

The *Death of Man vis-à-vis the Death of God:* Henri de Lubac on the Atheistic Humanism of Ludwig Feuerbach

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“Man is God to man.”
LUDWIG FEUERBACH
[1804-1872]

“Man without God is dehumanized.”
HENRI DE LUBAC
[1896-1991]

Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), one of the most eminent French theologians of the twentieth century, readily acknowledges the tremendous influence that atheism had exerted on contemporary thinking.¹ Just as readily, however, he belittles its power to induce people to forget their Christian past and to reject God. He remarks rather derisively:

Feuerbach and Marx, like Comte and Nietzsche, were convinced that faith in God was disappearing for ever. That sun was sinking on our horizon never to rise again. Their atheism both believed and rejoiced in its own finality, having, it thought, this advantage over former atheisms, that it discarded everything, even to the problem which had brought God to birth in man's consciousness...Yet the sun did not cease to rise! [DAH, vii]

¹ Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Edith M. Riley (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1950), v. [Henceforth all references to this work are abbreviated DAH and added at the end of the text.]

The widespread conviction regarding the death of God and the demise of religion reached its zenith in the nineteenth century when philosophical discourse revolved not only around the declaration that God is dead but also that a new moral order had dawned – a morality that enshrines the radical freedom and responsibility of men and thereby rebels against the allegedly stifling conventions imposed by the Christian idea of an omnipotent and transcendent Deity.² The leading thinkers of this period proclaimed that men have come of age and need no longer reckon themselves dependent upon, much less subservient to, a God whose existence, and whose very idea in fact, interferes with a sound understanding of individual freedom and responsibility.

The call to authentic human existence accordingly required that the individual choose his own values and make his own decisions. The idea of God had to be rejected therefore for its harmful effect on the human spirit as an obstacle to honest appraisal of the human situation. The death of God, in other words, must be upheld, in order to usher the rebirth of man for “in proportion as the divine subject is in reality human, the greater is the apparent difference between God and man; that is, the more, by reflection on religion, by theology, is the identity of the divine and human denied, and the human, considered as such, is depreciated.”³

De Lubac exhibits a full grasp of this atheistic dilemma which he articulates as follows:

The problem posed was a human problem – it was *the* human problem – and the solution which is being given to it is one that claims to be positive. Man is getting rid of God in order to regain possession of the human greatness which, it seems to him, is being unwarrantably withheld by another. In God

² While the above theme is more commonly associated with Friedrich Nietzsche, nonetheless, the importance of Ludwig Feuerbach in this regard cannot be gainsaid. De Lubac singles him out as “the stepping-stone between the great speculation known as German idealism and the great current of revolutionary thought and actions which were to be its principal, if not its most legitimate, heir.” [DAH, 8]

³ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), 26. [Henceforth all references to this are abbreviated *TEC* and added at the end of the text.]

he is overthrowing an obstacle in order to gain his freedom.
[DAH, 6]

The eclipsing of God and the subsequent overcoming of religion in the nineteenth century can also be traced to the ascendancy of the modernist temperament typified by what Georges de Schrijver calls 'strong thinking', which "assumed that it could grasp the essences of things in their logical connections, and based on this essential knowledge predicted and worked for the steady progress of human development, thus trusting in the rectilinear advance and finality of history."⁴ Modernity or the enlightenment installed reason above all other tribunals which previously decided the direction of knowledge and the shape of belief.

John Reader, American cleric and Christian apologist, offers this description of the central place reason came to occupy in the modern period:

Reason now becomes the sole reliable means of access to the world. It is through the power of clear and logical thought and the human capacity to observe, analyze and then construct hypotheses and theories that greater control is assumed over the external environment... Every aspect of reality is deemed to be susceptible to this reasoning process to the point where experiences that cannot be fitted into this framework are treated with suspicion or incredulity... Truth is no longer the prerogative of existing traditions and institutions but rather that which is to be shaped from the cauldron of philosophical and scientific exploration.⁵

The elevation of reason to a preeminent posture immediately placed tradition, religious or otherwise, under suspicion as it resulted in the insistent demand that everything measure up to its accounts of reality.⁶

⁴ Georges de Schrijver, S.J., "The Use of Mediations in Theology," (Lecture Delivered at the Graduate School, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, Philippines, August-September 2001), 10.

⁵ John Reader, *Beyond All Reason: The Limits of Post-Modern Theology* (Cardiff: Aureus Publishing, 1997), 19-20.

⁶ We can find this sweeping demand – for all learning to submit to and acquit itself before the tribunal of reason – best expressed by one of the leading

Thus had the fate of religion unraveled in modernity – disenfranchised in a world that considered a supernatural mooring utterly superfluous. Religion came to be branded as irrational and therefore rendered outmoded in a world where reason superseded everything. Indeed, as the Italian hermeneute and Christian convert, Gianni Vattimo, concurs, the announcement of the death of God is actually the recognition that God is no longer necessary.⁷ The modern period thus became the burial ground for religion, dismissed as inexpedient and inadequate to provide answers to the most piercing questions about human existence.

Belief in God also came to be regarded as incompatible with human freedom and dignity. The atheists of the modern period were unanimous in their conviction that God had to die to emancipate man from the moral order. De Lubac of course rejects this view. He vehemently maintains that those who charge that God enslaves man overlook a very important truth, namely, “that it is man’s relation to God that frees him from all servitudes” and that “it is in the affirmation of transcendence that man finds his most authentic truth.”⁸

This study explores this position of De Lubac vis-à-vis the atheistic philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) and argues with him that the death of God entails likewise the death of man. As Kenneth Schmitz puts it:

The widespread dismissal of the importance of God is not without consequences regarding the meaning of man. Indeed, it has led, not to man’s florescence but to... the very “death

representatives of the Enlightenment movement, Immanuel Kant: “Our age is, in every sense of the word, the age of criticism, and everything must submit to it. Religion, on the strength of its sanctity, and law, on the strength of its majesty, try to withdraw themselves from it; but by so doing they arouse just suspicions, and cannot claim that sincere respect which reason pays to those only who have been able to stand its free and open examination.” Cf. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. F. Max Müller (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961), 21.

⁷ Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, trans. David Webb (Oxford: Polity Press, 1997), 7.

⁸ Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 194. [Henceforth all references to this are abbreviated *TDC* and added at the end of the text.]

of man" – a death that is no mere metaphor, but that can be seen in the crises of our culture.⁹

Atheistic Humanism

Feuerbach is conceded to be the father of modern atheism¹⁰ since he provided the ground for the "positive, organic, constructive" (*DAH*, v) atheism that flourished in the nineteenth century. This label however belies a double irony. The first is that when he matriculated at Heidelberg it was for the express purpose of studying theology "with the intention of being ordained a Protestant minister."¹¹ And it was not just in deference to his father that Feuerbach pursued theology; his Protestant upbringing truly instilled in him a deep interest in this subject.

The second is that Feuerbach did neither dismiss religion completely nor discard the idea of God entirely. He wanted instead to make man realize that the true object of religion is not the God that is the product of his extrapolation but man himself:

The divine being is nothing else than the human being, or, rather, the human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective – *i.e.*, contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being. All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature. [*TEC*, 14]

This means that God is not alien to human nature but has to do with human nature itself; hence, he sought to redirect religious aspiration towards things essential to man like reason, love, will power, and perfection which, according to Feuerbach, constitute the essence of man.

⁹ Kenneth L. Schmitz, "The Death of God and the Rebirth of Man," (Lecture Delivered at the International Congress on Metaphysics for the Third Millennium, Rome, Italy, 5-8 September 2000), 2-3.

¹⁰ Marcel Neusch, *The Sources of Modern Atheism*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 31.

¹¹ Antonio Perez-Esclarin, *Atheism and Liberation*, trans John Drury (New York: Orbis Books, 1978), 133.

He contended, moreover, that the critique of religion must move beyond the denial of God toward the affirmation that man is the supreme being for man and, therefore, all conditions that degrade and deprive man of his true dignity must be renounced. He explained:

The true sense of Theology is Anthropology,... there is no distinction between the *predicates* of the divine and human nature, and, consequently, no distinction between the divine and human *subject*... While reducing theology to anthropology, (I) exalt anthropology into theology, very much as Christianity, while lowering God into man, made man into God... Hence I do nothing more to religion – and to speculative philosophy and theology also – than to open its eyes, or rather to turn its gaze from the internal towards the external, *i.e.*, I change the object as it is in the imagination into the object as it is in reality. [TEC, xxxvii-xxxix]

This abrupt and radical turnaround by Feuerbach is said to have been triggered by his dismay over the brutal reaction of the religious authorities at Heidelberg who called in the state police to quash the student revolt there. He was personally incensed by the cruel treatment suffered by his two brothers who were leaders of the secret organization that organized the revolt. This incident spoiled his allegiance to the church and he began to forsake theology.

What fortified further this resolve was the tutelage of Hegel at Berlin.¹² Feuerbach completely imbibed the modernist leaning of Hegel and he adopted the central concept of Hegelian idealism, namely, that “reason is the supreme metaphysical principle, the *Urgrund* or primal cause of all things, the ‘all-embracing, universal, true abode of all things and subjects’.”¹³ He thus ascribed to reason what were previously believed to be divine attributes like unity, universality, and infinity. This meant that religion should be completely subordinated to rational control.

¹² Feuerbach wrote endearingly of Hegel whom he called his second father and of Berlin which he assigned as the place of his spiritual rebirth.

¹³ Siegmund, 253.

The strategic concept behind his atheistic humanism is liberation. Feuerbach accentuated the exclusionary relationship between religious and political liberation. The proclamation of the death of God and the destruction of religion are the historical and ideological preludes to the liberation of mankind. Man cannot experience a liberating sense of exhilaration unless he is liberated from the religious clutch. It is only when man has come to the realization that there is no God but only man will he become fully human. On the one hand, until man unburdens himself of his religious illusions he will not be able to carry out his distinctively human tasks with complete freedom and wholehearted effort; on the other hand, the "elimination of God from the universe of the human imagination" will enable him to accept "responsibility for his own life."¹⁴

Feuerbach therefore prescribed the criticism of religion a prerequisite to all criticism. He assigned philosophy to undertake this mission, namely, "to restore humankind to sobriety through a sincere and satisfactory critique of religion."¹⁵ He further demanded the complete separation of philosophy from theology and advocated a new religion of action to replace "the pillar of Christian theology, the traditional *Weltanschauung* with its faith in personal immortality and clearly dualistic world view" with "a monistic concentration on the here and now."¹⁶

Authentic religion for Feuerbach cannot be nihilistic in the sense that it negates the present world. True religion must affirm *this* world. The real locus for religious fervor is here and not in some otherworldly realm of existence. It is within this context that for Feuerbach the Christian religion in particular is farcical and effete, unable to produce people who are sound and willing to assume the task of transforming this world. It becomes a moral imperative then that religion be cleansed of the enslaving character introduced by Christianity.

Feuerbach strongly maintains that there is no objectively existing God and that the idea of God is the mere product of pro-

¹⁴ Neusch, 34.

¹⁵ Perez-Esclarin, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Georg Siegmund, *God on Trial: A Brief History of Atheism* (New York: Desclee Company, 1967), 254.

jection: "Man – this is the mystery of religion – projects his being into objectivity, and then again makes himself an object to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject; he thinks of himself as an object to himself, but as the object of an object, of another being than himself." [TEC, 29-30]

The idea of God, in other words, is the result of a negative thesis, *alienation*, by which man projects his own splendid qualities into an imagined being who embodies precisely these qualities. Feuerbach accounts for this alienation in this way:

God is for man the commonplace book where he registers his highest feelings and thoughts, the genealogical album into which he enters the names of the things most dear and sacred to him. [TEC, 63-64]

In yet another telling passage, Feuerbach amplifies this alienating character of religion:

Religion is the disuniting of man from himself; he sets God before him as the antithesis of himself. God is not what man is – man is not what God is. God is the infinite, man the finite being; God is perfect, man imperfect; God eternal, man temporal; God almighty, man weak; God holy, man sinful. God and man are extremes: God is the absolutely positive, the sum of all realities; man the absolutely negative, comprehending all negations... But in religion man contemplates his own latent nature... this antithesis, this differencing of God and man, with which religion begins, is a differencing of man with his own nature. [TEC, 33]

Man likewise discovers a gap between his grand desires and his limited condition. While he earnestly longs for noble virtues and heroic deeds, he also finds himself vulnerable and faint. This impels him to hypostasize his wish entities into an absolute other which he christens God. Feuerbach writes:

The yearning of man after something above himself is nothing else than the longing after the perfect type of his nature, the yearning to be free from himself, *i.e.*, from the limits and defects of his individuality. [TEC, 281]

He therefore concluded that the idea of God is but the creation of man, the product of his imagination, and the objectification of his ardent wishes:

Religion...is the relation of man to himself, or more correctly to his own nature (*i.e.*, his subjective nature); but a relation to it, viewed as a nature apart from his own. [TEC, 14]

Feuerbach further asserted that religion results in the negative thesis of alienation because "the impoverishment of the real world and the enriching of God is one act." [TEC, 73] The very existence of God is comprised of the sum total of qualities which man attributes to Him. So when man enhances God with his own superb qualities he divests himself in the process of these same qualities. That is why, as Vincent Micelli accurately puts it, "in affirming God he denies himself; the poorer he becomes, the richer his God becomes; nothing really exists in God except what belongs and actually really still is in man's heart."¹⁷ The tragic consequence of all this is that, according to Feuerbach, the birth of God occasions simultaneously the death of man.

There must be a reason for this willingness on the part of man to diminish himself in favor of an illusion. Feuerbach suggests that this is because in his projected image of God man recuperates his own qualities elevated to the level of the infinite: "Our positive essential qualities, our realities, are...the realities of God, but in us they exist with, in God, without limits." [TEC, 38]

Feuerbach insisted that the time had come for man to recover from religion what he has projected of himself to God. Religion must be exposed as "the relation of man to his own nature" and purged of "its untruth, its limitations, its contradiction to reason and morality" for "herein lies the noxious source of religious fanaticism, the chief metaphysical principle of human sacrifices, in a word, the *prima materia* of all the atrocities, all the horrible scenes in the tragedy of religious history." [TEC, 197]

This *repossession* is the positive thesis of atheistic humanism. And in this consists religious liberation, namely, the unshackling of the yoke imposed by the religious myth called God so as to "to restore man to man and hence to his own greatness."¹⁸ Alienation is to be supplanted with repossession. Atheism which renounces the idea of

¹⁷ Vincent Miceli, *The Gods of Atheism* (New York: Arlington House, 1971), 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

God must now install a humanism that enthrones man in the place of God.

This then is the central affirmation of atheistic humanism: “the beginning, middle and end of religion is man.” [TEC, 184] There can be no genuine atheism that is not at the same time a humanism. It is only in this sense that Feuerbach allows the branding of his philosophy as an *atheism*:

If therefore my work is negative, irreligious, atheistic, let it be remembered that atheism – at least in the sense of this work – is the secret of religion itself; that religion itself, not indeed on the surface, but fundamentally, not in intention or according to its own supposition, but in its heart, in its essence, believes in nothing else than the truth and divinity of human nature. [TEC, xxxvi]

It was therefore with unrelenting focus that he pursued “the recovery of the human which the religions refused to acknowledge” and endeavored at “demystifying the religions and showing that whenever they speak about God, they are in reality saying something about man.”¹⁹

The vigor and the clarity of his logic appears unassailable. For if religion is indeed no other than the transference of the human reality to God, its content purely human, then Feuerbach is justified in claiming that it behooves man to unmask and smash the illusion that religion has for so long foisted upon him. It becomes his obligation to retrieve what is truly his and to destroy the alienation that religion has propagated. This is a task accordingly customized for the philosopher:

... The essence of religion, thus hidden from the religious, is evident to the thinker, by whom religion is viewed objectively, ... And it is our task to show that the antithesis of divine and human is altogether illusory, that it is nothing else than the antithesis between the human nature in general and the human individual; that, consequently, the object and contents of the Christian religion are altogether human.” [TEC, 13-14]

¹⁹ Neusch, 36.

Critical Remarks

Modern humanism, declares de Lubac, is the offshoot of resentment dictating a choice. Its hostility is directed against two fundamental Christian tenets whose true significance it distorts. He writes:

That same Christian idea of man which had been welcomed as a deliverance was now beginning to be felt as a yoke. And that same God in whom man had learnt to see the seal of his own greatness began to seem to him like an antagonist, the enemy of his dignity. [DAH,6]

This accounts for the deafening shout of modern humanism demanding liberation from the bondage of God and religion. This liberation is to be brought about by a radical choice which involves the rousing affirmation of man, a *humanism*, on top of the decisive negation of God, an *atheism*. Marcel Neusch elaborates how Feuerbach perceives this choice:

Feuerbach's critique of religion is based on a single principle: man, who is the alpha and omega of his philosophy. If he sets out to reduce theology to anthropology, he does so in order to show that man is the sole real content of the idea of God and thus to save man from alienation. The task Feuerbach sets for himself is both simple and clear: to give back to man what belongs to him. Anthropology, the term that sums up his new philosophy, is simply "religion become conscious of itself, religion that understands itself."²⁰

De Lubac calls this stance an absolute humanism, which does not merely claim to be the only genuine kind but, moreover, dismisses the Christian form as absurd.

The question to ask is whether such humanism could stand on its own, anchored as it is on a vigorous atheism. Perhaps it would be best to begin by examining how Feuerbach justifies his rejection of the idea of God. It may be recalled that he was once an ardent believer; it was only while in Berlin under Hegel that he became convinced that the existence of God could not be proved rationally.

²⁰ Ibid., 48.

He then shifted to a new posture of denying God and gratuitously assumed that religion is an illusion. He adopted a new approach towards religion, applying the method of genealogy. To account for how the idea of God was gestated in the human soul he proposed his projection theory.

An outright rejoinder can be advanced to counter this atheism of Feuerbach. It can be easily pointed out that it proceeds from a shallow and gratuitous assumption, the dire consequence of which is that his entire position suffers thereby from the shallowness and gratuitousness of its starting point. Its substitution of God with man hardly offers satisfactory answers to fundamental ontological questions. As a matter of fact, it culminates in a humanism bereft of the capacity to provide meaning. Antonio Perez-Esclarin captures this point exceedingly well:

It proposes to offer us an explanation of religious life and being, but it fails to explore the ultimate roots of not only religious being but being itself... Its key for explaining all religious phenomena is humanity, but it disregards the fact that humanity itself is a radical question more than an answer to anything.²¹

There stalks a not so obvious but destructive paradox in Feuerbach. His assertion that the existence of God cannot be probed by the rational faculty of man instead of raising reason to a great height succeeds only in baring its newly curtailed power. For with the banishment of the realm of transcendence to an allegedly dubious otherworld that escapes its reach, reason is now barred entry into a field into which "an earlier reason had thought it could enter."²² The modernist pretension to install reason as the supreme tribunal thus became instead the intonation for the requiem of the rational man and, of course, the confident and sovereign reason of the enlightenment.²³

Reason became so enfeebled and its capacity so restricted depriving man in the process of broader opportunities for intellec-

²¹ Perez-Esclarin, 137.

²² Schmitz, 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, 13.

tual inquiry. What remains is a decapitated reason engaged harriedly in a "flight from the invisible toward the visible, from the transcendent toward the immanent, from the spiritual toward the material."²⁴ Disengaged from speculation on these dimensions of reality, reason was consequently forced to deny the existence of these dimensions.

This is what became of reason in the atheistic humanism of Feuerbach, its openness rudely closed to the presence of the highest truth in the texture of being. All that is extolled of reason are the narrow limits of its competence. This is fatal to reason for as de Lubac warns, "one cannot sever the mind's relation to the Absolute – the Absolute thought as real – without destroying the mind itself." [TDG, 37] This relationship is essential because, he continues:

If the mind did not affirm God – if it were not the affirmation of God – it could affirm nothing whatsoever. It would be without laws; like a world deprived of its sun. It could no longer exercise any rational activity, and could only sink back into the dark limbo of obscure psychical subjectivism. It could no longer judge. It would have lost its sight, its norm, its justification, its point of reference, the one thing which can serve as a foundation for all else. [TDG, 40]

The agitated mind of the atheist like Feuerbach, restlessly inventing an idol to erect in the place originally occupied by God, betrays the refusal of reason to be crammed within a narrow space. It seeks to burst forth because man as a created spirit is impelled towards the absolute. No matter what conceals man from himself and deflects that impulse within him, it persists and insists release. [TDG, 113] De Lubac adds:

Human reason... which is responsible for the work of philosophy, is not satisfied with knowing an effect as long as it does not know the cause. Hence that continuous movement, that permanent disquiet, that unrest which lasts until reason, moving from effect to effect and from cause to cause, at last reaches the supreme cause from which everything derives, and which, by that very fact, explains and so unifies everything. [TDG, 151]

²⁴ Miceli, 2.

He therefore insists on the recognition, "in the face of rationalism in all its forms, and all forms of contempt for the certainties of reason," that God is the reality which "envelops, dominates, and measures our thoughts, and not the reverse." [TDG, 38] No system of thought can debunk this truth, de Lubac assuredly contends, for as he argues:

The idea of God cannot be uprooted because it is, in essence, the Presence of God in man. One cannot rid oneself of that Presence. Nor is the atheist a man who has succeeded in doing so. He is only an idolater who, as Origen said, "refers his indestructible notion of God to anything rather than to God himself." [TDG, 188]

At its best, the atheistic humanism of Feuerbach has very meager to offer. In the cognitive level it represents but a warped and myopic vision of reality. The same may be said of its moral basis. The kind of moral reflection it musters is one that revolves solely around the realization of purely human potentials without an ideal of human perfection to guide and inspire it to transcendence. Its failure to supply the moral foundation, that a theistic religion does, consigns it further to an all too human endeavor. Indeed, like every atheistic thought, it labors under the weight of an "uneliminable ingredient," namely, "a tragic view of life."²⁵ De Lubac shares his own wry comments on this point:

A purely humanistic consciousness, which will not recognize anything outside man, can never be quite certain whether the impulse which drives it towards life is hope or despair. To say that man is everything is surely to say that he finds himself faced by nothing...Can man be saved if we can have recourse to nothing beyond man? [TDG, 194-195]

Fuerbach vowed to rescue man from alienation into an other-world. His solution was to divinize man and humanity. He did not foresee however that this apotheosis of man and humanity would have adverse consequences and that in fact it would degenerate into systems and structures of inhumanity.

²⁵ Ernest Nagel, "Philosophical Concepts of Atheism," in *Critiques of God: Making the Case Against Belief in God* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), 17.

Jürgen Moltmann regards this position as nothing but a "reversed form of theism."²⁶ For while the idea of God is renounced, the power associated with Him is preserved and arrogated unto man. Man becomes the supreme being adorned with all the divine predicates at his command. What dire consequences this 'anthropotheism' has yielded, we can discern in the horrible pages of history:

If for this atheism 'man is finally man's God', this may be morally fine as an ideal in the face of the situation where man is man's wolf. But a century of experience with such anthropotheism has shown that even these human deities can become man's wolf. If the consequences of Feuerbach's dethroning God is that 'the state is unlimited, infinite, true, perfect divine man', and politics becomes religion, then the history of atheism against theism returns to its beginning, and the old theism would have to be called relatively human, in so far as it ascribes to God the properties and functions which it is better for men not to exercise against other men... In the enthusiasm of their religious inheritance, the anthropotheists of modern times from Feuerbach to Rilke, from Marx to Bloch, have overlooked the dark side of evil in man and the problem of suffering in the world."²⁷

This is the same view de Lubac affirms and he thinks of the historical aberrations that atheistic humanism has engendered as the logical conclusion of its inadequacy and error. He writes: "If the refusal, as it is called, to subject man "to supra-human truths and powers" is a refusal of God and of divine truth, it would very soon lead to the disfigurement of man "by putting him to some infra-human use." [TDG, 191] This is the bane of every atheism for which he reserves a rather unflattering judgment: "Those who do not recognize the attraction of a Transcendent Being in themselves have nothing to offer but a transcendent movement towards nothing." [TDG, 192]

It is not the case therefore, de Lubac stresses, that man is alienated by his God. What the atheistic humanism of Feuerbach

²⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1973), 251.

²⁷ Ibid., 251-252.

has prompted is rather the alienation of man *from* his God. It has robbed man of "his ultimate wealth, the most precious of all, where he could rediscover the principle not only of his *having* but of his *being*." And contrary to its boastful claim, it has not given rise to the rebirth of man. This is because, as de Lubac swears, "Man without God is dehumanized." [TDG, 193]

Indeed, atheistic humanism could only reek of the failure to realize that the death of man coincides with the death of God!

Conclusion

The disregard heaped upon religion by modernity petered out with the advent of postmodernity. The revolt against grand rational schemas, which led to the liberation and recognition of a plurality and multiplicity of narratives and discourses, initiated a reversal of the destiny of religion. Vattimo expounds on this theme in a landmark essay, "The Trace of the Trace," where he celebrates the return of religion and "its re-presentation, its calling to us with a voice that we are sure we have heard before."²⁸ Reader likewise ruminates on this return of religion and he muses: "Religion is back on the agenda."²⁹

Religion is truly enjoying some kind of resurgence and the revival of interest is evident even in Europe which is thought to have entered a post-Christian phase.³⁰ This rousing comeback is manifest in "the new vitality of churches and sects, and in the

²⁸ Gianni Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 80.

²⁹ Reader, 1.

³⁰ A recent article, "Lost in Silent Prayer," written by Carla Power, shares this finding: "Reports of God's death have been exaggerated; and in any event, the decline of organized religion in Europe has been gathering pace for a century... Yet an abiding respect for faith endures... According to the Turin-based Center for the Study of New Religions, 90 percent of Europeans think there's a God – up 20 percent in the last decade. Europeans may not be trundling off to Sunday mass, but at least some of them spend their vacations on pilgrimages or spiritual retreats. They may not be poring over the Scriptures, but they're avidly reading up on religion. *Newsweek* (12 July 1999), 47.

search for different doctrines and practices,³¹ the 'fashion' for Eastern religions."

For his part, de Lubac had always been sanguine about the fate of God in the world. What he detected was not the recurrence of religion, and therefore of belief in God, but its continuing validity, albeit with restrained puissance at certain periods in history. Among others, such as his unshakeable faith, he grounds his confidence on his shared conviction with Fyodor Dostoyevsky that "man cannot organize the world for himself without God" and that "without God he only organizes the world *against man*." (DAH, vii) Atheistic humanism is a non viable position for man to take; its promise of rebirth for man following the death of God is zilch.

There cannot be a genuine humanism that is not complemented with a theism. Man is of absolute value, it is true, but only because, according to de Lubac, "he is illuminated by a ray of light from the face of God; because, although he develops as he acts in history, he breathes the air of eternity." This can be the only foundation for an authentic humanism; any other kind would be "a mere vulgarity, a cynicism, or an empty dream." [TDG, 190]

It is then understandable that de Lubac should exude optimism that in the face of the continuing secularization of life and society belief in God will not disappear; on the contrary, he exclaims, that what can be expected is that human beings will rediscover Him at a deeper level.

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³¹ An interesting commentary in the above article pertains to the youth: "Young Europeans, in particular, are creating mix-and-match faiths, forging moralities where they can find them." (Ibid.) A good illustration of this trend is the example of Xoana Pintos Castro, daughter of an ex-priest who says she believes in God – but not her father's; instead, she has drawn from various sources – "Buddhism, the rituals of Roman Catholicism and the community spirit of Islam" – in order to build "a faith of my own." (Ibid., 48.)

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