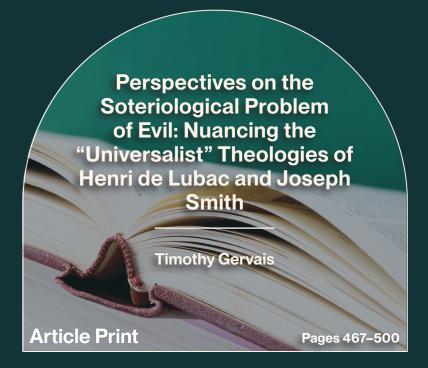


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Perspectives on the Soteriological Problem of Evil: Nuancing the "Universalist" Theologies of Henri de Lubac and Joseph Smith

Timothy Gervais

Abstract: Since the discovery of the new world by Christian European explorers during the age of discovery, the increasingly global community of the modern age has confronted Christian theologians with difficult soteriological questions. These questions have caused many Christian adherents to abandon conceptions of a uniquely Christian salvation in favor of theological positions of religious pluralism. Other Christian theologians have confronted these issues through creative inclusivist theological constructs that expand the offer of salvation to those who may not have professed Christianity in their mortal life. These inclusivist theologies are uniquely suited to address modern concerns about the salvation of non-believers in a largely un-Christian world, while still maintaining the exclusive Christian claim that salvation comes only through Christ. The inclusivist theologies of Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac and Joseph Smith are investigated and nuanced to display how they maintain a uniquely Christian view of salvation, while expanding traditional conceptions of who will receive access to salvific grace.

The question of the fate of those who have died not hearing of Christ appears to be rising to a climatic pinnacle in the global village of the modern epoch. As has been observed by Jonathan Wong:

Much has been said about the rise of the global village, and the vast movements of people across oceans and continents have led to an increasing diversity in the populations of our cities around the world. This has led to a greater awareness of the multiplicity of cultures, practices, and faith traditions in what was once the cradle of Christendom in the West. . . . A particularly vexing issue is the whole matter of the Christian understanding of salvation, especially in light of the many people who remain outside this faith tradition. The main way in which this question is phrased is, "How can the traditional Christian understanding of salvation as being available only to some (whether it be through membership in the church, or through an explicit profession of faith) be reconciled with the vast numbers of people who are of non-Christian religions?" In simpler terms, the question is, "Who can be saved?"

The study of who can be saved is known as "soteriology," and since the age of discovery there has been a veritable explosion of Christian theological proposals on the subject. The modern Christian world through adoption and promulgation has, by and large, acknowledged universalist or inclusivist soteriological models as the most suitable formulations for the contemporary individual.²

Loosely defined, Christian universalist theologies are those that maintain a doctrine of universal reconciliation, or that most, if not all, of humankind will ultimately be reconciled to God regardless of professed faith. Unfortunately, un-nuanced universalist theologies often stray deeply into the realm of soteriological pluralism. Soteriological pluralism has been defined by one writer as the view that

All religions are essentially the same, with similar ends, and are equally valid. . . . In essence, pluralism posits that because diverse religious claims now stand side by side in the marketplace, it would be ignorant and insensitive to elevate one faith tradition over another. Therefore the only way forward is to put everyone on the same level and to equalize all truth claims.³

Jonathan Wong, "Blind Men, an Elephant, and a King: The Problem of Soteriocentric Pluralism." Anglican Theological Review 95, no. 1 (2013): 81–82.

 [&]quot;Universal salvation, either as hope or as dogma, is now so widely accepted that many theologians assume it virtually without argument." Richard Baukham, "Universalism: A Historical Survey." Themelios 4, no. 2 (September 1978): 47.

^{3.} Wong, "Blind Men," 81, 84.

This trend is worrisome for many, as pluralist theologies have often led to a rejection or marginalization of conventional formulations about a host of theological subjects, including moral or ritual stipulations found in traditional Christian dogma (such as the requirement of baptism for salvation; see John 3:5). While one might debate the exegetical soundness of universalist theologies, which often override the predominantly exclusive tone of the New Testament, there can be no question that the love of God upon which such theologies are based is deeply scriptural. Indeed, both critics and proponents of universalism often accuse each other of misreading or ignoring large sections of the biblical text. As such, theological formulations are often determined not by the content of the text itself, but instead by the *a priori* theological, political, or philosophical considerations brought to bear on such texts.

Christian inclusivist theologies, while similar to their universalist counterparts, posit the *possibility* of salvation for Christians and non-Christians alike, but maintain that this salvation is mediated by Christ alone. Inclusivist theologies also often maintain that although one belief system is "true" (Christianity), there are latent truths found in most faiths, and that an individual's salvation may in some way depend upon their response to the truths they have been given within their own tradition. Consequently, some of the most popular or influential theologies among the religiously committed Christians are universal in their offer of salvation but acknowledge that not all individuals will take advantage of that offer. These are the inclusivist theologies mentioned above, ones which hold in careful balance both exclusive and universal scriptural passages.

Depending on the theological leanings of those who oppose them, these inclusivist theologies are frequently criticized as being either too broad or too limiting in their offer of salvation. This is possibly why there is some ambiguity in the terms *universalist* and *inclusivist*. Rarely are carefully formulated theologies so easily categorized when dealing with the immensely complex subject of the salvation of souls. Ultimately it is only the extreme ends of the doctrinal spectrum that are easily defined. Most theologies fall somewhere in the middle, in a more or less inclusivist vein.

The goal of this work is to present the soteriology of two influential theologians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Joseph Smith and Henri de Lubac. Both exhibit highly refined versions of inclusivism but have often been labeled universalist, or even pluralist, by their

critics. Despite these critiques, both have been tremendously influential in shaping the modern theological landscape. Their theologies exhibit striking similarities in their view of the universality of Christ's Atonement, their belief that all mankind will be given equal access to salvific grace, and their insistence that salvation comes uniquely through Christ's established church. Careful examination also exposes significant differences in their approach to the soteriological question.

Historical Background

Criticisms of the Christian view of salvation being mediated solely through Christ were raised as early as the fourth century AD by the philosopher Porphyry:

If Christ ... declares himself to be the Way of salvation, the Grace and the Truth, and affirms that in Him alone, and only to souls believing in Him, is the way of return to God, what has become of men who lived in the many centuries before Christ came? . . . What, then, has become of such an innumerable multitude of souls, who were in no wise blameworthy, seeing that He in whom alone saving faith can be exercised had not yet favoured men with His advent?⁴

This critique has continued to confront Christians through the modern age, and has come to be known as "the soteriological problem of evil." Robert Millet phrases this question succinctly:

The soteriological problem of evil might be stated simply as follows: If in fact Christ is the only name by which salvation comes . . . and if, as we have seen, the majority of the human race will go to their graves without ever having heard of Christ in this life, how can God be considered just or merciful?⁵

Despite nearly seventeen centuries of theological reflections on the subject, Porphyry's question, or questions similar to it, remain "far

Porphyry as quoted in Philip Schaff, ed., A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, vol. 1, The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustine (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Company, 1886), 416, oll.libertyfund.org/titles/schaff-a-select-library-of-the-nicene-and-post -nicene-fathers-of-the-christian-church-vol-1.

^{5.} Robert L. Millet, "The Soteriological Problem of Evil," *Religious Educator* 2, no. 2 (2001): 75, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol2/iss2/9/.

and away . . . the most-asked apologetic question on U.S. college campuses."6

Regardless of modern discomfort with the doctrine, there can be no question that the fundamental message of traditional Christianity is one of exclusive salvation by and through the central figure of Jesus Christ:

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6). Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13:14). For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16-18; see also Romans 1:16; Acts 4:12; Romans 10:9–15; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 9:27; 1 John 5:11-12)

It would not be an overstatement to suggest that the soteriological problem of evil is one of the most critical theological questions faced by modern Christians, who contend "with the reality that their fundamental conviction of salvation being mediated uniquely and exclusively through Jesus Christ is widely perceived as being parochial, intolerant, or even unconscionable."

Porphyry's argument does not seem to have been given the same weight anciently as it is given today. Augustine's response to the critique was a reversal of Porphyry's argument upon veneration of the Roman pantheon, and largely took for granted that a majority of mankind would be unable to attain salvation:

Gabriel Fackre, Ronald H. Nash, John Sanders, What About Those Who Have Never Heard?: Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 7.

Michael Hamkin Lee, "Theology of Religions and the Intuitive Dimension: How Do We Construct and Perceive God's Fairness," Missiology: An International Review 42, no.2 (2014), 139.

To these statements we answer by requiring those who make them to tell us, in the first place, whether the sacred rites, which we know to have been introduced into the worship of their gods at times which can be ascertained, were or were not profitable to men. If they say that these were of no service for the salvation of men, they unite with us in putting them down, and confess that they were useless. . . . If, on the other hand, they defend these rites, and maintain that they were wise and profitable institutions, what, I ask, has become of those who died before these were instituted? for they were defrauded of the saving and profitable efficacy which these possessed. If, however, it be said that they could be cleansed from guilt equally well in another way, why did not the same way continue in force for their posterity? What use was there for instituting novelties in worship.8

Augustine's thought was tremendously influential in the subsequent centuries, and his views that hell is punitive and eternal appear to have been widely adopted by the western Christian mainstream.9 The lack of concern towards the un-evangelized shown by Augustine and other subsequent Christian theologians can in some ways be attributed to the unprecedented growth the movement experienced during its first three hundred years. By the year 300 AD, there were probably as many as six million Christians in the Roman empire, roughly ten percent of the total population.¹⁰ The astronomical evangelical success the movement experienced in its early years generally stymied overly creative doctrinal responses to the soteriological problem, as the missionary impulse of the young movement was widely viewed as a sufficient response to the issue of a largely un-Christian world. The subsequent Edict of Milan in 313 AD (which outlawed hostilities toward Christians within the Roman Empire) and the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 AD (which ordered all Roman citizens to profess Christianity) increased the already dizzying growth of the Christian movement.11

^{8.} Schaff, Confessions of Augustine, 762.

^{9.} Kenneth W. Brewer, "Rob Bell and John Wesley on the Fate of the Lost and Those Who Never Heard the Gospel," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 48, no.1 (March 1, 2013): 125–26.

^{10.} See Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years; A Global History of Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 65–66.

^{11.} Sidney Z. Ehler and John B. Morrall, trans. and eds., Church and State through the Centuries: A Collection of Historic Documents with Commentaries (London:

The swift evangelical progress made by Christianity after these edicts resulted in something of a "theological stagnation" during the subsequent centuries on the subject of the salvation of unbelievers. This is not to say that theologians did not consider and propose solutions to the issue during this time. However, the scope of their proposals often failed to address the truly daunting number of individuals who would never hear the message of Christ. Concepts of deathbed revelation for particularly "virtuous pagans" provided solutions to the issue but on a much smaller scale than the formulations of the great universalist or inclusivist theologians that would come in later centuries. Such propositions, although providing a means by which select individuals might escape the circumstances which had consigned them to endless punishment, still took at face value the belief that a vast majority of mankind would ultimately not be saved.

By the early fifteenth century, Western European Christians had a comfortable view of the progress of salvific knowledge throughout the world: Europe was predominantly Christian, the Jews had long since rejected Christ and would ultimately be corrected in the eschaton, and Islamic peoples were openly hostile towards Christianity. These conditions lent themselves to a widespread belief that the gospel had largely been promulgated to all the peoples of the earth in fulfilment of Christ's prophecy found in Mathew 24:14. The Papal Encyclical Superna caelestis is strongly indicative of this mindset. Issued on 14 April 1482, by Pope Sixtus IV to Canonize St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, it evidences a "fortress mentality" and effectively states that the primary mission of the church is to maintain its current status against all potential intrusions:

Wherefore We require and warn each and every person constituted in dignity, in so far as Our present letters, being solemnly published, to exhort them by all the clergy and people of their cities, dioceses and parishes, that God Himself, from whom all good things proceed, be beseeched humbly, that . . . He might guard the Church Militant, the Apostolic Faith and all the faithful of Christ from the incursions of the pagans and other infidels and heretics and always protect and defend Her from all dangers.¹²

Burns & Oates, 1954), 4–7, archive.org/details/churchstatethrou0000sidn/page/n5/mode/2up.

^{12.} Sixtus IV, *Superna caelestis*, April 14, 1482, at The Franciscan Archive (website), franciscan-archive.org/bullarium/supern-e.html.

It was not until European encounters with the Americas began in the late fifteenth century that Christianity was confronted with circumstances that made it difficult to maintain a simplistic view of Christian exclusivity. Discovery of a significant portion of the world's population who had not heard of Christ challenged many common theological beliefs, and resulted in a renewed emphasis on missionary efforts to the un-evangelized. Contrast the encyclical *Inter Caetera* issued only eleven years after *Superna caelestis*, one year after Columbus's successful voyage:

Among other works well pleasing to the Divine Majesty and cherished of our heart, this assuredly ranks highest, that in our times especially the Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and be everywhere increased and spread, that the health of souls be cared for and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself.¹⁴

The discovery of vast groups of non-Christian peoples necessitated both an increase of evangelism as well as a fresh theological consideration of the salvation of the unbeliever. New theological proposals began early in the sixteenth century with Luis de Molina's proposition of the "middle-knowledge" of God (scientia media).¹⁵ Molina asserted that God has knowledge of counter-factual conditions and how individuals would respond if those conditions were true.¹⁶ Middle-knowledge thus could theoretically be used to defend two very opposite soteriological positions: 1) God has a perfect knowledge of how an individual would respond if they were given a chance to hear the gospel; consequently, God would be able to justly save or damn them regardless of whether they had actually heard the gospel in mortality; and 2) because God had prior knowledge of how individuals would respond upon hearing of Christ, he created a world in which only those who would accept the gospel would hear the message. The

^{13. &}quot;Especially since the age of exploration and colonialism, many Christians at some point have been troubled by the implications of affirming the long-held Christian tradition of exclusivism. We are confronted with troubling realities like the asymmetric access to the Christian gospel throughout the world and human history." Lee, "Theology of Religions," 140.

^{14.} Alexander VI, *Inter Caetera*, May 4, 1493, at Papal Encyclicals Online (website), papalencyclicals.net/Alex06/alex06inter.htm.

^{15.} See David P. Hunt, "Middle Knowledge and the Soteriological Problem of Evil," *Religious Studies* 27, no. 1 (March 1991): 3–26.

^{16.} Hunt, "Middle Knowledge," 4.

first position could be used to support either a highly inclusivist theology, or a theology of elected exclusivism. The second obviously supports a highly exclusive theological formulation. While not inherently an inclusivist position, Molina's formulations began a reassessment of the soteriological issue, and could easily be used to support a more generous view of God's grace.

Theological formulations since Molina have increasingly trended in a universalist or inclusivist direction, seeing their most rapid expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As noted by Baukham, "since 1800 . . . universal salvation, either as hope or as dogma, is now so widely accepted that many theologians assume it virtually without argument." The most enduring of these inclusivist theologies creatively offer a hopeful view of the possibility of salvation for unbelievers, while not drifting into the realm of soteriological pluralism and moral relativism by diminishing the role of Christian faith and practice in salvation. Outright universalism has been repeatedly rejected by the Christian mainstream. This is precisely because of the tendency of universalist theologies to diminish the necessity of Christian faith.

While Joseph Smith has often been mislabeled a "universalist" by his critics, his theology resides firmly in the "inclusivist" camp and can be viewed as a reconciliation of universalist and exclusivist principles. Interestingly, one of the most influential Catholic Theologians of the twentieth century, Henri de Lubac, has also been accused of universalism. De Lubac's theology, while more abstract than the restored gospel, bears many similarities to Smith's salvific vision. A careful investigation of both de Lubac and Smith shows that while maintaining the *possibility* of salvation for all, both present a theology that is far more nuanced than the oversimplified, pejorative *universalist* label implies.

The Theology of Henri de Lubac

The problem of the "salvation of unbelievers" has confronted the Christian conscience in tragic guise as a consequence of successive discoveries in geography, history, and prehistory which, while they immeasurably increase the sum of human achievement, seem to diminish in proportion the achievement of Christ. . . . Without closing our eyes to the

^{17.} Baukham, Universalism, 47.

^{18.} Baukham, Universalism, 48-49.

miserable state of many who are "in the shadow of death," we consider, nevertheless, with St. Irenaeus, that the Son from the very beginning and in every part of the world, gives a more or less obscure revelation of the Father to every creature, and that he can be the "Salvation of those who are born outside the Way." We believe, with St. Cyprian, St. Hilary and St. Ambrose, that the divine Sun of Justice shines on all and for all. We teach, with St. John Chrysostom, that grace is diffused everywhere and that there is no soul that cannot feel its attraction. With Origen, St. Jerome and St. Cyril of Alexandria we refuse to assert that any man is born without Christ. And, lastly, we willingly allow, with St. Augustine, the strictest of the Fathers, that divine mercy was always at work among all peoples, and that even the pagans have had their "hidden saints" and their prophets.¹⁹

Kevin Hughes argued that in order to properly contextualize the theological thought of Henri de Lubac, one must be cognizant of de Lubac's life experiences, his background, and particularly his involvement with the two World Wars.²⁰

Henri de Lubac was born on 20 February 1896 to a devout Catholic family in northern France. Evidence of theological interest for de Lubac began as early as the age of 17, when he was inducted as a novitiate in the Society of Jesus. One year later, with the outbreak of World War I, de Lubac was drafted into the French army and sent to fight in "some of the most devastating and destructive battles of the war." Entering the war only one year into his formal religious training deeply affected the theological development of the young de Lubac. Consequently, de Lubac's later theological contemplations seem to be "an attempt to reenvision the very project of theology itself, to confront the crisis of loss and fragmentation that the First World War provoked with the practical wisdom of the Catholic tradition, a wisdom that does not shrink from the war's fragmentation of meaning, but meets it with the paradox

Henri de Lubac, Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 1988), 217–19.

Kevin L. Hughes, "'Christianity is Never Triumphant': Henri de Lubac, La Nouvelle Theologie, and the Crucible of the Great War," (presentation, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA, 24 November 2014).

^{21.} Hughes, "'Christianity is Never Triumphant'," 1.

and mystery of faith in the crucified Christ."²² De Lubac believed the Christian life was "a meaningful and relevant response to life after the war" because of its ability to reestablish a lost unity between all mankind.²³ Commentators have thus classified de Lubac's theology as "social" or "communal," in that it emphasizes the role of Christian community in the salvation of souls. De Lubac's "social" or "communal" theology has been summed up well by Patrick Cruitt:

Humanity's unity has its origin in nature, for human beings are one on the basis of their creation in the *Imago Dei*. Since God is one, humanity is also one. Therefore, a human being's individual religious vocation is not simply a mystic ascent toward unity in God but also a call to community. This community comes into existence not through human striving but in response to the divine calling toward salvation in Christ. According to this understanding of humanity's vocation, sin is both a "breach with God" and "at the same time a disruption of human unity." Through Original Sin, separation entered into the created order, and through Christ and the Church original unity is restored.²⁴

If World War I was foundational for the development of de Lubac's theology of the spiritual unity of mankind, World War II was equally formative in his belief that the world faced issues that were spiritual at their core, issues that could only be solved by a turn to Christianity:

[The battle with Fascism] is no longer a problem of the historical, metaphysical, political, or social order. It is a spiritual problem. It is the total human problem. Today, the fight against Christianity . . . is aimed directly at the heart. The Christian concept of life, Christian spirituality, the inner attitude which, above any particular act or any external gesture, defines the Christian: this is what is at issue.²⁵

^{22.} Hughes, "'Christianity is Never Triumphant'," 2.

^{23.} Robin Darling Young, "An Imagined Unity: Henri de Lubac & the Ironies of Ressourcement," *Commonweal* 139, no. 15 (2012): 19.

^{24.} Patrick Cruitt, "We Are Not Saved Alone," Church Life Journal, McGrath Institute for Church Life, 17 January 2018, churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles /salvation-cannot-occur-in-isolation/.

^{25.} Henri de Lubac, "Spiritual Warfare," in *Theology in History*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), terrenouvelle.home .blog/spiritual-warfare-henri-de-lubac-1943/#:~:text=The%20Christian%20 concept%20of%20life,wanting%20to%20preserve%20the%20gospel!

The horrors of World War II only served to strengthen de Lubac's theological vision: Thus, what "de Lubac believed before the war already to be important to the renewal of Christian faith from within became a critical resource for the Christian stand against Nazism, and, after the war, for the Christian approach to the world in general." As de Lubac confronted the realities of Nazi Jewish extermination, his social theology of a unified human race was tested in a far more concrete manner than ever before. De Lubac was faced with the idea that because Jews were not a part of the Christian faith, they went from the fires of Hitler's death camps directly to the fires of hell. It is in this context that de Lubac formulated his vision of a reunification of the human race, a unity that began first and foremost with a reconciliation of Jew and Gentile through Christ:

Such, in any case, in the earthly order, is that tragic enmity, symbolic of so many others, between Jew and Gentile. Christ came to bring them to unity and peace. . . . Raised up on the Cross, his arms stretched out, he is to gather together the disunited portions of creation, "breaking down the middle wall of partition" between them. ²⁷

De Lubac maintained his social theology and urged Christian support of the Jewish people by showing a direct and indispensable relationship between Christianity and Israel. "More specifically, de Lubac argued for a vigorous defense of the unity of the Scriptures against those who claimed to distinguish between a 'Semite Old Testament' and an 'Aryan New Testament." To de Lubac "the conjunction of the two testaments was woven [as] a single vesture for the Word; together they formed one body, and to rend this body by rejecting the Jewish books was no less a sacrilege than to rend the body of the Church by schism." He later opined, "No Christian must let himself go so far as to think that a movement of withdrawal with respect to the Old Testament would leave his faith intact."

De Lubac's insistence on a deep spiritual connection existing between Jews and Christians was, in many ways, anticipated by the

Kevin L. Hughes, "Deep Reasonings: Sources Chretiennes, Ressourcement, and the Logic of Scripture in the Years Before—and After—Vatican II," *Modern Theology* 29, no. 4 (October 2013): 37.

^{27.} De Lubac. Catholicism. 42-43.

^{28.} Hughes, "Deep Reasonings," 37.

^{29.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 177.

^{30.} Hughes, "Deep Reasonings," 37.

"covenant theology" revealed to Joseph Smith. Perhaps greater than any other modern theologian, Smith reclaimed in a Christian context the ancient covenants made to the Jewish patriarchs. By reestablishing and rearticulating Christianity's relationship to Judaism, the gospel as restored through Joseph Smith anticipated and provided a cure for the modern crisis of the holocaust, close to a hundred years before de Lubac's identification of its root cause.

Nazi appropriation and warping of Christian doctrine in their persecution of the Jews made de Lubac all the more inclined to "spiritually arm" modern Catholics with a proper understanding of the Christian faith. During the Nazi occupation of France, at great personal risk, de Lubac began to produce and publish two book series whose focus was the renewal of the Church and recovery of patristic sources. "The first, *Sources Chrétiennes*, produced editions of patristic texts. The second, *Théologie*, offered theoretical discussions of traditional Christian scriptural and doctrinal principles." De Lubac's "zeal to bring *Sources Chrétiennes* and *Théologie* to press in the face of Nazi occupation came from [his] . . . conviction that these deep patristic and scriptural resources were all the more vital to a church faced with persecution."

De Lubac's efforts to recover patristic sources ultimately grew into the Catholic theological movement known as *Ressourcement*, or a "return to the sources." *Ressourcement* represented a revitalization of the study of what de Lubac viewed as the basic building blocks of Christianity: the biblical text, the liturgy, and patristic writings. By reincorporating these texts into theological study, de Lubac believed theology would be freed from the bonds of intellectualism and again made accessible and relevant to the modern Catholic laity. ³⁴ De Lubac said of the movement: "to the degree that we have let ourselves lose it, we have to rediscover the spirit of Christianity. To do so, we have to steep ourselves in its sources." ³⁵ To de Lubac, these sources were

^{31.} Kevin L. Hughes, "Ressourcement and Resistance: La nouvelle théologie, the Fathers, and the Bible, against Fascism," (unpublished manuscript, 2014) p. 16.

^{32.} Hughes, "Deep Reasonings," 36.

^{33.} Hughes, "Deep Reasonings," 36.

^{34.} Hughes, "Deep Reasonings," 39.

^{35.} De Lubac, "Spiritual Warfare," 489, terrenouvelle.home.blog/spiritual-warfare -henri-de-lubac-1943/#:~:text=The%20Christian%20concept%20of%20 life,wanting%20to%20preserve%20the%20gospel!.

primarily the writings of the early fathers of the Christian movement.³⁶ De Lubac and other theologians involved in the Ressourcement movement believed that these writings had been neglected in the formulation of modern Catholic thought, instead being usurped by medieval works, primarily those of Thomas Aguinas. 37 It should come as no surprise, then, that de Lubac's soteriology mirrored more closely that of the early fathers and was more generous than the post-Augustine and post-Aquinas models favored by the majority of theologians at the time. It is significant that, while the soteriological vision of Joseph Smith is often criticized for its departure from the Augustinian view of a two-part heaven and hell, de Lubac's reliance on the earliest Christian sources led him to a similar rejection of traditional soteriological formulations. De Lubac, who is known for understanding the "spirit" of earliest Christianity better than any other modern theologian, articulated a theological vision that echoed Joseph Smith's more closely than traditional Christian conceptions.

The primary focus of de Lubac's "new theology," as it was derisively labeled by his critics, was "a sharp critique of the regnant neo-Thomist separation between nature and the supernatural." The prevailing Catholic theology prior to de Lubac relied on a separation between "pure nature" and grace, or human nature and the supernatural. As articulated by David Grumett:

Nature and grace were, according to the reigning NeoThomist consensus, separate and discontinuous, with nature regarded as complete in itself and not dependent on divine action for its preservation. This "pure nature" was, indeed, unable to enjoy any form of relation with God, neither of participated being nor of knowledge, because its end, appetite, and powers were seen as solely natural. 39

In essence, because fallen human nature has no inherent connection to the divine, an eternal separation from God is the natural, and

^{36.} A.N. Williams, "The Future of the Past: The Contemporary Significance of the *Nouvelle Théologie*," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 4 (October 2005): 350.

^{37.} Williams. "The Future of the Past." 350.

^{38.} Hans Boersma, "Nature and the Supernatural in *Ia nouvelle theologie*: The Recovery of a Sacramental Mindset," *New Blackfriars* 93, no. 1043 (2012): 34.

^{39.} David Grumett, "Eucharist, Matter and the Supernatural: Why de Lubac Needs Teilhard," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 2 (April 2008): 166–67.

ultimately just, end of humanity without God's intervention. De Lubac was vehement in his rejection of the notion of pure nature, insisting that every man had a natural desire for God, a grace intrinsic to human nature that urged all men to a pursuit of the beatific vision.⁴⁰ This conception in many ways mirrors Joseph Smith's description of the light of Christ, which is "in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:13).

De Lubac's soteriology is inseparably connected to his construal of the relationship between nature and grace, and rests upon the "organic relation between . . . Christology and anthropology."⁴¹ This relationship is embodied in de Lubac's conception that salvation through Christ fulfills or completes a natural created dignity (or grace) inherent in all humanity. This dignity is a created "natural unity" of the human race as individuals bear within their soul the same image of God:

Was it not shown to them in Genesis, where it was taught that God made man in his own image? For the divine image does not differ from one individual to another: in all it is the same image. The same mysterious participation in God which causes the soul to exist effects at one and the same time the unity of spirits among themselves. Whence comes the notion . . . of one spiritual family intended to form the one city of God. 42

Ultimately, this natural unity is brought to fullness and perfected through the sacrifice of Christ, which binds all mankind together as the "Mystical Body of Christ." The ultimate unification (i.e. salvation) of humankind, according to de Lubac, must be seen as a fundamental desire of the triune God, and is the ultimate purpose of both the Church's existence as well as Christ's sacrifice. Sin then, is the antithesis of this unity, and is a disruption of either humanity's unity with God, or the unity of the human race with itself. Although those

^{40. &}quot;Specifically, de Lubac objected to two developments in the neo-Thomist tradition: the rise of the notion of pure nature and the denial of a natural human desire for the beatific vision." Boersma, "Nature and Supernatural," 36.

^{41.} David L. Schindler, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1998), xi.

^{42.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 29.

^{43. &}quot;Thus the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, a supernatural unity, supposes a previous natural unity, the unity of the human race." De Lubac, Catholicism. 25.

^{44.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 29-33.

two are separate classifications of sin, de Lubac is careful to point out that a disruption of unity with God ultimately results in a disruption of the unity of the human race. Likewise, disruption of human unity leads to a disruption of unity with God. Hence, for de Lubac, implicit in an individuals' endeavor to seek salvation and overcome sin is a much grander necessity to seek the reunification of mankind. To de Lubac, individual "redemption" is "a work of restoration [that] will appear to us by that very fact as the recovery of lost unity—the recovery of supernatural unity of man with God, but equally of the unity of men among themselves."45 God's salvific purposes will thus not be complete until "every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess" (Romans 14:11) in total unification: "We must surely affirm" maintains de Lubac, "that the one and only Church will remain incomplete until the last day. We may conclude with Bossuet: 'Jesus Christ will not be whole until the number of the saints is complete."46 In this way, de Lubac believes that a distinctly Christian soteriology must maintain the possibility that all may be saved. In the words of de Lubac: "The human race is one. By our fundamental nature and still more in virtue of our common destiny we are members of the same body. Now the life of the members comes from the life of the body. How, then, can there be salvation for the members if, per impossibile, the body itself were not saved?"47

In conjunction with promoting a significantly broader view of humanity's access to Christ's salvific grace than many traditional formulations of his time, de Lubac also sought to expand the scope of that grace. De Lubac envisioned Christ's sacrifice as one that covers every human blemish, thus reclaiming the whole of human nature. De Lubac, then, maintains the universalist or inclusivist belief in unlimited atonement, or that Christ's Atonement was on behalf of all mankind not solely the Christian elect. De Lubac illustrates this belief throughout many of his works, but perhaps nowhere more clearly than in *Catholicism*:

In making a human nature, it is *human nature* that he united to himself, that he enclosed in himself, and it is the latter, whole and entire, that in some sort he uses as a body. . . . Whole and entire he will bear it then to Calvary, whole and entire he will raise it from the dead, whole and entire he will save it. Christ the Redeemer does not offer salvation merely

^{45.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 35.

^{46.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 133.

^{47.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 222-23.

^{48.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 37-39.

to each one; he effects it, he is himself the salvation of the whole, and for each one salvation consists in a personal ratification of his original "belonging" to Christ, so that he be not cast out, cut off from this Whole.⁴⁹

It is from passages such as this that many misinterpret de Lubac's universal offer of salvation as an actualization of universal salvation. However, de Lubac carefully distinguishes between the offer of salvation and its actualization: "We are concerned here . . . with the possibility of salvation, and not with its actual realization; with the divine summons and not with the human answer to it."

De Lubac maintains that "No soul of good will lacks the concrete means of salvation, in the fullest sense of the word. There is no man, no 'unbeliever,' whose supernatural conversion to God is not possible from the dawn of reason onward." This is in large measure due to the created "grace" or "revelation of the Father" mentioned earlier, that is inherent in each person and naturally inclines them towards the divine: "The Son, from the very beginning and in every part of the world, gives a more or less obscure revelation of the Father to every creature, and that he can be the 'Salvation of those who are born outside the Way."

To de Lubac, the universal offer of salvation is extended to humanity as a whole, but the condition or actualization of that salvation is dependent upon an individual's response to that invitation. While Christ has already effected the "salvation of the whole," realization of that salvation comes from an individual's decision to "[ratify] his original 'belonging' to Christ." Personal salvation is thus effectuated and dependent upon an individual's choosing to have unity or "become one with" the communal whole of humanity symbolized by the "Mystical Body of Christ." Indeed, to de Lubac, traditional Christian rituals such as baptism "are the means of salvation," precisely because they are

instruments of unity [that] ... make real, renew or strengthen man's union with Christ [and] by that very fact they make real, renew or strengthen his union with the Christian community. And this second aspect of the sacraments, the social aspect, is so intimately bound up with the first that it can

^{49.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 38-39.

^{50.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 220.

^{51.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 220n13.

^{52.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 219-20.

^{53.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 218.

often be said, indeed in certain cases it must be said, that it is through his union with the community that the Christian is united to Christ. . . . Just as redemption and revelation, even though they reach every individual soul, are none the less fundamentally not individual but social, so grace which is produced and maintained by the sacraments does not set up a purely individual relationship between the soul and God or Christ; rather does each individual receive such grace in proportion as he is joined, socially, to that one body whence flows this saving life-stream.⁵⁴

While de Lubac nowhere explicitly states that baptism is not a requirement for salvation, it is certainly implicit in his theological conception. To de Lubac, baptism allows admission into "The kingdom of God," (i.e. the Catholic faith), but does not grant salvation per se. Salvation, or participation in the Beatific vision, comes from a unity with Christ and humanity that is not necessarily dependent upon one's relationship to the visible Church. Because all humanity is created with both a desire and a capacity for unity, de Lubac allows for the possibility of an individual attaining a salvific level of unity outside the Christian faith. This is perhaps the area of largest divergence between the soteriology of de Lubac and Joseph Smith. While de Lubac was capable of seeing the necessity of an expanded salvific vision, he was incapable of reconciling this expansion with a strict adherence to traditional ritual requirements such as baptism. In order to expand the Christian offer of salvation, de Lubac's theology required a redefinition of the role of baptism in salvation.

De Lubac's response to criticisms that this salvific vision diminished the need for the Church was to re-envision the salvific scope of the Catholic faith itself. While individual salvation might be possible outside of the visible Catholic church, "salvation for this body, for humanity consists in its receiving the form of Christ, and that is possible only through the Catholic Church.... In her alone mankind is refashioned and recreated." The Catholic Church is then less about the salvation of individuals and is instead concerned primarily with the "corporate destiny of man." It functions as the only banner under which ultimate unity can and will be achieved.

Outside Christianity humanity can doubtless be raised in an

^{54.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 82.

^{55.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 223.

exceptional manner to certain spiritual heights, and it is our duty — one that is perhaps too often neglected — to explore these heights that we may give praise to the God of mercies for them.... But the topmost summit is never reached, and there is risk of being the farther off from it by mistaking for it some other outlying peak. . . . A critical judgement, not of individual souls — for their precise situation in relation to the Kingdom is never known save to God alone — but of objective systems as found in a society and as offering material for rational examination, shows that there is some essential factor missing from every religious "invention" that is not a following of Christ. There is something lacking, for example, in Buddhist charity: it is not Christian charity. Something is lacking in the spirituality of the great Hindu mystics: it is not the spirituality of St. John of the Cross.... Outside Christianity all is not necessarily corrupt; far from it ... but what does not remain puerile is always in peril of going astray, or, however high it climbs, of ultimate collapse. Outside Christianity nothing attains its end, that only end, toward which, unknowingly, all human desires, all human endeavors, are in movement: the embrace of God in Christ.... Outside Christianity, again, humanity tries to collect its members together into unity. ... Only that Ideal which Christ gave to his Church is pure enough and strong enough—for it did not issue from the brain of man, but is living and is called the Spirit of Christto inspire men to work for their own spiritual unity, as only the sacrifice of his Blood can bring their labor to fruition. It is only through the leavening of the Gospel within the Catholic community and by the aid of the Holy Spirit that this "divine Humanity" can be established.56

De Lubac's creative re-envisioning of the role of unity, baptism, and the Church in the salvation of souls widely expanded traditional Catholic conceptions of who might be saved. The universality of the offer of salvation within de Lubac's theology, coupled with the actualization of salvation to non-Christians has often been misconstrued as universalism. Critics of de Lubac have argued that allowing for "implicit Christians" of other faiths ultimately removes the necessity of physically uniting oneself to the Church, becoming effectively, an

^{56.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 223-26.

unabashed soteriological pluralism.⁵⁷ However, to suggest that de Lubac endorses soteriological pluralism, or even unconditional universalism, would be to misrepresent de Lubac's entire theological vision. De Lubac consistently and repeatedly maintains that the Catholic Church is "by divine intention and Christ's institution the only normal way of salvation."⁵⁸ He maintains these seemingly contradictory views by articulating that even individual salvation that takes place "outside the [visible] Church," is ultimately derived from an individual's latent catholicity, or their "very real though indirect and more often hidden bond with her [the Church's] body."⁵⁹ To de Lubac, there is no salvation outside "the Church" properly understood, because "the Church" transcends the historical organization and encompasses all "soul[s] amenable to the suggestions of grace."⁶⁰

Of course the method of this salvation will differ according to whether the unbeliever has or has not encountered the Church. In the second case the only condition on which his salvation is possible is that he should be already a Catholic as it were by anticipation, since the Church is the "natural place" to which a soul amenable to the suggestions of grace spontaneously tends Far different is the case of the unbeliever who comes in contact with the Church — as long as she is shown to him in her true likeness, he has a strict obligation actually to enter her fold. . . . Those who do not know the Church are saved by her, therefore, in such a way that they incur the obligation of belonging to her even outwardly directly they come to know her.⁶¹

Thus, are readers left to puzzle out the particularities of de Lubac's paradoxical soteriology. On the one hand, "it is by the Church and by the Church alone that you will be saved," on the other, "the method of this salvation will differ according to whether the unbeliever has or has not encountered the Church." ⁶² If de Lubac's thought seems paradoxical, it is intentionally so, left open ended so that his soteriology matches the "paradox of paradoxes... the Crucified God." ⁶³

^{57.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 220-22.

^{58.} De Lubac. Catholicism. 222.

^{59.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 240.

^{60.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 236.

^{61.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 236-37.

^{62.} De Lubac, Catholicism, 236-37.

^{63.} Hughes, "Christianity is Never Triumphant'," 6.

In many ways de Lubac's pursuit of a more generous soteriology is constrained by his own tradition. While he is capable of discerning in the earliest Christian sources God's desire and capacity to save all humanity, the traditional formulations available to de Lubac failed to offer a concrete method by which those who did not have access to the Church could be saved. As such de Lubac is unable to articulate his intuition in a systematic way. While De Lubac's theological vision laudably synthesizes early Christian traditions to offer a hopeful and generous view of salvation, he is ultimately unable to go beyond the boundaries of traditional dogma in his pursuit of a more robust soteriological model. As it stands, de Lubac is more concerned with establishing "the possibility of salvation," rather than offering a clear explanation of how non-Christians, or even non-Catholics, will be saved. In many ways de Lubac appears to be "kept from the truth" only "because [he] know[s] not where to find it" (Doctrine & Covenants 123:12).

The Revelations of Joseph Smith

The great Jehovah contemplated the whole of the events connected with the earth, pertaining to the plan of salvation, before it rolled into existence, or ever "the morning stars sang together" for joy; the past, the present, and the future were and are, with Him, one eternal "now." . . . He comprehended the fall of man, and his redemption; He knew the plan of salvation and pointed it out. . . . He knows the situation of both the living and the dead, and has made ample provision for their redemption, according to their several circumstances, and the laws of the kingdom of God, whether in this world, or in the world to come. 64

Joseph Smith has long been a controversial figure in the Christian religious landscape.⁶⁵ His claim to revelatory visions from God, which overturned many traditional tenets of creedal Christianity, is often

^{64.} Joseph Smith, History of the Church, ed. B. H. Roberts, vol. 4, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 597, gutenberg.org/cache/epub/60708/pg60708-images.html.

^{65. &}quot;It is unlikely there will ever be consensus on Joseph Smith's character or his achievements. The multiplication of scholarly studies and the discovery of new sources have only heightened the controversies surrounding his life. . . . For a character as controversial as Smith, pure objectivity is impossible." Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), xix.

met with significant consternation from both Catholic and Protestant theologians. Because of this, and the relative obscurity of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it is rare to find a mainstream Christian theologian who makes a significant effort to understand and objectively evaluate the theological claims presented by Smith. However, upon close investigation, the soteriological framework articulated by Joseph Smith is often conceptually compatible with the basic tenets of recent mainstream Christian theological constructions, including those of Henri de Lubac.

Joseph Smith's soteriology at its most basic may be summed as follows:

- God desires that all of humanity have an opportunity to be saved.
- 2. Christ is the only means of salvation, and
- 3. God provides a way through which each individual has the ability to access God's salvific grace through Christ.

When put in such stark terms, Smith's soteriology does not typically incite any particular dismay among most modern Christian theologians. However, the method through which Smith received such knowledge (a physical manifestation of both God the Father and Jesus Christ) often leads mainstream Christians to focus on theological differences rather than on similarities. Such is, unfortunately, often the nature of interdenominational theological dialogue.

Before analyzing Joseph Smith's soteriological framework, one must address a methodological problem that faces any individual attempting to synthesize his theology. The problem lies in what to make of Joseph Smith's claims of revelation. Richard Lyman Bushman astutely articulates both the problem and a plausible solution:

A rhetorical problem vexes anyone who writes about the thought of Joseph Smith. Are his ideas to be attributed to him or to God? Some readers will consider it obvious that the revelations came from Joseph Smith's mind and nowhere else. . . . The most important [response] is that Joseph Smith did not think that way. The signal feature of his life was his sense of being guided by revelation. . . . To blur the distinction—to insist that Smith devised every

^{66.} David Paulsen, "Joseph Smith Challenges the Theological World," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 176–77, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol44/iss 4/16/.

revelation himself—obscures the very quality that made the Prophet powerful. To get inside the movement, we have to think of Smith as the early Mormons thought of him and as he thought of himself—as a revelator.⁶⁷

Viewing Smith in this light allows one to better piece together the "chaos of materials prepared by [Smith]."68 As Benjamin Park notes, this is no small feat: "Though they were perhaps a coherent whole in his mind, Smith's teachings were never presented in a systematic order but rather ... in 'flashes and bursts.' This collection of fragments has left many historians bewildered at the difficulty of presenting a coherent picture of his beliefs."69 Joseph Smith's untimely death at the hands of a mob in June 1844 cut short his revelatory efforts at a time when he was arguably at his prophetic height, as "it was not until the last three months of his life that Smith's sermons started to piece together what had previously been only theological fragments; and in his private teachings, he began to expound these ideas to his closest followers."70 As such, any attempt to distill Smith's theological vision is unfortunately subject to interpretation of a variety of scattered texts, similar in fact, to the method required to extract primary elements of de Lubac's theology.71

Joseph Smith was born shortly after the turn of the century in 1805 to a poor Yankee farm family. He grew up in a time known "for being rife with religious innovation, as numerous new religious movements

^{67.} Bushman, Joseph Smith, xxi.

^{68.} Parley P. Pratt, "Proclamation. To the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Greeting," *Millennial Star* 5 (March 1845): 152, catalog.churchofjesus christ.org/assets/0396a6ef-6202-4931-b1c3-edae4cc019bc/0/7.

^{69.} Benjamin E. Park, "(Re)Interpreting Early Mormon Thought: Synthesizing Joseph Smith's Theology and the Process of Religion Formation," *Dialogue* 45, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 62, dialoguejournal.com/articles/reinterpreting -early-mormon-thought-synthesizing-joseph-smiths-theology-and-the-process-of-religion-formation/.

^{70.} Park, "(Re)Interpreting," 61.

^{71. &}quot;The challenge we face lies in the fact that [Henri de Lubac] never wrote a systematic christology and, so, it has to be gleaned from his extensive writings on a myriad of subjects." Noel O'Sullivan, Christ and Creation: Christology as the Key to Interpreting the Theology of Creation in the Works of Henri de Lubac, (Bern, CH: Peter Lang, 2009), 7. "Smith was by nature eclectic, rather than systematic, and his teachings were emblematic of that approach. Though they were perhaps a coherent whole in his mind, Smith's teachings were never presented in a systematic order but rather, as Richard Bushman aptly described, in 'flashes and bursts.'" Park, "(Re)Interpreting," 62.

emerged from the fertile ground of the Second Great Awakening."⁷² The theological framework presented by Smith synthesizes or addresses many of the political, social, and religious ideologies of his day, and in many respects, the diverse religious background of his own family. Smith's extended and immediate family variously belonged to, or were interested in, the New England Congregationalists, Presbyterianism, Universalism, Methodism, and predominantly, unorganized personal religious experience. Despite the varied religious experiences of the group, church attendance in the Smith family was sporadic at best, and religious education largely took place at home.

The soteriological vision revealed to Smith can be viewed as something of a middle road, more austere than the universalism favored by his grandfather, and more generous than the Calvinistic leanings of Presbyterianism to which his mother was inclined. Additionally, Joseph Smith's formulations were influenced by his early and deeply personal encounter with a "virtuous pagan," as his older brother Alvin died, unbaptized, in 1823. Joseph saw his brother Alvin as being "the noblest of my father's family . . . [and] one of the noblest of the sons of men." Because of this, it must have been particularly painful when the minister presiding at Alvin's funeral intimated "that Alvin had gone to hell because of his refusal to attend church." Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of Smith's most powerful and explicit soteriological visions involved seeing his brother Alvin in the celestial kingdom (Doctrine and Covenants 137:5–6).

In many respects, similar to de Lubac, Smith's soteriology rests heavily on understanding human nature. However, to properly contextualize Smith's theology of human nature, one must understand his theological claims about pre-created man. He revealed that man was created spiritually by God, and lived with him as spirits before becoming embodied in the mortal world (Moses 6:51; see also Moses 3:5; Abraham 3:21–24; Alma 13:3; Helaman 14:17; Doctrine and Covenants

^{72.} Park, "(Re)Interpreting," 64.

^{73.} Steven C. Harper, "Joseph Smith and the Kirtland Temple," in *Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU]; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), rsc.byu.edu/joseph-smith-prophet-seer/joseph-smith-kirtland-temple-1836.

^{74.} Harper, "Joseph Smith," rsc.byu.edu/joseph-smith-prophet-seer/joseph-smith-kirtland-temple-1836.

^{75.} Bushman, Joseph Smith, 110.

38:1; 49:17; 93:29).⁷⁶ These created spirits were capable of progression and growth, contingent upon their choosing to heed the counsel of God the Father (Doctrine and Covenants 138:56; see also Alma 13:3).

Illuminating early Christian and Jewish tradition, Smith's revelations elaborated on Satan's fall from heaven, framing the event as a rebellion of a group of God's spirit children (Moses 4:1-4; see also Jude 1:6; Revelation 12:9; Abraham 3:21-26). Those who supported God in this heavenly conflict were given, as a reward, the opportunity to come to earth, receive a mortal body, and continue their progression by being tested by mortality (Abraham 3:21–26; see also 2 Nephi 2:21; Alma 12:24, 34:32, 42:10). Those who did not (Satan and his followers) were "thrust down" and have no additional opportunity to progress, and instead have a "place prepared for them . . . which is hell" (Doctrine and Covenants 29:36-38). Those who "do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them," in mortality will "have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever" (Abraham 3:25-26). Thus, for Joseph Smith, every individual living on the earth has already made a choice in the pre-mortal world to follow God (Abraham 3:26). Smith's revelations on the cosmological "first act" of the premortal world powerfully restructured traditional frameworks of salvation. By attaching some amount of salvific significance to a premortal decision to follow God, soteriological questions about eternal reward or punishment for humankind were reframed into two parts: 1) salvation from death and hell, primarily associated with choices made in the premortal world, and 2) exaltation in a return to the presence of God, primarily associated with choices made in mortality.

Joseph Smith understood the pre-mortal decision to follow God as pivotal enough to necessitate some eternal reward. The reward is two-fold, and ultimately has ties to a two-part conception of Christ's universal Atonement (2 Nephi 9:7, 10). The first part of the reward is given to every soul who inhabits the earth, that of a resurrected body akin to Christ's own (Alma 11:44. See also: 1 Corinthians 15:20–22). In this, Christ's defeat of death benefits all mankind unconditionally and universally (Alma 40:4; See also John 5:28–29).

The second reward is to inherit some form of eternal glory, and is nearly universal as well. Only those who "denied the Holy Spirit after having received it, and [have] denied the Only Begotten Son of the

^{76.} See also Job 38:4–7; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Jeremiah 1:4–5; Acts 17:28; Ephesians 1:3–4; Hebrews 12:9.

Father," will inherit the same punishment as Satan and his followers (Doctrine and Covenants 76:35–38). Smith's revelations are silent as to the number of individuals who will receive this punishment, but seem to imply the number will be limited. Correspondingly, he maintained that the vast majority of humanity will receive some form of glory, though only the most faithful will receive the highest degree (Doctrine and Covenants 76). The universality of Christ's Atonement ultimately has overcome the sinful effects of the original fall of Adam and Eve (Doctrine and Covenants 93:38). This is not to say that Smith believed the world was no longer in a fallen state. Sin, death, and sickness, all products of the fall, are still very much present in the world.

Joseph Smith contended that mankind was not born in a state of sin, but incurred sinfulness only through their own decisions. As such, humanity will be judged for their own personal "falls" but have the capacity to overcome those as well through Christ. The concrete reality of exaltation for an individual depends upon one's moral action in life, as individuals will be judged according to their thoughts. words, deeds, and the desires of their hearts (Doctrine and Covenants) 137:9; Mosiah 4:30). Human nature, both in the preexistent state and in mortality, is such that all individuals have the capacity to choose either good or evil (2 Nephi 2:26-27). The universality of Smith's salvific vision is assisted by a belief in what is termed "the light of Christ" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:2). This light is a created aspect of every human soul and "proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:12). It is "the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:13). This light is variously associated with a desire for God, and a capacity to discern right from wrong:

The Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.... And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged. (Moroni 7:16, 18)

As mentioned previously, a similar concept is reflected in de Lubac's

created "grace" or "revelation of the Father" inherent in each person that naturally inclines them towards the divine. Furthermore, de Lubac has also articulated a belief that Christ is "a source of universal light." To

The universal aspects of Joseph Smith's soteriological framework are held in careful balance with a staunchly exclusive view of the necessity of Christian faith for exaltation:

And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen. (2 Nephi 31:21)

Exaltation in the highest degree of eternal glory depends upon an individual "receiv[ing] the testimony of Jesus" and "being baptized after the manner of his burial" (Doctrine and Covenants 76:51). Being baptized "after the manner of his burial" includes the injunction that the ordinance be performed by one having authority given by God:

All the ordinances, systems, and administrations on the earth are of no use to the children of men, unless they are ordained and authorized of God; for nothing will save a man but a legal administrator; for none others will be acknowledged either by God or angels.⁷⁸

Joseph Smith's revealed soteriology is so faithful to the biblical injunction "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," that the framework does not include any method for full salvific activity outside of the Church. For Smith, even those in other faiths, who practice what de Lubac would call an "implicit Christianity," may at some point (often after death) obtain God's salvific grace through accepting Christ and being vicariously baptized. Otherwise, their claim on salvific grace is limited to the universal aspects of God's salvation, namely resurrection to a lesser degree of eternal glory.

[Baptism] is a sign and a commandment which God has set for man to enter into His kingdom. Those who seek to enter in any other way will seek in vain; for God will not receive them, neither will the angels acknowledge their works as

^{77.} O'Sullivan, Christ and Creation, 456.

^{78.} History of the Church, 5:259.

accepted, for they have not obeyed the ordinances, nor attended to the signs which God ordained for the salvation of man, to prepare him for, and give him a title to, a celestial glory.⁷⁹

While de Lubac argues a similar point about the necessity of the Church in all salvific progress, de Lubac must maintain his position through something of a pious agnosticism or studious ambiguity as to how salvation may still be obtained through the Church by those who remain outside the Christian fold at death. So Smith, however, having no loyalty to traditional Christian creedal dogma, and capturing the spirit of earliest Christian tradition, articulated a doctrine of post-mortem evangelization through which deceased persons would be given an opportunity to receive the gospel in the same manner as the living.

Will they all be damned for not obeying the Gospel, when they never heard it? Certainly not. But they will possess the same privilege that we here enjoy, through the medium of the everlasting priesthood, which not only administers on earth, but also in heaven, and the wise dispensations of the great Jehovah.⁸¹

Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God; Also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom; For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts. And I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven. (Doctrine and Covenants 137:7–10)

Similar in many respects to early Christian "harrowing of hell"

^{79.} History of the Church, 4:554. See also Loren Blake Spendlove, "Witness of the Covenant," Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship 58 (2023): 147, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/witness-of-the-covenant/.

^{80. &}quot;[Unbelievers] though they themselves are not in the normal way of salvation, they will be able nevertheless to obtain this salvation by virtue of those mysterious bonds which unite them to the faithful." De Lubac, Catholicism, 233.

^{81.} Teachings of Presidents of The Church: Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 408.

traditions, Joseph Smith's conception is more robust due to its universal and ongoing status. ⁸² In conjunction with post-mortem evangelization, Smith received revelation calling for vicarious ritual work for the deceased. ⁸³ This revelation was the ultimate key that allowed a perfect harmonizing of the demands of Christian faith and baptism for exaltation with the realities of unequal opportunity throughout history. "A view of these things," said Smith, "reconciles the Scriptures of truth, justifies the ways of God to man, places the human family upon an equal footing, and harmonizes with every principle of righteousness, justice and truth." ⁸⁴ For Smith, these revelations leveled the theological playing field, allowing God to judge all mankind against the same standards: their thoughts, words, deeds, and intentions.

Joseph Smith's conception of the standards of judgement also necessitated a restructuring of the traditional formulation of heaven. Speaking on John 14:2, he said:

There are mansions for those who obey a celestial law, and there are other mansions for those who come short of the law, every man in his own order. "But," says one, "I believe in one universal heaven and hell, where all go, and are all alike, and equally miserable or equally happy." What! Where all are huddled together—the honorable, virtuous, and murderers, and whoremongers, when it is written that they shall be judged according to the deeds done in the body? . . .

Paul says, "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So is also the resurrection of the dead" [1 Corinthians 15:41–42].85

For Smith, since nearly all individuals will be rewarded some measure of salvific grace by virtue of the universality of Christ's Atonement, there must be a delineation between those who were wholly faithful to God's commands in this life and those who were not. Because there is such a range of levels of commitment to Christ beyond

^{82.} See David L. Paulsen, Roger D. Cook, Kendel J. Christensen, "The Harrowing of Hell: Salvation for the Dead in Early Christianity," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 19, no. 1 (2010), scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol19/iss1/7/.

^{83. &}quot;Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" (1 Corinthians 15:29). See also Doctrine and Covenants 124:29; 127:5; 128.

^{84.} Teachings of Presidents, 409.

^{85.} Teachings of Presidents, 219-20.

verbal profession, Smith asserted there must be a similar spectrum of reward beyond the traditional bipartite segregation of heaven and hell. Mirroring Paul's division of resurrected bodies found in 1 Corinthians 15:40–41, Smith's revelations describe three distinct "kingdoms" akin in relational glory to the relative brightness of the stars, the moon, and the sun (Doctrine and Covenants 76). Exaltation in the highest, or celestial, kingdom is reserved for those who receive salvation in its fullest sense through their strict adherence to Christ's ritual and moral commandments:

They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given. . . . These shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever. . . . These are they who are just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood. These are they whose bodies are celestial, whose glory is that of the sun, even the glory of God, the highest of all, whose glory the sun of the firmament is written of as being typical. (Doctrine and Covenants 76:51–52; 62; 69–70)

The inhabitants of the second kingdom, or the terrestrial world, are individuals who, for various reasons, did not fully embrace Christ:

Behold, these are they who died without law. . . . Who received not the testimony of Jesus in the flesh, but afterwards received it. These are they who are honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men. These are they who receive of his glory, but not of his fulness. These are they who receive of the presence of the Son, but not of the fulness of the Father. Wherefore, they are bodies terrestrial, and not bodies celestial, and differ in glory as the moon differs from the sun. These are they who are not valiant in the testimony of Jesus; wherefore, they obtain not the crown over the kingdom of our God. (Doctrine and Covenants 76:72; 74–79)

Lastly, the individuals who inherit the telestial world are those who through their actions reject the grace offered them by Christ in the mortal world. Interestingly, Smith highlights that many of these individuals

reject the testimony of Jesus because of their fixation on individual teachers or prophets. This conception finds parallels in de Lubac's conviction that "schismatics" or "provokers of dissension" within the church are those for whom unity with Christ will be most difficult to achieve. 86 Smith continues:

These are they who received not the gospel of Christ, neither the testimony of Jesus. . . . For these are they who are of Paul, and of Apollos, and of Cephas. These are they who say they are some of one and some of another—some of Christ and some of John, and some of Moses, and some of Elias, and some of Esaias, and some of Isaiah, and some of Enoch; But received not the gospel, neither the testimony of Jesus, neither the prophets, neither the everlasting covenant. . . . These are they who are liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers, and whoremongers, and whosoever loves and makes a lie. (Doctrine and Covenants 76:81–112).

In a truly novel way (but perhaps unsurprisingly given his prior interactions with the Divine), Joseph Smith's soteriological vision separates the members of the Godhead and assigns each of them a "divine jurisdiction" or a kingdom where their presence is directly manifest. Grace is thus offered "by degrees," with individuals receiving a measure of the Godhead's presence directly proportional to their acceptance of Christ and adherence to his teachings. Only the most faithful will obtain exaltation in the highest kingdom and will be allowed to dwell in the presence of the complete Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The terrestrial world offers the "presence of the Son, but not of the fulness of the Father," while the telestial world only allows for the ministration of the Holy Spirit. This unique tripart separation of the Godhead is critical in enabling Smith's soteriological vision to both expand the offer of salvation while remaining faithful to traditional Christian moral

^{86. &}quot;It follows that the schismatic or the provoker of dissension outrages what is dearest to Christ, for he commits a crime against that 'spiritual body' for which Christ sacrificed his carnal body. It is a violation of that vital charity which is the guardian of unity. Conversely he who does not keep charity cannot speak in the name of unity. . . . Injury done to one or to the other—and one is never injured without injury to the other as well—is to rend the Church, the seamless robe that Christ willed to put on that he might dwell among us. It is a rending, so far as it is in man's power, of the very body of Christ. . . . It is an onslaught on the very society of the human race. In truth it is self-destruction, in that the schismatic cuts himself off from the tree of life." De Lubac, Catholicism, 78–79.

and ritual commandments. For Smith, this salvific model was the ultimate evidence that Christ's Atonement was for all men, offered to all men, and a powerful expression of God's love for humanity.

While one portion of the human race is judging and condemning the other without mercy, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard.....⁸⁷

He will award judgment or mercy to all nations according to their several deserts, their means of obtaining intelligence, the laws by which they are governed, the facilities afforded them of obtaining correct information, and His inscrutable designs in relation to the human family....⁸⁸

Men will be held accountable for the things which they have and not for the things they have not....⁸⁹

Summary and Conclusions

Thousands of years of Christian debate have ultimately failed to produce any consensus on a solution to the soteriological problem of evil. Apparent contradictions or tensions between the Christian belief in a loving God and the ritual and moral requirements articulated in the Bible have confounded Christian theologians and laymen alike for two millennia. Furthermore, traditional creedal Christian solutions to the issue have largely failed to withstand the test of time, as modern believers have, by and large, continued to struggle with the issue.

It is the incredible complexity of the issue that makes Joseph Smith's soteriological vision so compelling. With no formal theological training, Smith was able to articulate a consistent and systematic soteriological framework that not only addressed this ancient controversy, but anticipated modern concerns that were yet to be explicitly articulated. Smith's revelations provide clarity and coherence to a subject traditionally rife with paradox and obfuscation. As David Paulsen has noted:

[This] view could be seen as a comprehensive synthesis of all the major Christian responses to the question, affirming important strands of universalism, inclusivism, and

^{87.} Teachings of Presidents, 39.

^{88.} Teachings of Presidents, 404.

^{89.} Teachings of Presidents, 405.

restrictivism, all of which coalesce in the doctrine of postmortem evangelization.⁹⁰

Most of the issues presented by the Catholic modernist crisis and the world wars, to which de Lubac's theology is a response, were already adequately anticipated and addressed by Smith's revelations over one hundred years prior. However, for Catholics, de Lubac's theology does provide valuable insight on the subject. His theological efforts influenced many of the changes to Catholic practice and doctrine introduced at the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's, such as allowing churches to conduct mass in local languages rather than Latin. These changes are widely viewed as having helped reestablish the perceived value of the Church to the modern lay Catholic. These contributions are all the more noteworthy because de Lubac is also widely considered to be one of the Catholic theologians who was most in tune with the "spirit" of earliest Christianity due to his deep knowledge of, and appreciation for, the writings of the early Church fathers. Perhaps it should come as no surprise then that in many respects de Lubac's theological reflections mirror the revelation of the restored gospel received by Joseph Smith.

There are several significant parallels between the theology of de Lubac and Joseph Smith. De Lubac's insistence on humanity's "inherent grace" was a bold theological claim in his day, a claim that in many respects mirrors Smith's conception of "the light of Christ." Both concepts are integral in their respective accounts of salvation. De Lubac's insistence on the unbreakable connection between the Jewish people and Christianity resembles Smith's renewal of biblical covenant theology. Additionally, de Lubac's belief in a shared salvific destiny for all humanity echoes Smith's conception of a nearly universal "salvation" granted to mankind due to their faithfulness in the premortal world. Smith's articulation of varying "degrees" of glory and salvation correlated with the presence of the Godhead also anticipated de Lubac's articulation of the role of "unity with the divine" in man's ultimate soteriological status, as only those who achieve transcendent unity with the totality of God will ultimately be saved in the highest degree of glory.

^{90.} David L. Paulsen and Brent Alvord, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of the Unevangelized," review of No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized, by John Sanders, and What about Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized, by Gabriel Fackre, Ronald H. Nash, and John Sanders, FARMS Review of Books 17, no. 1 (2005), 188, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol17/iss1/8.

The purpose of this paper has been to show how two theologians have attempted to reconcile the exclusive message of Christianity with the reality of a largely un-Christian world. The care with which both de Lubac and Smith approach the question of the salvation of the unbeliever is paradigmatic of the charity each of us should exercise when addressing modern religious issues. One should not too quickly reject the formulations of the past, nor conversely, the concerns of the present. De Lubac and Smith both model how, in an age of religious decline, one may articulate afresh the essential message of Christianity.

Most importantly, the theologies of both Henri de Lubac and Joseph Smith highlight God's desire that all be saved. Each posits the universality of Christ's atoning sacrifice and, in their own fashion, allow it to affect good souls in all religious traditions. However, each resolutely maintains the exclusive merit of the Christian faith, thus resisting the all too easy path to soteriological pluralism. Upholding these three tenets is tremendously important as the Christian tradition attempts to reaffirm its relevance in the modern world.



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