muddying of the waters caused among Catholics by the new American ideology of 'neo-conservative/neo-liberalism' that supports the idea of an American empire, [Hugo's] aphorism about Christian social morality was somewhat prophetic of the way Roman Catholicism would be the casualty in the hardcore partisan battles among Catholic thinkers at the turn of the millennium. The Retreat took arms against the reductionism that is forced upon Roman Catholicism by Americanism, the Procrustean bed on which American ideologies, liberal and conservative, repeatedly dismember the Church.⁴

For Fielding, the theology of the Hugo-retreat had clear social and political implications for American Catholics in the 1940s and today -implications which struck at the heart of the dominant approach to social engagement in American Catholicism. This final chapter will present an examination of the implications of Hugo's theological argument for contemporary American Catholic social thought, and will suggest that his theology remains relevant today.

Before such an examination, though, a summary of Hugo's theology will be offered in order to bring together and fill out the various parts of his theological perspective that have already been discussed. The argument will then be presented that Hugo's theological insights remain relevant to contemporary Catholic discourse, particularly in American Catholic social thought. It will be noted that the charges leveled against Hugo by his neo-Thomist critics have a similar ring to those made against more

⁴ Fielding, 38.

contemporary American Catholic radicals by advocates of public theology –the dominant social perspective in American Catholic theological discourse today.

This criticism itself will be examined, with particular focus on the understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship that supports it. Indeed, as will be demonstrated, these public theologians have some significant theological similarities with their now much maligned neo-Thomist predecessors. Finally, it will be shown that Hugo’s theology and his challenge to neo-Thomism, while set in terms and categories somewhat removed from these contemporary conversations, continues to provide a much needed corrective and alternative to the dominant American Catholic social ethic of today, much as it did some seventy years ago.

Hugo’s Theology

The analysis that has been presented throughout the preceding chapters has sought to reveal that Hugo’s theology should be understood as having a much more nuanced view of the nature-supernatural relationship than his critics recognized. Far from promoting either a “Jansenist” denigration of human nature or an “exaggerated supernaturalism,” Hugo recognized nature as good and yet as always insufficient. This insufficiency was twofold: inherent to a finite human nature called to an infinite final end, and the historical result of original sin -concupiscence. His understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship, therefore, was one of distinction without separation – human nature was created with a supernatural final end far beyond its unaided ability to attain. In this sense, what Hugo was striving for was an integrated view of nature and grace –a view which emphasized the practical implications of the supernatural in the Christian life.

The Supernatural Life

Such integration was clearly the theological thrust of the retreat, the notion that by virtue of their supernatural final end, all Christians were called to live a supernatural life –the life of a saint.⁵ At its core, such a life required correspondence with the grace necessary to elevate that life to the supernatural, and in this way transform and perfect it. The action of grace was not simply the removal of sin, but more fundamentally it was an elevation beyond the natural life and its attachments to created goods.⁶ The focus of the retreat, then, was on how to live a supernatural life -a life that corresponded with grace. Over and over, Hugo assured his retreatants of the superabundance of grace, insisting that the availability of this gratuitous gift of God should not be their concern. Rather, their concern should be to correspond with this grace.

This correspondence with grace required not only the renouncing or giving up of sin, but also the giving up of attachments to created goods. For while they were not evil, these goods could never fulfill human nature's insufficiency, they could never take the place of the supernatural final end. Correspondence with grace required that one focus on the love of God alone, attachments to these created goods only presented distractions that weakened that love. This renunciation or "dying to self" was central to the retreat theology –the giving up of the merely good in favor of the infinitely better.

What the Hugo-retreat offered, then, was an account of how to live a life continually seeking to be in correspondence with the elevating and sanctifying action of

⁵For Hugo, "the fact that man has a supernatural end, determines that the means for attaining this end must also be supernatural." Hugo, *Sign*, 104.

⁶ Hugo explained that we have a twofold purpose in corresponding with grace: "first, that we may live on the supernatural plane; secondly, that we may overcome sin and its effects. And while these effects actually go on together in our souls, the limitations of human thought and speech compel it to distinguish them and treat of them separately." Hugo, *Nature*, 174.

grace. “The Folly of the Cross” was the name given to this constant assessment of one’s life, the ongoing attempt to correspond with the actions of grace by examining one’s own motives and actions to see if they were informed by the love of God alone –one’s supernatural final end. While this continual examination was a casuistry of sorts, it was not the rigid casuistry of the neo-Thomist manuals which Hugo had critiqued for separating the implications of the supernatural from the Christian life. Rather it was a flexible, alert, critical, yet loving assessment of the life of a Christian in light of his or her ultimate destiny. For while the call to die to self and mortify our attachments to created goods often seemed harsh, Hugo was a spiritual director and retreat leader for lay people as well as religious, and he was aware that the life of these men and women inescapably involved some use of these goods. But he was also aware that attachment to these goods often became habitual and could even come to dominate their lives, becoming ends in themselves and detrimental to the Christian life. For these habitual attachments became the “natural motives” which informed the “natural actions” that made up the “natural life.”⁷ And such a life, Hugo argued, was not the supernatural life to which Christians are called -a life embodied in supernatural actions motivated by the love of God.

The Samples

Much of the discussion in the retreat, therefore, was devoted to how to use these created goods without developing an attachment to them. In response to this chiefly pastoral, and indeed un-rigorous, concern for the proper use of these things of the world, Hugo offered the idea of the “samples.” This was the notion that many of the goods of the

⁷ Hugo was careful to explain, “I do not say that it is necessary to give up morally good natural motives under pain of sin. I do not say that such motives are wholly without merit in a Christian (that is a doubtful matter). I simply say that it is better, more loving, more pleasing to God, to act out of love for Him than for any merely natural good.” Hugo, *Nature*, 149.

world could be properly regarded as samples of God –reflecting the divine goodness. Regarded as such, these samples were affirmed as good and distinct from what was sinful. These samples included things like food, shelter, and money which were to a certain extent necessary and so could not be completely renounced. While such samples were needed, the continual use of these goods could, and usually did, lead to developing an attachment to them. Hugo recommended that the more these samples could be renounced, the less likely such attachments would form and become impediments to the love of God and to the correspondence with grace. The image of a farmer sowing seeds was used to illustrate this point: the more seeds that were sown, the greater the harvest that would be reaped. These goods were sown not because they were sinful, but in order to reap a much greater (supernatural) harvest. And just as the farmer did not mourn the loss of seeds, so these samples should be sown without regret but instead with joyful anticipation.

This renunciation was not always voluntary, for often God could and would cut away attachments to created goods. In this sense, Hugo suggested that suffering could be understood as the shears used by God to “prune” attachments –even attachments to oneself. God was understood as active in the world, working to bring us into correspondence with grace, and this pruning was the will of God bringing us closer to our ultimate destiny, and should also be regarded with a sense of gratitude and even joy. It was here that Hugo gleaned from Caussade’s notion of the “sacrament of the present moment” to illustrate the point that every moment of the day offered a chance to correspond with the will of God and God’s gratuitous gift of grace.

Through this continual sowing and pruning, and the ongoing assessment of one's attachments and motives that this involved, Hugo taught that the day-to-day life of a Christian could become transformed and perfected.⁸ For by giving up natural motives and actions in favor of supernatural ones, a Christian would begin to grow in correspondence with grace and become closer to union with God. This transformation and perfection were described as "the practical implications" of the supernatural on human nature. The supernatural was not depicted as a kind of extrinsic superstructure built on top of and adding to a sufficient human nature, but instead it was the inner dynamism which brought nature to its fulfillment.⁹ Indeed, grace was not remote from the "hurly-burly of every day," but instead, Hugo claimed, the hurly-burly of every day could become holy through correspondence with grace.¹⁰ This was the integrated view of the Christian life that Hugo proposed –what he called "the quintessential doctrine" of retreat theology.

***On Behalf of Gratia Elevans:
Hugo's Critique of Early Twentieth-Century Theology***

According to Hugo, though, this notion that all Christians were called to the supernatural life -a notion so central to spiritual masters like Ignatius, John of the Cross, Lallemant, and Caussade- had become lost in the "modern theology" that dominated Catholicism at the start of the twentieth-century. For instead of an integrated account of the nature-supernatural relationship, this theology separated and eventually even exiled the supernatural from human nature. And through this quarantining, the practical

⁸ Hugo used the image of fire transforming steel to illustrate this action of grace perfecting nature: "So must our human nature be transformed by grace; it likewise will remain essentially the same; but when penetrated through and through with divine action, it will soften and pliant, readily following the impulses of grace." Hugo, *Applied Christianity*, 25.

⁹ Hugo, *Nature*, 192.

¹⁰ Hugo, *Nature*, 226.

implications of the supernatural for the Christian life became ignored and forgotten. As a result, grace and the need to correspond with it were regarded as necessary only to the extent that such grace was needed to avoid sin –i.e., restore the damage done at the Fall. Lost was the notion that grace was primarily necessary, apart from sin, to elevate human nature and to bring it to perfection. For Hugo, this exile of the supernatural could be seen in the segregation of discussions of the mystical or supernatural from the manuals of moral theology. Instead of regarding the Christian life as one focused on seeking perfection, this theology presented the Christian life as chiefly concerned with avoiding sin by following the natural law.¹¹ For Hugo, this was a merely natural life.

Hugo described this modern theology as producing a “pious naturalism” that overemphasized the abilities of human nature, while under-emphasizing the need for grace.¹² And out of this naturalism emerged a “sin mentality” which no longer recognized nature as distinct from both the sinful and the supernatural.¹³ Instead, nature was regarded as either corrupted by sin or as blurred with the supernatural. In either case, he asserted that the loss of a correct account of nature caused many theologians working out of this mentality to view the world exclusively in terms of sin and the supernatural, with the result that the supernatural became regarded as simply that which was not sinful.¹⁴ In such an account, any sense of the supereminence and mystery of the supernatural was lost.

¹¹ Hugo suggested that while following the natural law and avoiding mortal sin indeed cleared away all that was wholly incompatible with the love of God, the Christian called to “heights of love” beyond this. Hugo, *Nature*, 167.

¹² Hugo described advocates of this naturalism as relegating the supernatural teaching of the Gospel – like the Sermon on the Mount- as only counsels of perfection, “they do not bind us strictly...so that, of course if we offend against the counsels of the Gospels, there is no sin involved.” Hugo, *Nature*, 77.

¹³ Hugo, *Nature*, 7.

¹⁴ Hugo, *Nature*, 7.

Hugo saw this sin mentality and its account of human nature as a major factor shaping how his critics read the retreat theology as being Jansenist or rigorist.¹⁵ Thus, in response to this criticism, he sought to recover a correct account of human nature from various sources within the tradition, and in this way, recover a sense of the supereminence and mystery of the supernatural.¹⁶ And so, for all the charges of denigrating nature and advocating an “exaggerated supernaturalism,” Hugo was focused on restoring a proper understanding of human nature which he believed to have been lost -one that recognized nature as good, but both inherently and historically insufficient.

Hugo’s Account of Human Nature

In Hugo’s theology, there was a clear recognition of the essential goodness in human nature. This goodness was particularly affirmed in his discussion of the samples, for if they were not fundamentally good these things could not be samples of God. This goodness was in human nature inherently but also remained in the concrete or historical state following the Fall. In fact, the effect of original sin on human nature was not the loss of this goodness, but rather the loss of the “preternatural gift of integrity” or original justice -a divine gift given to human nature to order its faculties under the love of and desire for God.¹⁷ Hugo explained that the “direct effect” of original sin was to deprive human nature of this gift, in effect to leave human nature unchanged but on its own.¹⁸ Indirectly, though, human nature did suffer some weakness after the Fall which prevented

¹⁵ Hugo stated that for his critics, “as long as you observe the Mosaic code –which, they say, except for the third commandment, is the natural law imposed by reason- all will be well, nothing more required, and anyone who asks more of you is stricter than Christ Himself, is therefore a fanatic, a rigorist, an extremist.” Hugo, *Nature*, 77

¹⁶ Hugo wrote; “The reason why *Applied Christianity* is so interested in vindicating the goodness of nature is that only in this way is it possible to understand and define the supernatural order; and the task which *Applied Christianity* sets for itself is to describe the supernatural life.” Hugo, *Nature*, 7.

¹⁷ Hugo, *Nature*, 47.

¹⁸ Hugo likened this to descendants of a wealthy person losing the family’s fortune. Hugo, *Nature*, 41.

it from functioning properly and from fully accomplishing “even that justice which is connatural to it.”¹⁹ This was the weakness due to concupiscence, the tendency of the human appetites to seek created goods rather than God.²⁰ And while concupiscence was not itself sinful, Hugo noted that the Council of Trent had made clear that it was an “inclination to sin” (*ad peccatum inclinat*).²¹ Human nature, then, was not viewed as sinful or radically incompatible with grace, but neither were its limitations and insufficiencies ignored.²²

Aquinas on the Effects of the Fall

Hugo argued that his account of human nature, far from being “Jansenist,” was, in fact, rooted in the thinking of Thomas Aquinas. He contended that Aquinas’s teaching provided “a fundamental principle” to the retreat’s “practical spiritual doctrine.” He even referred to the retreat as “Thomism in action.”²³ Such a claim was not unmerited. In his

¹⁹ Hugo, *Nature*, 43. Hugo explained that, while “in the long run” it was impossible to practice even the natural virtues without supernatural aid, i.e., without living a supernatural life, it was also indeed true that it was possible to perform “good natural actions” without the assistance of grace, “otherwise we would have to conclude that all the actions of pagans and infidels are sinful – a proposition that has been condemned by the Church.” Hugo, *Applied Christianity*, 201.

²⁰ Hugo described concupiscence as the natural appetites that were faculties of human nature and so good. He explained that in itself, “concupiscence is simply the tendency of the human appetite to seek its own good, its own delight (*concupiscentia est appetitus delectabilis*).” Prior to original sin they were regulated and ordered by the supernatural gift of original justice. But after the Fall, this gift was lost and, the principle of control being gone, concupiscence began to seek its own good immoderately and became, without any intrinsic change to itself and human nature, “an inclination of our corrupt nature to seek inordinately after corruptible goods.” Hugo, *Nature*, 46.

²¹ “Everything in *Applied Christianity*” Hugo wrote, “that speaks of the influence of concupiscence is based on those words, *et ad peccatum inclinat*.” Hugo, *Nature*, 41.

²² Hugo pointed out that while Baius and the Jansenists had held that all works of “infidels” were sinful because they regarded human nature as radically corrupt, in contrast, *Applied Christianity* took into “practical account of the disordered movements that result from concupiscence.” He contended that the retreat theology asserted that natural actions were likely to be blemished, “not radically or necessarily as the Jansenists held, but as a matter of practical experience and in the long run, as they habitually occur in one having a merely natural mentality.” Hugo described his theology as taking seriously the effects of concupiscence – the fact that natural actions (imperfect actions motivated by natural motives) were typically flawed because of concupiscence. He explained that although concupiscence was itself not sinful, it was nevertheless “prone to lead men astray and may even enter their good works, not of necessity ruining these in their substance, yet in some measure spoiling their goodness and diminishing their merit.” Hugo, *Nature*, 48-49.

²³ Hugo, *Nature*, 45.

discussion of the effects of original sin, Aquinas indeed asserted the goodness in human nature, distinguishing it as threefold: the first, being that which was intrinsic to human nature like the body, the soul, and its various powers: reason, the will, and the irascible and concupiscible appetites.²⁴ The next, was the gift of original justice (*donum originalis justitiae*), the only good of human nature that was not intrinsic to our nature.²⁵ The third aspect of nature's goodness was the "inclination to virtue" (*inclinationem ad virtutem*).²⁶ After the Fall, those aspects intrinsic to human nature (the first good) remained unchanged, thus human nature itself remained intrinsically good and unchanged.²⁷ In contrast, the gift of original justice (the second good), was completely removed.²⁸ While the loss of this gift did not intrinsically change human nature, the order and harmony it provided was lost.²⁹ This loss of original justice was the *direct* effect of original sin on human nature -not an addition to or intrinsic corruption of human nature, but rather the privation of a gratuitously given gift.³⁰

For Aquinas, all other effects on human nature which follow from the Fall were a result of this privation of original justice and so were *indirect* effects. And it was such an

²⁴ Aquinas, *ST I-II*, 85.1.

²⁵ Aquinas, *ST I-II*, 85.5., *ST I-II*, 81.2. While in a very exact sense Aquinas called original justice a good of human nature, he nevertheless was clear that it was not intrinsic to human nature. For to view it as such would be to understand it as something owed to human beings rather than as a gratuitous gift. The former view of original justice was the "pure naturalism" that both Baius and Jansen argued. Both of these sixteenth-century theologians asserted that original justice was part of human nature and thus owed to human nature by God (Baius) or required by God (Jansen) as a part of human nature rather than a gratuitously given gift. T.C. O'Brien, "Appendix 2," *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae, vol.26, Original Sin (1a2ae. 81-85)* trans. T.C. O'Brien, O.P. (New York: Blackfriars/ McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), 113.

²⁶ This inclination is an intrinsic part of human nature, deriving from the various aspects that comprise our nature. For example, Aquinas argued that our reason has a natural appetite for the truth, just as our will has for the good. In this way, both our reason and will incline our soul to satisfy these appetites by seeking their ends. This becomes an inclination to virtue, when for instance, in seeking the truth we practice the virtue of prudence and in seeking the good we practice justice. Aquinas, *ST I-II*, 51.1, *ST I-II*, 63.1, *ST I-II*, 85.1.

²⁷ Human reason, for example, is not damaged or diminished by original sin nor is our will. Aquinas, *ST I-II*, 85.1.

²⁸ Aquinas, *ST I-II*, 85.1.

²⁹ Aquinas, *ST I-II*, 85.3.

³⁰ Aquinas, *ST I-II*, 85.1.

indirect effect, in fact, that altered the inclination to virtue (the third good). For while this inclination remained in human nature after the Fall, it was lessened, not by original sin itself, but by the actual sins which occur after the loss of original justice.³¹ This lessening of human nature's inclination to virtue or "wounding of nature" was the consequences of the loss of order provided by original justice.³² As a result of this indirect wounding, the various faculties of human nature, like the reason and the will, have trouble properly functioning and practicing the virtues. Aquinas explained that, for example, human reason, especially with regard to moral decision making, was "blunted" and the human will became "hardened against the true good."³³ Therefore, "sustained virtuous activity" became increasingly difficult as concupiscence grew in ardor.³⁴ In short, an already insufficient human nature became even more limited following the Fall.

Due to their place in the hierarchy of human faculties, the "wounding" of the concupiscible appetites figured prominently in Aquinas' understanding how the inclination to virtue became lessened. These appetites were intrinsic to human nature (first good) and so were themselves not sinful.³⁵ Indeed, when ordered by original justice, these appetites worked with the inclination to virtue, particularly the virtue of temperance.³⁶ But when no longer ordered by original justice, these appetites worked against this inclination.³⁷ Aquinas described these unchecked concupiscible appetites as

³¹ Aquinas, *ST* I-II, 85.1.

³² Aquinas, *ST* I-II, 85.3.

³³ Aquinas, *ST* I-II, 85.3.

³⁴ Aquinas, *ST* I-II, 85.3.

³⁵ Aquinas, *ST* I, 81.2.

³⁶ This order, Aquinas explained, placed the concupiscible appetite under the control of our reason, and subjected to God as its final end. This order enabled the concupiscible appetite to temper its desire for created goods. Aquinas, *ST* I-II, 82.3.

³⁷ Aquinas, *ST* I-II, 82.3.

“straining towards” the various created goods they desired.³⁸ This was concupiscence. And with concupiscence, disorder and disharmony broke out as the other aspects of our nature, like the irascible appetites, the will, and the reason, were no longer ordered to the supernatural final end. As concupiscence inclined human nature towards the various created goods, it also inclined it away from God. And in this way, concupiscence became an inclination toward sin.³⁹

Human Nature “Left to Itself”

In summing all of this up in his commentary on the text, T.C. O’Brien, O.P., the translator of this section of the Blackfriars’ edition of the *Summa Theologiae*, noted that for Aquinas, original sin was not the privation of anything strictly proper to human nature.⁴⁰ Rather it was grace itself that was lost, and along with it, those perfections of human nature’s physical and moral being which depended upon grace in original justice were also lost. Following the Fall, therefore, human nature was just “left to itself” and it was in this sense that human nature became disordered.⁴¹ “Fallen nature” was human nature left to itself, without supernatural assistance and thus in disorder.⁴² And this disorder was not caused by the addition of sin, but by human nature’s own “defectibility.” As O’Brien explained, after the Fall, human nature “stays itself, but forlorn.”⁴³ This was

³⁸ Aquinas, *ST* I-II, 82.2.

³⁹ Aquinas, *ST* I-II, 84.3.

⁴⁰ O’Brien, 152

⁴¹ O’Brien continued, “Original sin is not the addition of a positive inclination to moral evil; it is the loss, the lack of supernatural endowment that would have restrained the sources of moral defect in man.” O’Brien, O.P., 152.

⁴² O’Brien described this “defectibility”: “As its description indicates, original justice preserved man from defects stemming from nature itself because of its ‘composition’ (Aquinas, *Compend. Theol.* 195). The preventative power of original justice points to an innate defectibility in man’s moral powers. This defectibility is not something added to nature, nor any positive obstacle or diminution of the inclination to virtue.” And for Aquinas, this inclination to virtue was ‘not the actual possession of virtues, but a capacity for their acquisition, even as it is a capacity to receive a yet unrealized human perfection.’” O’Brien, 157.

⁴³ O’Brien, 158.

Aquinas's account of human nature, one marked by inherent defectibility and disarray when left to itself.

Thus, for Aquinas there were two states of human nature: "the state of original justice" before the Fall and "the state of fallen nature" after.⁴⁴ In the former state, supernatural assistance ordered human nature, while the latter state was marked by the privation of that assistance. But in both, supernatural assistance was needed for human nature to function properly. In other words, human nature existed neither in a self-sufficient state of "pure nature," nor a state "perfect nature" in which supernatural assistance was somehow a part of or blurred with human nature.⁴⁵ In short, human nature, while not sinful, was not capable of much on its own. And its inherent insufficiencies were made only greater by the historical effects of sin.

It is worth noting, here, that this understanding of nature *left to itself* seems far from what many contemporary theologians have come to regard as the "Thomistic" view of human nature.⁴⁶ Indeed, Aquinas's view of human nature seems closer to what these same theologians have termed an "Augustinian" anthropology with its emphasis on the effects of sin and the need of grace, a view generally described as pessimistic in contrast to the more optimistic Thomistic approach. In fact, Hugo himself noted that Aquinas's account often contradicted many of the popular interpretations of his writings. Such interpretations pointed to "the optimism inherent in the Thomistic conception" and took

⁴⁴ O'Brien, 151.

⁴⁵ According to O'Brien, "When St. Thomas speaks of nature 'in its integrity' or of what man can do in his initial condition 'by his natural powers alone' [I, 95,1; I-II, 109,3], he is speaking of the state of original justice, and of man's moral capacity for ends connatural to human nature, a capacity enjoyed because of the gift of original justice. He does not refer to an imaginary condition either of 'pure nature' or of a 'state of integrity.' He compares the natural power of man in original justice with the same powers in fallen nature." O'Brien, *St. Thomas*, 151.

⁴⁶ For an example of the use of these categories see, Richard Gaillardetz, "Ecclesiological Foundations of Modern Catholic Social Teaching" in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., ed. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press 2004), 74.

that as a denial of the need for mortification: “since nature is entirely good and uncorrupt both in itself and its activities, why –they ask- should it be mortified?”⁴⁷ But this reading of Aquinas was a misunderstanding. Hugo argued that the teaching of the Angelic Doctor indeed made the need for mortification “more grim and urgent” and sent “its cutting edge deeper.” For it did not call for the removal of something extrinsic to human nature, but rather for the pruning of nature itself.⁴⁸

Why Renunciation is Needed

For Hugo, all of this was important, in that, just as he had turned to Ignatius, Lallemand, and Caussade to certify the retreat’s emphasis on the supernatural, so too he turned to Aquinas to justify the retreat’s teaching on human nature.⁴⁹ Following Aquinas, Hugo’s account was one in which human nature was never self-contained (“pure nature”) nor blurred with the supernatural (“perfect nature”), but rather was inherently insufficient. Such an account of human nature is important for understanding Hugo’s theology as being much more nuanced than his critics suggested. For it was because of concupiscence, both in the sense of it as a result of original sin and as being inherent to human nature, that attachments to created goods, as well as the motives and actions that stem from these attachments, needed to be renounced.⁵⁰ The mortification called for in the retreat, therefore, was much deeper and more radical than simply seeking to remove sinful corruption from post-lapsarian human nature. Instead, Hugo asserted, it was “a

⁴⁷ Hugo, *Sign*, 196.

⁴⁸ And so, Hugo concluded that the renunciation required by the supposedly more severe and gloomy Augustinian approach, which was practiced out of a conviction of personal sinfulness and corruption, was in fact “less strict, less thorough, less drastic” than that required by the Aquinas’s doctrine “freely practice, not in sorrow of being a sinner, though he will include this also, but in the joy of being a son of God, elevated by grace to the plane of the divine.” Hugo, *Sign*, 196.

⁴⁹ Hugo wrote that Aquinas’s account of human nature, “shows at once that nature is good and yet, in its present state, requires a purification.” Hugo, *Nature*, 47

⁵⁰ Hugo, *Sign*, 195.

disciplining of the natural faculties themselves, a restraint exercised on their natural activity, a curbing of it, even a breaking of it... that it may respond with immediate docility to the secret, unfelt control of grace.”⁵¹ In short, Christian renunciation was seen as not only a renunciation of sin, but more fundamentally, as necessary to bring human nature into correspondence with the gratuitous action of grace.

For Hugo, this was not a single action of grace (or “one grace”), but rather it was twofold and acted both medicinally on the effects of sin on nature (*gratia medicinalis*) and elevated human nature to the supernatural *gratia elevans*.⁵² But while *gratia medicinalis* became historically necessary after the Fall, the action of *gratia elevans* was always a part of the economy of salvation, even prior to sin.⁵³ He explained that,

sin is not the only or even the *primary* basis for mortification...there is *another* and a *prior* reason and motive... since man’s elevation to the divine life is the primary element in the divine plan for the salvation of mankind, it is also the primary basis for the practices proper to the Christian life, which is essentially a supernatural life; hence it is the primary reason and motive for the practice of detachment and mortification... Sin is a contingent act on the part of man, not an essential element in the divine plan itself as originally conceived by God... Therefore, the need to do penance on account of sin, as a corrective and atonement, derives obviously from the contingent fact of sin and is therefore itself contingent, secondary, supplementary.”⁵⁴

He argued that, therefore, the nature-supernatural relationship could not be understood as a consequence of original sin, but rather that the understanding of original sin presupposed the notion of *gratia elevans* -original sin was indeed a fall from grace. He

⁵¹ Hugo explained that such mortification did not destroy human nature, but broke it “as we speak of a spirited horse being broken, that it may also be controlled by a rein held lightly in a child’s hands.” *Hugo, Sign*, 196.

⁵² According to Hugo, grace did not do these actions separately or at different times, “it does them at one and the same instant of time, and so long as it resides in us, it continuously produces these two effects in us: it acts medicinally to help us overcome sin, and at the same time it elevates us above nature.” *Hugo, Nature*, 174.

⁵³ *Hugo, Nature*, 105.

⁵⁴ *Hugo, Nature*, 105.

contrasted this with the teachings of the Jansenists, who regarded original sin as a fall from nature and grace as simply a consequence of sin and a corrective of its effects.⁵⁵

To hold that mortification was motivated by sin alone, as his critics suggested, was to limit the idea of mortification too narrowly, to restrict the whole divine plan, and to fall into “gross naturalism.” The whole “sacrificial element in Christianity” was not simply to remove sin, Hugo concluded, but rather was to rise above attachments to the merely natural and bring our appetites, motives, and actions into correspondence with this elevating action of grace –to bring human nature to perfection.⁵⁶ Thus, the theology of the retreat, far from over-emphasizing the effects of sin, viewed these effects as secondary.⁵⁷ Instead, the retreat’s emphasis on dying to self was focused first and foremost on human nature’s supernatural destiny. The *gratia elevans* had very practical implications for the life of the ordinary Christian.⁵⁸ Hugo saw these practical implications of the supernatural as proof of “the unity of the Christian life.”⁵⁹ The supernatural actions and their correspondence with grace (chiefly *gratia elevans*) transformed and perfected one’s nature –making it into a “new creature.” In this sense, Hugo’s emphasis on the *gratia elevans* was similar to de Lubac’s focus on the *donum perfectum* and the transformation it brought about. This was the idea behind the “doctrine of assimilation” presented in the

⁵⁵ Hugo, *Nature*, 105.

⁵⁶ According to Hugo, “the primary reason why *Applied Christianity* condemns merely natural actions is that we have been elevated by grace to the supernatural and divine level of life, and elevation requiring us to rise also above mere natural standards of conduct, hence to abandon merely natural principles of actions, natural motives, and natural affections for creatures. This elevation to divine life is the primary reason for renouncing a merely natural mode of acting and living, because it is the primary fact and basis of the whole Christian religion.” Hugo, *Nature*, 54.

⁵⁷ Though they were secondary reasons for this mortification, the effects of sin were very real and needed to be taken seriously –thus, the need for remedial grace. While his view of the effects of original sin did not imply that human nature was intrinsically corrupted by the Fall, Hugo explained that it did “presuppose that there has been a Fall.” Hugo, *Nature*, 54.

⁵⁸ Hugo called the *gratia elevans* “the primary determinant of practical religious duties of Christian living.” Hugo, *Nature*, 71.

⁵⁹ Hugo, *Nature*, 204.

retreat. It was also, Hugo pointed out, consistent with Aquinas's statement that "grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it" (*Cum enim gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat*).⁶⁰

Distinct, but Not Separate

Underlying Hugo's theology and practice was his recognition of the distinctions that existed between the sinful, the natural, and the supernatural. Human nature was not sinful, but it was limited –both inherently and historically insufficient- and so distinct from the supereminence and mystery of the supernatural. While distinct from nature, the supernatural was not separate from it, but rather was intimately related to it as its final end.⁶¹ Hugo articulated this understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship which was at the heart of the retreat theology:

Grace is in itself a principle of action wholly distinct from the human soul and infinitely above it. Grace is not merged with the soul, nor lost in it, nor does it become part of the soul. It is joined to the soul, closely indeed, but only in an accidental manner, as the philosophers put it. The intimacy of this union is sufficient to permit unity of action even when the soul acts on the supernatural plane; still, the distinction must be insisted upon to guard the supernatural character of grace and of actions impelled by grace.⁶²

Nature and the supernatural were not extrinsically related in some two-tiered sense, nor were they radically incompatible, nor were they blurred together. The elevating action of grace was not an extrinsic addition to human nature, but rather it was the inner dynamism which has always been needed to bring an insufficient nature to its final end. In short,

⁶⁰ Aquinas, *ST I*, 1.8. Thomas Gilby, O.P., translated this famous axiom: "Since grace does not scrap nature but brings it to perfection," in *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae* vol.1 (New York: Blackfriars/McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1963), 31.

⁶¹ Hugo, *Nature*, 192.

⁶² Hugo, *Nature*, 59.

nature and the supernatural were distinct, but not separate. This was the understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship in Hugo's theology.

This was also the theology of nature and grace around which Dorothy Day had structured *The Long Loneliness*, and that she seemed to enthusiastically endorse it in her recently published diaries and letters.⁶³ For she had clearly described giving up the “natural happiness” she found in her life with Forster and in the Old Left in order to become Catholic in terms of a choice between the good and the better. Day did not understand herself as simply renouncing sin; she saw herself as also giving up a life of goodness and joy in order to pursue what she regarded as a much greater life—a supernatural life of holiness. And it was the natural happiness of her earlier life, in a sense a sample, which Day saw as leading her to this far better life.⁶⁴

This understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship as distinct but not separate was also at the heart of de Lubac's theological argument “to unite in order to distinguish” and “distinguish in order to unite.”⁶⁵ For de Lubac the gift of creation (the *datum*) was very clearly distinct from the gift of perfection (the *donum*). And yet, these two gifts were neither separate nor blurred, but rather human nature was created with a capacity and longing for a final end far greater than itself. As he made clear this “unity is in no way confusion, any more than distinction is separation.”⁶⁶ Human nature's desire for a supernatural final end, then, was not an extrinsic desire added to it, but rather it was

⁶³ For Day's diaries, see *The Duty of Delight*, Robert Ellsberg, ed. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008). For her letters, see *All the Way to Heaven*, Robert Ellsberg, ed. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010). For some discussion of the significance of the Hugo retreat as evidenced in Day's letters, see Michael Baxter's review of *All the Way to Heaven*, “The Long Correspondence,” *America* (November 8, 2010).

⁶⁴ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 134

⁶⁵ De Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 330.

⁶⁶ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 330.

a “natural desire” of human nature. And this final end did simply add to nature, but transformed and perfected it.⁶⁷

Of course, this is not to suggest that Hugo was the “de Lubac of Pittsburgh.” Hugo was clearly working out of theological impulses and an understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship very similar to those of de Lubac, as well as employing similar efforts at *ressourcement* to challenge the neo-Thomists. As noted in the previous chapter, though, he did this in a much less sophisticated manner. Hugo’s account of the transformation and perfection brought about by grace was, at times, more mechanical and even heavy-handed in comparison with that of de Lubac. While de Lubac articulated this transformation in terms of human nature’s natural desire for God, a notion de Lubac gleaned from his reading of Church Fathers like Origen, Hugo seemed to rely more on Lallemant’s notion of human nature’s empty void which only God could fill. Augustine’s restless heart apologetic, which informed de Lubac’s description of nature’s *potentia obedientialis* or anxious longing, was depicted by Hugo in the more mechanical terms of the final end for which nature was created. And his talk of dying and mortifying one’s motives and attachments to the natural in order to correspond with grace, often portrayed this transformation in a manner perhaps too severe. Hugo pointed out that such language was indeed rooted in the works of early-modern spiritual writers like Ignatius, Lallemant, de Sales, and John of the Cross. Nevertheless, it was the idea of dying to the “natural self” that drew much of the criticism of the retreat, and such images continue to leave contemporary readers uncomfortable.

⁶⁷ De Lubac, “Mystery,” 302.

Hugo and Contemporary Approaches to Catholic Engagement with American Society and Culture

Despite its weaknesses, Hugo's theological perspective continues to be important for theology, particularly for Catholic social thought in America. The charges leveled against Hugo by his neo-Thomist critics are very similar to contemporary charges leveled against American Catholic radicals, especially by "public theologians."⁶⁸ For instance, David O'Brien has argued that the "evangelical Catholicism" practiced by Day and the Catholic Worker movement, challenged the church but limited the audience, restricted its language, short-circuited its responsibility, and tended toward what he called "perfectionism" and "an apocalyptic sectarianism."⁶⁹ He asserted that these Catholic radicals, by always questioning the legitimacy of secular institutions and policies, "devalued" the demands of citizenship and "reduced" the moral significance of politics and the broader society.⁷⁰ O'Brien's assertion can be seen as stemming, at least in part, from a belief that the theology which informed their evangelical Catholicism had itself devalued human nature and tended toward a world-denying and rigorist perfectionism.⁷¹

⁶⁸ As noted in Fielding's articles, Hugo wanted American Catholics to be *radical*. "Totalitarian Catholics" was a similar term he used to describe Day and other Catholic Workers: "men and women who accept in full the practical implications of the Gospel, are capable of creating a genuinely Christian society or could feel at ease in such a society should it ever be established." Hugo, *Sign*, 180. For more on the American Catholic radicalist tradition, see Michael Baxter, "Notes on Catholic Americanism and Catholic Radicalism: Toward a Counter-Tradition of Catholic Social Ethics," in *American Catholic Traditions: Resources for Renewal*, ed. Sandra Yocum Mize and William Portier (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997), 53-71.

⁶⁹ David O'Brien, *Public Catholicism*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1989), 246.

⁷⁰ O'Brien continued this critique, arguing that "by defining issues and responses in Christian terms, [evangelical Catholicism] advocates become marginalized in the larger public debate. Respected, even admired, they are not seen as offering an appropriate or reasonable way in which the American public as a whole can evaluate problems and formulate solutions. Only part of the problem is church and state. Rather, it is a problem of responsible citizenship." O'Brien, *Public Catholicism*, 246.

⁷¹ Hugo subtitled *Nature and the Supernatural* - "A Defense of the Evangelical Ideal."

Similarly, George Weigel has described Day's theological perspective as rooted in "a radically eschatological view of history" and as having "apocalyptic overtones."⁷² He argued that this eschatology led Day to denigrate and ignore human history, and thus the "world's demands in history."⁷³ Because her "radically eschatological" view of history tended toward a Weberian "ethics of absolute ends" rather than an "ethics of responsibility," Weigel asserted that Day maintained a sectarian position, especially evident in her pacifist stance in World War II.⁷⁴ Again, the charge of denigrating or ignoring human history by focusing too exclusively on an eschatological final end can be read in a similar way to the charges of "exaggerated supernaturalism" made against Hugo decades earlier.

Murray and "Eschatological Humanism"

To fully understand the link between the charges made against Hugo and the more recent ones made against American Catholic radicals, the paradigm out of which the latter emerge must be recognized. It was the paradigm articulated by John Courtney Murray, S.J. in *We Hold These Truths*.⁷⁵ For it was here that Murray had highlighted a particular response to the growing *mystique de la terre* in American society at mid-century -the Catholic temptation to "spiritually withdraw" from American culture and society.⁷⁶ This temptation even had led to what he called a "new American Catholic

⁷² George Weigel, *Tranquillitatis Ordinis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 150.

⁷³ Weigel, 150.

⁷⁴ Weigel wrote that her eschatology was especially influential in her stance: "Like the monk Father Zossima in *The Brothers Karamozov*, Day believed that 'the radicalism of love ignores time,' and thus the world's demands in history—even under Hitler. Dorothy Day did not flinch from the implications of this radically eschatological view of our present responsibilities in this world." Weigel, 151.

⁷⁵ John Courtney Murray, S.J., *We Hold These Truths* (Kansas City, MO: Sheen and Ward, 1960), 185.

⁷⁶ Murray explained that for those making such a withdrawal, both human nature as well as human history were "refused and denied." He noted that this withdrawal was usually preceded by an "utter prophetic condemnation of the total *res humana*" which America represented. These "spiritually withdrawn"

Right,” an “integrist” movement that regarded all of nature and history only as sources of corruption.⁷⁷ These Catholics, Murray argued, tended toward an “eschatological humanism” which appealed heavily to Scripture and emphasized the fact that the final end of human nature was totally transcendent to any possible natural end.⁷⁸ This supernatural final end -the beatific vision –was understood as a divine gift that was “radically discontinuous” with all purely human effort and history.⁷⁹ And therefore, the only human values worth affirming were those evoked by grace. Working out of this perspective, these Catholics regarded the only true humanism to be eschatological and the only true human values as supernatural.⁸⁰ Their account of human nature emphasized sin as a constant and permanent reality which darkened all human achievement.⁸¹ American social conditions, institutions and ideals, thus, were seen as having only the character of a “necessary evil,” and so as “radically discontinuous” with grace.⁸²

For these Catholics, the Cross was regarded as the central, and paradoxical, truth of Christianity -“he who would save his life must lose it.” And the created goods of the

Catholics, thus, spent their days “solely in the search for the Kingdom of God, whose coming is not upon this world.” Murray, 184.

⁷⁷ Unlike the “Old French Catholic Right” which firmly believed that the Church’s fortunes were wedded to the fortunes of the monarchy, Murray pointed out that, “The new American Catholic Right” believed that the fortunes of the Church and of the individual Catholics were “completely divorced from all manner of earthly fortunes.” And this attitude had roots in the Catholic subculture -“ the secular separation of Catholics from the main currents of national life.” Murray, 185. For more on this notion of the “sectarian temptation,” see James M. Gustafson, “The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, The Church and the University.” In *The Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings of the Fortieth Annual Convention* 40, edited by George Kilcourse. (1985): 83-94.

⁷⁸ Murray explained that in this orientation, “The Kingdom is not built from below, nor does it repose upon any cornerstone laid by human hands. It is a divine act; it is an irruption from above.” Murray, 185.

⁷⁹ Murray, 185.

⁸⁰ Murray, 185

⁸¹ Murray, 187.

⁸² Murray suggested that, at best, participation or contribution to American society was regarded as irrelevant, like the basket-weaving of the Desert Fathers. As he saw it, those tending toward this orientation risked “entrusting the fortunes of this world and the forms of all its institutions to the dubious wisdom of the unregenerate.” Murray, 195. Regarding non-Christians as “unregenerate,” though a very traditional term in Catholic theology, seems an ironic term for affirming the worldly!

world were seen as having value only in being renounced.⁸³ For it was understood that through such renunciation alone –the dying to self as Christ died on the cross- that the supernatural final end could hope to be attained.⁸⁴ Therefore, Murray concluded, this eschatological humanism led its adherents to a hold complete “contempt for the world.”⁸⁵ Indeed, he contrasted it with an “incarnational humanism” which he clearly preferred, a humanism that was depicted as having a more affirming approach to human nature and the world, and likewise to the structures and institutions of American society and culture.⁸⁶

In his helpful account of Murray’s argument, Joseph Komonchak pointed out that this discussion of eschatological and incarnational humanism emerged out of Murray’s debate with Paul Hanly Furfey over the issue of intercredal co-operation in the mid-1940s.⁸⁷ Therefore, Murray’s account of eschatological humanism leading Catholics to a sectarian withdrawal from American society can be seen, at least in part, as referring to Catholic radicals like Furfey and the Catholic Worker. Murray saw these radicals as being focused on a supernatural final end that they regarded as “radically discontinuous” with human nature and history. At the heart of what can be read as his critique of American Catholic radicals, therefore, was what Murray regarded as their understanding

⁸³ Murray, 188.

⁸⁴ Murray argued that pushed to the extreme, the conclusion of this thinking would be that people not only may neglect, but even should by right neglect the cultural enterprise: “the cultivation of science and arts, the pursuit of human values by human energies, the work of civilization.” Murray, 188.

⁸⁵ Murray titled his section on “eschatological humanism” as “Contempt for the World.” Murray, 189.

⁸⁶ Komonchak has noted that this was a common distinction which had been used with regard to a debate going on in France. Murray was very much aware of this debate, and had published an article on it by Paul Henry, “The Christian Philosophy of History,” *Theological Studies* 13 (September 1952): 418-32. Joseph Komonchak, “John Courtney Murray and the Redemption of History: Natural Law and Theology” in *John Courtney Murray & The Growth of Tradition*, ed. J. Leon Hooper, S.J. and Todd David Whitmore (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996), 76.

⁸⁷ Komonchak, “John Courtney Murray,” 74.

of the nature-supernatural relationship: human nature was sinful, radically discontinuous with the supernatural, and thus to be viewed with contempt and renounced.

Not surprisingly, this was also the way Hugo's critics read his understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship. That Murray perceived Catholic radicals in a similar manner to which Hugo's critics perceived him makes sense. For, as Michael Baxter has noted, despite the differences Murray had with Fenton and Connell, these theologians all shared a similar two-tiered understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship.⁸⁸ It was out of this dualism that Murray read Furfey as denigrating nature as sinful and radically discontinuous with grace, just as Fenton and Connell had read Hugo in a similar manner. It is through this two-tiered theological perspective, and the incarnational-eschatological paradigm it fostered, that many contemporary theologians -successors of Murray- continue to read and critique American Catholic radicals. And it is in light of this final point, that Hugo's response and challenge to the neo-Thomists remains relevant for discussions of Catholic engagement in American culture and society today.

The Public Theologians

1. Charles Curran

Charles Curran provides an excellent and influential example of such a contemporary reading of American Catholic radicals. In *American Catholic Social Ethics* (1982), Curran portrayed Furfey and members of the Catholic Worker movement as espousing a "radical type of social ethics."⁸⁹ He described it as being based on a "gospel

⁸⁸ Michael J. Baxter, "'Blowing the Dynamite of the Church': Catholic Radicalism from a Catholic Radicalist Perspective" in *The Church as Counterculture*, ed. Michael L. Budde (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), 198.

⁸⁹ Charles E. Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics: Twentieth-Century Approaches* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 130. Curran focused his attention particularly on Furfey, whose writings offered the "closest thing to a systematic and theoretical development of the radical Catholic approach personified in the Catholic Worker viewpoint." He described Furfey's *Fire on the Earth* (1936),

radicalism” that called for a heroic life of love exercised in the works of mercy and voluntary poverty, and one that insisted all Catholics were called to a life of holiness. Curran argued that this radicalism was based on the belief that a “radical incompatibility” existed between Catholicism and contemporary American culture and society.⁹⁰ As Murray and the other American neo-Thomists had before him, Curran maintained that this radical incompatibility was grounded in an understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship that was also one of radical incompatibility: “Either one lives on the supernatural level or one rejects the supernatural and grace and lives under the power of sin.”⁹¹ In this way, Catholic radicals were portrayed as viewing the world in terms of an absolute division of sin and the supernatural, with nature hopelessly denigrated as sinful and radically incompatible with grace.⁹² Again like his neo-Thomist predecessors, Curran contended that this view of radical incompatibility inevitably led to a sectarian withdrawal from society.⁹³ In sum, Curran maintained that American Catholic radicals like Furfey and the Worker tended to denigrate nature and its relationship with the supernatural and sought sectarian separation from it in their quest for holiness and perfection.

Three Theories of Society (1937), and *The Mystery of Iniquity* (1944), as an “early trilogy on radical Catholicism.” Curran, 133.

⁹⁰ Curran stated that he defined American Catholic social ethics “in the light of the question of the relationship between being Catholic and being American.” Curran, 158.

⁹¹ Curran, 143. Curran argued that, “Catholic radicalism builds on an incompatibility between the present society and the pistic society, or between sin and grace...Such an approach fails to give enough importance to the reality of the goodness of creation which is present in the world, overestimates the presence of sin in the world, fails to recognize that grace is already present and to a limited extent redeeming the present, and sees only discontinuity between the present and the eschatological fullness.” Curran, 168.

⁹² According to Curran, radicals saw this opposition in terms of the struggle between the Kingdom of God and the world: “The opposition is clear –the kingdom of God or the Mystical Body of Christ against the kingdom of Satan or the Mystical Body of Satan.” Curran ,143.

⁹³ Curran suggested that this Catholic radicalism was “at the very least congenial to with a sect type of ecclesiology.” And he defined such a sect ecclesiology as “a small group of Christians striving for perfection who are separated from the rest of the world.” Curran, 169.

For this particular study of Hugo, it is interesting to note that Curran qualified his critique of Furfey by stating that in general he was not as “consistently radical” as others in the Catholic Worker movement.⁹⁴ For example, Curran described Dorothy Day as having taken an “absolutist” stance during World War II, and that she was “a total pacifist opposed to all war no matter what the purposes or the goal.”⁹⁵ Day had shifted her justification for this pacifism, he noted, from more historically based reasons to ones centered on “the gospel command to love.”⁹⁶ As noted earlier, other scholars had credited Hugo with helping to influence that shift.⁹⁷ In contrast, Curran contended that Furfey was not a “total pacifist,” but instead accepted a limited just-war approach.⁹⁸ Furfey was also portrayed as taking a less than whole-hearted embrace of Peter Maurin’s “Green Revolution” –a revolution that called for a return to the land, a withdrawal from the evil industrial society, and opposition to technology. According to Curran, Furfey tempered Maurin’s radicalism by calling for a “realistic recognition” that many of the same social problems existed in both rural and urban areas, and objecting to “such doctrinaire opposition” to technology as such.⁹⁹ Interestingly, to support this claim Curran cited Furfey’s two 1939 articles in *The Catholic Worker* on agrarianism to which Hugo had responded. Following the logic of Curran’s argument, Hugo would certainly be regarded as a one of the “more consistent” of the American Catholic radicals.

According to Curran, Furfey’s inconsistent radicalism was the inevitable result of his desire to base his thinking in Catholic theology, a desire that had caused him to alter

⁹⁴ Curran 162.

⁹⁵ Curran, 163.

⁹⁶ Curran, 157.

⁹⁷ McNeal, *Harder than War*, 41

⁹⁸ Curran contended that despite the fact that Furfey was active in the antiwar movement all his life, in theory he held a version of the just-war theory. Curran, 157.

⁹⁹ Curran, 163.

and modify his radicalism.¹⁰⁰ Such modification was necessary, he explained, since “traditional Catholic theology and ecclesiology” understood that “grace builds on nature.”¹⁰¹ This idea that grace *builds* on nature was clearly the understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship that Curran espoused and the one through which he read and critiqued Catholic radicals. The implications of his argument here were that “more consistent” radicals, like Day, Maurin, and Hugo, worked out of a view of “radical incompatibility” between nature and grace, and that they made no attempt to alter their radicalism to fit with Catholic theology. For Curran, American Catholic radicals were clearly not in line with traditional Catholic theology and ecclesiology.¹⁰²

2. Kristen Heyer and Richard Gaillardetz

A more recent instance of such a reading of Catholic radicals, and one which relied heavily on the earlier work of O’Brien and Curran, appeared in Kristen Heyer’s *Prophetic & Public* in which she contrasted the “prophetic” social ethic of Michael Baxter with the more “public” one in the arguments of J. Bryan Hehir.¹⁰³ According to Heyer, Baxter represented the “prophetic sect type” and “a rigorist, evangelical social ethic” exhibited by Day, the Catholic Worker movement, as well as “certain aspects of the work and posture of Pope John Paul II.”¹⁰⁴ In this way, like radicals before him, Baxter was portrayed as understanding the nature-grace relationship to be “radically discontinuous.” Heyer contended that Curran’s critique also applied to Baxter, for in the

¹⁰⁰ Curran, 165.

¹⁰¹ Curran, 158. Elsewhere, Curran asserted that “Anyone familiar with the Catholic tradition knows that the relationship between the supernatural and the natural is not that of incompatibility. Grace does not destroy nature but builds on it.” Curran, 145.

¹⁰² Curran 159. Curran contended that “Catholic ecclesiology did not allow for the “sectarian approach which serves as the basis for much Christian radicalism in the Protestant tradition.” Curran, 165.

¹⁰³ Kristen Heyer, *Prophetic & Public: The Social Witness of U.S. Catholicism* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁴ Heyer, 59, 60.

“Catholic tradition,” she explained, “grace builds upon rather than destroys nature.”¹⁰⁵

Echoing Curran and Murray, Heyer argued that,

The supernaturalism and personalism of Day, Furfey, and [Virgil] Michel have a significant impact on Baxter’s social ethic. Their scripturally informed ethic, based upon radical gospel teachings that highlight differences between church and world and discontinuities between grace and human efforts, is evident in Baxter’s approach.¹⁰⁶

As Joseph Connor, S.J. had done more than sixty years before, Heyer described the social ethic held by Catholic radicals like Day and Baxter as “perfectionist.”¹⁰⁷ It should also be noted, that, as in Connor, much of the contemporary criticism regarded American Catholic radicals’ pacifism, along with non-participation in U.S. governmental institutions like voting or paying taxes which were often associated with American war-making, as evidence of their sectarian perfectionism.

Heyer’s depiction of Baxter and his understanding of human nature corresponded well with what Richard Gaillardetz has described as the “Augustinian” anthropological perspective in Catholic social ethics.¹⁰⁸ According to this perspective, grace was “a divine force oriented toward the healing of a fundamentally broken human nature,” while the natural order possessed no “autonomous status” and served primarily as “the arena for the working out of the drama between sin and grace in human history.”¹⁰⁹ With this emphasis on sin and grace, human nature was understood as fundamentally broken and wholly corrupted by sin.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ To support and justify this claim, Heyer quoted Curran: “traditional Catholic theology and ecclesiology cannot be consistently radical.” Heyer, 90.

¹⁰⁶ Heyer, 76.

¹⁰⁷ Heyer, 76.

¹⁰⁸ Gaillardetz, 74.

¹⁰⁹ Gaillardetz, 74.

¹¹⁰ Gaillardetz, 74.

Both Heyer and Gaillardetz argued that it was such an Augustinian anthropology that informed the stance of Baxter and other radicals on the Catholic engagement with America.¹¹¹ Baxter's radicalist social ethic was contrasted with that held by "public theologians" like Curran, Hehir, David Hollenbach, S.J., Richard McBrien, Kenneth Himes, O.F.M., and Michael Himes.¹¹² This contrast was due to the fact that Baxter's Augustinian anthropology so greatly differed from the "Thomistic" account of human nature held by these public theologians -a more "positive" account which granted a more relative autonomy to human nature.¹¹³ As pointed out earlier, absent from this depiction of the Thomistic anthropology was any sense of the "defectibility" of human nature "left to itself" which had marked Aquinas's thinking.

According to Gaillardetz, these public theologians proposed a "correlational cultural engagement" for the Church in America.¹¹⁴ They believed it possible to construct a "public theology" which would be one of "mutually critical" dialogue between the

¹¹¹ Gaillardetz suggested that this Augustinian perspective was operative in the theological framework what he called "radical cultural engagement" -a view of the Church's engagement with American society and culture inspired by the "radical social witness" of Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin and the Catholic Worker. He pointed out that theologians like Baxter and William Cavanaugh (as well as, in very different ways, David Schindler and John Milbank) have found inspiration in the "counterculturalism" and commitment to fundamental gospel values in these sources of Catholic radicalism in America. Gaillardetz, 78.

Interestingly, both Heyer and Gaillardetz also argued that Pope John Paul II also held such a perspective, and that his stance toward the world sometime revealed "a kind of apocalypticism." This "apocalypticism" was particularly revealed in the "popular, but overdrawn" opposition of a "culture of death" and a "culture of life." Gaillardetz asserted that, "Almost invariably, when the pope chose to interpret the 'signs of the times' in his encyclicals, the analysis highlights the negative features of the world today." He pointed out that this apocalypticism has even led some scholars to suggest that the pope had "moved beyond Niebuhr's 'Christ transforming culture' to an *almost sectarian* 'Christ against culture.'" Gaillardetz, 77, see Heyer 60.

¹¹² Gaillardetz, 79. Heyer argued that the "Thomistic" anthropology emphasized the continuity between nature and grace, and thus between the Church and the American political system. Heyer, 90.

¹¹³ Gaillardetz, 74. Heyer, 90.

¹¹⁴ According to Gaillardetz, the correlational model emerged from David Tracy's description of the theological task as that of "mutually critical correlation." He called it a "mediating position" between the radical approach of Baxter (et al) and the "neoconservative" approach of George Weigel, Richard John Neuhaus and Michael Novak. Gaillardetz, 80.

Church and American society and culture.¹¹⁵ Some scholars have identified this as part of a particular “American Rahnerian” perspective that has become operative within late twentieth-century Catholic theological discourse.¹¹⁶ This model of engagement would imply a necessary affirmation of the goodness of human nature and therefore of the social, political, and economic aspects of American society – an affirmation which these theologians rooted in “a Catholic notion of sacramentality.”¹¹⁷

The work done by public theologians with this notion of “sacramentality” emerged especially clear in Kenneth and Michael Himes’ influential book, *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology*.¹¹⁸ In it, the authors advocated for a “public theology” that would work against the tendency toward the privatization of religion in America. They saw this privatization as a result of a false separation of the sacred from

¹¹⁵ Gaillardetz described this public theology as seeking to “bring the wealth of the Christian theological tradition to bear on social questions of broad import.” But, such engagement with the larger culture was not seen as being “unidirectional,” for there was often much that the Church could learn from American society. As Gaillardetz explained, “American values of freedom, personal autonomy, and participative decision making are all values the Church would do well to adopt.” Gaillardetz, 79.

¹¹⁶ Reinhard Hütter described “American Rahnerians” as third generation students of Karl Rahner, S.J. who have embraced a reading of Vatican II that emphasizes its discontinuity and rupture with earlier Catholic theology. Their faithfulness to this theme of discontinuity has led these theologians to disregard the basic thrust of Rahner’s Transcendental Thomism (renewing and revising a continuous theological tradition) and instead merge with an understanding of systematic theology as exclusively “critical reflection on the role of religion in political and cultural contexts, usually in service of a program of liberation, self-realization, and social justice.” For these theologians, the main task of Catholic theology is to revise Catholic faith and morals, “always in pursuit of the paradigmatic modern Protestant goal of relevance.” Reinhard Hütter, “The Ruins of Discontinuity” *First Things* (January 2011), printed off the *First Things* webpage. Also see Hütter, “Theological Faith Enlightening Sacred Theology: Renewing Theology by Recovering its Unity as *sacra doctrina*,” *The Thomist* 74 (July 2010), and R.R. Reno, *The Ordinary Transformed: Karl Rahner and the Christian Vision of Transcendence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995).

¹¹⁷ Gaillardetz, 80. It was their inability to embrace such a sacramental approach to American materialist culture that led Eugene McCarraher to conclude that American Catholic radicals were ultimately “irrelevant.” Eugene B. McCarraher, “The Church Irrelevant: Paul Hanly Furfey and the Fortunes of American Catholic Radicalism,” *Religion and American Culture* 7 (Summer, 1997): 186.

¹¹⁸ Kenneth and Michael Himes, *The Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993). Heyer noted her heavy reliance upon the Himes brothers, whose approach reflected “the fully theological and fully public approach” for which she said her book’s conclusions called. Heyer, xix.

the secular which led to the exclusion of theology from public policy debates.¹¹⁹ The “public theology” that the Himeses proposed would overcome this separation by revealing the connection existing between the two spheres, a connection based on a “sacramental” understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship.

3. Kenneth and Michael Himes

According to the Himeses, in the Catholic tradition all of created nature was the locus of grace, and so grace was always and already present in creation.¹²⁰ This understanding of nature and grace informed their understanding of the sacred-secular relationship. For, they argued that that the sacred was simply the secular in its “fullest depth.”¹²¹ Thus every experience, act, and event had the potential for disclosing the sacredness of the secular. This, they contended, was the “Catholic sacramental vision.”

¹²² Although the created natural world was the locus of grace, the historical fact of sin often prevented that world from recognizing its graced character. And so, the Church was needed in order to reveal or “thematize” this always-already present grace in the world.¹²³

¹¹⁹ The Himeses defined “public theology” as, “an articulation of the Roman Catholic tradition’s worldview or background theory which informs a social ethic and consequent public policy choices.” Such a social ethic was necessary because one could not move immediately from theology to public policy. They explained that theology had to be “mediated by social ethics” before it could make specific judgments about public policy. Therefore it would be “simplistic politically and fundamentalistic theologically to ignore the mediating role of social ethics.” Himeses, 23.

¹²⁰ Himeses, 81.

¹²¹ They explained, “the sacred is the sacramental form of the secular, i.e., the sacred is the secular in its full depth.” Himeses, 80.

¹²² They described this Catholic sacramental vision as such: “Put simply, there are not seven sacraments, seven sacred rites, in a profane world but seven events which presume and seek to evoke awareness if the sacredness of all reality. Catholicism’s sacramental vision, founded upon its theology of grace, teaches that God’s gracious self-communication is always mediated. Where this vision is often misunderstood, even by Catholics themselves, is in believing that the mediation of God’s grace is restricted to special rituals which formally designate ‘sacraments.’ Such a notion of sacrament is an impoverished understanding of the Catholic theology of grace. It is a sacramental theology resting on a false division of sacred and secular, dividing life into realms of experience, one labeled ‘religious’ and the other ‘every day.’ But this is precisely what the Catholic theology of grace rejects, and thus any theology of sacrament which sets these rituals apart from the context of ordinary human experience must also be rejected.” The Himeses called this a “restricted vision of the sacramental principle.” Himeses, 85.

¹²³ Himeses, 86.

For the Himeses, grace was not understood as entering the world through the sacraments and preaching of Church, but rather the Church used its sacraments and preaching to thematize the grace always-already present to the world.¹²⁴ Therefore, the Church engaged with American society and culture –the “public”- not as a means of bringing grace, but rather as a means of making that society aware of its graced character.¹²⁵ In a similar manner to arguments made by Murray and Curran, the Himeses contended that this sacramental vision prevented Catholics from any type of “spiritual withdrawal” from American society, for Catholics *must* engage with the “public.”¹²⁶

It is worth noting that to support their account of “the Catholic sacramental tradition,” the Himes brothers relied heavily upon the work of Langdon Gilkey (1919-2004), a liberal Protestant theologian from the University of Chicago, whom they described as “an exceptionally knowledgeable and sympathetic observer of the Catholic tradition.”¹²⁷ Interestingly, Gilkey himself had acknowledged his own indebtedness to the work of another liberal Protestant, Paul Tillich (1886-1965).¹²⁸ Indeed, the Himeses justified their notion of the Church’s role in thematizing grace with Gilkey’s argument that “religious symbols must provide shape and thematization to the patterns of ordinary

¹²⁴ According to the Himeses, sacraments were not “intrusions into the secular world,” instead they were points at which “the depth of the secular is uncovered and revealed as grounded in grace.” Himeses, 82.

¹²⁵ The Himeses’ relied upon Robert Bellah’s definition of “public” in Robert Bellah, et al, *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1991), 179 [Himeses, 19].

¹²⁶ They argued that this sacramentality was precisely why it was “necessary for the believers in the Catholic tradition with its sacramental understanding of the relationship of grace and nature to enter into political conversation and action. For if it is the case –and we believe it is- that the world is grounded in the self-giving of God, and if it is also the case-and it surely is- that the world is not obviously seen to be so, then the church as ‘the sacrament of intimate union with God and the unity of all humanity’ must work to allow the world to be what it is... so believers must engage in the transformative conversation action so that human political, social and economic communities become what they are but so often obscure, the locus of the agape of God.” Himeses, 84.

¹²⁷ Himeses, 83.

¹²⁸ See, Langdon Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co. 1981).

life.”¹²⁹ According to Gilkey, they explained, the “sacramental principle so central to Catholicism” was “weakened” when the understanding of sacrament became limited to events affecting people only as members of the Church and not simply as “persons in the world at large.”¹³⁰ For the Himeses, viewing the sacraments in this manner limited the understanding of the graced character of the world, and thus prevented recognition of its sacredness. This in turn, led to the spiritual withdrawal of Catholics from American society and culture, and specifically from public policy debates.

The Public Theologians and the Neo-Thomists

This sacramental approach taken by the public theologians was one of the approaches many Catholic theologians in the second half of the twentieth-century used to describe the integration of nature and grace. It was an approach which clearly sought to offer a way to understand the nature-supernatural relationship that rejected the once dominant two-tiered understanding.¹³¹ For it was the two-tiered account that theologians like the Himeses saw as the cause of the privatization of religion in America and the separation of theology from public policy debates which they hoped to overcome. What is important in looking at contemporary approaches to the nature-supernatural

¹²⁹ Gilkey, “Symbol, Meaning, and Divine Presence,” *Theological Studies* 35 (1974): 261 [Himeses, 83].

¹³⁰ Himeses, 83.

¹³¹ Frederick Bauerschmidt explained that for proponents of this approach, the anthropological starting point for theological reflection appears natural, and so theology is understood as, “articulating common human experience in a Christian way.” This common human experience is an always-already graced experience and so the world is understood as the “primordial arena” in which grace is encountered. This always-already graced reality is “un-thematized” though –not to be yet articulated into Christian categories– and thus the role of the Church and its sacraments becomes one of “thematizing” this grace (i.e. to name, symbolize and celebrate that grace that is encountered in the world). He pointed out that such things as sacraments or preaching are “‘causes’ of grace principally in the way that they thematize, and thereby make available for conscious appropriation, the grace that is already present.” Frederick Bauerschmidt, “Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic,” *Communio* 31 (Spring 2004): 71.

relationship, though, is not *that* one integrated nature and grace, but, as Frederick Bauerschmidt as pointed out, *how* one understood that integration.¹³²

While the sacramental approach did, in many ways, differ from the approach taken by the neo-Thomists, it also shared important similarities –particularly with regard to the understanding of human nature.¹³³ For instance, both seemed to regard human nature as having a kind of “self-transparency” such that it was able to interpret and come to some knowledge of itself.¹³⁴ In the two-tiered approach, human nature was understood as able to grasp knowledge of itself through reason alone, apart from the illumination of grace. And as was noted earlier, this ability of unaided human reason was extended to include knowledge of the preambles of the faith. In the sacramental approach, human nature was able to attain such knowledge not from unaided reason, but from the always-already present, albeit unthematized, illumination of grace. In the sacramental approach, therefore, the notion of an unaided human reason appears to have been replaced by that of an always-already divinely illuminated human reason.¹³⁵

In either case, the need for grace –*gratia elevans*- to transform and perfect human nature, which both Hugo and de Lubac emphasized, was forgotten. These ultimately similar accounts of human nature seemed rooted in the fact that neither the neo-Thomists nor the public theologians seriously took into account the two-fold inadequacy of human nature: the historical effects of original sin, and the inherent limitations constitutive of

¹³² Bauerschmidt, 71.

¹³³ Michael Baxter, “Blowing the Dynamite of the Church,” 203.

¹³⁴ Bauerschmidt, 77.

¹³⁵ Bauerschmidt argued that neither approach was consistent with the teaching of Aquinas. For this teaching would grant “in principle the ability of unaided human reason to have some limited knowledge of God and the good, but would emphasize that even in principle this knowledge is quite limited –as Aquinas says, ‘only for a few, and after a long time, and mixed with many errors.’” [ST I, 1,1] And in actual practice, he pointed out, “human sin means that reason misses the mark more often than not.” Bauerschmidt, 75.

human nature as “created and finite while at the same time called to share in the vision of God.”¹³⁶ The upshot of all this was that the public theologians’ always-already graced nature ended up appearing a lot like the neo-Thomists’ self-contained nature. For while not a separated nature, the understanding of human nature as always-already graced so blurred it with the supernatural that nature’s insufficiencies became forgotten or ignored.

In attempting to explain all of this, Bauerschmidt suggested that the public theologians have failed to realize that what they took to be the workings of grace in American society and culture, and therefore its graced character, was more often simply “echoes of the rapidly dissipating Catholic subculture.”¹³⁷ These theologians, like most Catholics in America prior to the 1960s, were so formed by the Catholic subculture in which they lived that they came to think that certain attitudes, dispositions, and values were simply part of human nature, rather than recognizing them as having been cultivated by the Church’s teaching, preaching, and the grace of the sacraments.¹³⁸ In other words, what they perceived to be evidence of the sacredness of the secular was in fact the leavening presence of the Church within America.

There is also the fact that public theologians, along with many other Catholic theologians, seemed to rely heavily upon the theological notion that “grace builds on nature.” While Curran, for example, described this notion as having emerged out of “traditional Catholic theology and ecclesiology,” and Heyer from “the Catholic

¹³⁶ Like T.C. O’Brien, O.P., Bauerschmidt pointed out that for Aquinas, both before and after the Fall, “human nature needs the help of God as first mover, to do or wish any good whatsoever.” And beyond this general need for divine providence, human beings also need the special assistance of sanctifying grace in order “to do and wish supernatural good.” (*ST* I-II, 109, 2) Bauerschmidt, 74.

¹³⁷ Bauerschmidt, 73. For more on the profound effects the loss of this subculture had on American Catholics, see William L. Portier, “Here Come the Evangelical Catholics,” *Communio* 31 (Spring, 2004): 35-66.

¹³⁸ Bauerschmidt, 73.

tradition,” neither offered a citation for exactly where they found this axiom.¹³⁹ The most obvious source, of course, is Aquinas’s assertion that “grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it” (*gratia non tollat naturam sed perficiat*).¹⁴⁰ But while *perficiat* can be translated in different ways, “builds on” is not an option.

The origin of this axiom, thus, does not appear to be in “traditional Catholic theology.” This much used and often repeated notion does seem to suggest, though, an understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship very much like the two-tiered account of the neo-Thomists. For the idea that grace *builds* on nature clearly presupposes an understanding of nature as a self-contained structure upon which grace *builds* a kind of superstructure. Grace is not portrayed as the inner dynamism which drives human nature toward perfection, but rather as a *superadditum* extrinsically added upon a somewhat self-sufficient human nature. The two-fold insufficiency that marks human nature, captured in Aquinas’s account of nature “left to itself” and his assertion that “grace *perfects* nature,” is lost.

Public theologians appear to have failed to move beyond the two-tiered neo-Thomist model. For their emphasis on the goodness and autonomy of human nature, particularly as it was embodied in American institutions, seems to have caused them to not only misconstrue Aquinas’s teaching, but often to fall into a dualism they looked to correct. Their desire to overcome the notion of a separated human nature has led to nature becoming so blurred with the supernatural that the need for *gratia elevans* –and the transformation and perfection it brought about- has tended to be lost. In this way, American society and culture, like an always-already graced human nature, has been

¹³⁹ Curran, 158, Heyer 90.

¹⁴⁰ Aquinas, *ST I* 1, 8 ad2.

affirmed by public theologians “as is,” in much the same way as the neo-Thomists had done a generation earlier.¹⁴¹

Heyer, for instance, highlighted three organizations as correctly incorporating theology into public-policy debates: Network, Pax Christi USA, and the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops.¹⁴² All of these groups are, for the most part, lobbying organizations that seek to incorporate theological resources into their policy statements. That other organizations arrive at similar points of view without specific theological resources, though, makes it unclear as to what work these resources are actually doing. Indeed, such resources often seem to simply back up conclusions that Network, Pax Christi, and the USCCB have already arrived at on non-theological grounds. The use of theology in these organizations’ public policy papers, therefore, can appear as something super-added onto positions already existing within a largely self-contained (and sacred) public sphere -an addition which can easily become separated, forgotten, and irrelevant.¹⁴³ All of which echoes what Blondel had highlighted as the dualism that allowed for French Catholic support of the “natural” goals of *Action française* –goals neatly separated from Maurras’s atheism.

If Gaillardetz was correct, and this sacramental approach of the public theologians has been the approach taken by “the majority of Catholic moral theologians and ecclesiologists in North America,” then most contemporary discussions of nature and grace, though seemingly diverse, have operated out of this shared notion of nature.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Bauerschmidt, 73.

¹⁴² See Heyer, 119-175.

¹⁴³ Indeed, Bauerschmidt warned, “we ought to be dubious about attempts at ‘public theology,’ suspecting that this is in fact nothing but a theology stripped of all substantive Christian convictions.” Bauerschmidt, 75.

¹⁴⁴ Gaillardetz, 79.

This is an account of human nature so blurred with the supernatural that it no longer was recognized as distinct – marked by both its inherent and historical limitations, and in need of transformation. Instead, human nature has tended to be depicted as always-already graced and so an emphasis on its need for further transformation has been downplayed, or dismissed as “Augustinian.” This seems to have been especially true in the treatment of American culture and society in much of contemporary Catholic discourse.¹⁴⁵

Why Hugo Still Matters

An awareness of the dangers in both a separated nature and one blurred with the supernatural was clear in Hugo’s emphasis on the distinctiveness of human nature:

The affirmation of an order of good natural activity midway between sin and grace is the means of avoiding the two great (and closely related) Jansenistic errors in this matter. It saves us from the error of believing that, since the Fall, all natural activity is evil; and at the same time, it prevents us from denying or underestimating the supernatural order, for it shows us that the effect of grace is to raise us above, *not sin merely*, but the divinely created natural plane itself.¹⁴⁶

Because they did not maintain a proper account of human nature, Hugo saw the neo-Thomist theologians of his day losing sight of the mystery and supereminence of the supernatural. The same can be said for public theologians today. Likewise, Hugo’s critique of the neo-Thomists can be applied to contemporary public theologians. For in their attempt to defend the sacredness of human nature -and the American institutions they associate with it- public theologians have tended to downplay and even ignore the twofold inadequacy of human nature.

For Hugo, such thinking was a form of “naturalism” and perpetuated an account of nature that did not exist -an account which had become “entirely merged with the

¹⁴⁵ For instance, Heyer makes a spirited defense of the U.S. government, as well as practices in American political “activism” like voting and lobbying. Heyer, 81, 95.

¹⁴⁶ *Nature*, 5.

supernatural.”¹⁴⁷ From this contemporary form of naturalism, not only has a correct account of human nature been lost, but the supernatural, no longer supereminent and mysterious, has become disparaged and seen simply as that which was not sinful.¹⁴⁸ Lost in this more recent discourse was the idea that human nature, while itself a gratuitous gift of grace, had been called to a destiny that was far beyond its limited abilities to attain.¹⁴⁹ Instead, the supernatural was regarded as nature in its full depth. And through this sacramental view, as with its two-tiered counterpart, the Catholic radicalist emphasis on these practical implications of the supernatural –that Christians were called to move beyond the “merely natural”- has been perceived as rigorist, perfectionist, and sectarian.

This was the sin mentality that Hugo argued shaped his critics, and which seems to also shape public theologians’ view of American Catholic radicals. For having lost a correct sense of human nature (good, but insufficient and distinct), these theologians have tended to see the world exclusively in terms of the sinful and the supernatural blurred with nature. Accordingly, only attachments to what is sinful must be renounced; everything else is graced. Any notion that Christians have been called to give up

¹⁴⁷ Hugo, *Nature*, 11.

¹⁴⁸ Hugo, *Nature*, iii, 5, 7. It is worth noting that Hugo critiqued a scheme -in many ways the reverse of this “naturalism”- that ended up looking very similar. Rather than merging natural actions with the supernatural, Hugo pointed out that Jansenists merged natural actions with sin, “regarding all natural actions as evil.” Hugo argued that these Jansenists also failed to recognize the reality of the natural (both historical and ontological), and therefore also blurred the nature-supernatural relationship. For in the Jansenists’ emphasis on the sinfulness of human nature, the supernatural became understood as simply that which was not sinful human nature, with its mystery and supereminence lost. As noted in the previous chapter, such a scheme seemed to be operative in the understanding of nature and grace held by John Milbank in his account of de Lubac in *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005). While Milbank was most explicit in this argument here, hints of it can be seen in *Theology and Social Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), particularly in his discussion of de Lubac, and of the “extremely hazy” bounds between Church and state. Milbank’s emphasis on church seems to leave little outside it except that which is sinful. Milbank, *Theology*, 225-228, 406-408. All of this is somewhat ironic in that Milbank lives in a state with an established church.

¹⁴⁹ Hugo explained that the graced character of human nature was not so much its created humanity, but its supernatural final end: “God gave us our human nature only that we might, through serving Him in it, come to possess supernatural happiness.” Hugo, *Applied Christianity*, 200.

something more has been rejected as world-denying Jansenism. This was the way Fenton and Connell read Hugo's calls for renunciation as rooted in a denigrating view of nature. And Murray read Catholic radicals' withdrawal from American political institutions as rooted in their view of "radical discontinuity" between nature and grace. Likewise, it has been the way Curran, Heyer, and Gaillardetz have read contemporary Catholic radicals as sectarian and rooted in the understanding of a "radical incompatibility" between corrupt nature and the supernatural. In short, if all the world is graced, sin is the only thing that must be renounced.

As Hugo had argued earlier, for those operating out of this sin mentality, gone was any sense that Christians were called to live something more than a natural (self-sufficient or always-already graced) life -that they were instead called to a supernatural life of holiness. Likewise, lost was any sense that the supernatural final end has practical implications for human nature, transforming and perfecting it into a "new creature" – making it holy. De Lubac himself seemed to make a similar point in his critique of Edward Schillebeeckx for describing the Church as *sacramentum mundi* and for advocating a type of implicit Christianity following Vatican II.¹⁵⁰ Hugo pointed out that those working out of such a sin mentality,

view holiness and perfection as a work of supererogation, limiting its pursuit to a small group of 'extraordinary souls,' while they encourage the devotees of their more cheering system to think that they may fulfill their highest Christian duties by the more pleasant method of practicing the natural virtues, say, at the movies or the baseball park.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Brother Richard Arnandez, F.S.C. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 191-234.

¹⁵¹ Hugo, *Nature*, 78.

This criticism could be applied to public theologians' affirmation of the "sacramentality" of American political, social, and economic institutions -an affirmation which often suggested that these institutions provided a path to holiness "as is."¹⁵²

Indeed, in their attempt to articulate the integration of grace into the world -the sacred into the secular, theology into public policy making- public theologians have tended to uncritically affirm American society and culture.¹⁵³ Thus, in their attempt to make the call to holiness universal -to bring the idea of holiness out of its exile- these theologians have a difficult time identifying what is not holy in the world. While such "worldly" institutions and vocations may indeed have offered a way to live a supernatural life of holiness, as Bauerschmidt argued, they could not simply be affirmed "as is."¹⁵⁴ Rather, Christians must discern what is holy in them and renounce or transform what is not in light of their ultimate destiny.

It was such ongoing discernment, always in light of the supernatural final end, that Hugo advocated in the retreat. For it was not simply the sinful that needed to be sown, rather Christians also needed to give up that which was good but insufficient or imperfect. And as noted, within this category, Hugo placed natural actions ranging from smoking to participation in a just war. Actions which were motivated by attachments to created goods that were not themselves sinful, but were also not supernatural. Hugo's continual and critical evaluation of what Christians encountered in America was not done in order to reject it outright, but to assess it in light of their ultimate end and to chart how

¹⁵² For instance, the Himeses argue that Christians "must engage in transformative conversation and action so that human political, social, and economic communities become what they are but so often obscure, the locus of the agape of God." Himeses, 84.

¹⁵³ This is Baxter's argument in, "Notes on Catholic Americanism and Catholic Radicalism," and "Blowing the Dynamite of the Church."

¹⁵⁴ Bauerschmidt, 73.

to negotiate the complexities of their lives in that light. Hugo was not a rigorist; he was a spiritual director offering a pastoral tool to lay people for their engagement with American culture and society.

For all his supposed extremism, then, Hugo was actually occupying something of a middle ground. While he was not a world-denying Jansenist nor a sectarian, he did not think that nature or the world was sufficient to fulfill human flourishing. Instead, he argued that attachments to created goods must be left behind so that one could live a supernatural life of holiness -the life of a saint. From this theology, Day and others were able to put forth a radical Christianity without lapsing into either a blanket denial of the goodness of creation, nor a blanket affirmation of the world as the general site -a primordial arena- for grace. Human nature, politics, or the world were not inherently sinful or radically discontinuous with grace, but neither were they a sufficient locus for human flourishing.

Recognizing the theology of Hugo and the retreat as such, the view of Catholic radicals and their understanding of nature and grace that has been presented by public theologians can be seen as a caricature. Withdrawal from, and even rejection of, certain aspects of American life has not been done out of a view that human nature was corrupted by sin and therefore radically incompatible with grace. Rather it was done out of recognition that while these aspects may indeed be good, they often became obstacles in the daily, ongoing challenge of living a life of holiness –the life of a saint. Human nature was not understood by its always-already graced character or blurred relationship with the supernatural, as it was by its need for fulfillment by its supernatural final end.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵Rahner also described this need in human nature, “We can only fully understand man in his ‘undefinable’ essence as we see him as *potentia obedientialis* for the divine life; this is his *nature*. His nature

Nature encountered grace not as something completely alien or extrinsic to it, nor as something already-always possessed unthematically. Instead, grace was encountered as the final end for which nature was created.¹⁵⁶ Hugo's approach affirmed the fundamental goodness of human nature, but it also recognized the insufficiencies of human nature.¹⁵⁷

While not a "professional" theologian, Hugo was an example of an early twentieth-century American Catholic spiritual writer who wanted to integrate Christians' daily engagement in American life, their "social ethic," into the broader vision of their journey to God. Like de Lubac, though in a less nuanced and more mechanical way, Hugo proposed this vision of an integrated Christian life in response to the two-tiered neo-Thomism of his time which had exiled the supernatural and its practical implications from the life of ordinary Christians. And like other early twentieth-century efforts at *ressourcement*, Hugo appealed to the broad tradition of spiritual writers to justify and support this vision. And all of this remains relevant today, as Hugo's vision of an integrated "supernatural life" continues to offer a corrective to the dominant accounts of the nature-supernatural relationship and the social ethics these accounts inform.

is such that its absolute fulfillment comes through grace, and so nature of itself must reckon with the meaningful possibility of remaining without absolute fulfillment." Karl Rahner, S.J. *Nature and Grace* trans, Dinah Wharton (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 140.

¹⁵⁶ For Hugo, this was the Ignatian idea that "God gave us our human nature only that we might, through serving Him in it, come to possess supernatural happiness." Human nature, the starting point for our efforts to serve God, was understood as itself based in the supernatural, like a home's foundation which rested upon supernatural rock. Hugo, *Applied*, 200.

¹⁵⁷ Bauerschmidt affirmed Hugo's argument that the insufficiencies and limitations of human nature were not simply a result of sin. Rather he described them as "constitutive of our nature as beings who are created and finite while at the same time called to share in the vision of God." And because of these inadequacies, human nature was an inherently unstable notion. He suggested that, therefore, "Theological anthropology has its proper place, but that place is not as the basis for dialogue, if for no other reason than that thoroughly paradoxical character of human nature makes it an unstable and contested foundation." And like Hugo, one could affirm that there was something like "human nature" distinct from the sinful and the supernatural—indeed, the doctrine of the Incarnation required it—without making it a category that was frozen in time or immediately accessible to our comprehension. Bauerschmidt called this an "Augustinian sensibility" with regard to human nature. Bauerschmidt, 76.

CONCLUSION

Though unable to lead retreats after 1942, Hugo continued to write articles, pamphlets, and books which proposed his vision for an integrated Christian life. But by 1959, when he was once again able to give retreats, the fervor of the early years of the retreat movement had died down. Despite all his efforts, Hugo's hopes for the retreat appeared to go unfulfilled as its categories and language soon became outdated. With the increasing influence of Ammon Hennacy and the Berrigan brothers within the *Catholic Worker*, Hugo's radicalism also seemed to lose its edge.¹ Strong memories remained of the division Hugo's retreat brought to the *Catholic Worker*, as well as to places like St. Vincent's in Latrobe. As has become clear throughout this study, both within the *Worker* and beyond, Hugo had his detractors. And so the image of Hugo that appeared, even prior to his death, within the scholarship on Day and the *Catholic Worker* was often not flattering. Emerging from both his legacy in the *Worker* and accusations made against him during the retreat controversy, Hugo was often depicted as a rigorist whose theology tended toward a kind of world-denying perfectionism.

Such depictions, though, missed the more nuanced theological argument that Hugo had offered. While perhaps expressed in terms that tended to be overly severe and

¹ By the early 1980s, as Hugo was writing his two-volume account of the retreat, he could not get any interest in it from the *Catholic Worker*. The archives at Marquette contain letters Hugo sent to Sister Peter Claver Fahey in which he is almost begging her to intervene on his behalf with the editors at *The Catholic Worker* to help publish and promote his book.

mechanical, Hugo's theology did provide a means of living a life of holiness for people such as Day and others, like Sister Peter Claver Fahy. Indeed, far from denigrating human nature, Hugo sought to articulate an account of nature which recognized its fundamental goodness, but also took seriously its insufficiencies. This account fit with his understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship as one in which nature was distinct, but not separate from the supernatural.

This theology of nature and grace informed the central idea of the retreat, that Christians should not settle for a merely "good life" of simply avoiding sin, but rather that they were called to seek the fullest embodiment of the Christian life, the supernatural life of holiness –the life of saint. Such a life sought correspondence with the grace which would then bring about transformation and perfection. This correspondence required the removal of all obstacles to grace and thus a dying to one's natural self -the Folly of the Cross. The retreat, then, was not a morbid exercise in self-abuse, but rather was a means for ongoing discernment of how to live a fully Christian life. Hugo was not a rigorist. He saw his retreat as a pastoral and practical tool for Christians to evaluate what they encountered in American culture and society, not to reject it outright, but to assess it in light of their ultimate final end and to negotiate the complexities of their lives in that light. American Catholic CO's in World War II embodied such discernment. Ultimately, Hugo's argument was that the supernatural had practical implications for the life of ordinary Christians, and yet not every aspect of that life was always-already sacred.

It was Dorothy Day who truly seemed to embody the retreat's vision of an integrated, supernatural life of holiness. Indeed, she beautifully articulated that vision throughout *The Long Loneliness*. Hugo would come to refer to Day as the "imprimatur"

on the retreat theology.² As Hugo saw it, if the retreat theology was perceived as rigorist or excessively perfectionist it was because the measure of the Christian life, especially that of the ordinary Christian, had become too low.

The retreat's emphasis on the practical implications of the supernatural in the Christian life was nothing new or original in Christianity. As Hugo worked to show, the retreat theology was part of a much deeper theological tradition that also included St. Ignatius's "practical mysticism" and the spiritual doctrine of Louis Lallemant. Indeed, throughout his defense of the retreat, Hugo turned to sources from the Christian tradition to justify and certify its theological perspectives. In this sense, he should be seen in light of other such efforts at *ressourcement* being made at the time.

Hugo's theology should also be understood as offering a challenge to the two-tiered view of the Christian life that was the norm at the time. Such a view was itself a legacy of the seventeenth-century Quietist controversy and was supported by the two-tiered theology in early twentieth-century neo-Thomism. Hugo's integrated understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship was clearly presented as a corrective to this dominant theological view. Hugo, therefore, should be read within the context of the broader challenge to this neo-Thomism taking place in the first half of the twentieth-century. Such a reading of Hugo reveals his significance beyond Day and the Catholic Worker. For his controversy with prominent neo-Thomists was a particularly American version of the much larger nature-grace debate taking place within Catholicism in the decades prior to *Humani Generis*. The retreat controversy, then, can be viewed similarly to the controversy that had earlier surrounded Blondel's "Testis" articles, and

² Hugo likened this to Léon Bloy once saying of Jacques and Raissa Maritain, "Here is my Imprimatur!" Hugo, *Your Ways Are Not My Ways*, vol 1, 24.

the one which was embroiling de Lubac during the same period. While Hugo's arguments were certainly not on the same level as those of Blondel or de Lubac, he was still working out of the same essential theological impulse. The reaction Hugo received to his theological challenge also seemed to share much in common with that experienced by de Lubac and others.

Like his European counterparts, Hugo also seemed to recognize that these nature-supernatural debates were not merely academic, but that they had very real social and political implications. As was the case with Blondel's defense of social Catholics, Hugo's defense of American Catholic CO's struck at the heart of the dominant social ethic at the time, a social ethic very much supported by the two-tiered theology. It is in this way, that Hugo remains relevant to contemporary Catholic discussions of American society and culture, discussions which have become dominated by an approach not so unlike that of the neo-Thomists. For Hugo's theology of nature and grace provides a theological foundation for Catholics, and particularly Catholic radicals, to engage with American society and culture. Thus when these Catholics practice withdrawal from specific American institutions, like participating in the military, paying taxes, and voting, or when they renounce certain practices of American capitalism, it should not be caricatured as an "apocalyptic sectarianism" inconsistent with Catholic theology.

Hugo made clear that such selective withdrawal is not a condemnation of such institutions as always sinful, but instead, can be made out of a desire to live a "higher way." Indeed, Hugo's retreat offers a theological tool to discern such engagement, as it did for Day and several others. It is an engagement which is not an outright rejection of America, but neither is it a blanket "sacramental" affirmation of American institutions as

paths to human fulfillment and holiness. And so, while somewhat outdated and even uncomfortable, Hugo's retreat theology can provide a means for ordinary Christians today who seek holiness and sanctification in their daily lives.

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