

# THE UNFOLDING OF MODERNISM IN FRANCE: BLONDEL, LABERTHONNIÈRE, LE ROY

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**T**HE PURPOSE of this essay is to sketch the approximately twenty-year history of one of the most important movements in Roman Catholic theology between Trent and Vatican II. While Modernism unfolded chiefly in England, France, and Italy, and to a limited extent traces of it appeared in Germany and the United States, I limit this study to the Modernist movement in France, where its philosophical and theological aspects were most profoundly developed.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, I focus on three men, Maurice Blondel, Lucien Laberthonnière, and Edouard Le Roy, who are linked together not only by personal association but also by a common theme in their constructive theology, that is, by a turning to man and to his religious experience as the basis and starting point of theology. Loisy, too, since he was central to the Modernist movement and served as a direct catalyst for the thinking of these men, plays a large role in the history of their development and will be considered in that light.

The contribution I hope to make with this historical study lies as much in the suppositions on which it is based as in the data it presents. I approach Modernism from a positive and constructive point of view. In so doing, I may help to uncover a somewhat buried tradition of liberal theology that is peculiarly Roman Catholic and extremely relevant to the theological discussion of today.

“Modernism” is a curious word within Roman Catholicism. The word itself contains a fundamental ambivalence which may be explained as follows. The term “Modernism” was officially adopted and precisely defined towards the end of a historical movement of thought by the Encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis*, which constructed in systematic fashion the “Modernism” it condemned.<sup>2</sup> Surveying the writings of the period, the authors of the Encyclical drew together those specific themes

<sup>1</sup>Modernism was much more than a theological movement. Extremely complex, it included social, pastoral, even political aspects and aspirations. My discussion deals only with the theological aspects.

<sup>2</sup>The word “Modernism” has a wider and more general application which is of little concern here. There is evidence of the use of the word during the “Modernist” movement itself before the Encyclical to refer to progressive theological developments. But this usage was not common and *Pascendi* really defined the word for Roman Catholic usage. Cf. Jean Rivière, *Le modernisme dans l'église* (Paris, 1929) pp. 22-34.

and ideas which seemed to constitute a threat or be contrary to Catholic teaching. These ideas were interpreted in a most extreme way and organized into a coherent system or doctrine which is called "Modernism." The result is that the word is entirely negative. Like the abstract word "naturalism" or "rationalism," "Modernism" describes an extreme that must be avoided, a condemned position. But at the same time the word also refers in fact to a definite historical movement of thought within the Catholic Church that began around the year 1900 and ended a short time after its condemnation in 1907, depending on what historians call preludes and aftermath. This movement of thought was fundamentally healthy. Responding to a crisis, it was a legitimate attempt to confront Catholic doctrine with the exigencies of science and modern intellectual culture. Insofar as the word "Modernism" refers to this limited and chronologically rather well-defined movement of thought, it is neutral and historians use it that way, that is, without involving any qualitative judgment on the thought of the men involved.<sup>3</sup> Thus the ambivalence: the word refers at the same time to a theoretical position that is condemned and to a concrete movement of thought.

This ambivalence is written into the word itself and is the cause of a kind of permanent confusion. A few examples will illustrate this. *Pascendi* names no one a "Modernist"; it constructs an abstract system. But all the same, the Encyclical consistently refers to the "Modernists" who hold the condemned doctrine. In constructing the abstract and coherent system, the Encyclical draws together ideas from the actual movement of thought, especially from the writings of Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell. As a consequence, Loisy and Tyrrell are often considered the archetypal "Modernists" and their thought is *ipso facto* considered heterodox and condemned. The Encyclical, however, precisely because it was describing a self-consistent mosaic out of the pieces of the period, did not have to be faithful to the context or integrity of anyone's thought. It is not surprising, then, that neither Loisy nor Tyrrell recognized their integral positions in the Encyclical account of "Modernism," because indeed it does not represent them. The result is that, historically, it must be honestly asked not only whether or not Loisy and Tyrrell were "Modernists," but also whether or not there were any "Modernists" at all.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Alec R. Vidler, *20th Century Defenders of the Faith* (New York, 1965) p. 35, and Harry W. Paul, "In Quest of Kerygma: Catholic Intellectual Life in the Nineteenth Century," *American Historical Review* 75 (1969) 420.

<sup>4</sup> The point here is not that there were no "Modernists," but that whether or not someone was a "Modernist" in the terms of *Pascendi* can be determined only by historical study. Ironically, it cannot be determined simply on the basis of the fact that someone was condemned or silenced. The consequences of *Pascendi* were devastating: at once there were no single "Modernists" who recognized their positions integrally represented in that document, and yet the "Modernists" were everywhere.

Another problem is seen in the case of the Catholic historian. As was indicated, those who were suspected of "Modernism" did not recognize their thought in the Encyclical, even though the term was accepted by some. Furthermore, not only does *Pascendi* not represent accurately the historical movement it refers to, it positively distorts it.<sup>5</sup> Yet *Pascendi*, being an authoritative papal statement, has been taken by Catholic historians as a normative definition of the historical movement itself and used as a hermeneutical principle for interpreting it.<sup>6</sup> Thus *Pascendi* led not only to a situation in which the Catholic theologian and the objective historian meant two radically different things by the word "Modernism," but also to a situation in which one could only expect a neutral view of this historical movement from outside Catholicism.

The confusion would be seen again if, because of Catholic usage, one were forced to say that men like Blondel, Laberthonnière or Le Roy participated fully in the "Modernist" movement and yet were not "Modernists." This would make little sense to those aware of history but unversed in the theology of Pius X, as is becoming more and more the case even within Catholic theology. Or again, by the same confusion, contemporary theology, which is taking up themes actually developed earlier during the "Modernist" period, can be rendered suspect simply by noting this fact. And this is further complicated when it is recalled that many positions condemned by *Pascendi* and the syllabus of errors that preceded it by two months, *Lamentabili*, are commonly held by Catholic theologians today.

In a period when theology must be open and ecumenical, it would seem that the particular Roman Catholic usage of the word "Modernism" is part of a private language that is out of place. For this reason I use the word "Modernism" here to refer simply to the specific historical movement within Catholicism during the first decade of this century. Its sense is therefore neutral. This does not undermine the fact that the abstract system which *Pascendi* describes is certainly a menace not only to Catholicism but to Christianity itself. But because this Encyclical cannot be taken as a description of what was actually being said during the historical movement in question, the strictly historical usage of the word places *Pascendi* aside and thus makes of it what it really is, namely, an abstract and authoritative warning against dangers to be avoided in

<sup>5</sup>The movement was not a unified system. It did not have its roots in nor was it founded upon philosophical premises. *Pascendi* is not a description of the actual historical movement to which it refers. Cf. Alec R. Vidler, *The Modernist Movement in the Roman Church: Its Origins and Outcome* (Cambridge, 1934) pp. 1-10; also Emile Poulat, *Histoire, dogme et critique dans la crise moderniste* (Paris, 1962) p. 9; hereinafter referred to as *Histoire*.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Rivière, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

any theology. The following pages, then, will show how the thought of three Modernists, Blondel, Laberthonnière, and Le Roy, developed during the years from 1893 to 1913.<sup>7</sup>

Maurice Blondel was born in Dijon in 1861; Lucien Laberthonnière was born in Chazelet, a small village in Berry, in 1860; Edouard Le Roy, about ten years their junior, was born in Paris in 1870. All three grew up into a France whose Catholic intellectual life was beginning a dramatic renaissance. The Modernist movement can be seen as its full flowering forth.

#### THE APOLOGETIC QUESTION

The period between 1893 and 1913 includes the early writings of these three men and easily embraces the Modernist movement itself. The division of this period into four stages dealing with (1) the apologetic question, (2) the biblical question, (3) the question of dogma, and (4) the decline of Modernism, is a convenient manner of schematizing events in relation to the men in question. Even though this scheme reflects different aspects and phases of the unfolding Modernism, it should not be taken as an interpretation of the whole movement. The apologetic question, for example, arose after Blondel's publication of *L'Action* in 1893 but was a live issue throughout the period.

#### *Maurice Blondel (1861-1949)*

Blondel was essentially a religious philosopher, one whose long philosophical and apologetic career was motivated by an intention to "elaborate a philosophy which, in its own autonomous movement, would spontaneously open up out towards Christianity."<sup>8</sup> At the very beginning of that career, upon his entry into the *Ecole nationale supérieure* in

<sup>7</sup> Vidler, in his more recent *A Variety of Catholic Modernists* (Cambridge, 1970), prefers not to call Blondel a Modernist. His reasons are that Blondel was not condemned (but neither was von Hügel), that he did not think himself a Modernist (but few did in the sense of *Pascendi*), that he was not touched by it (but neither was Laberthonnière, who is considered a Modernist), that he fought against what he understood as the Modernism of others (as did Laberthonnière), and that he had a very ecclesiastical mentality and was extremely sensitive to papal authority (cf. pp. 79-82). While this last is probably the strongest reason, still it can be shown that there were really two Blondels of this period, the one seen in his attitudes, fears, and piety, the other in the basic ideas, logic, and influence of his thought. We call Blondel a Modernist because he participated in this movement in spite of certain contradictions in the man. And we hope that Vidler's friend was not a prophet when he cautioned: "If you did call him a modernist, he would appear from heaven and fell you to the ground" (cited by Vidler, *ibid.*, p. 97).

<sup>8</sup> Henri Bouillard, *Blondel et le christianisme* (Paris, 1961) p. 15. Bouillard gives a short survey of Blondel's writings during the period in question on pp. 15-48. A fuller account of Blondel's role in this apologetic movement is Raymond Saint-Jean, *L'Apologetique philosophique: Blondel 1893-1913* (Paris, 1966).

1881, Blondel was scandalized by the rationalistic attitudes he found there. How can a philosopher take seriously a doctrine that demands the submission of mind and will to an external supernatural order, and that under pain of eternal damnation? How can a philosopher be obliged to take account of an event that occurred so long ago in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire, while simultaneously rejoicing at being ignorant of so many other great but contingent events which only impoverish the internal life? The intention of the project to write a study of human action reflects Blondel's personal experience of the divorce between philosophy and Christianity in the French philosophical community.<sup>9</sup>

After rewriting it six times, Blondel finally presented, defended, and published his thesis *L'Action* at the Sorbonne in 1893.<sup>10</sup> The book is a long phenomenological analysis of human action which seeks to uncover its inner and implicit logic. In the introduction Blondel explicitly refuses to define the term "action" and says that the richness of the category must be allowed to display itself in the course of the work.<sup>11</sup> As a first meaning, however, "action" may be said to correspond to what modern philosophers term "existence."<sup>12</sup> Beginning with the question about one's personal destiny, which cannot be escaped, Blondel traces the expanding horizons of human action and achievement. He shows that the dynamism of human action, manifested in an insatiable desire for an absolute beneath every finite act of willing, demands a supernatural communication by God, whether or not it is actually given. Blondel

<sup>9</sup>These objections were registered by a fellow student; cf. Bouillard, *op. cit.*, p. 71. Blondel discusses the sources and influences of his thesis, as well as the ideas against which he was reacting, in a letter to Auguste Valensin, June 10, 1931, in Maurice Blondel and Auguste Valensin, *Correspondance* 3 (ed. Henri de Lubac; Paris: 1957) 175-81; hereinafter referred to as BV. Among the influences, Blondel cites several German idealists. The relation between *L'Action* and this tradition is studied by John J. McNeill, *The Blondelian Synthesis* (Leiden, 1966).

<sup>10</sup>Maurice Blondel, *L'Action: Essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique* (Paris, 1893); hereinafter referred to as *L'Action*. There were two versions of the early *L'Action*. The first was the version Blondel actually defended, 146 copies of which were printed but were not intended for sale. The other commercial edition cited here includes a revision and expansion of the first after p. 401; 750 copies were printed. One year later the book was sold out and Blondel never reprinted it during his lifetime. In 1950 the first commercial edition of *L'Action* was reprinted with identical pagination by Presses Universitaires de France as *Les premiers écrits de Maurice Blondel* 1. An account of the double printing of the original *L'Action* is given by Blondel in a letter to Valensin, May 16, 1912 (BV 2 320-23). An account of his defense, written by Blondel, was published by Joannès Wehrlé as "Une soutenance de thèse," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 154 (1907) 113-43.

<sup>11</sup>Blondel, *L'Action*, p. viii.

<sup>12</sup>Jean Lacroix, *Maurice Blondel: An Introduction to the Man and His Philosophy* (tr. John C. Guinness; New York, 1968) pp. 18, 21-22.

concludes the study by discussing hypothetically the possibility that Christianity may be the response to that demand.

Blondel's explicit raising of the religious problem and his reference to a supernatural and to Christianity were seriously questioned and severely criticized within the philosophical community. In his anonymous short notice in the newly-founded *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, Léon Brunschvicg noted that a work which terminated in a doctrine of transcendence and a literal practice of Catholicism would find unyielding adversaries among the defenders of reason. He noted as well that "the notion of immanence" was "the basis and very condition of every philosophical doctrine."<sup>13</sup> The issue did not sit well with the administrators of education either, and for the next two years Blondel received no university appointment.<sup>14</sup> He was further concerned when in 1895, from the Catholic side, an otherwise sympathetic writer described *L'Action* as a new psychological apologetic. It was to justify his purely philosophical method, then, that Blondel wrote his long *Letter on Apologetics*.<sup>15</sup>

Written primarily for the philosophical community, as he explained many times afterwards, Blondel's *Letter on Apologetics* of 1896 is less an apologetic and more an account of the philosophical presuppositions for apologetics. In it he tries to justify his strictly philosophical method in *L'Action*. Here one finds Blondel's often-quoted definitions of the principle and the method of immanence. The principle of immanence

is the idea, which is at bottom perfectly true, that nothing can enter into a man's mind which does not come out of him (*que ne sorte de lui*) and correspond in some way to a need for development, and that there is nothing in the nature of historical or traditional teaching or obligation imposed from without which counts for him, no truth and no precept which is acceptable, unless it is, in some way, autonomous and autochthonous.<sup>16</sup>

The method of immanence that flows from this principle corresponds

<sup>13</sup> [Léon Brunschvicg], "L'Action," review of book of the same title by Maurice Blondel, in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 1 (1893) supplément 1. Blondel responded with a long letter to the editor: Maurice Blondel, "Correspondance," *ibid.* 2 (1894) supplément 5-8.

<sup>14</sup> Blondel was finally nominated to the Faculté des lettres of Aix-Marseille in December 1896, and the rest of his life was centered in Aix-en-Provence.

<sup>15</sup> The original title of this work is "Lettre sur les exigences de la pensée contemporaine en matière d'apologétique et sur la méthode de la philosophie dans l'étude du problème religieux," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 131 (1896); 132 (1896). It is reprinted in *Les premiers écrits de Maurice Blondel* 2 (Paris, 1956) 5-95. Its English translation is found in Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma* (tr. Iltyd Trethowen; New York, 1964) pp. 125-208; hereinafter referred to as *Letter*.

<sup>16</sup> Blondel, *Letter*, p. 34 (152). First page references are to the French text; those in parentheses refer to the English translation.

closely to what Blondel calls in *L'Action* a phenomenology of the logic of action:

The method of immanence, then, can consist in nothing else than in trying to equate, in our own consciousness, what we appear to think and to will and to do with what we do and will and think in actual fact—so that behind factitious negations and ends which are not genuinely willed may be discovered our innermost affirmations and the implacable needs which they imply.<sup>17</sup>

In this way Blondel adopted the term “method of immanence” from his philosophical critics, who insisted that it was the prerequisite of modern philosophy. By endorsing this method Blondel guaranteed philosophy its relative autonomy. He went on to insist that the supernatural is beyond the competence of philosophy; for ultimately it is transcendent, and its acceptance is a function of a basic option on the part of man. In thus resolving the problem, however, Blondel only found himself immersed in a more serious one.

If the philosophical community was more or less satisfied with Blondel's clarifications, this was not the case with many scholastic theologians. The *Letter on Apologetics*, especially by advocating a method of immanence, touched off a controversy on the apologetic question that would last all through the period in question here. Blondel constantly asserted thereafter that the audience of his *Letter* were the rationalists of the university world. He did not think to consider the theologians and had no idea of the intellectual situation of scholasticism, of its inability to comprehend his position.<sup>18</sup> Blondel's philosophical prose in the *Letter* as elsewhere is often tortuous and difficult. But what he intended with his method of immanence, its necessity, and the problem it responded to, these are clear. The attacks only illustrate to what extent the attackers were isolated from their contemporary culture.<sup>19</sup>

The next eight years of Blondel's life, up until 1904, were marked by great anxiety and relative silence on his part apropos of the apologetic

<sup>17</sup> Blondel, *Letter*, p. 39 (157). The phrase “method of immanence” never appears in *L'Action*.

<sup>18</sup> Cf., e.g., letters of Blondel to Valensin, July 11, 1912 (BV 2, 338); to Abbé Picard, Dec. 19, 1896, cited in Maurice Blondel and Joannès Wehrlé, *Correspondance* 1 (ed. Henri de Lubac; Paris, 1969) 44; cited hereafter as BW; to Abbé Pacaud, Dec. 20, 1896, in Maurice Blondel, *Lettres philosophiques* (Paris, 1961) pp. 121–23; cited hereafter as LP.

<sup>19</sup> Another source of misunderstanding was Blondel's critique of the forms of apologetics in use. His critique was taken as rejection, and it was imagined that Blondel wanted to substitute his method of immanence in their place. His intention, however, was to show that these methods were insufficient in themselves and needed an integrating factor. His method of immanence was to serve as a basis for an “integral apologetic” which included other methods.

question. His reaction to the attack of the Dominican Schwalm was one of self-doubt, and he made a pilgrimage to Lourdes to pray and seek light, docility, and detachment from his own views.<sup>20</sup> The charges against him were far-ranging and wild: subjectivism, immanentism, naturalism, etc. In 1899 a papal encyclical warned against subjectivist philosophy, and Blondel worried whether it was aimed at him. Later on in the same year he learned that people were pressing for his and Laberthonnière's condemnation in Rome.<sup>21</sup> So great was the tension and so violent the polemic that he decided early not to enter the public controversy that surrounded the apologetic question. A significant exception to this is an interview explaining his position that Blondel had published under the name of a close friend, the abbé F. Mallet.<sup>22</sup> Another is a letter to the abbé Pêchegut which Blondel allowed to be published after much hesitation and doubt as "A propos de la certitude religieuse."<sup>23</sup> This whole period between 1896 and 1904, in which he saw himself misunderstood and misrepresented by scholastic representatives of orthodoxy, caused Blondel considerable suffering. But at the same time that he remained silent, he had an outspoken defender in Lucien Laberthonnière.

#### *Lucien Laberthonnière (1860-1932)*

Laberthonnière entered the Grand séminaire at Bourges at the age of twenty for the six years of philosophy and theology preparatory to ordination. Of these years he wrote to Blondel:

The religious question arose in me almost naturally. There was a need inside me for a response, a need of the soul. And you can imagine in those conditions how the instruction available there must have appeared to me: empty, artificial, incoherent, the response to nothing at all. Almost in spite of myself I resolved to

<sup>20</sup> Letter of Blondel to Laberthonnière, Oct. 1, 1896, in Maurice Blondel and Lucien Laberthonnière, *Correspondance philosophique* (ed. Claude Tresmontant; Paris, 1961) p. 103; hereinafter referred to as BL.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. letters of von Hügel to Laberthonnière, Dec. 2, 1899, of Laberthonnière to Blondel, Dec. 5, 1899, of Blondel to Laberthonnière, Dec. 8, 1899 (BL, pp. 134-38). Cf. also Maurice Blondel and Henri Bremond, *Correspondance 1* (ed. André Blanchet; Paris, 1970), p. 233. (Hereinafter referred to as BB.)

<sup>22</sup> F. Mallet [Maurice Blondel], "Un entretien avec M. Blondel," *Revue du clergé français* 27 (1901) 627-36. Everything that Mallet published on Blondel during this period was Blondel's own work; cf. Saint-Jean, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>23</sup> *Revue du clergé français* 29 (1902) 643-59; cf. BV 1, 57. Blondel published other philosophical material during this period. Moreover, in his correspondence during these years he continually probed and clarified his thoughts on the apologetic question: e.g., he had an extended exchange with one of his critics between 1901 and 1902; cf. Saint-Jean, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-100.



denounce it, to point out its radical insufficiency, and to work at substituting something that is living and lived. Ever since then this idea has never left me.<sup>24</sup>

Laberthonnière completed his seminary training in 1886 and the same year entered the religious congregation of the Oratory. There he encountered a spirit quite other than the decadent Aristotelian scholasticism of the seminary, a current of thought much closer to Augustine. He continued to experience an interior restlessness, a need "to pose the religious problem in a philosophical way" but "without separating religion from philosophy as has been the tendency, if not the deliberate intention, since the Middle Ages. Pascal and Maine de Biran confirmed me in this outlook," he wrote, "and in that way I joined the Augustinian tradition."<sup>25</sup>

The year after entering the Oratorians, Laberthonnière was appointed professor of philosophy at the Congregation's college at Juilly. During this time he took advantage of the proximity of Paris to attend courses at the Sorbonne and eventually earned his license in philosophy there. In 1897 he was appointed superior of the Ecole Massillon in Paris and in 1900 superior at Juilly. Forced to leave Juilly in 1903 because of laws passed against Catholic schools, Laberthonnière took up residence on rue Las-Cas behind the Palais Bourbon in Paris, where he lived the rest of his life immersed in philosophical and religious writing.<sup>26</sup> He was direct, outspoken, and convinced, and a large part of his career unfolded in a polemic atmosphere.<sup>27</sup> Long before his definitive move to Paris, he was deeply involved in the apologetic question.

Certainly one of the most significant events in Laberthonnière's life was his reading of *L'Action* in 1894. He recorded his enthusiasm in a letter to Blondel that same year: "For my part, I don't even dare tell you all the values I see in your book, lest I appear given to exaggeration."<sup>28</sup> This was the first letter in a correspondence that would last over thirty-five years and include close to four thousand letters. It reflects a remarkably close friendship, mutual respect, and collaboration during the years studied here through later periods of misunderstanding to final separation. In 1897, however, Laberthonnière decided to take up the

<sup>24</sup> Letter to Blondel, Jan. 29, 1900 (BL, pp. 145-46). A sketch of Laberthonnière's life is given by Paul Beillevert in *Laberthonnière: L'homme et l'oeuvre* (ed. Paul Beillevert; Paris, 1972) pp. 11-42.

<sup>25</sup> Cited from a letter of Laberthonnière by M.-M. d'Hendecourt, "Laberthonnière (1860-1932)," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 63 (1960) 54.

<sup>26</sup> M.-M. d'Hendecourt, *Personnes et liberté: Essai sur la philosophie du Père Laberthonnière* (Paris, 1947) pp. 10-11, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Bremond once affectionately referred to Laberthonnière as "le violent de la rue Las-Cas": Letter of Bremond to Blondel, April 5, 1906 (BB 2, 66).

<sup>28</sup> Letter to Blondel, April 18, 1894 (BL, p. 66).

defense of Blondel's method of immanence against its theological attackers. He entered the apologetic debate with one of his most important articles, "Le problème religieux."<sup>29</sup>

Laberthonnière begins this article by indicating that he will engage the religious problem of how man can know the supernatural on a theological level, that is, as opposed to Blondel's philosophical method. Supposing that man is in contact with God supernaturally, Laberthonnière asks in Christian theological terms how this can be the case. It cannot be through pure reason, for this would constitute rationalism. Besides, the term of every objective apologetic is precisely an act of faith. Ultimately, he argues, one cannot presume that, concretely, the natural and supernatural are two separate spheres; were this the case, they could never be united. One must presume rather that they are actually united historically. Prior to the conscious acceptance of this union in an act of faith, there is an anterior synthesis of grace and nature, God penetrating the natural order. Thus grace is the basis of the solution to the religious problem; the theological justification for the method of immanence is a theology of grace, God immanent to man and overcoming the distance between the two orders. If one wants to discover the unity of the natural and the supernatural orders, one must look for that union in man by a method of immanence.

This article was to exercise considerable influence. Laberthonnière wrote later that he considered it the point of departure for his own theological reconstruction.<sup>30</sup> After reading the first half of the article, Blondel wrote to him: "The more I return to it, the more light, force, and newness I find. Nothing like it has been said, nothing closely related, as far as I know."<sup>31</sup> Blondel recognized his debt to Laberthonnière still later when he said that Laberthonnière saved the method of immanence by clearing aside certain theological difficulties and by showing how man is moved by a destiny that is not one of pure nature. Historically, man has a vocation for beatitude that is supernatural.<sup>32</sup>

But the article had a still further and more subtle influence on the future course of the discussion of the method of immanence. After Blondel's *Letter on Apologetics*, the theologians began reading *L'Action* as a Christian apologetic instead of an autonomous philosophical

<sup>29</sup> *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 132 (1897) 497-511, 615-32.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Laberthonnière's appreciation of his own work in Lacanuet, *La vie de l'église sous Léon XIII* (Paris, 1930) pp. 524-35; chapters 9-11 of this work (pp. 384-543) were written by Laberthonnière.

<sup>31</sup> Letter of Feb. 18, 1897 (BL, p. 107).

<sup>32</sup> Letter of Blondel to Valensin, May 8, 1912 (BV 2, 308). The point is important; for while the dependence of Laberthonnière on Blondel is well known, the influence of Laberthonnière on Blondel for certain theological themes is less recognized.

dialectic and often judged it in terms of the requirements of Catholic theology. He was accused of setting up his method of immanence as a self-sufficient apologetic, one that neglected the external and objective signs of revelation. In writing his article, Laberthonnière accepted, as it were, the theological terrain of discourse and in so doing helped shift the philosophical discussion with rationalism into a dialogue with Catholic theology. From this point on, the method of immanence would tend to be justified from a theological point of view, that is, in an attempt to show its consistency with theological tradition.

The next year, 1898, Laberthonnière published a long study called "Le dogmatisme moral," an important essay that lays down the epistemological suppositions of his philosophical thought.<sup>33</sup> In 1900 he responded to the criticisms it elicited with "Pour le dogmatisme moral."<sup>34</sup> The following year he contributed another important positive statement on apologetics in "L'Apologétique et la méthode de Pascal."<sup>35</sup> These articles, together with three others, constitute the central core of his thought published in 1903 under the title *Essais de philosophie religieuse*.<sup>36</sup> By this time the names of Blondel and Laberthonnière were closely connected as representing the necessity of a method of immanence in approaching the religious question.

The apologetic question is often seen as one of the preludes to the Modernist crisis. It is important to note that what has been described here is simply Blondel's and Laberthonnière's participation in a movement of thought that was much larger.<sup>37</sup> This apologetic question corresponds to the first and fundamental phase in the developing thought of Blondel and Laberthonnière. But side by side with this debate on apologetics was another movement of thought, quite distinct in its beginnings and intimately connected with the work of Alfred Loisy. The controversy centered around the biblical question. The second phase in the development of Blondel's and Laberthonnière's thought occurred when the apologetic and biblical questions began to dovetail.

<sup>33</sup> *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 136 (1898) 531-62; 137 (1898) 27-45, 146-71.

<sup>34</sup> *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 139 (1900) 398-425.

<sup>35</sup> *Revue du clergé français* 25 (1901) 472-98.

<sup>36</sup> *Essais de philosophie religieuse* (Paris, 1903). This has been re-edited along with another early volume by Laberthonnière as *Le réalisme chrétien précédé de Essais de philosophie religieuse* (ed. Claude Tresmontant; Paris, 1966). Unfortunately, this recent edition omits a significant article, the appendices, and the detailed table of contents of the original edition.

<sup>37</sup> Efforts at renewing apologetics went far beyond the work of Blondel and Laberthonnière. Such names as Ollé-Laprune, Georges Fonsegrive, Henri Bremond, and others are also intimately connected with the movement. Complicating things is the fact that the apologetic movement was often linked with the work of social-action groups and associated with liberalism in Church-state matters and politics. All of this added to the confusion of the period.

## THE BIBLICAL QUESTION

The single most important factor contributing to the Modernist movement in France was the introduction of the results and the method of biblical criticism. And the single most important figure in this biblical movement was Alfred Loisy. Loisy is viewed here in the very narrowly limited framework of his encounter with Blondel. Blondel's reaction to Loisy provides in turn important clues for interpreting Blondel's own thought. After sketching the main events constituting the biblical question, I shall make some comments to underline its significance and importance.<sup>38</sup>

Born in 1857, Loisy entered the seminary at Châlons in 1874. He was sent to the newly founded Institut catholique in Paris to continue his studies in 1878, withdrew a short time later because of health, but then returned in 1881 after his ordination and brief pastoral experience to pursue higher studies. Here he was influenced by Louis Duchesne, an enthusiastic advocate of modern and objective critical-historical method. He assisted as well at the lectures of Renan at the Collège de France and gradually became expert in biblical criticism. By 1890 Loisy was appointed to the chair of Sacred Scripture at the Institut in addition to teaching biblical languages. Even before this, however, his ideas were considered suspect. A series of events in 1893 led to his dismissal from the Institut that same year.<sup>39</sup> Loisy was then appointed chaplain to a convent school of Dominican sisters at Neuilly just outside Paris.

The assignment at Neuilly (1894-99) left Loisy time to continue his critical research as well as to engage the question of an understanding of Catholicism that could be reconciled with his historical findings. Through von Hügel, Loisy was introduced to Newman and read his theory of the development of dogma. Moreover, he composed an apologetic work which, though not published by itself, served as a basis for *L'Évangile et l'église*. He continued to publish during this period, many articles appearing under pseudonyms; among the most important were the "Firmin" articles, which appeared in *Revue du clergé français*

<sup>38</sup> Undoubtedly the best single source for this question is Emile Poulat (n. 5 above). Besides the histories of Modernism, one may consult on Loisy his two autobiographies: *Choses passées* (Paris, 1913) and *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire religieuse de notre temps* 1-3 (Paris, 1930-31). Albert Houtin and Félix Sartiaux, *Alfred Loisy: Sa vie—son oeuvre* (ann. and ed. Emile Poulat; Paris, 1960), should also be consulted, for it gives a different impression of the man. One of the main contributions of Vidler's *A Variety of Catholic Modernists* is his interpretation of the meaning of Loisy's "loss of faith" prior to his participation in the Modernist movement; cf. pp. 20-62.

<sup>39</sup> An article by Mgr. d'Hulst, rector of the Institut catholique, on biblical exegesis unwittingly compromised Loisy's position. This was followed later in the year by Loisy's publication of the final lecture of his course in Scripture, which tried to clarify his view of historical method applied to Scripture. His dismissal was brought about by the controversy these two publications caused.

between 1899 and 1900. The first five of these articles treated the theological themes of development, the nature of religion, and the nature of revelation. The last article turned from theory to the history of the development of biblical religion and was discontinued after the first installment at the order of the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Richard.<sup>40</sup>

During the academic year 1899–1900, Harnack delivered his lectures at the University of Berlin on the essence of Christianity which, upon publication, had enormous success.<sup>41</sup> When the French translation appeared in May 1902, Loisy's immediate reaction was a desire to respond. Encouraged by friends to do so and having all the necessary materials at hand, Loisy composed *L'Évangile et l'église* in six weeks.<sup>42</sup> Published in November 1902, the book was greeted with enthusiasm by the younger clergy and with initial favor by the more liberal Catholic press. But by the beginning of 1903 the attack had begun.<sup>43</sup> The influence, reaction, and controversy that surrounded "the little book" made it the center of an intellectual turmoil that would last for several years and would begin to subside only after the Church's condemnation of "Modernism."

Blondel's reading of *L'Évangile et l'église* resulted in an exchange of letters with Loisy in early 1903 that constitutes one of the significant contributions of the whole Modernist movement on the questions of historical and theological method.<sup>44</sup> Blondel immediately reacted to Loisy's assertion that Jesus had a limited consciousness, a position he feared concealed an implicit and untenable Christology. Loisy maintained, however, that he was writing as a historian and that this was the inevitable conclusion of a critical examination of New Testament texts. Not being an exegete, Blondel quickly challenged a historical method that would lead to such a conclusion. A strictly historical method, he argued, cannot be employed with religious data, since by a hermeneutical circle it reduces these data to events explicable in the natural order.<sup>45</sup> Loisy, in turn, clearly responded that as a historian he operated with a methodological reserve. He did not attempt to determine the whole reality of religious data and explicitly left open the question of a theological or faith interpretation. The problem for Blondel at this point

<sup>40</sup> Poulat analyzes these articles, *Histoire*, pp. 74–88.

<sup>41</sup> Adolf Harnack, *What is Christianity?* (tr. Thomas Bailey Saunders; New York, 1957).

<sup>42</sup> Paris, 1902. Cf. Poulat, *Histoire*, p. 60.

<sup>43</sup> The book was condemned locally by Cardinal Richard in January, but the majority of French bishops did not follow suit.

<sup>44</sup> These letters are found in *Au coeur de la crise moderniste: Le dossier inédit d'une controverse* (ed. René Marlé; Paris, 1960) pp. 72–111; Hereinafter referred to as AC.

<sup>45</sup> The term "hermeneutical circle" is not Blondel's. What it means here is that the positivistic suppositions of scientific history govern interpretation and ultimately exclude the supernatural from the events considered.

was that a limitation in Jesus' consciousness left faith in his divinity with no real historical support. The result would be fideism. In short, Loisy's limiting of Jesus' consciousness was in effect a negation of his divinity.<sup>46</sup>

In early October of this same year, in an attempt to clarify his position in *L'Évangile et l'église*, Loisy worsened his situation irremediably with his book *Autour d'un petit livre*.<sup>47</sup> Growing impatient, Loisy puts forward in *Autour* a clear but often ironical statement of the possibility of an autonomous historical method, free from the tutelage of scholastic theology. But by confronting head-on the question of the relation of theology and history, always in the context of particular doctrines, Loisy seemed to abandon his chances of success.<sup>48</sup>

The effects of what Loisy wrote, the ways in which it was received, were probably more important than the actual positions he took. Those close to Blondel grew increasingly disturbed by the scandalous influence of Loisy on younger clergy and students and began to exert pressure on him to publicly enter the fray. Toward the beginning of December, then, Blondel began the painfully difficult composition of *Histoire et dogme*. Although he had much material at hand from his exchange with Loisy, the difficulty he had composing this work is understandable. Besides poor health, there was the subtlety of the question itself around which raged a controversy involving every possible extreme position. Besides, Blondel himself was suspect in some quarters. His name was not infrequently associated with Loisy's by the theological right, and this had to be rectified. But in attacking Loisy's "historicism," he did not want to seem to endorse the scholastic "extrinsicism" which was equally odious in his eyes.<sup>49</sup> Finally, having been at least partially satisfied with Loisy through correspondence, he could not bring himself to attack the man in attacking what he considered a dangerous and erroneous methodology. He thus decided to address himself to two abstract and ideal systems of ideas which he himself constructed, i.e., extrinsicism and historicism. In so doing he ran the risk of pleasing no one. It was only after much hesitation that *Histoire et dogme* appeared early in 1904.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Von Hügel supported Loisy's findings on Jesus, and Blondel and he exchanged their Christological views during this same period of early 1903. This correspondence is found in AC, pp. 114-151.

<sup>47</sup> Paris, 1903. From this book were taken about 40 of the 65 propositions condemned by *Lamentabili*; cf. Poulat, *Histoire*, p. 184, n. 44.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Poulat, *Histoire*, pp. 185-87.

<sup>49</sup> Blondel uses these words in a completely pejorative sense to designate not the use but "the abuse of exclusively historical or exclusively dogmatic preoccupations": letter of Blondel to Mourret, Oct. 7, 1904 (AC, p. 205). Blondel's correspondence with Gayraud, one of his scholastic critics, gave him an inside view of extrinsicism; cf. n. 23 above.

<sup>50</sup> This hesitation reached a veritable crisis level by the end of December. It must be said that Blondel acted with great courage in publishing *Histoire et dogme*. He was driven by

Blondel published his chef-d'œuvre on religious historical method in three successive issues of *La quinzaine* during January and February of 1904.<sup>51</sup> In it he strikes a middle position between what he labels extrinsicism and historicism.<sup>52</sup> Extrinsicism refers to a decadent form of the scholastic apologetic whose sole structure or logic is to demonstrate empirically and rationally an objective credibility for the divine authority of the Christian message through miracles. This faith is then imposed on the passive believer authoritatively, as it were from the outside. By historicism Blondel means a doctrine of immanentism into which a historian, lacking an explicit and critical theory of method, will ultimately slide when dealing with religious data. To the extent that one succeeds in determining and explaining religious data, as the historian would ordinary positive and empirical events, one at the same time distorts the religious or transcendent character of these data. Blondel's own mediation between these extremes rests on an existential view of the "real history" beneath its historical and written record. His philosophy of action allows him to see "tradition," grounded in the actual lives of Christians, as the continuous link in the development of dogma. And, inversely, this living tradition of faith life reaching to the present allows the Christian historian, in faith, to recognize the integral supernatural reality of the originating events of Christianity at the other end of history.

*Histoire et dogme* did not put an end to the controversy, and the question of theology and history and apologetics continued to occupy attention through 1904 and into 1905. A campaign was launched against Blondel in the conservative Catholic press, and he was prepared lest, after having placed Loisy on the Index, Rome turn towards himself and Laberthonnière.<sup>53</sup> Blondel tried to clarify his position in an important

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the conviction that no one else could say what he had to say against Loisy. Cf. letter of Blondel to Wehrlé, Dec. 29, 1903 (AC, p. 178); also AC, pp. 152-81, for the correspondence preceding the publication of *Histoire et dogme*.

<sup>51</sup> Maurice Blondel, "Histoire et dogme: Les lacunes philosophiques de l'exégèse moderne," *La quinzaine*, 56 (1904) 145-67, 349-73, 433-58; re-edited in *Les premiers écrits de Maurice Blondel* 2 (Paris, 1956) 149-228. Its English translation is found in *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma* (tr. Alexander Dru; New York, 1964). Page references to *Histoire et dogme* are to the texts in the French edition, and corresponding loci from the English translation are given in parentheses.

<sup>52</sup> Blondel writes: "I had to be hard on Extrinsicism so that I could be effectively hard on Loisyism": letter of Blondel to Mourret, Jan. 4, 1904 (BV 1, 124).

<sup>53</sup> Loisy's *L'Évangile et l'église* and *Autour d'un petit livre*, along with three other works, were put on the Index Dec. 16, 1903, before the appearance of *Histoire et dogme*. For reference to Blondel's fears of condemnation during this period, see his letter to Wehrlé, Feb. 22, 1904 (BV 1, 235-36). See also BV 1, 121-24.

article in the spring.<sup>54</sup> Von Hügel, too, joined the controversy with an article on biblical criticism and Christology.<sup>55</sup> And in Toulouse, a comparison between Loisy and Blondel by Abbé Venard prompted Blondel to clarify further his views on the relation of Christian dogmas and method to Christian facts.<sup>56</sup> It should be added that Laberthonnière, after an initial enthusiasm, came to share Blondel's views that Loisy was compromising Christ with his history and that his historical method tended to exclude the supernatural. A neutral point of view was untenable vis-à-vis religious historical data.<sup>57</sup> Without naming Loisy, he took up this last point in 1903 in "Les études historiques et l'apologétique."<sup>58</sup> By the time Blondel published *Histoire et dogme*, Laberthonnière was putting the finishing touches on *Le réalisme chrétien et l'idéalisme grec*, which contains a long and important treatment of theology, history, and development.<sup>59</sup>

### *The Significance of the Biblical Question*

Two factors must be kept in mind in any attempt to interpret this series of events and grasp its importance. The first is the systematic or theoretical distinction between the apologetic and historical questions. The second is their interrelatedness or interdependence. In the period in question, the theoretical distinction is represented by an actual separation, and their interrelationship is represented by their sudden and violent merging.

First, these two strands of the Modernist problematic arose separately: Loisy was at work and suspect before Blondel published *L'Action*. Indeed, the separation between historical studies and theology, the atemporal character of theology and its distrust of the study of history which characterized Catholic theology in the nineteenth century, is well exemplified here.<sup>60</sup> Duchesne, who so inspired Loisy, was a ruthless

<sup>54</sup> F. Mallet [Maurice Blondel], "Un nouvel entretien avec M. Blondel," *Revue du clergé français* 38 (1904) 405-16, 513-31.

<sup>55</sup> Baron F. von Hügel, "Du Christ éternel et de nos christologies successives," *La quinzaine* 58 (1904) 285-312.

<sup>56</sup> [L. Venard], "La valeur historique du dogme, à propos d'une controverse récente," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique (Toulouse)* 6 (1904) 338-57. Blondel's response: "De la valeur historique du dogme," *ibid.* 7 (1905) 61-77. Blondel's response is reprinted in *Les premiers écrits de Maurice Blondel* 2 (Paris, 1956) 229-45.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. letters of Laberthonnière to Blondel, Jan. 21 and April 13, 1903 (BL, pp. 156-57, 166-67).

<sup>58</sup> *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 145 (1903) 369-80.

<sup>59</sup> Paris, 1904. This work has been re-edited in the volume *Le réalisme chrétien* (n. 36 above) This re-edition lacks the detailed table of contents of the original edition.

<sup>60</sup> Mark Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology: 1800-1970* (tr. N. D. Smith; Paramus, N.J., 1970) pp. 35-37.



historian who left to theologians the task of reconciling doctrines with facts. He realized when Loisy did not that the refusal to question traditional theological orthodoxy as it was then understood was "the necessary condition of remaining in the Church."<sup>61</sup> It would be difficult to overemphasize this separation of theology from history as a factor for understanding this conflict; for it resulted in a lack of historical consciousness which at its extremes, and even among theologians, approached a mythic mentality.<sup>62</sup>

Secondly, the historico-biblical and the theologico-apologetic questions are interrelated, but in the period in question they were thrown together, became entangled and sometimes confused. The working synthesis between these two alienated disciplines that was suddenly required constituted an enormous problem. Not simply the external problem of accepting the findings of history, or the relation of these findings to doctrine; it was even more an internal problem of faith consciousness. Loisy himself was scandalized by his own historical conclusions, and the "Firmin" articles are an attempt to reconcile a history and a doctrine that seemed irreconcilable. The period is thus characterized by a groping for categories that would be equal to the task but were not readily available. The apologetic and biblical questions, then, are intimately related, but the very suddenness with which they were thrust together led to inevitable and considerable confusion between them; and in this confusion both historian and theologian or religious philosopher tended to judge the real from his own specialized and sometimes isolated point of view.

In this light, much can be clarified in the Blondel-Loisy encounter. The briefest reading of Blondel's correspondence with Loisy on the questions of Jesus' consciousness and historical method is enough to show the vast difference between them in mentality, supposition, method, and approach to the issues.

On the one hand, in writing *L'Évangile et l'église*, Loisy placed himself on a historical level in order to respond to Harnack.<sup>63</sup> But at the same time his history had theological consequences. Moreover, his book

<sup>61</sup> Vidler, *The Modernist Movement in the Roman Church*, p. 76. Cf. also Albert Houtin, *Histoire du modernisme catholique* (Paris, 1913) pp. 2-3.

<sup>62</sup> Loisy was greeted with such arguments as: I have certitude that that flowering chestnut tree is there in front of me. Why should it have been different for the apostles before the resurrected Christ? How could Jesus have been unaware of his messianic role if the angels spoke of it before his birth? Cf. Poulat, *Histoire*, pp. 125-56, 190-243. There were, of course, more competent critiques; but an awareness of the abyss that separated the exegete and general Catholic consciousness is crucial.

<sup>63</sup> Not only Loisy's historical method but the fact that he was responding to Harnack tended to be neglected in the whole controversy.

contained theological assumptions, some of which were developed earlier.<sup>64</sup> In their discussions, Loisy was not willing or was not able to enter into Blondel's world of religious philosophy and Christology.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, what shocked Blondel was not Loisy's theology or theory of development, but his actual historical reconstruction of Christian origins and, by extension, his historical method.<sup>66</sup> Blondel's second complaint was with Loisy's method, and in making it he displayed an incomprehension of the scientific exegete's world.

In the course of their correspondence, Blondel began by misinterpreting Loisy on some basic points. Blondel saw Loisy as trying to mediate the truth of Christianity or the divine character of its historical unfolding by history alone.<sup>67</sup> But this contradicts not only Loisy's explicit declarations of intention, both published and in letters, but also the whole logic of *L'Évangile et l'église*. Methodologically, Loisy supposes the gospel as a given and tries to show that the "Church is the continuation of the gospel; Christian development is not exterior to or alien to the gospel."<sup>68</sup> This is why the position vis-à-vis Harnack is so important. What is at stake and to be proved historically is the relation between the gospel and the Church, and not the validity of either.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> There is a certain irony in the fact that Loisy's major assumption is his acceptance of the Catholic Church as a principle of interpretation. This is what most distinguishes his history from Harnack's. Cf. J. Wilbois, "La pensée catholique en France au commencement du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 15 (1907) 388; also Poulat, *Histoire*, pp. 94-98. But even here it should be recalled that there were two Catholic Churches involved: the existing one and the one Loisy was proposing. The difference between them was the reason why the historical response to Harnack tended to be overlooked.

<sup>65</sup> "If I wanted to be mean," Loisy wrote to Blondel, "I would say that you are mainly reproaching me for not having included your philosophy in my history"; Letter of Loisy to Blondel, Feb. 22, 1903 (AC, p. 96).

<sup>66</sup> Blondel's Christology, his "Panchristism" as he called it, is extremely important for understanding Blondel's reaction to Loisy and for Blondel interpretation in general. However, the question is too large to be discussed here.

<sup>67</sup> This supposition runs through Blondel's first letters to Loisy insofar as they deal with method. The supposition returns in his exposition and critique of "historicism" in *Histoire et dogme*. As Loisy wrote later, "Blondel supposed that I wanted to prove by history alone the supernatural truth of integral Catholicism" (*Memoires* 2, 392). Cf. also Loisy's letter to Blondel, Feb. 11, 1903 (AC, pp. 84-85).

<sup>68</sup> Letter of Loisy to Blondel, Feb. 11, 1903 (AC, p. 85).

<sup>69</sup> Loisy wrote to Blondel: "I do not think that many people have had the idea of a historical apologetic for religion. Well, this idea has been the driving force of my existence" (*ibid.*, p. 82). The word "apologetic" as used by Loisy here has a meaning that is considerably different from its usage in the apologetic question. For Loisy, an apologetic did not mean the establishment of credibility or the mediation to the threshold of faith for those outside faith. Loisy did not have in mind "a complete apologetics of the Catholic religion" or "a complete interpretation of Christianity." René Marlé, *Introduction to Hermeneutics* (tr. E. Froment and R. Albrecht; New York, 1967) pp. 100 and 102, seriously misrepresents Loisy on this central point.

Loisy's "apologetic" is for those who are already Christian. In relation to liberal Protestantism, it is an apologetic for the continuity of the Catholic Church with the gospel through development.<sup>70</sup> As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, it is an apologetic that called for the adjustment of Catholic theology to the data of history of which it was unaware. In doing this, Loisy was attempting to render the Church's doctrine more intelligible.<sup>71</sup>

Closely related to this misinterpretation is Blondel's failure, both in his correspondence with Loisy and in his published treatments of history and dogma and theology, to explain exactly what the role of the historian is. Is there not a legitimate function that the strictly scientific historian fills in the study of Christian origins? It would seem more consistent to admit that, while there is no "pure history," as Blondel and Laberthonnière showed, still there are different levels of historical investigation and that Loisy was perfectly consistent in exercising a methodological reserve and in seeking to establish the outward or external figure of Christian origins.

For these reasons, although *Histoire et dogme* must be seen in the light of Blondel's controversy with Loisy, the historicism represented in it cannot be taken as Loisy's position. If Blondel's criticism of historicism is read as a critique of Loisy's actual conception of historical science, the criticism will be found to make no sense. In a certain sense, then, Blondel is technically correct in explicitly warning his readers against attributing the doctrine to any person.<sup>72</sup> Once extrinsicism and historicism are taken as abstractions which, when criticized, illuminate the positive methodology Blondel himself is advocating, the work stands out as a brilliant account of development in Christian faith which gives in turn a solid basis for religious historical method. In this way the method Blondel

<sup>70</sup> In this, the problematic of Loisy's *L'Évangile et l'église* is similar to that of Newman in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London, 1894); see esp. pp. 4-5, 7, 9. Loisy had read Newman and his first Firmin article was "Le développement chrétien d'après le Cardinal Newman," *Revue du clergé français* 17 (1898) 5-20.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. letter of Loisy to Blondel, Feb. 11, 1903 (AC, p. 85).

<sup>72</sup> Blondel, *Histoire et dogme*, pp. 154, 193 n. 1 (225, 258 n. 1). There is some ambiguity here; for even after his decision to represent "historicism" as an abstract system, Blondel frequently referred to *Histoire et dogme* in letters as being directed against Loisy; cf., e.g., letters of Blondel to Valensin, Dec. 18, 1903 (BV 1, 108) and to Wehrlé, Dec. 29, 1903 (AC, p. 178). He also used some texts of Loisy in writing it. More often, however, he insisted that he was reacting to the influence of Loisy, against conclusions drawn from him but of which Loisy himself was innocent; cf. letter of Blondel to von Hügel, Feb. 11, 1904 (AC, pp. 212-14). Ultimately, *Histoire et dogme* did not in fact escape injuring Loisy, no matter what Blondel's intentions were; for it was an obvious attack against Loisy and it relates to him much as *Pascendi* does to the Modernist movement. Loisy was there for the reader, and Blondel's "historicism" does not represent his thought.

argues for will be seen to support the historian and complement his work on a religious level.<sup>73</sup>

The significance of the merging of the biblical and the apologetic questions is precisely the fact that they did merge and that theology was finally confronted with history. Both Blondel and Laberthonnière were drawn into the Loisy controversy, and this engagement resulted in a significant development of their thought by forcing them to confront the development of dogma and the historical nature of consciousness and dogmatic expression.

The publication of Blondel's response to Toulouse on the historical value of dogma in early 1905 can be considered the end of this second phase of the development of the movement studied here. In a letter to Blondel on that issue, Abbé Venard suggested that the solution to the problems raised by the entangled biblical and apologetic questions must be found in a new and less intellectualistic conception of faith.<sup>74</sup> Blondel seemed to share that idea. Already in 1904 he had begun reading Cardinal Dechamps and would supply valuable contributions to a notion of faith in the following years. But for the moment, in April 1905, another figure appeared on the scene who, with a short article on the nature of dogma, caused almost as much noise as Loisy: Edouard Le Roy.

#### THE QUESTION OF DOGMA

*Edouard Le Roy (1870-1954)*

Edouard Le Roy received his early education, which was in large part literary, at home under the direction of a tutor. In 1892 he entered the science section of the Ecole nationale supérieure as a bachelor of letters and from then on his training was in mathematics: *Agrégation ès science* in 1895, *Docteur ès science* in 1898. He began immediately thereafter a

<sup>73</sup> Blondel himself rejected this suggestion that his method complemented Loisy's, because Loisy "maintains that there is a terrain where the historian is absolutely and definitively at home; and [Blondel] does not admit that": letter of Blondel to Bremond, March 15, 1904 (BB 1, 448.). For this reason, Blondel preferred to call his method "corrective" in relation to Loisy's method; cf. letter of Blondel to von Hügel, March 15, 1904 (AC, p. 217). But the difference between "corrective" and "complementary" here is based on Blondel's appreciation of Loisy's method as untenable and fades if one sees Loisy's method as sound and coherent. At other times Blondel seemed to recognize the complementarity of the method of immanence with historical study. In 1898 he wrote to von Hügel: "The success which is so necessary and—with time—so certain of your biblical criticism seems to me intimately bound to the progress of the apologetic method of immanence, which alone, it seems to me, includes the freedom of evolution and the fixity of orientation in the life of humanity": letter of Blondel to von Hügel, Aug. 18, 1898 (cited by Poulat, *Histoire*, p. 541). Cf. also letters of Blondel to Laberthonnière, Nov. 17, 1902 and January 23, 1903 (BL, pp. 154-55, 158).

<sup>74</sup> Letter to Blondel, March 8, 1905 (BV 1, 215-16).

career as professor of mathematics in various lycées in Paris and the Paris area. The student and professor of mathematics, however, was also passionately interested in philosophy. He discovered Bergson in 1896 after a disappointing encounter with scholastic manuals and ultimately was Bergson's successor to the chair of modern philosophy at the Collège de France in 1921 (and his successor in the Académie française as well). Le Roy was a committed and outspoken Catholic. Like others of this period, his constant interest in religious and apologetic questions is often linked to the influence of Ollé-Laprune.<sup>75</sup>

The constant and enduring intentionality of Le Roy's philosophical writings can be seen as a reaction against a twofold enemy: scientism, where fellow scientists and philosophers of science were maintaining that there is no real knowledge outside of the exact sciences, and an idealism that would limit and determine reality by the clear lines of an abstract, notional, or intellectualistic logic.<sup>76</sup> These themes, indeed, underlie Le Roy's first important philosophical study, "Science et philosophie."<sup>77</sup> Appearing in 1899–1900, this long article is divided into three parts: (1) a Bergson-inspired critique of common-sense knowledge; (2) a criticism of science and scientific categories; (3) a third level, properly philosophical knowledge, and how the three ways of knowing are interrelated.

Immediately after this, Le Roy became a young but articulate member of the Société française de philosophie, which met once a month in Paris and was the sustaining force behind the important *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*.<sup>78</sup> During the next few years he contributed several articles to that journal which, together with his interventions at the meetings of the Société, tended toward the definition of his "new philosophy." Among the more important of these are "Un positivisme nouveau,"<sup>79</sup> "Sur quelques objections adressées à la nouvelle philosophie,"<sup>80</sup> and "Idéalisme et positivisme."<sup>81</sup> As early as 1902 Le Roy had conceived the broad lines of a theory of dogma.<sup>82</sup>

In April 1905, Le Roy published in *La quinzaine* his short article

<sup>75</sup> This influence of Léon Ollé-Laprune was also felt by Blondel and Laberthonnière during their formative years.

<sup>76</sup> Marcel Gillet, "La philosophie d'Edouard Le Roy," *Archives de philosophie* 27 (1964) 530–33.

<sup>77</sup> *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 7 (1899) 375–425, 503–63, 708–31; 8 (1900) 37–72.

<sup>78</sup> Blondel was also a member of this society but, being in Aix, did not assist regularly at its meetings. Laberthonnière was elected a titular member in 1905 and participated in many of the monthly discussions.

<sup>79</sup> *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 9 (1901) 138–53.

<sup>80</sup> *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 9 (1901) 292–327, 407–32.

<sup>81</sup> *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie* 4 (1904) 152–78.

<sup>82</sup> Edouard Le Roy, "Discussion sur les éléments chrétiens de la conscience contemporaine," *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie* 2 (1902) 62.

"Qu'est-ce qu'un dogme?"<sup>83</sup> He begins by describing the difficulties that modern intellectual culture has, not with individual dogmas but with the very notion or possibility of dogma. Then, identifying himself with that culture, he accepts these objections as valid but maintains that they suppose and are addressed to a conception of dogma that is false. Over against an erroneous intellectualistic concept of dogma, Le Roy attempts a redefinition of the nature of a dogmatic proposition which will satisfy both the exigencies of Catholic theology and contemporary intellectual culture.

In itself, this short and apparently simple article is both subtle and complex, not to mention incomplete, since it relies on certain of Le Roy's philosophical presuppositions published earlier. Too short for the subject it engages, it raised more problems than it solved. Moreover, it is exceedingly direct and seemed to be a rash statement: Le Roy's only concession to caution was to propose his statement, despite appearances, as a question raised for theologians rather than a finished thesis.<sup>84</sup> To complicate matters, *La quinzaine* opened a *Tribune libre* and invited responses and discussion. Among the responses, attacks along with charges of heresy were not slow in coming, nor were they limited to the *La quinzaine*.<sup>85</sup> The debate lasted through 1905.

The year 1905 is also significant because Laberthonnière assumed direction of the influential *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*. On the death of its former editor, Blondel bought the review and Laberthonnière became its editor.<sup>86</sup> The *Annales* had constituted a significant contribution to religious thought during the previous seventy-six years. With the collaboration of Blondel and Laberthonnière it became the principal organ of the advocates of a method of immanence, even while retaining its wider scope.<sup>87</sup> Blondel left Laberthonnière free in his direction of the review, and for the rest of the period in question it consumed much of his time and energy. Since Blondel's ownership was kept secret<sup>88</sup> and most of his contributions directly concerning religious problems were pseudony-

<sup>83</sup> *La quinzaine* 63 (1905) 495-526.

<sup>84</sup> But, as Vidler comments, "he did not really conceal the fact that he had an answer to propose" (*20th Century Defenders of the Faith*, p. 51).

<sup>85</sup> There were some more or less favorable responses, the most notable being by the Dominican Sertillanges. This candidness, however, almost cost him his position on the theology faculty of the Institut catholique at Paris.

<sup>86</sup> Technically, Laberthonnière was executive secretary of a board of editors. This was not a sudden move; the possibility of this eventuality arose in 1903; cf. BW 1, 301.

<sup>87</sup> La rédaction, "Notre programme," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 151 (1905) 5-31, is a joint statement of policy by Laberthonnière and Blondel. Abbé Wehrlé was to write to Blondel: "For me, the *Annales*, that was you and that was Père Laberthonnière": letter of June 28, 1913 (BW 2, 487).

<sup>88</sup> Letter of Blondel to Mourret, June 21, 1905 (BV 1, 223).

mous, the *Annales* were largely associated with Laberthonnière's name.

Also during this time Laberthonnière and Le Roy participated in a discussion group, the Société d'études religieuses,<sup>89</sup> which was founded by Laberthonnière in January 1905 and met regularly at his residence to explore the religious dimensions of contemporary issues. Among the members were other close friends of Blondel. The meetings, centering on religious philosophy, did not fulfil everyone's initial expectations. Some were dissatisfied with the academic tone of the discussions, others with the prominent role Laberthonnière played or Le Roy later seemed to assume in them. The group, it was felt, also aroused suspicion among Church authorities.<sup>90</sup>

During the rest of 1905 and through 1906 Le Roy, Blondel, and Laberthonnière were heavily engaged in religious controversy. Le Roy was busy on the theological scene responding to the criticisms that his article on dogma had elicited. Blondel's attention, too, gradually shifted from the philosophers of the Sorbonne to the Catholic theologians and their problematic. In October 1905 he began a series of articles under the name of his friend Mallet on the apologetics of Cardinal Dechamps, an authority supporting his method of immanence.<sup>91</sup> Also under the name of Mallet he had published a study on the act of faith and faith's relation to science in which some of the themes from *Histoire et dogme* recur.<sup>92</sup> Laberthonnière was heavily engaged in writing reviews of books and other journals for the *Annales*, often making positive statements therein. While becoming prolific and somewhat polemic, he still contributed some constructive statements of his deepening and ever-consistent religious views.<sup>93</sup>

Laberthonnière suffered a blow in April 1906 when he learned through the newspaper that his *Essais de philosophie religieuse* and *Le réalisme chrétien* had been placed on the Index.<sup>94</sup> In spite of the danger that this

<sup>89</sup> The statutes and aims of the group were announced in the first issue of the *Annales* under Laberthonnière's direction: 151 (1905) 110–11. The group is also referred to as the "Association d'études religieuses"; cf. BV 1, 325–26; BW 1 301.

<sup>90</sup> The group is often discussed in the Blondel-Wehrle correspondence; see BW 1, 300–351 *passim*.

<sup>91</sup> F. Mallet [Maurice Blondel], "L'Oeuvre du Cardinal Dechamps et la méthode de l'apologétique," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 151 (1905–1906) 68–91, 449–72, 625–46; 153 (1907) 561–91.

<sup>92</sup> F. Mallet [Maurice Blondel], *Qu'est-ce que la foi?* (Paris, 1907). This originally appeared as "La foi et la science," *Revue du clergé français* 47 (1906) 449–73, 591–605.

<sup>93</sup> Some of his more important articles during this time are: "Illusions de ceux qui ne croient pas," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 151 (1905) 283–310; "Réponse à Monseigneur Turinaz," *ibid.* 151 (1906) 398–417; "Le dogme de la rédemption et l'histoire," *ibid.* 151 (1906) 516–34; "Le témoignage des martyrs," *ibid.* 153 (1906) 60–90; "L'Eglise et l'état," *ibid.* 153 (1907) 449–86.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. BV 1, 251–53. The date of the condemnation was April 4, 1906. Some held Le Roy

condemnation might have indicated for the *Annales* themselves, Laberthonnière published in late 1906 Le Roy's long article in three installments on the notion of miracle.<sup>95</sup> The article is especially interesting for its method. Le Roy supposes the truth or fact of miracles and tries to redefine the notion of miracle in terms of his own philosophy. Blondel, in turn, was not at all happy that the article had appeared in the *Annales*.<sup>96</sup> In 1907 he criticized Le Roy's position under the pseudonym Bernard de Saily and tried to disassociate his own thought from what Le Roy was holding.<sup>97</sup>

In 1907 Le Roy renewed the controversy over his theory of dogma when he collected his responses to his critics and published them together with his original article in the volume *Dogme et critique*.<sup>98</sup> This volume, together with several previous philosophical articles which are needed to interpret it, constitutes the main source for Le Roy's theory of dogma. Seen in its entirety, that theory is thoroughly coherent and makes a considerable advance over Blondel and Laberthonnière in the practical application of the method of immanence to a specific problem, namely, the interpretation of the nature itself of the dogmatic statement of religious truth. In spite of this, the book was quickly condemned. Published in April, it was put on the Index July 26, 1907. And just after Le Roy's publication of *Dogme et critique*, Blondel published a statement categorically disassociating himself from Le Roy's thought in every respect. He asserted that Le Roy's philosophical method and doctrine were completely heterogeneous to his own and represented an attitude that accorded with his own on no point whatever.<sup>99</sup>

After *Dogme et critique*, Laberthonnière's reaction against Le Roy also

responsible for drawing the attention of authority toward Laberthonnière by his "recklessness"; cf., e.g., the two letters of Wehrli, to Blondel and to Laberthonnière, both of April 7, 1906 (BW 1, 341-43).

<sup>95</sup> "Essai sur la notion du miracle," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 153 (1906) 5-33, 166-91, 225-59.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. letters of Blondel cited in BV 1, 285.

<sup>97</sup> Bernard de Saily [Maurice Blondel], "La notion et la rôle du miracle," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 154 (1907) 337-61. A full discussion of debate on the nature and role of miracle during this period is found in François Rodé, *Le miracle dans la controverse moderniste* (Paris, 1965).

<sup>98</sup> Paris, 1907. Le Roy inserted in this same volume a long essay on the resurrection of Jesus which, like the study of miracle, is a good example of his theological method: "Résurrection de Jésus," *Dogme et critique*, pp. 155-257. This same year Le Roy also published a long study on the problem of God which characteristically begins with a critique of the scholastic approach to the problem: "Comment se pose le problème de Dieu," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 15 (1907) 129-70, 470-513.

<sup>99</sup> Maurice Blondel, "L'Apologétique et la philosophie de M. Blondel," *Revue du clergé français* 50 (1907) 546. This was, of course, not true.



began to harden.<sup>100</sup> Towards autumn he began an extended critique of Le Roy's theory of dogma in the essay "Dogme et théologie."<sup>101</sup> Like Blondel in *Histoire et dogme*, Laberthonnière was to strike a middle position after criticizing both Le Roy and the more traditional position represented by a Jesuit of the Institut catholique, Jules Lebreton.<sup>102</sup> But after a long and repetitious discussion, the essay never comes to term, and Laberthonnière's promised constructive position does not appear.

Important as these events were, they were secondary to the growing influence of Loisy and Tyrrell inside and outside their own countries. Finally, Rome reacted authoritatively. In July 1907 a new syllabus of errors was published as the papal decree *Lamentabili*.<sup>103</sup> Shortly afterwards the Encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis*, dated September 8, 1907, defined and condemned "Modernism."

#### THE DECLINE OF FRENCH MODERNISM

Loisy was excommunicated by name and declared *evitandus* March 7, 1908. Tyrrell died suddenly July 15, 1909. But the fourth and final phase of the Modernist movement, its denouement, dates from the publication of *Pascendi*. The repressive enforcement of this document, not only in seminaries but also in the broader world of Catholic thought by the councils of vigilance it provided for, brought to a halt a whole movement of thought in a matter of a few years. This period immediately following the Encyclical was thus a particularly nervous one for Blondel and Laberthonnière and their *Annales*. Bremond described the situation well when he said that the author of the Encyclical

has finally convinced the Pope and everyone else of the existence of *Modernism*, and since the bishops especially are exhorted, *in visceribus Christi*, to completely

<sup>100</sup> Laberthonnière's impression of Le Roy's initial article on dogma was not as negative as that of Blondel's. During Laberthonnière's visit in July 1905, Blondel tried to "open his eyes" in regard to Le Roy: letter of Blondel to Wehrlé, July 13, 1905 (BW 1, 306). Blondel also "led Bremond to deplore Le Roy": letter of Blondel to Wehrlé, Nov. 13, 1905 (BW 1, 332). During 1906 a close friend of Laberthonnière felt that he was struck by a certain fascination with Le Roy's way of thinking; cf. letter of Blondel to Wehrlé, May 3, 1906 (BW 1, 350). Laberthonnière was constantly being warned of the possible danger to himself and to the *Annales* which an association with Le Roy represented.

<sup>101</sup> "Dogme et théologie," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 154 (1907) 561-601; 155 (1907-1908) 10-65, 479-521; 157 (1908) 5-79; 159 (1909) 279-313. In September Bremond wrote to Blondel saying that Laberthonnière was trying to kill himself writing pages upon pages against Le Roy; cf. letter of Sept. 18, 1907 (BB 2, 102).

<sup>102</sup> Lebreton had just finished a controversy with Tyrrell. In this series, unlike Blondel, Laberthonnière analyzes the positions of these two men on the basis of their texts. His interpretation of Le Roy, however, was not entirely accurate.

<sup>103</sup> *Lamentabili sane exitu*, dated July 3, 1907, approved by Pius X July 4, was published July 17, 1907.

wipe out the Modernists, everyone is going to start asking: "Well, let's see, who are they?"—And, infallibly, our *Annales* will be on the top of the list of dangerous reviews.<sup>104</sup>

The *Annales*, however, survived until 1913, and it contains valuable precisions on the part of both Blondel and Laberthonnière on revelation, religious knowledge, and specifically Christian faith.

The reactions of Blondel and Laberthonnière to the question of what influence *Pascendi* should have on the policy of the *Annales* illustrate well their different temperaments.<sup>105</sup> Blondel's suggestion that the *Annales* print the Encyclical text as a manifestation of orthodoxy was not taken up. Instead, it was decided to include an editorial statement, drafted by Blondel, on their position on the method of immanence and its relation to the supernatural. The statement clearly distinguishes the method of immanence from that which the Encyclical condemned.<sup>106</sup> Afterwards Blondel suggested a policy of caution. The *Annales* should back off from direct confrontation of contemporary theological issues and devote itself to critical historical and technical philosophical studies, for in the long run more good could be accomplished that way. Laberthonnière, however, was more inclined to proceed as if the Encyclical had changed nothing, as if the validity of their position must finally prove itself. Laberthonnière's policy, to a certain extent, prevailed, and in 1909 Blondel himself became deeply involved, though pseudonymously, in a strong polemical analysis and attack against the extrinsicist conception of the relation between the natural and supernatural orders.<sup>107</sup> Again in October 1912, under the name of Bernard de Saily, Blondel began a long polemic against extrinsicist apologetics. This ran into late spring of the

<sup>104</sup> Letter of Bremond to Laberthonnière, Sept. 22, 1907 (BB 2, 107).

<sup>105</sup> Cf. letters of Blondel to Laberthonnière, Sept. 20, 1907, Oct. 11, 1907, Feb. 19, 1908 (BL, pp. 201-3, 209-11, 212-13). Cf. also the other Blondelian correspondences for further information on the problem and the concern it caused, e.g., BV 1, 367-70; BB 2, 307-9.

<sup>106</sup> Statement signed "La rédaction," entitled "L'Encyclique 'Pascendi dominici gregis,'" *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 155 (1907) 5-9. Blondel and Laberthonnière were not alone in these deliberations. Interestingly, von Hügel thought the declaration was a betrayal of the truth; cf. BB 2, 113.

<sup>107</sup> Testis [Maurice Blondel], "La 'Semaine sociale' de Bordeaux," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 159 (1909-10) 5-21, 163-84, 245-78, 372-92, 449-71, 561-92; 160 (1910) 127-62. Added to this were five responses to objections through 1910. The context of these articles was the conflict between the Catholic social movement in France and their opponents with tendencies towards the *Action française*. Blondel examines the philosophical and theological suppositions of the two positions and justifies the former by showing that the supernatural penetrates the natural order so that political and economic orders do not escape moral and Christian judgment. Cf. Bouillard, *Blondel et le christianisme*, p. 46; also the letter of Blondel to Paul Archambault, Sept. 3, 1924 (BW 2, 414-20), where he explains how the articles came to be written.

next year and concludes with a constructive statement justifying an integral apologetic.<sup>108</sup>

I have indicated that the period after *Pascendi* included a further development in the thought of Blondel and Laberthonnière. In Blondel's case, this is seen especially in the formation of some precise theological distinctions and the merging of several theological themes developed over the years as a result of the clash of his method of immanence with the theological world.<sup>109</sup> Laberthonnière had defended Blondel's method of immanence on a theological level on the basis of the immanence of the supernatural order to the natural. In 1902 Blondel himself touched upon the theological theme of the universal possibility of salvation by showing that an objective knowledge of revealed truth is not the necessary condition of salvation, any more than good will on the part of those who ignore it is a sufficient condition. That which saves is not man's certitude but God's action.<sup>110</sup> During this same period Blondel was involved in a long exchange with Wehrle in which he distinguished between redemption and revelation. The effects of redemption are universally available and are interiorly at work in mankind. The Christian economy of salvation cannot be subordinated to objective knowledge of it.<sup>111</sup> In *Histoire et dogme* Blondel insisted that pure nature never existed,<sup>112</sup> and in his study of Dechamps he distinguished and explored the relationship of the interior fact of soliciting grace and the external fact of revelation which together make up Christianity. Here Blondel described a supernatural that is not only immanent but also conscious, even though anonymously.<sup>113</sup>

During all this time, precisely because he was advocating a method of immanence, Blondel was equally careful to stress the necessity of an external and objective contribution to faith. Indeed, in varying degrees,

<sup>108</sup> Bernard de Saily [Maurice Blondel], "Thèses de rechange," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 165 (1912) 27-53, 137-84; "Thèses et attitudes de rechange," *ibid.* 165 (1913) 359-97; "Terrain de rencontre et points d'accord," *ibid.* 166 (1913) 5-45, 150-90.

<sup>109</sup> The period also represents a significant development of Blondel's thought from a purely philosophical point of view. Bouillard traces this aspect of the evolution in *Blondel et le christianisme*, pp. 114-20.

<sup>110</sup> Blondel, "A propos de la certitude religieuse," pp. 656-57.

<sup>111</sup> The exchange between Blondel and Wehrle during 1903 and 1904 is recorded in AC, pp. 255-96. Cf., also, BW, I, for the same period, and the letter of Blondel to Laberthonnière, Aug. 26, 1904, BL, pp. 179-83.

<sup>112</sup> Blondel, *Histoire et dogme*, p. 244 (284).

<sup>113</sup> F. Mallet [Maurice Blondel], "L'Oeuvre du Cardinal Dechamps et la méthode de l'apologétique," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 153 (1907) 582. Blondel says here that a universal grace works in the soul of each man so that all men participate supernaturally in the redemption more by acts that are faithful to this secret grace than by ideas that conform to its external manifestations. The Christian economy cannot be subordinated to what is explicitly known by revelation. *Ibid.*, 565.

he saw Loisy, Le Roy, and even Laberthonnière either neglecting this or not taking it sufficiently into account. But after *Pascendi*, Blondel emphasized with increasing clarity the theological suppositions of his method of immanence. In the short statement of the editors he explicitly rejects a theory that Christianity is based on an "efference" whereby dogma and practice are seen as the products of an evolution from below, out of the depths of nature.<sup>114</sup> In contrast to this efference, he began speaking of an "afference," that which is brought to man by God. And besides the objective and external afference represented by revelation, one must also hold that there is a real interior afference or gift that works in man but is not of man.<sup>115</sup> In the *Semaine sociale* articles, then, Blondel describes a double-afference theory which includes both external authoritative revelation and the supernatural working of grace within human nature that allows man to recognize external revelation. He goes on to coin the term "monophorism," a false understanding of Christianity relative to his own double-afference theory. Monophorism sees Christianity as coming completely from the outside, imposed authoritatively, without responding to any interior aspiration. It is the error of extrinsicism.<sup>116</sup> Finally, he describes the actual state of man as "trans-natural." Grace is actually operative interiorly in man and all men share in a supernatural vocation, a calling, that does not escape consciousness.<sup>117</sup> With these distinctions Blondel has moved well away from the philosophical problematic of *L'Action* and the *Letter* and is addressing squarely the questions of the Catholic theologians of the period. In this context some of his most important observations for a theological concept of faith knowledge occur.<sup>118</sup>

During this period Laberthonnière was not idle. His "Dogme et théologie" articles and the discussions they stimulated lasted into 1910. He also took up the attack against the *Action française* and although the material there contributes little to the theology of the movement, his

<sup>114</sup> La rédaction, "L'encyclique 'Pascendi Dominici Gregis,'" pp. 5-9.

<sup>115</sup> Letter of Blondel to Wehrlé, Sept. 22, 1907, BW, II, pp. 383-84. Blondel had used these terms earlier. See letter to Le Roy, Nov. 16, 1905, LP, p. 257.

<sup>116</sup> "Monophorism," a theory of single "afference," could also apply to an immanentist interpretation of Christianity wherein the supernatural would be seen as only internal and gradually manifesting itself through an evolution.

<sup>117</sup> Testis [Blondel], "La 'Semaine Sociale' de Bordeaux," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 159 (1909-1910) 268-71.

<sup>118</sup> Thus Blondel, who in 1901 wanted to drop the term "method of immanence" because of the theological misinterpretations it caused (cf. "Un entretien avec M. Blondel," p. 632), found himself saddled with it after *Pascendi* and tried to clarify and defend it. Two works by close friends during this period helped in this defense: Joannès Wehrlé, *La méthode d'immanence* (Paris, 1911) shows the influence of his long discussions with Blondel on redemption and revelation; Auguste Valensin and Albert Valensin, "Méthode d'immanence," *Dictionnaire apologétique de la foi catholique* 2 (4th ed.; Paris, 1911) 579-612.

aggressiveness may have helped determine his future.<sup>119</sup> His continuing concern for the nature of religious knowledge is seen in many of his articles between *Pascendi* and 1913: in 1909, "Saint Thomas et le rapport entre la science et la foi";<sup>120</sup> in 1910, "La critique et l'apologétique";<sup>121</sup> in 1912, "Subjectivisme et apologétique intégrale."<sup>122</sup>

In 1911 Le Roy reopened the question of miracle by presenting his theory before the Société française de philosophie. Both Laberthonnière and Blondel had the opportunity to respond to Le Roy on that occasion, Blondel by written communication. The exchange allows one to see the very different intentions and approaches within their common framework on the part of Le Roy on the one hand, Laberthonnière and Blondel on the other.<sup>123</sup>

In 1913 a series of three events brought the movement of thought described here to an end. On May 5 the *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* from 1905 to 1913, that is, during the period of Laberthonnière's editorship, were condemned by the Index. The next month a decree of June 16-17 placed two more of Laberthonnière's books, *Le témoignage des martyrs*<sup>124</sup> and *Sur le chemin du catholicisme*,<sup>125</sup> on the Index. Although these short essays had previously appeared in the pages of the *Annales*, a separate condemnation was required because they had been republished as books and the general condemnation of the review did not touch them specifically. Finally, shortly after this, in July, Laberthonnière received word that he was now reduced to silence. Without any official word of explanation he was told he could no longer publish anything at all.

The *Annales* were discontinued temporarily after the initial condemnation by the Index, but in the light of the events that followed, it was judged better to discontinue the review sine die.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Lucien Laberthonnière, *Positivisme et catholicisme* (Paris, 1911). Laberthonnière said that the *Action française* was influential in the eventual condemnation of the *Annales*; cf. Louis Ruy, in *Laberthonnière: L'homme et l'oeuvre*, p. 49.

<sup>120</sup> *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 158 (1909) 599-621.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* 160 (1910) 547-59.

<sup>122</sup> *Revue pratique d'apologétique* 13 (1912) 749-67.

<sup>123</sup> Edouard Le Roy, "Le problème du miracle," *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie* 12 (1911) 85-168.

<sup>124</sup> Paris, 1912.

<sup>125</sup> Paris, 1913.

<sup>126</sup> Laberthonnière was silenced and efforts to lift the ban never succeeded. However, he wrote the Notre Dame Conferences from 1925 to 1927 that were delivered by Père Sanson. Blondel turned to more strictly philosophical matters after the war. Le Roy, too, continued to write in the domain of philosophy and science and some of his works were placed on the Index.—An exhaustive bibliography of Blondel's works and publications about him up to 1951 is André Hayen, *Bibliographie Blondelienne (1888-1951)* (Paris, 1953). This has been updated to the year 1961 in Antonina Costa, "Bibliographia Blondeliana (1951-1961),"

## THE MODERNIST PROBLEMATIC

Modernism was born out of the confrontation between traditional Catholic doctrine and theology, and the history, science, and culture of modernity. One sees in the Church of the end of the nineteenth century an authoritarian structure, a world apart, whose official scholastic theology, with its hardened and static formulas, was isolated from modern intellectual culture but shared in the Church's authority.<sup>127</sup> For this Church, the world of modern philosophy, the advances of critical historical scholarship, and the world of science were a grave menace. Given this situation, once the principle of immanence and the presuppositions of man's autonomy began to be taken seriously in the domain of philosophy, the idea of a supernatural truth imposed on man from the outside and solely through a church authority became ambiguous. On the level of historical science, when the method and findings of biblical criticism began to be recognized, certain historical data seemed to contradict this authority. When this modern world came crashing in on Catholic theology, crisis was born. This is the general problematic of Catholic Modernism, and it can be rendered even more precise in the terms in which Blondel, Laberthonnière, and Le Roy saw it. In this light their constructive efforts will make more sense.

All three men had their feet in both worlds; all three were students of modern philosophy, none were scholastics, all three studied at the Ecole normale supérieure or the Sorbonne and were members of the Société française de philosophie. Through Loisy they were confronted with the results of biblical criticism. Le Roy especially was the philosopher of science, but neither of the other two was ignorant of the questions discussed there. But also, all three were convinced Catholics and religious men. All three recognized the nature and seriousness of the crisis: a "new problem" of a public and social apostasy, the beginning of "the complete withdrawal of an entire civilization," wrote Blondel.<sup>128</sup>

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*Teoresi* 17 (1962) 294-320. An exhaustive bibliography of all the works of Laberthonnière published up to 1972 has been prepared by Paul Beillevert, "Bibliographie," in *Laberthonnière: L'homme et l'oeuvre*, pp. 243-73. A bibliography of Le Roy's works is found in *Les études philosophiques* 10 (1955) 206-10.

<sup>127</sup> "It has to be admitted," Laberthonnière wrote to Blondel, "theology right now is dead": letter of March 11, 1895 (BL, p. 90). Le Roy, too, severely criticized Catholicism's divorce from the intellectual world, its open hostility toward it, its ignorance regarding the problems connected with faith, its defensive, negative, condemning stance vis-à-vis the advances of science. The situation was especially scandalous in view of the role of the Church in the education of Western civilization. To be a Catholic seemed to mean to be condemned to stop thinking. Cf. Edouard Le Roy, "La situation intellectuelle du Catholicisme à l'heure présente," in *Les conditions du retour au catholicisme* (ed. Marcel Riffaux; Paris, 1907) pp. 312-24.

<sup>128</sup> Testis [Blondel], "La 'Semaine sociale' de Bordeaux," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 159 (1909-10) 169.

For those who knew Christianity and who also participated in intellectual affairs, Christianity had simply lost its meaning, Laberthonnière said.<sup>129</sup> In terms of dogma, contemporary culture as Le Roy viewed it was characterized not by any partial heresy or by the rejection of this or that dogma, but by the rejection of the very supposition of dogma, a global reaction against all dogmas. "It is the idea itself of dogma that is repugnant and a scandal."<sup>130</sup> It is a question, Blondel said, "of seizing whole and entire the invisible kernel of difficulties which, unless they are solved, will leave us without any possible Christianity."<sup>131</sup>

All three, then, recognized that the contemporary situation called for a new basis for understanding Christianity, its authority, and its doctrine. "We are faced," Blondel wrote, "with a permanent and profound transformation within the constitution of philosophy as a whole, and my desire is to show why this must produce both a religious development for philosophical thought in its entirety and a human development for the religious consciousness and for the very understanding of Christianity."<sup>132</sup>

### *Faith and Reason*

The question of faith and reason underlies the whole apologetic question as it unfolded during this period. Blondel was shocked by the philosophical milieu at the Ecole normale supérieure in which the possibility of a supernatural truth being imposed on man was simply written off. In his *Letter on Apologetics* he posed the problem as a "cruel dilemma" between the principle of immanence and man's autonomy and a Christian truth that is supernatural, beyond man's power to discover for himself, and yet imposed on his thought and on his will as obligatory.<sup>133</sup> Le Roy begins his short article on dogma with the objections of modern culture against the unintelligibility of dogmas, their lack of critical foundation, the fact that they are simply imposed on man.<sup>134</sup> For those who stand outside Christianity, Blondel wrote, "there is something meaningless and even irritating about such an inventory of spiritual treasures, of which they know nothing, or which they consider

<sup>129</sup> Lucien Laberthonnière, letter to Dr. Rifaux, in *Les conditions du retour au catholicisme*, p. 321.

<sup>130</sup> Le Roy, *Dogme et critique*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>131</sup> Blondel, *Letter*, p. 38 (155).

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53 (170).

<sup>133</sup> Blondel, *Letter*, p. 34 (152-53). See also Laberthonnière, "Philosophie et religion," *Essais de philosophie religieuse*, pp. xviii-xxiii (pp. 20-23 in the recent Tresmontant edition).

<sup>134</sup> Le Roy, *Dogme et critique*, pp. 6-13. Blondel approved of Le Roy's formulation of the problem. He wrote to Laberthonnière: "He energetically justifies the way in which we posed the problem": letter of April 22, 1905 (BL, p. 186).

imaginary, and about the use of unfamiliar language full of complacent sentiments which awaken no echo in their own hearts."<sup>135</sup>

Blondel, Laberthonnière, and Le Roy all addressed the problem of faith and reason, of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural. Each can be seen responding to the following questions: How can a religious teaching or revelation, imposed from without, be justified when modern philosophy and modern man are committed to a principle of immanence, and precisely the autonomy of man? How can supernatural truth be man's truth, and assure his freedom rather than tyrannize him? Does dogmatic truth find any echo in man's experience? Does it have any meaning?

### *Scandal of a Particular Revelation*

The scandal of a particular revelation as an answer to the problem of life, of a concrete universal as the ground of Christianity, is indigenous to the rational philosophic spirit. Blondel heard the challenge: "Why must I take account of these facts when I can legitimately disregard so many other facts which are equally real?"<sup>136</sup> That the universal should appear in the particular, the infinite in the finite and concrete, Blondel says, this is the obstacle in the idea of revelation. One can imagine the infinite in the negation of the relativity of this world, but to grasp it again, the absolute, being itself, within a series of phenomena that make up history, in a particular event and limited and sensible forms—this is the scandal of revealed religion.<sup>137</sup>

This scandal in the idea of a revelation, however, was aggravated by the biblical question, and the sense of historicity that critical historical study mediated gave the problem a new dimension. Historical inquiry cast doubt upon facts that were taken for granted. Moreover, it raised the question of the proper method for determining "what really happened" in Christianity's originating events and how one should understand these events. How does one really know Christian truths affirmed in the past? And what is the relation of past Christian events to Christian truth? Blondel saw in "historicism" a tendency to escape this problem by turning Christianity into an ideology, or a natural religion, or one based

<sup>135</sup> Blondel, *Letter*, p. 21 (140).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13 (134).

<sup>137</sup> Blondel, *L'Action*, p. 395. "I can understand," he says again, "the astonishment [of the critical historian or the philosopher] at the very idea of an absolute incarnate in the relative; of the presence within the historical order of an activity capable of realizing the infinite; of a consciousness that remained human without ceasing to be divine; of a supernatural mystery fully contained at a point in time and place in the humblest form of nature; of one risen from the dead who preserved the sensible appearance and the reality of natural life" (*Histoire et dogme*, p. 187 [252-53]).



only on an interior or immanent supernatural.<sup>138</sup> Both Blondel and Laberthonnière addressed the question of the insufficiency and the necessity of historical knowledge in relation to Christian truth. They sought to determine the exact place of the facts or originating events of Christianity in relation to Christian truth. Indirectly, Le Roy too addressed this question insofar as his theory of dogma allows room for historical research and accepts the specifying quality of Christianity's originating events as the stable ground of Christian dogma. The question, then, concerned an understanding of the possibility and the necessity of normative Christian events and revelation in a world of historicity and historical consciousness and the way to interpret the past.

### *Problem of Development*

A large portion of Modernist theology centers around this third problem for dogma: development. But in the three men studied here there is a significant shift in the problematic compared to their immediate predecessors. Both Newman and Loisy proposed theories of the development of dogma in order to explain how dogmas develop, that is, how they arise. In Blondel, Laberthonnière, and Le Roy, however, development is not argued for, it is presupposed. It is true that they too speak to the problem of how dogmas arose in history. But over and above this they realized that dogmas continue to exist in a historical situation and continue to develop. The problem thus shifts to the question how Christian truth can remain the same; that which has to be explained is not mobility but stability, not change but consistency.

### THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS PERIOD

The movement of thought represented in Blondel, Laberthonnière, and Le Roy proposed a new understanding or interpretation of Christianity in relation to the extrinsicist scholasticism of the period. Loisy saw this new understanding as being mediated by history and a historical reconstruction of the past. Indeed, no single force shook the static theological system that structured Catholic consciousness more strongly than history. Blondel, Laberthonnière, and Le Roy, however, mediated this new understanding by integrating both history and theology into a broader concept of religious knowledge, one more adequate to deal with the multiplicity of problems at stake.

I said at the outset that the contributions of this movement were generated in the turn to man and his experience that the method of

<sup>138</sup> Behind Blondel's critique of historical method is a concern for the external and stable basis of Christianity in its origins: "I'm afraid that if one 'relativizes' the person of Christ himself [i.e., Jesus], that will be the end of everything": letter of Blondel to Wehrle, Dec. 15, 1902 (AC, p. 51).

immanence entails. Three general themes emerge in Blondel, Laberthonnière, and Le Roy responding to the problems we have isolated. First, over against the extrinsicist understanding of revelation, faith, and doctrine that scholasticism produced, this movement of thought saw revealed truth and doctrine as responding to the immanent demand of life itself, even while the response to this desire remained absolutely transcendent. In terms of faith and reason, the movement saw religious truth as an explanation of reason to itself, without in any way destroying the inner logic of science or philosophy. Moreover, faith knowledge was conceived of as real knowledge, an experience of the divine that must entail an internal relation to man's concrete and practical life. Every apologetic attempt to establish objectively and abstractly *that* the Christian message is true will be abortive if it cannot show that that truth has a meaning for concrete and personal living.

Secondly, in response to the problem of the consciousness of history, and of the particularity and relativity of worldly events and interpretation, the three men saw Christian revelation as involving a tension between two factors. On the one hand, the origins of Christianity and particularly Christ formed a kind of *axis mundi* or specific norm for religious truth in a world of pluralism and historical process. On the other hand, the history of Christianity was seen as a history of interpretation of the transcendent meaning and reality of those events. Thus the creeds, doctrines, and dogmas of the Church grew out of lived Christian life and experience reflecting on itself in the categories of successive cultures. The mediating principle between origin and interpretation that insures a consistency of doctrine is primarily the presence of God to Christian life experience by His grace. The role of grace in these three thinkers is what more than anything else distinguishes them from the Protestant liberal theological tradition with which they otherwise had much in common.

Thirdly, the principle of the stability of Christian truth along the history of its development is thus found in the constant presence of God to Christian life by His grace. Anthropologically, however, this constancy is primarily manifested in the steadfastness of Christian life itself, in the action and worshiping behavior of the community, in the stability of the direction in which Christians live their lives. This life experience, in turn, is the principle by which the past is to be authentically interpreted.

When Vidler published *The Modernist Movement in the Roman Church* in 1934, the reviewer in the *Catholic Times* concluded thus: "The encyclical 'Pascendi' brought the Modernist Movement to an end. It is dead, let it lie buried. This attempt at exhumation, even on a plea of history, is not worth the attention of Catholics."<sup>139</sup> It goes without saying

<sup>139</sup> *Catholic Times*, Oct. 19, 1934, cited by Vidler, *A Variety of Catholic Modernists*, p. 7.

that conditions have changed and there are several reasons that call for a re-examination of the Modernist period and perhaps a reopening of the Modernist question. From a sheerly historical point of view, it is becoming increasingly difficult to understand the atmosphere of fear and caution in which men like Blondel proposed their responses to the crisis of modernity, or to understand the "ruthless suppression" of the movement by Catholic authority.<sup>140</sup> As scholastic philosophy and theology become less normative in Catholic schools of theology, and with the generally more open and ecumenical spirit Catholic theology is enjoying, the Church's reaction to Modernism is slowly slipping into incomprehension.

But the issue goes well beyond historical curiosity. The questions that Modernism faced are fundamental and must find a response in any period. The issue, therefore, transcends Catholic theology. To the extent that believers participate in modern culture, marked by a sense of autonomy and aloneness, of historicity and cultural relativity, they wonder how there can be any normative or authoritative Christian truths. The questions of the intellectual culture of the nineteenth century are very much the questions of common culture and general consciousness today. But for Catholic theology this period is particularly important precisely because many of the attempts at theological reconstruction in the recent past that seem new will be found to have close parallels in this Catholic history. An investigation of the Modernist period will help to uncover a solid tradition of liberal Catholic theology, one with a firm philosophical base, and one that is similar in some respects to Protestant liberal theology but also quite distinct from it. Finally, this tradition will be found to offer something constructive to current theological discourse on the basic issues of religious knowledge, faith, revelation, and doctrine.

<sup>140</sup> The phrase is Vidler's, *20th Century Defenders of the Faith*, p. 37.



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