

TWENTIETH-CENTURY CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND THE TRIUMPH OF MAURICE BLONDEL¹

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Introduction

The second of November, 2011 will mark the 150th anniversary of Maurice Blondel’s birth. He was born at Dijon into an old, landed Burgundian Catholic family. His father and his uncle were both lawyers. He studied philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure from 1881 to 1884 and defended his controversial dissertation, *L’Action*, at the Sorbonne on 7 June 1893. A year and a half later, on 12 December 1894, Maurice Blondel and Rose Royer were married. They had three children. Rose Royer Blondel died on 7 March 1919 in the twenty-fifth year of their marriage. After a year at the University of Lille, Blondel taught philosophy at the University of Aix en Provence from 1896 to 1927, when blindness forced him into retirement. From 1931 onward, thanks to the help of his

¹This essay is based on the second annual Michael J. Kerlin Lecture given at La Salle University on 22 March 2010 and dedicated to the memory of my friend Michael Kerlin (1936–2007).

secretary and former student, Nathalie Panis, he continued to write at an extraordinary pace until his death in 1949 at the age of eighty-eight. After his death, Panis retained the care of his archives at Aix en Provence.²

A professional philosopher, Blondel (1861–1949) had a decisive impact on twentieth-century Catholic theology. Often noted, his impact is as often left unexamined. After the briefest sketch of Blondel’s philosophy of action, this essay addresses a more historical question: how did this philosopher, important in his own right, come to have such a deep and abiding impact on twentieth-century Catholic theology?³

1. Blondel’s impact on twentieth-century Catholic theology

Five years after the Second Vatican Council ended in 1965, Canadian theologian Gregory Baum published a book-length attempt to re-vision Catholic theology. He entitled the opening chapter “The Blondelian Shift.”⁴ Almost two decades later, Hans Urs von Balthasar called Blondel “the greatest Catholic philosopher of modern times.” He credited *L’Action* (1893) with giving to Catholic thought “a decisive new beginning.”⁵ Anglican theologian

²On Blondel’s life, see Oliva Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel: A Philosophical Life* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010). Blanchette dedicates his book to Nathalie Panis. See also the chronology in Henri Bouillard, *Blondel and Christianity*, trans. James M. Somerville (French edition 1961; Washington/Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1969), 218–19 and Jean Lacroix, *Maurice Blondel: An Introduction to the Man and His Philosophy*, trans. John C. Guinness (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), chapter 1. Lacroix knew Blondel personally and belonged to the network Étienne Fouilloux describes as the second “Lyon School.”

³On Blondel’s philosophical importance, see *Maurice Blondel et la Philosophie Française*, Colloque tenu à Lyon, ed. Emmanuel Gabellieri and Pierre de Cointet (Lyon: Éditions Parole et Silence, 2007).

⁴Baum credits Blondel with initiating in the Catholic Church “a new style of thinking about that transcendent, redemptive mystery in human history which we call God” (Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience* [New York: Seabury Press, 1970], 1).

⁵Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope ‘That All Men Be Saved’? With a Short Discourse on Hell* (German edition 1986/1987; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 81, 114. The quote from 114 begins chapter 7, entitled “Blondel’s Dilemma.”

John Milbank called Blondel's philosophy, "reunderstood as theology, . . . perhaps, the boldest exercise in Christian thought of modern times."⁶

So how did Blondel get into contemporary Catholic theology? The short answer in two parts is, first, that Blondel was a profoundly religious man whose philosophy reflected on his own lived life. It was his intention from first to last that his philosophy be religiously and theologically relevant. He wanted to be a real philosopher but also to deal with religious questions he took to be an inevitable constituent of human existence. "I propose to study action," he wrote in 1886, "because it seems to me that the Gospel attributes to action alone the power to manifest love and to attain God! Action is the abundance of the heart."⁷ His last work was called *Philosophy and the Christian Spirit*, in three volumes. He signed the contract for the third volume the day before he died.

Second, Blondel's philosophy came to the center of twentieth-century theology through its appropriation by a group of social and intellectual Catholics, both laity and clergy, in the French city of Lyon in the decades after the "double hécatombe" of the Catholic "modernist crisis" (1893–1914) and Great War (1914–1919). Not least among this "Lyon school" was a group of French Jesuits at La Fourvière, the Jesuit theologate in Lyon. Chief among these "jésuites blondélisants" was Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), the pivotal figure in twentieth-century Catholic theology.⁸ From Lyon,

⁶John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 319. This quote comes near the end of a ten-page excursus on the theological significance of Blondel's philosophy.

⁷Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*. Texts presented and translated by Alexander Dru and Iltyd Trethowan (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), from Dru's "Historical and Biographical Introduction," at 33, citing Blondel's *Carnets Intimes*, October 1886. Written in 1964, Dru's and Trethowan's "Introduction" retains its value as an entrée to Blondel in English.

⁸On the "Lyon School," see Étienne Fouilloux, "La seconde 'École de Lyon' (1919–1939)" in E. Gabellieri and P. de Cointet, eds., *Blondel et la philosophie française* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2007), 263–73. The phrase "double hécatombe" is Fouilloux's at 265. On the "jésuites blondélisants," see the contribution to the same volume by Msgr. Peter Henrici, "La descendance blondélienne parmi les jésuites français," 305–322. Henrici introduces the phrase "jésuites blondélisants"

Blondel's influence spread in Jesuit networks throughout Europe. During the period between 1896 and 1913, in response to theological critics of *L'Action*, Blondel engaged intensely with theologians on the question of the supernatural. Along with *L'Action*, it is primarily his work during these years that changed the face of Catholic theology.

This essay traces the Blondelian thread to de Lubac and the Lyon school and then to Vatican II, and, finally, to John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et ratio*. In a preliminary form that would require further development, this essay argues that the figure of Maurice Blondel holds together in a continuous narrative a series of four widely significant events that, for varying reasons, are often treated as isolated episodes in French Catholic history. These events include: 1) the modernist crisis, during which the theological implications of Blondel's thought began to emerge; 2) the rise of the proto-fascist *L'Action française*, Blondel's opposition to which, between 1909 and 1913, clarified the political implications of his thought; 3) the debate on "Christian philosophy" (1930–1931), which made clear the extent to which Blondel had problematized the question of the relation between philosophy and theology, and to which debate Pope John Paul II returned in his 1998 encyclical *Fides et ratio*; and 4) the controversy over "*la nouvelle théologie*," brought to a head by the publication in 1946 of de Lubac's *Surnaturel*, the fruit of two decades of work developing the theological implications of Blondel's thought. This essay focuses on de Lubac's role as the main channel through which Blondel entered twentieth-century Catholic theology. For reasons of space, the essay can only gesture in the direction of the second and third events. It concludes with a treatment of Blondel in *Fides et ratio*.

at 310. The translations throughout are my own. See also Henrici's major work *Hegel und Blondel, Eine Untersuchung über Form und Sinn der Dialektik in der "Phänomenologie des Geistes" und in der ersten "Action"* (Pullach bei München: Verlag Berchmanskolleg, 1958) and the discussion in Bouillard, *Blondel and Christianity*, 212–13, from which this citation is taken. It was Henrici who suggested to the young Michael Kerlin that he write his Gregorian University dissertation in philosophy on Blondel.

2. *Blondel's thought in the context of the Modernist crisis*

In introducing the modernist crisis, it is necessary briefly to describe the nineteenth-century revival of medieval thought known as “neo-scholasticism.” If those accused of Modernism, including Blondel, had one thing in common, it was their distaste for and opposition to neo-scholastic thought as inadequate to contemporary religious needs.⁹ Neo-scholasticism has an inevitable political dimension. This helps to explain the intensity of the modernist crisis and the vehemence of Rome's response.

After 1789, the Catholic Church in Europe locked itself in prolonged combat with anti-clerical liberalism as embodied in modern secular states. Napoleon had jailed two popes at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The revolutionary upheavals of 1848 saw the assassination of Pius IX's prime minister and, in 1870, when the Franco-Prussian War forced French troops to withdraw their protection from Rome, Italian nationalists stormed the city. Pius IX took refuge in the Vatican.

In a self-conscious act of anti-Modernism, his successor, Pope Leo XIII, with the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in 1879, launched a revival of the thought of the thirteenth-century St. Thomas Aquinas. With its massive reassertion of objectivity, Leo's neo-scholastic revival would counter the turn to the subject in modern philosophy since Descartes, as well as the political upheaval it was thought to have caused. In his contributions to Catholic social thought, especially in *Rerum novarum* (1891), Pope Leo began to articulate in traditional terms of goods and ends an alternative social and political order. It is instructive to recall that *Aeterni Patris* and *Rerum novarum* were written by the same pope as part of the same project. In the Modernist crisis, the intellectual and theological issues

⁹On 21 June 1965, after reading *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, Étienne Gilson wrote in a long letter to de Lubac, “The tragedy of modernism was that the rotten theology promulgated by its opponents was in large part responsible for its errors. Modernism was wrong, but its repression was undertaken by men who were also wrong, whose pseudo-theology made a modernist reaction inevitable.” He went on to say, “I see redemption only in a Thomist theology as you perceive it, in the company of St. Augustine, St. Bonaventure, and the great theologians of the East” (Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund [French edition, 1989; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993], 124–26, at 126).

are real and important but they are intensified by and difficult to disentangle from the politics of revolution and restoration, and even *raillement*, Pope Leo's attempt at rapprochement with the Third Republic.

A personal example illustrates what I mean by the "massive objectivity" of neo-scholastic thought. Elementary school students at Our Lady of Mount Carmel School in Tenafly, N.J., imbibed it from the *Baltimore Catechism*. Broadly following Chapter 3 of *Dei Filius*, the First Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, the *Catechism*, as I recall it, defined faith as "the theological virtue by which we believe all the truths that God has revealed on the authority of God revealing them who can neither deceive nor be deceived." Such a conceptual definition presents faith in terms of unmediated objectivity. Even as a child, I recall being troubled by this definition and wondering how I could ever get to the "authority of God" of which my *Catechism* spoke so easily. Even the mediation of the Church, e.g., the instruction of Sr. Julia and Sr. Rose Clare at Mount Carmel, which the *Catechism* presumed, had to be subjectively appropriated.

Inquiry into the historical and subjective appropriation of what the *Catechism* called "the authority of God" was the common project, to the extent that we can speak of one, of Blondel and others who were accused of Modernism.¹⁰ The situation is complicated by the fact that *Modernism* is an outsider term. None of the thinkers conventionally thought of as "Modernists" used this term to describe themselves.

With his 1907 encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis*, Pope Pius X condemned "Modernism" as the "synthesis of all heresies" (paragraph 39). The encyclical associates the "Modernists'" subjective turn with the epistemological and political chaos that made the Church the object of persecution by European secular states. In one

¹⁰Although he is often grouped with the Modernists, Blondel was, in the words of John Paul II, "one of the first to discern what was at stake in the modernist crisis and the errors that were involved" ("A letter from Pope John Paul II to Bishop Bernard Panafieu," 19 February 1993, *Communio* 20 [1993]: 722; republished in the current issue). In this context, John Paul II notes that Blondel's "twofold fidelity to certain demands of modern philosophical thought and to the Magisterium of the Church did not come without its cost in terms of incomprehension and suffering, at a time when the Church found itself confronting the modernist crisis" (*ibid.*).

of its most compelling passages, speaking of sentiment and action giving rise to “purely subjective truth,” *Pascendi* pronounces such truth as “of no use to the man who wants to know above all things whether outside himself there is a God into whose hand he is one day to fall” (paragraph 39).

Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. (1877–1964), the leading neo-scholastic thinker of the first half of the twentieth century, was such a man. The English title of his major work is simply *Reality* (1946). After the colon comes the subtitle, *A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought*. One might read Garrigou-Lagrange and early twentieth-century neo-scholasticism sympathetically as a reassertion of objectivity in the face of the perceived chaos of post-Kantian philosophy and modern politics as represented by the French Revolution, the revolutions of 1848, and the Great War.¹¹

Between 1907 and 1965, *Pascendi* locked Roman neo-scholastics such as Garrigou and those accused of Modernism such as Blondel together in a common history. It is a “history of the attempted elimination of theological modernism, by censorship, sackings and excommunication—and the resurgence of issues that could not be repressed by such methods.”¹² Aidan Nichols attributes the “*damnatio memoriae*” suffered by Roman neo-Thomism after 1965 in part to its role as Modernism’s foe and its inevitable association “with the mechanisms of doctrinal control put in place by the encyclical [*Pascendi*].”¹³ Garrigou is “the model Thomist” of this period. In their common history, Blondel and later de Lubac represented Garrigou’s worst nightmare: a return of the Modernism condemned by Pope Pius X. From 1913 on, Garrigou “would remain in pursuit of Blondel both publicly and privately for the rest of his life.”¹⁴

¹¹On Garrigou-Lagrange, see Richard Peddicord, O.P., *The Sacred Monster of Thomism: An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2005). Peddicord attributes the phrase “sacred monster” (*monstre sacré*) to François Mauriac, at 2; and Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Reason with Piety: Garrigou-Lagrange in the Service of Catholic Thought* (Ave Maria, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2008).

¹²Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 4–5.

¹³Nichols, *Reason with Piety*, 8.

¹⁴Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 257. Monsignor Paul Mulla, Blondel’s godson, and

One French historian calls the Modernist crisis “the intellectual matrix of contemporary Catholicism.”¹⁵ At its heart was a focus on the obvious fact that, if there is indeed an objective or revealed truth, it is only historical subjects who receive it. Whether we conceive the conditions of subjective appropriation of truth in terms of experience, interpretation, liberation, lived practice, liturgy, life, or action, inquiry into them is our inheritance, only partially resolved, from the Modernist crisis. And this is where Blondel comes in. He wishes to show an interior connection between the deepest dynamism of human spirits and the supernatural revelation of God.

3. *Blondel's way of immanence*

In the first book of the *Confessions*, St. Augustine addresses this rightly famous word to God, “You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” This Augustinian apologetic of the restless heart had been at the literary center of French religious sensibility at least since the time of Blaise Pascal in the seventeenth century. During the years of the Modernist crisis (1893–1914), the chief representative of this tradition of interiority or way of immanence was Maurice Blondel.

Drawing on St. Augustine and his heirs as well as on post-Kantian philosophy, and appealing to the Church’s traditions of contemplative and mystical prayer, Blondel and others during the Modernist crisis tried to articulate in new ways how God’s truth might become a spiritual possession for human beings. In 1893, at

a professor of Islamic Studies at the Oriental Institute in Rome, told Blondel that Garrigou admitted he had never read *L'Action*. Mulla’s warnings from Rome, according to Blanchette, “had a lot to do with Blondel’s refusal to allow any second edition of *L'Action* of 1893 to appear as long as he was alive . . .” (284–85). “The model Thomist” is from Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, 10. Nichols calls Garrigou a “Thomist of the strict observance,” which he describes as “a Thomism defined over against Catholic Modernism” (*Reason with Piety*, 2, 4).

¹⁵ “[L]a crise moderniste constitue la matrice intellectuelle du catholicisme contemporain, dans le mesure précisément où elle se définit de relire le message fondateur à la lueur des connaissances scientifiques du siècle dernier” (Étienne Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté. La pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II, 1914–1962* [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998], 10).

the age of thirty-two, he published *L'Action*, a revision of his philosophy dissertation.¹⁶

4. Blondel on action

Blondel's was not a mere psychological or even moral appeal to experience. Rather he sought a rigorous philosophical account of the basic dynamism of human existence, which he calls "action." In the 446 pages of *L'Action*, one looks in vain for a simple definition of "action." *L'Action* is an ambitious phenomenological analysis that seeks to show the rationality inherent in action. The Introduction promises that "the very meaning of the word and the richness of its contents will unfold little by little."¹⁷ "Action" in Blondel's sense is not any particular act or set of actions but the "activity of the spirit at its source and in the integrality of its unfolding."¹⁸ Action so understood cannot be contained in a closed natural order. Through his analysis, Blondel sought to "open up a position in philosophy through which the light of the Christian revelation could pour in."¹⁹

"Yes or no," asks Blondel in *L'Action's* opening sentence, "does human life make sense, and does man have a destiny? I act, but without even knowing what action is, without ever having wished to live . . ." For Blondel, we are, in a sense, condemned to act and our various actions set us on a path and make us certain kinds of people. Later "existentialists" would make much of this idea that we are condemned to freedom. Not to decide is to decide.

Blondel's own analysis of the phenomenon of "action" distinguishes the "willing will" (*volonté voulante*) and the "willed will" (*volonté voulue*) or particular willed actions. The "willing will" is Blondel's philosophical transposition of St. Augustine's "restless

¹⁶Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, translated by Oliva Blanchette (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). On the dissertation and its argument, see Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 43–94.

¹⁷Blondel, *Action (1893)*, 3.

¹⁸Lacroix, *Maurice Blondel*, 29.

¹⁹Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 45, 15. In his first three chapters, Blanchette treats Blondel's defense of his dissertation, the process of writing it, and the treatment of the supernatural in the original 1893 version of *L'Action*.

heart.” According to his analysis, its aspirations are infinite, its capacities limited. “Will I at least,” he asks, “be able to accomplish what I have resolved, whatever it be, as I have resolved it? No. Between what I know, what I will and what I do there is always an inexplicable and disconcerting disproportion. My decisions often go beyond my thoughts, my acts beyond my intentions.”²⁰ Rather than to nausea or visions of Sisyphus, such thoughts led Blondel to conclude that philosophical analysis reveals that we need God even as it simultaneously reveals that we are incapable of reaching God on our own.²¹ Rather than in contemplative terms, Blondel conceives of our receptivity to God in terms of the dynamism of what we make and do.²² Philosophical analysis, he thinks, leaves us with a fundamental decision for or against God or the “supernatural.” This is a philosophy that occupies secular space, autonomous from faith, but not separate from it, and incomplete if it fails to consider the supernatural. As Michael Kerlin summarized *L’Action* in a posthumously published article, Blondel:

shows the ways in which we move forward in semi-light by acts of natural faith through wider and wider circles of social involvement to form ourselves and our world. When we make any of these circles a final stopping point, we find ourselves pushed forward by the necessary logic of our situation and our analysis. It is a movement that can logically stop only with the alternative of affirming the possibility of “one thing necessary” beyond all human creations, imaginings, and conceptions.²³

Before the condemnation of Modernism in 1907, Blondel called this approach to God as the final goal of human life the “method of immanence,” because, rather than by appeal to external forms of “evidence,” such as miracles and prophecy, it proceeds from an analysis of the “interior fact” or what is inside us. In the tradition of Augustine and Pascal, he insisted that God’s revelation

²⁰Blondel, *Action* (1893), 4.

²¹See Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 77–78.

²²This is the main emphasis of Milbank’s account in *Theology and Social Theory*, 219.

²³Michael J. Kerlin, “Maurice Blondel, Philosophy, Prayer, and the Mystical,” in *Modernists and Mystics*, ed. C. J. T. Talar (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 76.

and the possibility of supernatural life correspond to our deepest longings and, indeed, to the very dynamism of “action.” They are not imposed from without by any external authority.²⁴

5. Blondel on apologetics

Blondel’s philosophy of action had theological consequences. They began to become clear during the modernist crisis. Revived or neo-scholasticism, as promoted by Leo XIII and emphatically reaffirmed by Pius X in 1907, dominated Catholic thought in the 1890s. It was strongly evidentialist, if not rationalist.²⁵ Blondel had intended *L’Action* primarily as an intervention into the secular philosophical discussion he had known at the *École*. Responding to those who had read *L’Action* psychologically as a form of apologetics, Blondel wrote what has come to be called in English “The Letter on Apologetics” (1896) to show what an adequate contemporary apologetics would have to do.²⁶ The “Letter” begins with a review of six methods of apologetics. The sixth or “old method” he called “Thomism,” as he recalled it from manuals he read as an undergraduate. He cited from *Le Monde* a summary of a recent Catholic

²⁴*Supernatural* implies the possibility of relations with a power of grace that is not reducible to our own subjectivity, a completing and perfecting gift beyond the capacity of our nature as we know it, hence “supernatural.” Whether Blondel’s strictly philosophical analysis led to the Christ-specific supernatural of Christianity or a more indeterminate notion is much debated. In *Blondel and Christianity*, Bouillard argues for the latter, at 84–102. In the context of the “Letter on Apologetics,” Blanchette insists that Blondel intends “a strictly Catholic idea of the supernatural here.” See *Maurice Blondel*, 134; on the “method of immanence,” 136–44; and on the sense in which the supernatural is “necessary,” 139. “In no way,” writes Balthasar of Blondel’s attempt to historicize nature, “did he [Blondel] intend thereby to ‘immanentize’ revelation (as if it could be construed, for example, merely by analyzing the internal act of consciousness)” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. [German edition 1951; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992], 341).

²⁵Kerr describes the “revival of Thomistic philosophy” after 1879 as keeping “very much the same canons of rationality as we find in the Enlightenment” (*Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, 2).

²⁶On the relation of *L’Action* and the “*Lettre*,” see Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 144. He calls the English title “an editorial misnomer,” which serves to obscure Blondel’s primarily philosophical intent, at 109.

conference on modern apologetics: “Reason proves the existence of God. It is possible that he has revealed himself. History shows that he has done so, and it also proves the authenticity of the Scriptures and the authority of the Church. Catholicism is thus established on a truly rational basis.”²⁷

At this point, Blondel had yet to encounter St. Thomas himself, who was not part of the curriculum at the École. His description of “Thomism” antagonized the Dominican M.-B. Schwalm, who responded to the “*Lettre*” in the *Revue Thomiste* for September 1896. At the International Catholic Scientific Congress at Fribourg the following year, Blondel spent five hours with Schwalm trying to explain his philosophical intent and later responded to his criticisms in an article. In 1893 he had asked another Dominican, Reginald Beaudoin, to read *L’Action* and assure him of its orthodoxy. Beaudoin became Blondel’s ally and confidant and, as Socius or Assistant to the Dominican General at Rome in the years leading up to *Pascendi*, an important supporter.²⁸

Between 1897 and 1901, Blondel began to read Aquinas himself. By 1910–1911, he had introduced Aquinas into the curriculum at Aix and Marseilles. He began to “lecture extensively” on Aquinas the following year and continued for the next six or seven years.²⁹ By the time he came to write *History and Dogma* in 1904, he could no longer call the rationalist apologetics he wanted to critique “Thomism.” Responding primarily to Abbé Gayraud, a former Dominican and member of the French National Assembly, Blondel invented a word for this approach. He called it “extrinsicism.” It seems to confront human subjects with a revelation from outside with little connection between what God reveals and the signs that establish it. This is a supernatural revelation built upon or superadded to a relatively autonomous philosophical account that could do almost as well without the superaddition. To Blondel,

²⁷Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, 145. Compare Gabriel Daly, *Transcendence and Immanence: A Study in Catholic Modernism and Integralism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), chapter 1 on “Roman Fundamental Theology in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century.”

²⁸On Blondel and the Dominicans Schwalm and Beaudoin, see Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 173–75.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 179, 267–72 with discussion of the texts Blondel read and taught.

“extrinsicists” seemed to say, “Here is a stone; I have established that God’s order requires you to take it.”³⁰

Blondel’s carefully qualified insistence, from a philosophical point of view, that revelation or the supernatural fulfills our deepest human dynamism flies in the face of this approach. An extrinsicist neo-scholastic approach tended to treat our supernatural destiny in separation from a putative natural end extending even to the next life and to separate nature and grace in a two-tiered system. This made it theoretically possible to keep completely separate such spheres as “religion” and “politics,” the beatitudes and the Ten Commandments, theology and philosophy. The emphasis in the previous sentence should be on *completely*.

6. Blondel’s critique of *L’Action française*

In addition to what it implied about theology and philosophy, Blondel’s critique of “extrinsicism” in neo-scholastic apologetics and his corresponding constructive “intrinsicist” position had political consequences. These became evident between 1909 and 1913 in Blondel’s anonymous defense of the “social Catholics” of the “*semaines sociales*” de Bordeaux in a series of articles he signed “*Testis*” or “Witness.” Blanchette calls these articles Blondel’s “most significant contribution to the *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*” between 1905 and 1913.³¹ The “*semaines sociales*” were periodic study weeks devoted to Catholic social thought, especially *Rerum novarum*. They were organized by Blondel’s friend Henri Lorin, whose public pronouncements often echoed themes from Blondel’s philosophy. Blondel’s thought also inspired the popular social democratic movement, *Le Sillon*, condemned by Pope Pius X in August 1910. Its founder, Marc Sangnier (1873–1950), and many other leaders, were Blondel’s former students. From Blondel the social Catholics took the idea of Catholics as a leavening presence

³⁰Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, 276. Continuing his “sacred stone” metaphor, the “sacred deposit of faith” is “an arolith [a stone from heaven] to be preserved in a glass case safe from a sacrilegious curiosity . . .” (278). His introductory account of “extrinsicism” is at 226–31.

³¹Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 233. He portrays the *Testis* articles as “an expansion of Blondel’s philosophy into social action,” at 242.

through whom life and love might circulate in a secular environment, renewing French society by spiritual means.

The Third Republic's anti-clericalism drove significant numbers of French Catholics to ally themselves with the "proto-fascist monarchist movement" *L'Action française*. Between October 1909 and May 1910, Blondel wrote seven *Testis* articles in the *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*. He had purchased this journal in 1905. His friend Lucien Laberthonnière edited it until its condemnation by Pius X in 1913. The driving force behind *L'Action française* was the charismatically brilliant atheist and positivist Charles Maurras (1868–1952). Blondel critiqued this Catholic-positivist alliance for the restoration of France on the basis of his theology of nature and grace. If the separate and impermeable levels of nature and grace could only be related externally, he argued, then a Catholic-positivist alliance could only lead to authoritarianism and coercion. Its successful end would be the use of violence to impose the faith resulting in a kind of sacralized paganism.

Blondel's first two *Testis* articles defended the social Catholics. The third profiled what Blondel called the "monophorist" mentality. *Monophorisme*, another Blondelian neologism, approached an extrinsicist theology of nature and grace and its practical and political consequences from a new direction. In the wake of *Pascendi*, and borrowing from the apologetic "method of Providence" of the nineteenth-century Belgian Cardinal Victor Dechamps (1810–1883), Blondel had begun speaking of a "double afferance" of the "supernatural as it enters concretely and historically into the natural order."³² Dechamps' interventions at Vatican I were largely responsible for the appeal to the Church and its holiness as a motive for faith in Chapter 3 of *Dei Filius*. In his method of Providence, Dechamps insisted on both the "interior fact" and the "exterior fact." This roughly corresponds to Blondel's notion of a "double afferance" of God's supernatural gift as coming "from both inside and outside human consciousness." *Monophorisme* is then a single "afferance" or bringing forth of God's gift, one that is purely external.³³ According to Blondel, monophorists could not avoid

³²Ibid., 255. What attracted Blondel to Dechamps was that his apologetic "did not allow for a separation of the rational motives for credibility and the concrete motives for faith." On Blondel's appropriation of Dechamps, see 228.

³³Blanchette treats the *Testis* articles in *ibid.*, chapter 7. His definition of

naturalism “even if they juxtapose it with an exclusively extrinsicist and authoritarian supernaturalism.”³⁴ The fourth and fifth articles in the series lay out the “perverse fruits” of extrinsicist monophorism in the areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and theology.

The Suarezian Thomist Pedro Descoqs, S.J. (1877–1946), in later years de Lubac’s philosophy professor at Jersey, entered the fray against Blondel. His articles defending a Catholic political alliance with *L’Action française* also appeared in the columns of *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*. The sixth and seventh *Testis* articles are Blondel’s response to Descoqs. After the last *Testis* in May 1910, Blondel left the field. The condemnation of *Le Sillon* followed in August. Descoqs continued his defense of the Catholic-positivist alliance against Blondel in subsequent publications. Citing *Pascendi*, the condemnation of *Le Sillon*, and the 1910 Oath against Modernism, Descoqs tarred *Testis* with the Modernist brush. The social Catholics whom Blondel was defending had already been accused of “social Modernism.”³⁵

In 1910 Blondel collected the seven *Testis* articles in a little book called *La Semaine Sociale de Bordeaux et le Monophorisme*. Citing this “outstanding essay,” Hans Urs von Balthasar contrasted “integralist” attempts at an “orthodox” alternative to Modernism with love or *caritas* as the form of revelation and denounced them as efforts “to shut down the opponent through an unintellectual and unspiritual use of force.”³⁶ This had been Blondel’s point against what he termed “extrinsicist monophorism.” “One must even say,” Blondel wrote in 1910, “that in so far as monophorism (*intégrisme*) triumphed, the Catholic apostolate would be sterilized, the religious

“monophorism” is at 246.

³⁴Maurice Blondel, “The Third ‘Testis’ Article,” translated by Peter J. Bernardi, S.J., *Communio: International Catholic Review* 26 (Winter 1999):846–74, at 872.

³⁵Blanchette thinks it probable that Descoqs didn’t know that “Testis” was Blondel. He also emphasizes that Blondel never called Descoqs a monophorist. See *Maurice Blondel*, 256.

³⁶Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D.C. Schindler (German edition, 1963; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 59 and note 4 where Balthasar refers the reader to Blondel’s “outstanding essay,” “*La Semaine Sociale de Bordeaux et le Monophorisme*” (1910). For his part, Blondel refused to cede the term *integralist* to Maurras and his Catholic partisans. Instead he called their approach “*monophorisme*.”

sense perverted, Christian piety falsified . . .”³⁷ Blondel had some measure of belated vindication in December 1926 when Pope Pius XI forbade Catholic participation in *L’Action française*. Blondel contributed to a special issue of *La Nouvelle Journée*. Pius XI read it and had his nuncio in France write Blondel a “letter of august thanks for a presentation whose reading caused the Holy Father a vivid

³⁷“La Semaine Sociale de Bordeaux et le Monophorisme,” 93, as cited and translated by Alexander Dru in his “Introduction” to Blondel, *Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, 27. On this controversy, see 26–31 and Dru’s article “From the *Action Française* to the Second Vatican Council: Blondel’s *La Semaine Sociale de Bordeaux*,” *Downside Review* 81 (1963): 226–45. The present essay relies heavily on Peter J. Bernardi’s definitive study of this controversy, *Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, & Action Française: The Clash over the Church’s Role in Society during the Modernist Era* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), “protofascist monarchist movement” at 2. See also Michael Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism and Catholicism: The Politics of Charles Maurras and French Catholics, 1890–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Writing in 1963 and 1964, and sensing that the heirs of Descoqs and Garrigou were losing control of Catholic intellectual life, Dru came out swinging in *L’Action française*’s direction. Writing in a Church torn by partisan theological strife, Bernardi’s exposition is much fuller and more complete. He takes admirable pains to be fair to both sides. “In the controversy between Blondel and Descoqs,” he concludes, “neither disputant can claim a total victory. Each had important insights that were corrective of the other’s positions. Indeed each modified his views in the light of criticism,” at 268. Bernardi backs up this conclusion with nearly 300 pages of rigorous scholarship. I applaud both his scholarship and his much needed irenic intent. But his even-handed treatment of this controversy tends to obscure the asymmetry of the respective positions Descoqs and Blondel occupied on the theological landscape of 1910–1914. Blondel and Descoqs wrote in the aftermath of *Pascendi* (1907) with its concluding mandate for diocesan vigilance committees and censorship; the imposition of the Oath Against Modernism (1910); and the suppression of the social Catholic network of *Le Sillon* and its journal (1910). Powerful support from prestigious neo-Thomist theologians in Rome and France lent to *L’Action française* what Dru calls “an aura of hyper-orthodoxy.” See his “Introduction” to *Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, 31 where he lists its supporters. Without denying the real substance of Bernardi’s careful exposition of their intellectual differences, it must be said that raising the specter of “Modernism” in such an overheated environment is more like a threat than a form of intellectual exchange, a threat backed up by the “unintellectual and unspiritual use of force” denounced by Balthasar. Such threats add an ominous layer of meaning to Descoqs’ arguments. Bernardi makes this clear, e.g., at 155–56, but his concluding emphasis remains on the question of “mutual vindication” (see 229–30).

satisfaction.”³⁸ Blondel’s old adversary Pedro Descoqs lived to see Pope Pius XII rescind his predecessor’s judgment.

7. The 1931 debate on “Christian Philosophy”

In the intensely secular environment of the *École Normale Supérieure*, *L’Action* appeared to violate philosophy’s autonomy. Neo-scholastic thinkers like Descoqs, by contrast, read Blondel’s project as blurring the distinction between the natural and the supernatural and jeopardizing the gratuity of the supernatural. Blondel’s attempt to maintain a formal distinction between philosophy and theology, while expanding the role of philosophy, problematized prevailing understandings of philosophy and theology and their relation in both church and academy. The 1931 controversy over “Christian philosophy” made this clear.

The debate began when Blondel published a series of essays in honor of the fifteen-hundredth anniversary of St. Augustine’s death in 430. Just as he had done earlier for Aquinas, Blondel introduced St. Augustine into the curriculum at Aix around 1920–1921. In response to Blondel, historian of philosophy Émile Bréhier asked “Is there a Christian philosophy?” Bréhier answered in the negative. In 1931 Étienne Gilson gave an affirmative but primarily historical response. Jacques Maritain and others responded as well. Blondel himself entered the fray with his book, *Le Problème de la philosophie catholique*. It consisted of the second part of the *Lettre* of 1896 re-edited, re-edited versions of his pseudonymous essays on Cardinal Dechamps’ apologetic (1905 and 1906), and a new section addressing Bréhier and Gilson and arguing for a “philosophie catholique.” In his treatment of Dechamps, he argued that the “circumincision” of internal and external facts takes place in action. Opposing both the absorption of one by the other or a mere external juxtaposition, Blondel had made it difficult to keep philosophy and theology, nature and grace, completely separate.³⁹

³⁸As cited in Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 324.

³⁹On this debate, see Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, chapter 10; Maurice Nédoncelle, *Is There a Christian Philosophy?* trans. Iltyd Trethowan, O.S.B. (French edition 1956; New York: Hawthorn Books, 1960), especially chapter 5. Trethowan took the occasion of his contribution to the Introduction to the *Lettre*

In 1936 de Lubac published “Sur la philosophie chrétienne,” an article in which, “without ‘concordism,’” which Blondel opposed, he tried to show that the positions of Maritain, Gilson, and Blondel “did not contradict each other but were responding to three different situations engendering three different problems.” In de Lubac’s reading of Blondel, “philosophy was not yet Christian since it was hollowing out the empty space that Christian revelation was to fill.” Accordingly, Blondel rejected the phrase “Christian philosophy” and spoke instead and “in another sense” of “Catholic philosophy.” De Lubac ended his article “by outlining the idea of a subsequent sense of philosophy, enlightened by Christian faith, after the manner of the reflection of the Fathers and of certain studies by Gabriel Marcel,” more like “Catholic philosophy” in Blondel’s sense.⁴⁰

The 1931 debate has achieved a certain paradigmatic stature in discussions of philosophy and theology. As we shall see below, Pope John Paul II revisited this debate in his 1998 encyclical *Fides et ratio*. In his commentary on the encyclical, Avery Cardinal Dulles reframed the debate of the 1930s in terms of the encyclical’s “three stances” of philosophy (paragraphs 75–77) and located the pope’s own position as closest to de Lubac’s, which he read as a mediation between Blondel and Gilson.⁴¹

8. “La nouvelle théologie,” 1946–1950

The political-theological battle lines drawn in the controversy between Blondel and Descoqs over the *semaines sociales* helped

on *Apologetics and History and Dogma*, 105–12, esp. at 112, to dispute Nédoncelle’s interpretation of Blondel on the role of the “undetermined supernatural.” See also Gregory B. Sadler, *Reason Fulfilled by Faith: The 1930’s Christian Philosophy Debates in France* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011). Though highly relevant, it appeared too late to be consulted for this article.

⁴⁰de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 24. De Lubac’s article appeared in *Nouvelle revue théologique*, at 18. See Blanchette’s comments on de Lubac and other theological interpreters of Blondel “reintroducing a theological confusion” into Blondel’s philosophy in *Maurice Blondel*, 143.

⁴¹Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., “Can Philosophy be Christian? The New State of the Question,” in *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, ed. David Ruel Foster and Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 3–21, at 18.

to define the post-war controversy over *la nouvelle théologie* that flared up in the wake of the appearance of de Lubac's *Surnaturel* in 1946. Until 1926, when Pope Pius XI forbade Catholic participation in the movement, Garrigou-Lagrange, like Pedro Descoqs, had been a partisan of *L'Action française*.⁴²

De Lubac had a different political orientation, which helped inspire his efforts in "spiritual resistance" to Nazi anti-Semitism and genocide. David Grumett describes him as "instrumental in founding and subsequently editing" from 1941 the *Cahiers du témoignage chrétien*, an underground journal of the French resistance. Far from a quixotic posture, the *Cahiers*, according to Grumett, became "the principal means of disseminating reliable printed information about the occupation and Nazi genocide elsewhere." The *Cahiers* encouraged the French in spiritual resistance and gave access to "accurate versions of papal pronouncements" subject to censorship in official newspapers.⁴³

Such activities made de Lubac a fugitive in his own country. He tells the story of carrying the notebook for *Surnaturel* in 1943, while "being hunted by the Gestapo," and revising it while in hiding.⁴⁴ De Lubac eluded the Gestapo but they captured and executed his friend and confrere Yves de Montcheuil. "And it is vital to grasp," writes John Milbank, "that de Lubac's and de Montcheuil's *political* opponents—Catholic Rightists supporting the Vichy

⁴²On Garrigou's politics, see Peddicord, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism*, chapter 5 and the "Conclusion" to Nichols, *Reason with Piety*. He notes that Garrigou's defense of the "indirect temporal power" in his response to Pius XI's condemnation of *L'Action française* is based "on the relation of *all human acts whatsoever* to man's 'ultimate supernatural end.'" Of de Lubac, Nichols writes that he "maintained at all times an exemplary devotion to the figure, and the texts, of Thomas," at 127, 129.

⁴³David Grumett, *De Lubac: A Guide for the Perplexed*, with a Foreword by Avery Cardinal Dulles (New York/London: T&T Clark, 2007), 40. Chapter 2, entitled "Spiritual Resistance to Nazism," highlights the "profoundly political" character of the "context, motivation and implications of de Lubac's theology," at 25. On this context, Grumett cites Joseph A. Komonchak, "Returning from Exile: Catholic Theology in the 1930s," in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 35–48. See also David Grumett, "Yves de Montcheuil: Action, Justice, and the Kingdom in Spiritual Resistance to Nazism," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 618–41. Grumett emphasizes Blondel's role in inspiring Montcheuil's spiritual resistance to the Nazis.

⁴⁴de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 35.

regime and collaborating with the occupying Germans—were also their *theological* opponents.”⁴⁵

From his post at the Angelicum in Rome, Garrigou monitored twentieth-century Catholic theology. He regarded Blondel as a Modernist and, when he read *Surnaturel* in 1946, the Blondelian strains in de Lubac’s work struck him as unmistakable. He called what was going on at La Fourvière the “new theology.” “La nouvelle théologie, où va-t-elle?” he asked in the title of a 1946 article in *Angelicum*. His answer was that it led straight to Modernism. Given their respective theological and political orientations, Garrigou and de Lubac recapitulated in a post-World War II setting the theological-political controversy between Descoqs and Blondel in the years before the Great War.

The ensuing battles over *la nouvelle théologie* ended in 1950 with Pope Pius XII’s encyclical *Humani generis* and the removal of de Lubac from his teaching position at La Fourvière. De Lubac recalled reading the encyclical “toward the end of the afternoon, in a dark, still empty room, in front of an open trunk . . .” He found it “rather curious” when he read “a phrase bearing on the question of the supernatural” and “intending to recall the true doctrine on this subject.” “It reproduces,” he wrote at the time, “exactly what I said about it two years earlier in an article . . .”⁴⁶

⁴⁵John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 3. On this same page, Milbank describes *Surnaturel* as “arguably the key theological text of the twentieth century,” but finds its contents “substantially” modified “under pressure” in the later works *The Mystery of the Supernatural* and *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, both published in French in 1965.

⁴⁶de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 71. The literature on *la nouvelle théologie* is vast. For two recent studies, the first more theological, the second more historical-theological, see Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie & Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (New York/London: T&T Clark, 2010). My primary emphasis here is on this controversy’s continuity with the earlier one between Blondel and Descoqs. On Blondel and Garrigou, see Michael J. Kerlin, “Anti-Modernism and the Elective Affinity Between Politics and Philosophy,” in *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context*, ed. Darrell Jodock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chapter 11 and id., “Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange: Defending the Faith from *Pascendi* to *Humani Generis*,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 97–113. Both articles

As Peter Henrici has noted, after the modernist crisis and *Pascendi*, there was a certain taboo in ecclesiastical circles against pronouncing Blondel's name.⁴⁷ This taboo, as well as our tendency to regard these controversies as isolated episodes instead of chapters in a continuing drama, has to do with what must rightly be called the "repressive apparatus" of *Pascendi* and its aftermath.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, this all too brief summary indicates the extent of Blondel's subterranean influence on Catholic thought between the wars. Because of this taboo, de Lubac's significant debt to Blondel has come to light only gradually. It is confirmed by de Lubac himself in the memoir published shortly before his death. This summary should also make clear how Canadian philosopher Kenneth Schmitz could claim that, "It is not too much to hold that, along with the work of patristic scholars, his [Blondel's] thought was a principal current leading up to the Second Vatican Council."⁴⁹ Continuing Schmitz's metaphor, we might say that Blondel's current flowed to the Council chiefly through Henri de Lubac.

9. Maurice Blondel and Henri de Lubac

De Lubac spent the academic year 1912–1913 studying law at the Catholic Faculty of the University of Lyon. He joined the

portray Garrigou sympathetically. See also Peddicord, *Sacred Monster*, 61–78; 147–60. On de Lubac and *Humani Generis*, see Joseph A. Komonchak, "Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 579–602; David L. Schindler's Introduction to the 1998 edition of *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, xxi–xxv, and Grumett, *De Lubac: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 47–51. For an alternative interpretation, see Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*. Milbank begins with the provocative and arguable claim that those who deny that de Lubac was "implicated in" *Humani generis*'s censure are "surely wrong" (x). After *Humani generis*, Milbank writes, "outside his historical work, de Lubac comes across as a stuttering, somewhat traumatized theologian, only able to articulate his convictions in somewhat oblique fragments" (7).

⁴⁷Henrici, "La descendance blondélienne parmi les jésuites français," 309.

⁴⁸Even as temperate a historian of the modernist crisis as Marvin O'Connell is struck by the excesses of anti-Modernism. See *Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 341, 347–48. O'Connell speaks of *Pascendi*'s "repressive apparatus" at 347.

⁴⁹Schmitz, Foreword to Blondel, *Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, 6.

Jesuits in 1913. Anti-clerical policies of the Third Republic made it necessary for him to go to the Isle of Jersey. With 1914 came the Great War and de Lubac, along with many other clergy, was drafted into the French army where he served from 1915 to 1919. In 1916, at Eparges near Verdun, de Lubac was one of the half million wounded in the Battle of Verdun, sustaining a serious head wound, the effects of which continued throughout his life. After the war, he continued his philosophical studies at Jersey (1920–23), where Pedro Descoqs' modern Thomism held sway. De Lubac recalls scribbling "some rather nonconformist notes" during Descoqs' classes, notes "inspired more by Saint Thomas than by my Suarezian master, whose combative teaching was a perpetual invitation to react."⁵⁰

De Lubac began theological studies at Hastings on the south coast of England in 1924. But in 1926 he returned with the Jesuit theologate to Lyon and completed his final two years of theology at La Fourvière. La Fourvière was much more a "traditionally neo-scholastic school" than any sort of Blondelian enclave. But there was also a group of professors whom Henrici calls "*relectures jésuites*." Chief among them was Auguste Valensin, Blondel's friend and disciple, from whom de Lubac learned Aquinas through Blondel and Rousselot. Blondel himself was at this time teaching at Aix en Provence, on the Mediterranean coast near Marseilles, not far from Lyon to the north.⁵¹

Under the influence of Valensin and others, de Lubac became an integral part of a loose network of lay and clerical intellectuals and activists that Fouilloux calls the "second school of Lyon." Its leaders had been moved to some degree by the spirit of Leo XIII's call for *ralliement* with the Third Republic. Politically, they tried to navigate between the royalist Catholic integralism of the right, as exemplified by Charles Maurras and *L'Action française*, and the aggressive anti-clericalism of the early twentieth-century Third Republic. Theologically they negotiated the shoals between Roman anti-modernism, suspicious of Blondel, and their desire to

⁵⁰de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 42

⁵¹"*Relectures jésuites*" at "La descendance blondélienne parmi les jésuites français," 309. For biographical information on de Lubac, I have relied on Susan Wood's entry on him in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians*, ed. Patrick W. Carey and Joseph T. Lienhard (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), 330–33. See also Grumett, *De Lubac*, 1–6.

pursue, within the bounds of orthodoxy, the kinds of questions raised during the modernist crisis.⁵² Lyon industrialist Victor Carlhian, a student of Blondel's colleague, Lucien Laberthonnière, and a chief force behind *Le Sillon* in Lyon prior to its suppression in 1910, helped to bankroll the group. Fouilloux calls it an "école polycopiante," whose publications, produced on copiers of the day, circulated in underground fashion, "a samizdat before its time."⁵³

At the theological heart of the Lyon School were Henrici's "relectures" or "les jésuites blondelisants." For Henrici, de Lubac is "without a doubt the central figure in this line of Blondelian Jesuits."⁵⁴ In Fouilloux's image, the "fires" of the Lyon School burned brightest in 1938 with de Lubac's publication of *Catholicism*, a book begun as lectures given to social Catholics around Lyon.⁵⁵ As Henrici emphasizes, de Lubac's strong connection to Blondel has only gradually and recently come to light. De Lubac entered theology "through the narrow gate of philosophy, specifically the philosophy of Maurice Blondel."⁵⁶ "During my years of philosophy (1920–1923)," wrote de Lubac, "I had read with enthusiasm Maurice Blondel's *Action, Lettre* (on apologetics) and various other studies I had heard a lot about him from Father Auguste Valensin. I had visited him for the first time in 1922"⁵⁷

De Lubac's major work on the question of nature and grace, *Surnaturel*, was not published until 1946 when World War II was over. But in the 1920s, Père Joseph Huby encouraged the young de Lubac "to verify historically the theses of Blondel and Rousselot on the supernatural while studying the same problem in St. Thomas." De Lubac's memoir describes Fr. Huby's informal Sunday evening

⁵²Here I am following Fouilloux, "La seconde 'École de Lyon' (1919–1939)," 268, 271–72.

⁵³Ibid., 268. Their publications included, beginning in the 1930s, the unedited works of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, including *The Divine Milieu*.

⁵⁴Henrici, "La descendance blondélienne," 310.

⁵⁵Fouilloux, "La seconde 'École de Lyon' (1919–1939)," 272. De Lubac describes the lectures on which the book is based in *At the Service of the Church*, 27.

⁵⁶Xavier Tilliette, "Le Père de Lubac et le débat de la philosophie chrétienne," *Les Études philosophiques* 50 (1995): 193–203, at 193, as cited by Henrici, "La descendance blondélienne," 311, n. 21.

⁵⁷de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 19. The occasion of his visit to Aix was his chronic earaches.

discussion group at which his investigation of the “supernatural” began.⁵⁸

On 3 April 1932, de Lubac wrote to Blondel what he describes as “this sort of sketch of what would later become my book *Surnaturel*.” He urged Blondel, “with all the freedom of a disciple,” that in his recent work, the philosopher of Aix had moved too close to the modern hypothesis of “pure nature.” De Lubac recalled to Blondel: “It is in fact the study of your work that made me begin, some eleven years ago, to reflect on these problems, and I believe that I have remained faithful to its inspiration.” He went on to cite Blondel as the inspiration for the watchword that characterizes his approach to nature and grace: “unite in order to distinguish the better.”⁵⁹

When *Surnaturel* appeared in 1946, de Lubac sent a copy to Blondel, still working on his final incomplete trilogy. Blondel called *Surnaturel* a “fundamental, truly monumental work.” “I find in it a light, a power, a joy for which I cannot thank you enough, without forgetting the gratitude I owe you for the care with which you raise me above disparaging remarks and objections.” The eighty-five-year-old Blondel found himself “strengthened by it to pick up once again my efforts to finish the multiple drafts of Volume III on ‘La Philosophie et l’Esprit chrétien’”⁶⁰

After Blondel’s death in 1949 and the controversy over “*la nouvelle théologie*” (1950) had somewhat subsided, de Lubac, along

⁵⁸“Plus tard, le P. Huby suggérera à de Lubac de vérifier historiquement les thèses de Blondel et de Rousselot sur le surnaturel, en étudiant le même problème chez St. Thomas” (Henrici, “La descendance blondélienne,” 312). Cf. de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 34–35. Henrici goes on to suggest that de Lubac’s first studies of Baius and Jansenius, published in 1931, were inspired by a 1923 article of Blondel on Jansenism and anti-Jansenism in Pascal. Earlier (at 311, n. 19), Henrici cites Antonio Russo’s dissertation, written under the direction of Walter Kasper, *Henri de Lubac: Teologia e dogma nella storia. L’influsso di Blondel* (Rome: Studium, 1990) as thoroughly documenting the influence of Blondel on the young de Lubac.

⁵⁹de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, Appendix 1:7, 183–85, with Blondel’s reply to de Lubac’s “very useful admonitions,” at 185ff. For de Lubac on “unite in order to distinguish the better,” see *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed with an Introduction by David L. Schindler (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 30–31, preceded by a reference to Blondel’s *L’Action* at 29.

⁶⁰de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 188, citing Blondel to de Lubac, 19 December 1946.

with Henri Bouillard, and other Jesuits, did much to secure Blondel's legacy, continuing to raise him "above disparaging remarks and objections," and to get out the documentation related to the modernist crisis.⁶¹ In 1957, de Lubac published anonymously the first two heavily annotated volumes of the correspondence between Blondel and Auguste Valensin between 1899 and 1912. By 1965, de Lubac could publish the third volume of correspondence from 1912 to 1947 under his own name.⁶² In 1960 René Marlé published a collection of correspondence and other documents related to the modernist crisis under the title *Au Coeur de la crise moderniste*. Henrici credits the "indefatigable Père de Lubac" with preparing this collection. Also in 1965, de Lubac published an annotated edition of the correspondence of Blondel and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and in 1969, the correspondence of Blondel and Johannès Wehrlé, a Parisian parish priest with whom Blondel corresponded during the modernist crisis and thereafter.⁶³ After a long discussion of his editorial work on the works of Auguste Valensin, de Lubac wrote that he considered the "posthumous editions" he published of Valensin, Montcheuil, Blondel and Teilhard "to be one of the most useful tasks ever given to me to accomplish."⁶⁴

10. Blondel at the Second Vatican Council

In the early days of the modernist crisis, in the 1896 *Letter on Apologetics*, Blondel distinguished two ways of "looking at the history

⁶¹Bouillard's study *Blondel et le Christianisme* appeared in 1961. See note 2 above.

⁶²For the publication data, see Henrici, "La descendance blondélienne," 307, n. 13. Henrici calls these volumes "a near inexhaustible mine of information."

⁶³See *ibid.*, 308, n. 14 for the publication data. De Lubac tells the story of these publications in *At the Service of the Church*, 101–03. Modernist scholars Émile Poulat and René Virgoulay have criticized the editing of *Au Coeur de la crise moderniste*. See Marvin O'Connell, *Critics on Trial*, 254, n. 13. De Lubac explains his and Marlé's respective roles in *At the Service of the Church*, 102–03. He undertook his writing on behalf of Teilhard at the direction of his Provincial who wrote to him in 1961 that "the four Provincials of France, with the approval of the Father General, want one of those who knew him well, who have followed his thought, to bring his testimony to bear about him" (*At the Service of the Church*, 104, citing Fr. Blaise Arminjon to de Lubac, 23 April 1961).

⁶⁴de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 101.

of philosophical ideas.” Rather than remaining “outside the mainstream,” cut off “from the only sort of life that is fruitful,” Blondel followed another path. Trying:

to perceive that stirring of parturition with which humanity is always in labor, we set ourselves to profit by this vast effort, to enlighten it, to bring it to fruition, to kindle the smoking flax, to be less ready to suppose that there is nothing of value for ourselves even in those doctrines which seem most opposed to our own, to go to others so that they may come to us—and that is the source of intellectual fruitfulness.⁶⁵

Blondel’s impulse “to go to others so that they may come to us” bore fruit at the Second Vatican Council. Bringing to a close his survey of the Blondelian line of descent among French Jesuits, Henrici notes that *L’Action*, a project conceived as an apologetic addressed to “contemporary unbelievers, dilettantes, pessimists, and positivists,” had ironically become “a fountain of youth for Catholic theology and philosophy.”

He summarizes three intimately related Blondelian philosophical themes that led many twentieth-century Catholic thinkers to re-conceive the relationship of philosophy and theology. First, in the area of philosophical anthropology, human beings, as historical, are defined by their supernatural destiny. Second, in the area of knowledge, the dynamism of human knowing is ordered to the vision of God as both necessary and impossible to us. Third, and most audacious, is Blondel’s argument in Part V, Chapter 3 of *L’Action*, that the union of humanity and divinity in Christ is “the measure of all things” (*panchristisme*) and perhaps the only solution to the “Kantian aporia of the evanescence of sense data (*données sensibles*) faced with the intellect’s dynamism toward the intelligible, and a definitive consistency of the sensible world as the basis of all human experience.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, 147.

⁶⁶On this cosmological aspect of Blondel’s thought, see David Grumett, “Eucharist, Matter and the Supernatural: Why de Lubac Needs Teilhard,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 2 (April 2008): 165–78. Grumett argues that, in order to complete his critique of “pure nature,” de Lubac needed the cosmic dimension offered by Teilhard. In the course of his argument, he makes clear the impact of Blondel’s 1930 edition of his Latin dissertation on the “vinculum substantiale,” the bond of substance, in Leibniz, on both de Lubac and Teilhard.

If there is one thing to learn from the Jesuit heirs of Blondel, Henrici concludes, it is “that philosophy and theology belong (*tiennent*) together more than we are accustomed to think, and that, if there is no theology without philosophy, it is also the case that, without theology, a philosophy of even the slightest depth is impossible.”⁶⁷ Blondel’s opening of the “closed compartments” (*cloisons étanchées*) of “separate philosophy” and “separate theology,” Henrici notes, had “repercussions even up to the most authoritative teachings of the Church,” not only in the 1998 encyclical *Fides et ratio*, but also in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

De Lubac’s influence on the documents of the Council is well-known and often commented upon. But Henrici concludes his article with a quote from Yves Congar that locates de Lubac’s deep influence precisely at the point of the Blondelian reconception of the relation of philosophy and theology. “If we had to characterize the Council’s approach in one word,” Congar wrote in 1966, “we could invoke the ideal of knowledge Maurice Blondel proposed and which he reclaimed in the face of what he so oddly called ‘monophorism,’ that is to say, a thingly conception of knowledge.” Henrici adds, in apposition to this last phrase, “an extrinsicist system of closed compartments.”⁶⁸

In view of his notion of “the ebb and flow of theology,” it might not have surprised de Lubac that a Blondel-inspired theology of nature and grace, rather than a once for all achievement, has proven unstable and unfinished. On the one side, undifferentiated appeals to the graced character of our world threaten to evacuate its christological and trinitarian center. Reassertions of philosophical autonomy in appeals to the *praeambula fidei* in the *Summa theologiae* of St. Thomas (1, 2, ad 1) and Vatican I’s dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* unsettle the christological and trinitarian center of this

⁶⁷On the three themes, see Henrici, “La descendance blondélienne,” 320–21. On Christ as “the measure of all things,” see Blondel, *Action*, 420–21.

⁶⁸Henrici, “La descendance blondélienne,” 322, citing Congar in *Documentation catholique*, 1 January 1966, p. 13. See also Étienne Michelin, *Vatican II et le ‘Surnaturel’* (Venasque: Éditions du Carmel, 1993), as cited in David L. Schindler’s discussion of “The Present Ecclesial-Cultural Situation,” in his Introduction to the 1998 edition of *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, xxv–xxx, 1, at xxvii, n. 48. De Lubac himself comments briefly on “The ‘Supernatural’ at Vatican II” in *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Bro. Richard Armandez, F.S.C. (original French edition, 1980; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), Appendix A, 177–90.

theology of nature and grace from another side.⁶⁹ Clarifying the senses in which we can truly say the world is graced remains a major task of contemporary Catholic theology.

11. Maurice Blondel and *Fides et ratio* (1998)

In addition to Vatican II, Henrici also mentioned the encyclical *Fides et ratio* as one of the examples of the repercussions

⁶⁹For de Lubac on the sense in which the world is graced, see his lengthy engagement with Schillebeeckx's characterization of the Church as the "sacrament of the world," in *A Brief Catechism on Nature and Grace*, Appendix B, "The 'Sacrament of the World?'" 191–234. Commenting on this text, Susan Wood, after noting that over the course of his life de Lubac's writings "show a unity and betray no shifts in theological positions or fundamental convictions," locates the fundamental issue between him and Schillebeeckx as "how grace was present in the world—within the temporal order by creation or through the Christ event mediated through the church sacramentally" (*Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians*, 332–33). See also Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, "Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic: Five Theses Related to Theological Anthropology," *Communio* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 67–84. On reassertions of philosophical autonomy, see Ralph McInerny, *Praecambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006) and, for a contrasting view, Robert Barron, *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), chapter 9, esp. 147. On *Dei Filius*, see Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 302–19. Bernardi's final chapter in *Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, & Action Française*, with its reflections on Blondel's "contested legacy" (267), succeeds in capturing the ambivalence and instability of the present situation, esp. at 261–68. For the present state of the question on the controversy over *Summae*, see Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., ed, *Summae: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought*, trans. Robert Williams, rev. Matthew Levering (Ave Maria, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2009). See also William L. Portier, "Thomist Resurgence," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 494–504. Concluding a long, reflective review essay on Pope Benedict's *Jesus of Nazareth* (2007), Anthony Scigliano puts his finger on a tension he sees in the book and in the present state of Catholic theology "between the symbolic hermeneutics of de Lubac and company and a felt need for a public reason such as natural law that has some sort of autonomy vis-à-vis revelation." The pope, he suggests, does not want to resolve this tension. Such resolution can easily lead to "rational or irrational coercion." "Instead," writes Scigliano, "Benedict would seem to suggest a *logos* embedded in the liberating circulation of divine love, and divine love that incarnates itself as healing reason." See Anthony C. Scigliano, Jr., "Pope Benedict XVI's *Jesus of Nazareth*: Agape and Logos," *Pro Ecclesia* 17, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 159–85, at 185.

of Blondel's thought reaching to the most authoritative teachings of the Church. Indeed, Henrici sees Blondel's thought at the center of the encyclical and refers to Maurice Blondel as the encyclical's "innommé," the "one who went unnamed." The encyclical can be seen as the second of three steps taken by Pope John Paul II, which, viewed together, represent the vindication and even the triumph of Maurice Blondel.

The First Step: the 1993 Centenary Letter. Anniversaries of significant events played a formative role in the life of Pope John Paul II. His enthusiasm for the celebration of the Jubilee Year in 2000, with its emphasis on repentance and "purification of memory" should be understood in this context.⁷⁰ The late pope was not one to miss an anniversary. On 19 February 1993, John Paul II took the first of his three steps in a letter to the Archbishop of Aix en Provence. The occasion was the centenary of the publication of *L'Action* in 1893. In order to appreciate how remarkable this letter was, one must recall the words of Pope Pius X in *Pascendi* that caused Blondel so much grief in 1907 and thereafter.

We cannot but deplore once more, and grievously, that there are Catholics who, while rejecting *immanence* as a doctrine, employ it as a method of apologetics, and who do this so imprudently that they seem to admit that there is in human nature a true and rigorous necessity with regard to the supernatural order—and not merely a capacity and a suitability for the supernatural, such as has at all times been emphasized by Catholic apologists. (paragraph 37)

⁷⁰It has been said that Balthasar's reflections on the "burden of the dead" in his 1965 work *Who is a Christian?* trans. John Cumming (original German edition, 1965; New York/Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1967) significantly inspired Pope John Paul II's approach to the Jubilee Year 2000 as a time of repentance. "The connection of the contemporary Christian with those who are dead," Balthasar wrote, "saddles him with a reckoning of past errors he has to be able to bear . . ." See *Who is a Christian?* 14–15 and Luigi Accattoli, *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness: the Mea Culpas of John Paul II*, trans. Jordan Aumann, O.P. (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1998), especially chapters 1, 8, and 9 on the process by which the pope arrived at the precise form for his pre-Jubilee call for a communal examination of historical conscience. For clarification of the various theological difficulties involved with "purification of memory," see the December 1999 study of the International Theological Commission on "Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past."

Pascendi is here rejecting the way of immanence as accepting Kant's starting point and rejecting his conclusions. The distinction between *immanence* as a doctrine and as a method was one that Blondel consistently emphasized in defending his work from neo-scholastic criticism. Here Pius X cut the ground from beneath him and rendered his name suspect and in need of defense in ecclesiastical circles for the rest of his life. "I have read the encyclical, and I am in a stupor," he wrote on 17 September 1907. To his close friend, the Jesuit Auguste Valensin, he wrote, "It almost makes one cry out, Happy are those who are dead in the Lord." By 22 September he had achieved a certain perspective on the encyclical. "We have a double task to accomplish," he wrote to Johannès Wehrlé, "work of sanctification and edification by our loyalty, if necessary to go as far as heroism; work of illumination and engagement with scholastic minds."⁷¹

Nearly a century later, on the 1993 centenary of *L'Action*, another pope offered a stirring tribute to the memory of Maurice Blondel.

Thus, in calling to mind the work, we intend, above all to honor its author, who, in his thought and life, was able to affect the coexistence of the most rigorous criticism and the most courageous philosophical research with the most authentic Catholicism, even as he drew on the very fountainhead of dogmatic, patristic, and mystical tradition. This twofold fidelity to certain demands of modern philosophical thought and to the Magisterium of the Church did not come without its cost in terms of incomprehension and suffering, at a time when the Church found itself confronting the modernist crisis and the errors that were involved.⁷²

⁷¹Blondel to Fernand Mourret, 17 September 1907, and Blondel to Valensin, 20 September 1907, as cited in O'Connell, *Critics on Trial*, 348; Blondel to Wehrlé, 22 September 1907, as cited in Peter J. Bernardi, "Maurice Blondel and the Renewal of the Nature-Grace Relationship," *Communio* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 806-45, at 819. Bernardi provides a thorough treatment of Blondel's response to *Pascendi*, at 818-22. Blanchette minimizes Blondel's agony over the encyclical but also makes clear the toll the constant threat of condemnation took on Blondel's family, *Maurice Blondel*, 230-31, 279-80.

⁷²Pope John Paul II's letter to Archbishop Bernard Panafieu of Aix en Provence is translated by Mark Sebanc in "Notes and Comments, On the Centenary of Blondel's *L'Action*," *Communio* 20 (Winter 1993): 721-23. (It is retranslated and published in the present issue of *Communio*.) The passage cited above is from p.

This extraordinary papal recognition of Blondel acknowledges both his fidelity to the Church's Magisterium and his suffering during the Modernist crisis. Pope John Paul II calls *L'Action* "the treatise of a philosopher on that which surpasses philosophy." This description could apply just as easily to the pope's own 1998 encyclical *Fides et ratio*. In that encyclical, in the context of rejecting "rationalism" and "dogmatic pragmatism," John Paul II briefly cites *Pascendi* (paragraph 71). But cut off from its theological-political context, *Pascendi* becomes a century-old warning against "rationalism" and "historicism" that John Paul II joins Pius X in rightly rejecting.

The Second Step: The encyclical Fides et ratio, 1998. Fides et ratio carries Pascendi along as a minor tributary into one of the great theological streams that flowed into the Second Vatican Council. This stream runs back, as we have seen, through Henri de Lubac and others, to Maurice Blondel. Pope John Paul II honored de Lubac in 1983 by making him a cardinal. The nineteenth-century reformer, Antonio Rosmini, called by some the Italian Newman, makes an appearance in this encyclical (paragraph 74). In fact, the encyclical

722. Immediately follows this sentence: "Encouraged many times by my predecessors Leo XIII, Pius X, and Pius XII, Blondel pursued his work, even as he indefatigably and doggedly clarified his thought without at the same time repudiating what had inspired it." This surprising claim that previous popes, including Pius X, encouraged Blondel in his work is not without substance. In 1912, Pius X charged the bishop of Aix "to reassure him against all attacks about his orthodoxy, which in the mind of the Pontiff was 'certain'" (Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 285–86). On 22 December 1944, Pius XII addressed a letter to Blondel, signed by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, then of the Vatican secretariat of state and the future Pope Paul VI. Somerville, writing in 1960s, called this "the great vindication of his life's work." The letter urged Blondel to continue the philosophical work which "you have carried on with a talent equaled only by your faith." Somerville cited *La Documentation catholique* 42 (1945): 498–99. Bernardi points out that, though this letter can be considered "a vindication of Blondel's orthodoxy," it also mentions "some expressions that a theological rigor would have desired to be more precise" (*Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, & Action Française*, 267, n.115, citing the letter mentioned above). Though John Paul's 1993 letter does not mention Pope Pius XI, his 1931 encyclical *Quadregesimo anno* (paragraph 46) praises the "*semaines sociales*" which Blondel had so ably defended against *L'Action française*, denounced by Pius XI in 1926. See also note 37 above. Such "encouragement" never overcame the "taboo" of which Henrici spoke and the need for Blondel to be "raised above disparaging remarks and objections," a need he thought it necessary to thank de Lubac for filling.

has been read as “an act of reparation in so far as it recommends thinkers condemned or dismissed in the nineteenth-century turn to Neo-Thomism.”⁷³ In 2002 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith formally dispelled the suspicion of heresy that had surrounded Rosmini since 1887. On 18 November 2007, Pope Benedict XVI beatified him.⁷⁴ In contrast to Rosmini and other former outliers mentioned in the encyclical, Blondel’s name is conspicuously absent from *Fides et ratio*. And yet his presence in the encyclical is palpable, as in its reference to philosophers who “produced a philosophy which, starting with an analysis of immanence, opened the way to the transcendent” (paragraph 59).

Peter Henrici makes the case that *Fides et ratio* should be read “precisely as a magisterial sanctioning of Blondel’s concept of philosophy,” while at the same time, “the philosophical biography of the young Blondel . . . could be read as a philosophical justification and grounding of the (existential) task of philosophy advocated by *Fides et ratio*.” He points out that the encyclical lacks a “philosophical bridge” to mediate between its simultaneous affirmations about the human quest for meaning and its fulfilment in Christ. Henrici sketches four “structural convergences” between *L’Action* and the encyclical and concludes that *L’Action* “may, in fact, be read as a complementary philosophical commentary on *Fides et ratio*.” It exemplifies precisely the kind of philosophical mediation the encyclical needs. Given this analysis, as well as the clear allusions to Blondel he finds in paragraphs 26, 59, and 76, Henrici raises the obvious question: “Why was Blondel’s name not mentioned in the encyclical?”

Such an omission could not possibly be accidental. Henrici attributes it to John Paul II’s desire not to “impose any specific philosophy on his reader.” Blondel’s philosophy is the kind of

⁷³Wayne J. Hankey, “Practical Considerations About Teaching Philosophy and Theology Now,” in *Restoring Faith in Reason*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan F. Parsons (London: SCM Press, 2002), 199, as cited in Aidan Nichols, O.P., *From Hermes to Benedict XVI: Faith and Reason in Modern Catholic Thought* (Leominster Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2009), 214.

⁷⁴The CDF statement on Rosmini appeared in late June 2001 and was reported in *L’Osservatore Romano* on 1 July 2001. See David McLaurin, “Houdinis in the Holy Office,” *Tablet* (7 July 2001): 979–80. The CDF stated that, while the forty Rosminian propositions condemned in 1887 remained erroneous, they do not faithfully represent his thought. See *Origins* 31 (16 August 2001): 201–02.

philosophy the encyclical presupposes, but it is not the only possible one. Given what Henrici calls the “inner relation between Blondel’s thought and the lines of thinking” in the encyclical, as well as the pope’s desire to remain open “to a wide spectrum of Christian philosophies,” John Paul II, Henrici thinks, deliberately avoided mention of Maurice Blondel.⁷⁵

The Third Step: Address to the international Blondel conference, 2000. As if to confirm Henrici’s reading of the encyclical, Pope John Paul II took a third step. The occasion was an international meeting at Rome’s Gregorian University to relate Blondel explicitly to the themes of *Fides et ratio*. The meeting’s theme was “Blondel Between *L’Action* and The Trilogy.” On 18 November 2000, the pope told those assembled at the Gregorian that their meeting had particular relevance to urgent issues he had raised in the encyclical. These issues included the study of philosophy as a *preparatio fidei* (paragraph 61) and the relationship of theology, as

⁷⁵Peter Henrici, S.J., “The One Who Went Unnamed: Maurice Blondel in the Encyclical *Fides et ratio*,” *Communio* 26 (Fall 1999): 609–21, trans. D.C. Schindler, quotations at 617–20. In “La descendance blondélienne,” Henrici uses the omission of Blondel’s name from the encyclical to suggest that “even today [the taboo against mentioning the name of Blondel] is not entirely lifted.” See 309. In his chapter-length treatment of *Fides et ratio*, Aidan Nichols finds clear traces of Blondel. Paragraph 7, e.g., with its emphasis on “a moment of fundamental decision” Nichols reads as “highly reminiscent of Blondel’s story of the way the option for the supernatural takes place in the pages of *L’Action*.” But on the whole, Nichols reads the encyclical as representing a “synthetic outcome” to the debates about faith and reason and philosophy and theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The pope, he argues, espouses, in chapter 6, Gilson’s understanding of “Christian philosophy” (Nichols, *From Hermes to Benedict XVI*, chapter 10, on Blondel at 207–08, 212; on Gilson at 216). This reading is at odds with that of Avery Dulles cited in note 41 above. Dulles finds the pope opting in paragraphs 75–76 for de Lubac’s mediation between Gilson and Blondel, a variant on the third philosophical “stance” treated in these paragraphs. Dulles also clarifies the continuities amid the “striking differences” between Vatican I’s dogmatic constitution on faith and reason, *Dei Filius*, and *Fides et ratio*. Chapter 2 of *Dei Filius* teaches that “God can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason” (Deum ... naturali humanae rationis lumine e rebus creatis certo cognosci posse). Dulles again likens the pope’s positions on faith and reason to de Lubac’s, going so far as to speculate, as Henrici did with Blondel, on why de Lubac’s name is not mentioned. See Dulles, “Faith and Reason: From Vatican I to John Paul II,” in *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought*, 193–208, at 204 for his remarks on Blondel and de Lubac.

the science of faith, with philosophical reason (paragraphs 64–69). His next words recalled his 1993 letter, which he then went on to cite.

At the root of Maurice Blondel’s philosophy, there is a sharp perception of the drama of the separation between faith and reason (cf. paragraphs 45–48) and the intrepid will to overcome this separation as contrary to the nature of things. The philosopher of Aix is thus an eminent representative of Christian philosophy, understood as rational speculation, in vital union with faith (cf. paragraph 76), in a dual fidelity to the demands of intellectual research and to the Magisterium.⁷⁶

Was this an act of reparation, purification of memory? Perhaps only Maurice Blondel himself could answer that. In any case, history has been kind to the philosopher of Aix. More than a century after *Pascendi*, one might faithfully read the intervening history of Catholic theology, from the perspective sketched here, as the “triumph of Maurice Blondel.” It is a triumph that came a century out of time and fraught with irony and deep ambivalence. Perhaps Blondel would not have been surprised.

Writing in 1980, Henri de Lubac credited to Blondel the “main impulse” for Latin theology’s “return to a more authentic tradition.”⁷⁷ Later he tried to capture the impression Blondel made on him at their first meeting in 1922 by citing an unpublished word portrait of Blondel written in 1935. It is something like the impression Michael Kerlin made on me.

In his presence I understood from the outset what it meant to consider the teaching profession as a kind of priesthood. . . . In Maurice Blondel’s patient voice and sustained eloquence there were at that time inflections of goodness, charity and urbanity, in the broad sense of that word, that I have rarely found in so developed and refined a degree in men of the Church. In the conversation of this so-called great “combatant” of ideas, there was not the least trace of [that] bitterness I left Maurice

⁷⁶*Discours de Jean Paul II aux participants au Colloque International “Blondel entre ‘L’Action’ et La Trilogie,”* Saturday, 18 November 2000. The text is found on the Vatican website. The translation is my own.

⁷⁷de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, 37 and the explanation of Blondel’s impact that follows.

Blondel not only enlightened but calmed, and, reading his long works, which are more spoken than written, I found once again that immense patience, at once gentle and persistent, which ended in triumphing over all⁷⁸

This, perhaps, was Blondel's truest triumph. □

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⁷⁸de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 19, citing a 1935 description of Blondel by Antoine Denat, a professor of literature.